

# **Subsistence group knows what it is talking about**

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A couple of weeks ago, a bunch of people gathered in Copper Center to talk about something that everybody talks about, but hardly anybody understands: subsistence.

What gave importance to the meeting was that the people actually knew something about the subject. They were Native villagers searching for a way to make sure that after Congress decides what to do with federal land in Alaska they, and their children, will be able to continue living by hunting, fishing, gathering berries and

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# Subsistence council ...

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bird eggs.

The group, called the Subsistence Resource Council, was created at a meeting sponsored by RurAL CAP in Bethel in November, 1976. The purpose of the group is to support Alaska's subsistence people in dealing with current and future problems involving subsistence and protect the quality of life in rural Alaska.

The council reviewed several of the current major d-2 proposals and apparently reached a unified position. Although the position is not yet available for public scrutiny, George Allen of RurAL CAP explained the agreement reached on several major points:

## Opposes Definition

The council opposes any effort to define what subsistence is. Definitions are usually an important part of law-making because they help explain how the law is to be carried out. The Council, and others, point out that subsistence is different in every region of the state and that subsistence, like any other social and economic system, changes with time.

"What this proposal does as an alternative to defining subsistence is to prescribe a process by which subsistence can be defined as it changes in each region over time," Allen said.

Allen pointed out subsistence is actually defined in the first draft d-2 bill prepared by the Alaska Federation of Natives and commented, "The council said the one group we want to go and see first is AFN."

Byron Mallott, president of AFN, has made it clear that the first draft is only a tentative proposal.

## Management System

Another point discussed by the council was what kind of

management system would give the most protection to subsistence: the traditional federal parks, forests and refuges, or the cooperative management concept, which calls for federal, state, and possibly private land to be managed jointly by agencies and landholders.

Without actually endorsing either approach, the council proposes an "organizational structure to permit cooperative subsistence resource management." The structure would include three types of organization which would generate accurate, up-to-date subsistence information and help create subsistence protection and planning policy. The types of organization would be: small groups of villages using the same local area for subsistence purposes; regional subsistence boards; and a statewide subsistence resource council.

## Local Folk Dance

Allen said one of the major problems with many d-2 proposals is that subsistence users would be fragmented. For example, under the proposal offered by conservationists, subsistence boards would be set up to issue subsistence permits for a certain park or reserve. Under this arrangement, there is no opportunity for rural people to really help develop policy or to strengthen subsistence protection by banding together.

According to Allen, this creates a situation where "biologists still call the tune and the local folks dance."

The structure proposed by the council can only work, Allen said, if there is a major shift in the way people think about conservation:

"I would suggest there be an explicit statement of national policy written into the legislation that there is a relationship between habitat and wildlife resource conservation and the

resource needs of village people in Alaska. I think what has to be done in this national interest land legislation is to balance the needs for local conservation and national conservation."

Members of the Subsistence Resource Council will meet with the Federal State Land use Planning Commission on April 19 to discuss its proposal.

The Copper Center meeting held March 18-20, was chaired by Gene George of Stevens Village.

Council members present were Arnold Brower, Jr., Barrow; Kenneth Charlie, Minto; Jim Farmer, Ruby; Isaac Hawk, Eek; Paul Kiunya, Kipnuk; Arnold Melsheimer, English Bay; David Nanalook, Togiak; Anthony Philemonoff, St. Paul Island; Harold Sparck, Bethel; and Dale Stotts, Barrow.

Also present were Esther Wunnicke, Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission; Jim Kowalsky, Friends of the Earth; Phil Kelly, Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs; Don Mitchell, Norman Cohen and Lisa Ratner of Alaska Legal Services; and George Allen, Rural Alaska Community Action Program. Local visitors included Hector Ewan and Walter Charley.

Council members unable to attend were Frank Woods, Chief of the Council, New Stuyahok; Larry Bemis, Jr., Yakutat; Nancy Craig, Mentasta; Buster Gene, Gakona; Andrew Golia, Dillingham; Willie Goodwin, Kotzebue; George Olanna, Shishmaref; and Roosevelt Paneak, Anaktuvuk Pass.

Other activities of the Council have included drafting recommendations on subsistence for presentation to the Alaska Legislature through the Citizen Participation Conferences held in Anchorage and Juneau.