

Your help needed in mammal regulation

The State of Alaska is taking the first step to regain control of the nine marine mammals which are utilized by Native people of Alaska. That control was lost nine years ago when the Marine Mammal Protection Act was passed and placed control in the hands of the federal government.

One reason the regulation of marine mammals was taken away from the state, according to the Audubon Society, was because of the emphasis on sports harvesting of the resources. In other words, the sports hunters got a bigger share of the hunting pie than did the other users such as subsistence and the resource was being depleted.

Now the state, if it wants to keep control of the resource, must assure that the subsistence priority be maintained and it also must do everything to assure that local villagers have first crack at economic benefit from the opening of the resource. That means at hunting and perhaps at commercial meat sales of the harvested mammals.

It has been pointed out that the federal requirements of the state will have state officials jumping through hoops with a serious and complicated problem.

On the other hand, it also has been pointed out that one species — the walrus — is in danger of crashing, that is, of becoming too large for the population to sustain itself on the resources.

The federal government has admitted it can do little to increase regulation so as to increase harvesting and bring the herds down to a healthy manageable size. And the state is on a closer level to maintain the harvest.

But it is a complicated issue. We are certain that state officials who want to, can develop a plan of properly managing the harvest so as to benefit not only the villagers, but to allow for a sports or commercial harvest that would never cause the kinds of problems that were present before.

They can develop a good plan if the people who live and have lived with the mammals for untold generations help out. Scientific data is the primary source of information available to the state now but the information that a hunter in Nome or on St. Lawrence provides can be more telling than any chart of statistics.

In the coming months the state will need help if it is to properly manage the resource. It may be tempting to withhold that information but remember that you are the source of the best information and your input is needed in deliberations.

Participate and become informed on the matters that affect your livelihoods. You can only benefit if you do and only you will be harmed if you do not.