

# Coastal villages need resource board

by Paul Swetzof  
for the Tundra Times

Native people living in Alaska's coastal villages need to consider forming a "Coastal Village Resource Board."

This board would assist in the management of coastal resources, including fisheries and marine mammals. It would also mount an intense lobbying effort in Congress and the Alaska Legislature to gain recognition and co-management authority of coastal resources.

## OPINION

The Bering Sea is one of the richest natural ecosystems in the world, and it is one of the only ones which is still intact. However, the rape of our ocean resources has the immediate potential of wiping out our children's future. It is our children who will have to abandon their villages if the resources are wiped out.

It is our children whose identity will be destroyed, and it is our children who will have to pretend to be white men, rather than proud Aleuts, Yupiks and other coastal Natives in order to get by in the urban junkyards they will be forced to inhabit.

Greed, primarily by Seattle-based factory trawlers and the huge driftnets used by Japanese, Taiwanese and Korean fishing fleets, is rapidly depleting the resources of our great seas. If the resources of the Bering Sea and the North Pacific Ocean become severely depleted, our coastal communities and our Native cultures will be in danger of extinction.

Our villages cannot survive without our most precious resources. Already, halibut bycatches by the trawlers are causing cutbacks to the allocation of

coastal communities and west of Unimak Pass few, if any, of our coastal residents have limited entry salmon permits.

Sea lions, a vital food staple for thousands of years, are becoming harder to find. Village hunters are having to travel farther down the coast each year to find the sea lion.

Pollock, probably the most plentiful fish in the ocean, is being harvested by factory trawlers in numbers so great they are hard to imagine. Many boats drag the bottom, wiping out everything in their path, including juvenile King crab stocks.

When a staple for marine mammals and birds, such as pollock, becomes scarce, these animals have to exploit resources they have not historically harvested. This puts a strain on less populous resources, changing migration patterns and stressing the populations themselves.

The end result is the marine resources and the coastal people who depend on them become endangered species, and this is genocide. It's genocide because the nutritional, cultural and economic subsistence needs of our village people do not figure into the economic plans of the large Seattle and foreign interests which dominate the fishing industry.

Fisheries management organizations, such as the North Pacific Fishery Management council, make deliberate decisions ignoring the voices of those with the least economic clout — Native villagers.

An intent by either passive or aggressive means to eliminate a culture is genocide. It won't mean much to any of us if these so-called management councils come to us after the fact and say they really didn't mean to destroy our villages and kill our cultures.

Mike Swetzof, an Aleut living at St. Paul, reports that all winter he has seen a number of factory trawlers engaged

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in joint ventures a mere four to five miles off the island's shores. This is quite a sight to villagers who are trying to get into the fisheries.

There is no local economic zone, no safety net, around the villages to preserve the resources so that they can survive. There is no management council which gives more than lip service to village people. If this keeps up, there will be no people.

What else does this all mean to individuals and their communities, some of which have been in the same vicinity for 10,000 years? It means that when an individual wants to get a loan for a boat in order to break into the fisheries, it is almost impossible.

He or she has no collateral to speak of. People unable to show a bank they are guaranteed a specific area in the vicinity of their village large enough to fish and make a living at it won't get a loan to get started.

There is no way village people are going to compete with factory trawlers. If a community can't plan for its economic, cultural and nutritional subsistence needs, it is very difficult for that community to continue to exist.

Currently, most village people don't know what is going on. What they do know, however, is whatever is going on doesn't include them.

Villagers need a voice. A Coastal Village Resource Board with management powers would provide the means necessary for rational and renewable resource management. It would work for the good of local Alaskans and not, as is now the case, everyone but Alaskans.

Perhaps with a new state administration we'll be able to find a friendly ear to this idea.

It is imperative that we get Native organizations to speak with one voice in this matter. The Alaska Native Coalition, the Alaska Federation of Natives and our other local, regional and statewide tribes/villages, organizations and corporations must act now.

We need serious action from these people who are always claiming to represent us. I intend to push our leaders to put up or shut up. I suggest we all do the same on the local and regional level. The local economic zone and the coastal village resource board: let's do it.