

Big Game Animals Under Heavy Pressure

On the evening of April 2, the Board of Fish and Game concluded their hearings on the new proposed game regulations. The two-day public hearing included many interested groups and individuals ranging from wolf-preservationists to falcon enthusiasts.

Stu Carlo, a representative from RurAL CAP attended the two-day hearing and reported that the major concern of the people who testified was the tightening of regulations on large game species and that for the past few years there has been a sudden increase of hunting pressure from urban hunters and non-resident hunters.

Areas that have had noticeable increases in aerial hunting for moose are the Alaskan peninsula, Kuskokwim River, Lower Yukon and tributary rivers and the lakes between the Tanana and Koyukuk Rivers.

Also of concern, Carlo said, was the quality of trophy head sheep that are declining due to the hunting pressure. Lyn Castle, a guide representing Alaska Professional Hunters Association, Inc., introduced a proposal whereby the taking of sheep must have a 7/8 curl rather than a 3/4 curl.

The intent of this resolution is to hopefully increase the quality of future trophy heads and population, but Carlo said, "I see it as a more privileged class of people hunting a very sought after species, where guides can afford to hunt this type of species, the resident hunter may run into economic problems in pursuing such a quality trophy. I think that the guide should have a limited number of clients and the price

of non-resident licenses should be increased."

Among the 35-40 people that testified, there were only seven Native people and six of them were representing their areas and were employed by RurAL CAP.

Nick Gregory, representing Bristol Bay, came out strong on non-resident hunting of moose and caribou in the Bristol Bay area. He said that he proposed the Bristol Bay Area (game units 9 and 17) should be open to resident hunting only.

His justification was the sudden depletion of the moose population and the many moose carcasses left out in the field with only the heads and antlers being taken. He also quoted the number of moose taken since 1963 - 1973.

The last three years had an increase of 520 moose kills plus moose killed that were not reported, bringing the total number of moose killed to 813. Nick Gregory also proposed that caribou in this area be restricted to resident hunters only.

The same reason was given for depletion of game and the field behavior of the non-resident hunter. The residents of Bristol Bay are in fear that this game (which is their meat subsistence) will go the way the salmon did.

Jimmy Huntington, representing the Koyukon Development Corporation and Tanana Chiefs Conference, emphasized the need to put restrictions on the resident and non-resident hunters, especially from urban centers who utilize aircraft and all-terrain vehicles to pursue game.

He mentioned that if the means in which people hunt by aircraft goes unchecked, our game resources are going to go like the great plains buffalo. He proposed that no person may take or assist in taking any big game in any game management unit until after midnight of any day in which he was airborne.

Also, he proposed opening and closing dates in the Yukon Flats, Minto area, and game units in the Galena area where people who do live in these areas will have a chance to hunt against the Labor Day week-end hunters from the urban areas and the reason for the village people having a greater chance of preventing their meat from spoilage.

Bill Barr from Shishmaref, representing Kawerak Incorporated, emphasized that the Board of Fish and Game should recognize the values and life-styles that rural Native people place on subsistence living.

He proposed that there must be some type of control put on the wolf because of the great toll that they take in the domestic reindeer herds on the Seward Peninsula.

Barr mentioned that with the restrictions put on aerial hunting of polar bear, that for the first time in several years, there have been polar bear kills in some villages along the coast this past winter.

Walter Charlie from Copper Center and representative of Copper Center Advisory Board, lent some weight to proposals that restricted the killing of big game species same day airborne.

He also stressed the need to restrict snow machine hunting in some areas. He cited an example near his village where there were 37 moose in the valley and the snowmachine hunters with pickups and trailers completely slaughtered the 37 moose.

Charlie Kairaiuk from Bethel representative of Yupiktak Bista, stressed the need of local input into the game regulations and the need for judicial units to do better jobs of controlling the hunters that violate the game laws.

He also stressed that the judicial branch of the state must take notice of the need to fine and prosecute game violators much stronger.

Carlo summarized the hearing by saying that the people mentioned above were probably the most informed on the game populations in their respective areas, and the pressures and means in which they are being hunted by "outside" hunters.

It has been the policy of the State of Alaska through their game management program to recognize the importance of subsistence hunting to its rural residents. If the Board of Fish and Game does not come up with strong regulations that conform to the natural realities of our wildlife populations, then the Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game should utilize his powers to protect wildlife resources and maintain them on a maximum sustained level.

The behavior of the urban and non-resident hunter must be modified. Instead of paying too much attention to supplying the demands of the hunters, he should pay rather more attention to the resources.