

Severed Net Rots In Poly Bag

By TIM BRADNER
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Nick Demientioff, formerly of Holy Cross and now of Fairbanks, had a gill net staked out for King Salmon in the Tanana River.

When he went down to check his net the other day, he found it gone.

On a tripod Nick used to anchor the net, he found a note telling him he could come up to the State Department of Fish and Game Office and get it.

The 40-foot net, which cost \$125 when Nick bought it recently, had been cut and dragged out of the water, he said, damaging it severely.

And when he got up to the Fish and Game office, he told the Tundra Times, he found it stored in a plastic bag and still wet.

"I've got a bum leg and it was a couple of days before I could get a ride up to the office, from the time I found the net," he said.

But by the time he got there, he said, the still-wet netting was rotten and almost unfit for further use.

According to Nick, he had the gill net staked out near the confluence of the Chena and Tanana Rivers. The net was stretched out and anchor-

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State Game Agents Mutilate Net . . .

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ed right at the mouth, but was in the Tanana River current.

"You can tell the difference right away," Nick said, "The Tanana runs muddy water and the Chena runs clear. This kind of net is no good in clear water; it will only work in muddy water."

The location, where Nick has a plot of land on the point where the two rivers come together, is known as the only good fishing location for some distance up and down the Tanana.

In other places there would either be no fish, or else the net would be clogged with drifting branches coming down the river.

"I scouted all over the Tanana looking for a better place to fish," he said, "The only other place is about a mile and a half upriver. You can catch the fish there but

the drift is bad. It will tear out your net."

Nick had a subsistence fishing permit from the Fish and Game office when he went down to put his net into the water.

He had been fishing at the spot, "on and off for about two years," he said.

Nothing had ever been said before to him, he said, about a state fish and game regulation prohibiting nets and fish-wheels within 500 feet of the mouth of certain rivers in the interior of the state, of which the Chena happens to be one.

The measure was designed as a conservation regulation, to insure salmon running up the specified streams would not be disturbed.

But, Nick pointed out, his net was in Tanana River water and the only salmon he could possibly catch, he said, were those heading up the Tanana, even though his net was within 500 feet of the Chena's mouth.

"I could have been legal in putting my net a little over 500 feet below the Chena's mouth," he said. "I would have entirely been legal and still would have caught almost every salmon heading for the Chena River mouth. That just shows you how ridiculous the law is."

The note Nick found where his net was said, "You may pick up your net at the office of Dept. of Fish and Game. Address on other side of the card."

The penned-scrrawl was on the back of a white business card, and on the other side was the name of a Fish and Game protection officer and the address of the Fairbanks Fish and Game office.

The entire net had been cut and dragged out, Nick said.

He did not find a written citation form ordinarily used in fishing violations, he said. There was only the white business card.

When he went up to the state office building to get his net, he was, "boiling mad."

"I was so mad I felt I could have just about done anything," he said. "Nobody had ever told me about this regulation before."

At the office, he was received with politeness. He was shown and given a xeroxed copy of the state regulation under which his net was seized.

But this didn't repair his net nor get him the fish he lost while the net was stored in the state warehouse.

The fishing site used by Nick, who is well known along the Tanana and Yukon from the days he operated the "Beaver," a small river-freighting boat, is popular and has been used for years before Nick began using it.

According to others who have fished in the spot in past years, Fish and Game authorities have never applied the regulation before.

"All I want to do now," Nick said, "is get back fishing. But I'm afraid to put my net back there because they might tear it out again. I'm going to have to buy a new net anyway, and I don't know where I'm going to get the money."

"But I'll be satisfied if I can just fix up the old net enough to put it in for a few days, catch some more fish and then go buy a new one."

To all appearances, he said,

the man who took his net from the water didn't know how to go about it properly.

"If he had used a little common sense," Nick said, "he would have looked me up or gone to find another person who knew how to take the net out properly."

Don Roberts, regional Fish and Game protection supervisor, was not available for comment yesterday.

Roberts was at Bettles, on the Koyukuk River north of Fairbanks, on sheep patrol. The northern sheep-hunting season started Aug. 1 and game authorities are patrolling the area by air.