

Fish, game board limits 'rural' communities in state

The Joint Board of Fisheries and Game has limited the number of Alaska communities which may be considered "rural" under the subsistence law, according to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game.

The board's action is a "first cut" toward determining rural status for areas of the state. About 20 percent of Alaska residents live in areas which require further review by the boards prior to final rural determinations.

The greater Anchorage area, the Juneau Borough, most of the greater Fairbanks area, most of the Kenai

Peninsula, most of the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, Valdez and Whittier were found not to meet the statutory definition of rural.

In these areas, the board found that the non-commercial use of fish and game is not a principal characteristic of the economy. Based on the information available at this meeting, the board believes the remainder of the state may be classified as rural. However, for an area to be rural it must also show customary and traditional use of fish and game.

During future meetings, the in-

dividual boards will determine if these areas can demonstrate customary and traditional uses of fish stock or game populations.

In some areas, use of some species may be customary and traditional, while use of other species may not be.

Alaska residents still have the opportunity to harvest fish and game throughout the state. If an area is not rural, it does not mean that there will be no hunting or fishing opportunities for residents.

In the 1986 law, the Legislature authorized the Board of Fisheries to

establish personal use fisheries — with nets or other efficient gear — open to all Alaskans. The law also set up an Alaska hunter preference for moose, caribou, elk and deer.

The Board of Game will begin examining customary and traditional uses of game today at the Anchorage Hilton Hotel, as it considers proposed changes in big game seasons and bag limits.

The Board of Fisheries will address a few subsistence proposals at its April meeting and will announce its future schedule at the end of that meeting.