

# Meeting may help preserve trapping

by Sen. John Binkley  
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — A meeting coming up later this week in Anchorage will cover several issues important to the future of life in rural Alaska.

## OPINION

Indigenous Survival International is scheduled to hold its sixth annual assembly at the Egan Convention Center this week, Wednesday through Friday. I hope the discussions held will provide some direction to the state of Alaska about its role in promoting a healthy economy in rural communities.

Many of the meetings and speakers during the three-day assembly will be devoted to the issue of fur trapping and its importance to the economy of rural Alaska.

Trapping has been under assault for many years now, and the level of pressure by animal rights groups to abolish it altogether has been growing each year. They have just about succeeded in wiping out the seal skin trade in Northern Canada, for example, leaving the rural residents there who depended on these furs for much of their livelihood with no alternative except government assistance.

Their efforts now are primarily directed at shutting down the demand for furs in the European markets, which have long been a prime market for wild furs from Alaska.

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The efforts of these groups are misguided for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that they completely ignore how vital trapping is to thousands of people living in the rural areas of Alaska, Greenland and Canada. Trapping not only provides income to these people, but also is an important part of their lives in terms of their relationship to the land and the animals living in the world's last wild places.

These animals are not endangered, and in most cases not even threatened, but the way of life for those who trap them certainly will be if these groups are successful.

And you can be certain if they succeed at eliminating trapping, their next goal will be to put an end to the harvesting of larger animals, including those taken strictly for subsistence pur-

poses by rural residents.

Canadian trappers have been fighting these efforts for several years now, and I'm glad to see that many Alaskans have joined the fight. The task facing us is going to be largely educational, convincing people living outside remote areas of the importance of animal harvesting to rural residents.

The Yukon Flats area, for example, covers 10,000 square miles and is home to nine Native villages where trapping, hunting and fishing provide the only stable sources of income. Trapping has been an important part of the economy since the Hudson Bay Co. first opened a trading post in Fort Yukon in the 1840s. If it were to be eliminated, there simply is no other economic activity that could step in and replace it.



Organizations such as Indigenous Survival International will be important if we are to be successful in overcoming the assault against not only trapping, but on every aspect of rural life that involves harvesting animals. The alliance consists of indigenous peoples from Alaska, Canada and Greenland and represents more than 1.5 million people who take their livelihood from the land.

I hope the discussions in the upcoming assembly will result in an even more united effort between the participating countries in developing strategies to preserve an important part of life for rural people. And I encourage the participants to direct resolutions to the state of Alaska, laying out what we can do as a state to help in the effort and asking for that specific assistance.