

MARINE MAMMAL MANAGEMENT DISCUSSED

Bush Representatives From Alaska's West Coast Present Views

The continuing question of the future of Marine Mammal management was discussed in a three-day meeting of the U.S. Marine Mammal Commission in Anchorage on Nov. 13-15.

Rural representatives from the West Coast of Alaska were present to air their views on the possible transfer of management authority from the Federal Department of Commerce and Interior to the State of Alaska.

Under the present structure, only Alaskan Natives are permitted to harvest marine mammals.

The state has not guaranteed a continuing access for Native people, although Jim Brooks, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, has said, "Regulations we have proposed to the federal government in our attempts to regain management authority continue to recognize subsistence utilization, and our subsistence policy considers this to be the first priority utilization of game resources in Alaska."

Native people aren't too sure. While the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has a "subsistence policy" some point to the recent Musk Ox hunts on Nunivak and Nelson Islands (for which \$500 tag fees for residents were changed) as an example of the state's disregard for the subsistence needs of village people.

They argue that similar high

fees could be levied against Natives who have traditionally hunted walrus and other Marine Mammals should management authority revert to the state.

Another argument advanced in favor of a return to state management, was that local people could realize significant cash return by guiding and outfitting commercial and sport hunting parties. As well, proponents argued, use of hides, ivory, etc. could assist in establishing a thriving industry in the villages.

Basically, then, a problem of "subsistence versus development" is emerging, one which will be around for a long time.

Rural CAP has stated, through resolution and testimony by Peter Kunnuk, staff nutrition coordinator, that decisions regarding management cannot be made by bureaucrats, instead CAP has urged that extensive public hearings be held in the coastal regions before any changes to the present management structure are permitted, a sentiment echoed by AFN and other individuals in attendance at the meeting.