

Have to Die So Another May Live?



REP. STEVE COWPER

Photo by Howard D. Ringley Jr.

moose pretty slim.

In 1975, I flew that same old Tri-Pacer over the flats again for nearly three hours. There wasn't a moose in sight.

Alaska has changed a lot in those few years between 1968 and 1975. Once-plentiful game animals now are scarce. Urban hunters who formerly drove up the road a few miles to fill their meat locker now have to fly in to rural areas to be assured of

success. There, of course, they compete with rural subsistence users for the resource.

When the animals get scarce, somebody has to stop hunting them. It's as simple as that. The trouble arises when the managing agency has to say who gets to hunt and who doesn't.

In the d-2 legislation now being considered by the United States Congress, a lot of provisions are still up in the air. One sure bet, however, is that a preference will be created for subsistence users on federal lands.

Defining a "subsistence user" is, of course, an enormously difficult task. There's very little question about a person who derives all or a substantial part of his food and fuel from the land. But what about a traditional subsistence user who makes, say, \$25,000 per year as a construction worker or as an employee of a village or regional corporation?

The Congress is fumbling with the problem of defining subsistence, and a number of unworkable solutions have been advanced so far. The latest entry is a six-step maze of red tape which may be a bureaucrat's dream, but it's going to be a nightmare for a subsistence user from Chefnak. Remember those limited entry permit appli-

cations?

Originally, it was thought best to limit subsistence preferences to Native people as defined in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Such preference would be legal under the United States Constitution, but from a political standpoint it would probably create racial tensions that we don't need here

in Alaska. For those reasons and others, many Native leaders have rejected a purely racial distinction.

Perhaps the most practical approach will be to create preferences for traditional subsistence users within certain geographical areas in the event a limited harvest is required, and

(Continued on page 12)

Urban legislator's view of subsistence . . .

(Continued from page 1)

then if necessary to favor the subsistence users who show the greatest economic need.

For example, if it were found necessary to limit the take of moose to 500 in the Kobuk valley, then the people of Kobuk, Kiana, Ambler, and other nearby settlements would be granted the first right to harvest the moose. If more than 500 subsistence users from the area applied, those with the least cash income would come first.

Under the above plan, if there's more than enough fish or game for the residents of the management area, then Alaskan sport hunters and fishermen would get their chance. If the resource is plentiful, outside and foreign sport hunting could continue on a carefully monitored basis.

Another important question that must be answered in the d-2 legislation is whether the state or the federal government will manage the newly-created parks

and refuges on a day-to-day basis.

In the past, the performance of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has been heavily criticized by residents of the rural areas. This has resulted in a feeling that federal management might be more sensitive to the needs of the local people.

Unfortunately, rules and regulations issued from Washington, D. C., sometimes don't make much sense in Alaska. Federal management looks good now to some who are disgruntled with the performance of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, but the best solution may be to change Fish and Game.

A good way to start might be to encourage, and perhaps require, Fish and Game to use local paraprofessionals in both research and enforcement activities. In addition, overall control could be shifted from the present statewide boards of fish and game to regional boards consisting of local people who have to deal with local problems on a daily basis.

Over the long haul, it is likely that state government will be more responsive to the needs of

Alaskans than the federal government. The Carter administration has pledged to keep the federal budget from undue expansion; that means that federal employees who may be needed to manage fish and game and to enforce the laws on federal land in Alaska may not be approved. Inadequate management and enforcement will inevitably mean a decline in the number of animals, and perhaps also of fish.

If the new federal parks and refuges are managed by Fish and Game, the Secretary of the Interior will still retain the right to formulate his own rules to which Fish and Game must adhere. Thus ultimate control will remain within the federal government, even though the state will be making the day-to-day management decisions.

Also, if the federal government is managing the lands and they aren't doing it properly, you have to write to a distant official to complain. If Fish and Game is the manager, your legislator can step in; and the last time I noticed, Governor Hammond was answering his mail also.