

Local Fish and Game Management

In this issue of the Tundra Times, we have provided coverage of two shining examples of something that rural and Native Alaskans have been urging for a long time—local control or management of wildlife resources.

We should state here and now, in the event that we have neglected to do so previously, that we are fully aware of the constitutional restraints which **at this time** prevent the State of Alaska from creating a statutory priority use of subsistence resources by Native Alaskans. Nonetheless, we are also painfully aware that the state has been so timid, so reluctant even to pay lip service to the cultural and economic needs of many rural Alaskans that the "subsistence" policies of two state administrations have been rendered worthless.

The inability of the state to acknowledge the need of certain Alaskans for wildlife resources is an injury; the tendency of state officials, from top to bottom, even to enter into meaningful dialogue with subsistence hunters and fishermen about their needs is an insult.

There is no subsistence question which goes begging more often for a decent answer as a result of this insulting attitude than the question of local participation in the management of fish and wildlife resources.

Local participation can take many forms. At the very least, local experts can be relied upon in gathering crucial data on wildlife distribution, habits and habitat which are needed to make any sound management decisions.

This same rich bank of resource knowledge more than qualifies Native and rural Alaskans to suggest how fish and wildlife may best be used to insure that there is a supply for the future.

Yet it is also clear from the examples we offer in this issue (management of wildlife on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation by Indians and the formation of a local management agency to control the hunting of Arctic whales) that Native people are quite capable of recognizing the need for controls and limitations on their own fishing and hunting. The days of running herds of buffalo over the cliffs are gone.

What the Apaches and the Inupiat apparently must prove to their critics is that the need of local people for wild food can be reconciled with the biological reproductive requirements of wild species for survival.

We are certain that the critics will soon eat their own words.

JRR