

AFN pushes for federal control

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) will push for federal legislation that will ensure federal oversight of the management of fish and game resources on all federal lands in Alaska, AFN President Morris Thompson announced last week.

Thompson said the decision resulted from "continued frustration" in dealing with the state. The AFN and other Native organizations has been working for years in an attempt to secure legislation that would put fish and game management authority in the hands of regional boards, he said.

The entire issue of regionalization has been addressed numerous times both on the state and national level. The concept was included in last year's D-2 bill which passed both the House and Senate before being killed by Senator Gravel. AFN's position is that the management of all fish and game resources in the state should be handled at the local level.

The AFN worked with the state in Washington on a national level to ensure continued state management of fish and

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game resources on all lands in Alaska. Although the AFN supports state management of fish and game, it is its feeling now that federal oversight is necessary to ensure the resources are managed in a way which benefits those users directly affected.

"It is regrettable that the Legislature would not enact legislation which would allow this issue to be dealt with on the state level. This leaves us the only option of requesting legislation to deal with this critical issue at the federal level" said Thompson.

In the early weeks of this year's legislative session, Representative Terry Gardiner D-Ketchikan, introduced a bill to decentralize the Department of Fish and Game. AFN, along

with other Native and non-Native organizations, supported this bill. Gardiner's bill provided for regulatory powers to be invested in seven regional fish and game boards. Regulations drafted by the regional boards would then be subject to amendment or veto by a statewide master board.

According to the AFN, Halford's bill established regional councils which have no real authority. "They would simply assist the more than 50 local fish and game advisory committees that already are established," Thompson pointed out.

Thompson said that, essentially, Halford's bill leaves the current situation unchanged, with fish and game management left at the status quo. "Nowhere in the Halford bill is it required

that the statewide board must take into serious consideration the recommendations of the regional councils," said Thompson.

"In order for the whole concept of regionalization to work and be successful, the local advisory committees and regional councils *must* have a greater say in the management of resources within their areas," Thompson said. Under Gardiner's bill, presidents of the regional councils would be members of the master board.

Thompson said the AFN would rather have no bill than the Halford bill because it does not improve a system that "is the root of dissatisfaction between local users and the Department of Fish and Game."