

Subsistence: AFN's Highest Priority

Efforts of the Alaska Federation of Natives have succeeded in making subsistence one of the major issues in proposed (d)(2) legislation.

Had AFN not pursued the protection of subsistence rights for Alaska Natives, the issue may well have taken a backseat to other natural resource concerns such as energy, private land ownership, recreation and transportation corridors.

When AFN representatives travel back to Washington D.C. this month for mark-up activities, they will once again carry with them a strong message to Congress concerning subsistence protection.

Although at this point AFN does not endorse any particular subsistence language, they have two major concerns for inclusion into proposed legislation.

AFN feels subsistence must be preserved as a Native right for Native subsistence users, and that there must be strong Federal oversight in any subsistence related section.

According to President Byron Mallott, AFN wants a strong declaration from Congress that subsistence use is the highest priority use of natural resources on Federal lands.

"We would like to have legislation that is clean, simple and straightforward. The language should talk about policy and purpose as opposed to how management should be implemented," Mallott said.

While in Washington, AFN will attempt to gain support from the Department of Interior for its Land Bank concept. Introduced last summer, the Land Bank program would permit any ANCSA corporation to place up to 90% of its land in a "bank" at any given time. The agreement would be for a period of not less than 10 years with options to renew for no less than five years. During the term of each agreement all development rights would be suspended and renewable resources would only be used for traditional subsistence activities. Additionally, land banked would be exempt from State and local real property taxes and not subject to adverse possession.

Although the current Subcommittee print embodies a land trust idea which would allow Native land owners to place land in trust with the Secretary of Interior, AFN prefers the language in their land bank concept.

As clearly stated in testimony before the Subcommittee and both publically or behind closed Washington doors, AFN feels subsistence rights of Alaska Natives must be protected.

