

Editorial



Native organizations must act now

by Julie Kitka

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In light of the impending federal takeover of fish and game management on public lands, Gov. Steve Cowper has called the Alaska Legislature into special session today.

The subsistence challenge lawmakers are faced with is how the state of Alaska can regain management authority over fish and wildlife resources on more than 60 percent of Alaska's land affected by the takeover.

Unless the Alaska Constitution is amended to allow the preference, state law will remain out of compliance with federal law, and the federal government must assume management responsibility on all public lands.

During the regular legislative session this spring, House lawmakers considered a proposal to amend the Alaska Constitution. AFN and other Native organizations went on record in unanimous support of an amendment following the Subsistence Summit Conference of the statewide Native community last April.

Unfortunately, the measure failed to pass by the majority needed (27 votes) and never even came to a vote in the Senate. The state of Alaska faces a similar situation during the special session: Legislators must act to block federal intervention or live with the reality of dual management in Alaska for an indefinite period of time.

AFN and other Native organizations need the support of the villages to be successful in this effort. It is essential that the statewide Native community remind Alaska's legislators of their obligation to protect the welfare of all residents of the state.

We urge you to send public opinion messages — via the Legislative Information Office nearest you — and phone calls of support to your representatives and senators, as well as to House Speaker Sam Cotten and Senate President Tim Kelly. Time is too short for letters. Please call *today*.

This issue is by far the most important challenge before Alaska Natives today. If the Legislature does not pass an acceptable constitutional amendment, AFN and other Native organizations are prepared to take legal action. We already have been informed that the Alaska Outdoor Council and the National Rifle Association are planning to file a lawsuit challenging Title VIII of ANILCA on federal constitutional grounds.

This means *all* village councils, village corporations and Native regional organizations must now make clear they are for a constitutional amendment for a rural preference. We must remind the Legislature in no uncertain terms of its obligation to keep state control of fish and game, and we must act immediately in order to achieve our goal.