

Alaska boards of fisheries and game subsistence policy

The Boards of Fisheries and the Board of Game recognize that existing cultures and life styles in Alaska are of great value and should be preserved. Accordingly, customary and traditional subsistence uses of fish and game are assigned a priority among beneficial uses.

The use of fish and game for subsistence is vital to the existence of many Alaskans, although limitations on the productivity of fish and game stocks may limit continued increases in the number of subsistence users.

Beyond directly satisfying food requirements, home consumption of fish and game tends to preserve cultures and traditions and gives gratification to a strong desire possessed by many Alaskans to harvest their own food. The latter functions seem genuinely important to the physical and psychological well-being of a large number of Alaskans.

In some circumstances, subsistence users may also be participants in sports or commercial harvesting. Where subsistence users can satisfy their harvest by commercial or sports methods, special regulations for the subsistence priority may not be needed. Where regulations are needed, commercial and sports uses may not need to be totally eliminated prior to restrictions on subsistence uses, not traditional and customary subsistence uses will receive a priority harvest opportunity in the Boards' regulatory systems.

Whenever possible, the subsistence priority should be achieved by existing regulatory techniques, such as open and closed seasons, bag limits, control of methods and means of take, and controlled use areas. When a resource is plentiful enough to accommodate all uses, the Boards may not need to distinguish between different types of use. Special regulations such as designation of a subsistence hunting or fishing area to allocate a subsistence resource to local subsistence users may be enacted if the above approach is inappropriate or ineffective.

If further restriction is necessary, priority among subsistence users will be based on 1) customary and direct dependence upon the resource as the mainstay of one's livelihood; 2) local residency; and 3) availability of alternate resources. The Boards will depend heavily on data gathered by the Subsistence Section in achieving priority for subsistence and in considering the three factors above.

Implicit in the two criteria of "direct dependence" and "availability of alternative resources" is the idea that a subsistence priority is based to some extent on the actual needs of people. Subsistence needs of individuals, families, and cultural groups may differ in type and degree. It is recognized that judgement will be an unavoidable necessity in weighing actual need. Elements to consider in establishing the level of subsistence need include location, local cultures, traditions, customs, and alternative resources.

The Boards recognize the need for regional differences in the approach to fish and game management and they will maintain flexibility by periodically examining social and economic conditions, as well as biological conditions which may warrant a change in subsistence uses and the Boards' regulations.