

# We must keep fighting for subsistence

by Rep. Eileen MacLean  
for the Tundra Times

JUNEAU — After two days of emotional talk and a final debate closed to non-Native outsiders, Alaska Natives — including myself — agreed last week on a series of measures to assure continuation of traditional hunting and fishing rights.

**Inupiat Paitot**  
*People's Heritage*

## OPINION

This agreement took place at a statewide subsistence gathering organized by the Alaska Federation of Natives.

Some 700 Natives, most from rural villages, met behind closed doors at the Egan Convention Center in Anchorage and emerged after long hours of deliberation with a series of resolutions that were passed unanimously.

The meeting, organized as an educational forum, brought consensual agreements among Natives on the issue of subsistence. It's nothing short of miraculous that the meeting forged stronger agreement and unity between Natives across the state.

The measures include support for a state constitutional amendment that could revive Alaska's old rural-



priority subsistence law. As you know, the old law was declared unconstitutional by the Alaska Supreme Court in December because it denied subsistence hunting and fishing to non-rural residents.

In addition, we agreed to work for an eventual subsistence preference for all Natives — not just rural residents — as well as tribal management of subsistence activities.

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Signs are strong that the proposals supported by Natives at the gathering will continue to face opposition in the Legislature, as well as from sport hunters and others who have opposed Alaska's old subsistence law.

The constitutional amendment approach proposed by Gov. Steve Cowper and Rep. George Jacko, D-Pedro Bay, does not have enough support to pass the Legislature.

However, the gathering eventually agreed on a compromise of sorts. We backed a proposed constitutional amendment by Rep. Lyman Hoffman,

D-Bethel, that simply allows the state to enact subsistence laws that are in step with federal statutes.

The House Resource Committee is expected to adopt Hoffman's amendment, perhaps incorporating the measure into one of the other two constitutional amendments that currently reside in the committee.

Such a change in the constitution apparently would allow the state to rewrite its laws to permit a rural subsistence preference because federal laws also call for a rural priority on federal lands in Alaska.

The Native gathering also agreed to urge the state to review and revise, before July 1, all state subsistence statutes, policies, regulations and programs and practices in order to establish an overall subsistence management regime that is responsive to the true subsistence needs of Alaskans.

In reaction to our effort along with others, the federal government is soliciting public views on subsistence through May 13 to be addressed to:

**Regional Director  
Glenn Ellison  
1011 E. Tudor Road  
Anchorage 99503**

As a guidance for those who wish to comment, I strongly encourage all Natives to give input on this crucial issue so vital to preserving our cultural heritage.