

# **Game guides**

A small, vocal group of Alaskans exercises especially powerful influence over the state's game management policies. Each hunter from each village, and every urban hunter from Fairbanks or Anchorage, competes for an increasingly scarce game resource with the small community of Alaskan game guides. Alaskan hunters, village and urban alike, usually hunt game with the objective of providing food for their families.

Alaskan game guides, however, cater to an affluent, non-Alaskan clientele. For a price, ranging from several hundred dollars to several thousands of dollars, guides will deliver a few seconds pleasure to head hunters and thrill seekers. In a real sense, the system is a marketing of Alaskan wildlife for export. The guides have jealously guarded their interest in the system over the years, steadily encroaching into traditional village hunting areas, establishing base camps on the sites of choice hunting and fishing camps used for generations by Native families. Recently, the special guiding interests persuaded state law and policy makers to establish a system under which the guides receive "exclusive guiding areas."

The theory behind this system is that the guides, being granted their own turf, will become more responsible in their attitude toward conserving the game. In reality, the guides now have exclusive control over the game in each area, and are able to auction wildlife in their domains to the highest bidder.

The system works to the detriment of village hunters, whose interests were ignored when the system was established, and who feel increasingly stiff competition against head hunters in trying to provide for their families. The system also works against urban sports hunters, who, under the state constitution, also have an interest in the game resource. But the urban hunters, seasonally wishing to fill their freezers, cannot expect to compete successfully against professional guides, knowledgeable about their exclusive areas, who deliver prime specimens to outsiders who will pay the high cost of export without question.

With this cozy arrangement, it is understandable how Alaskans are often distrusted and thought unable to manage their resources by congressmen and key government officials. This is the image which so easily prompts National Monuments to be created.

Villagers and urban sports hunters alike ought to recognize the system for what it is, and persuade their state legislators to take a close objective look at the system. The guides have successfully persuaded our representatives in Juneau that they are honorable men, who contribute to the economy by bringing in outside money in the spirit of "fair chase" and "noble quest."

The guides are auctioneers of a limited resource that properly belongs to Alaskans. The economic contribution is doubtful, as the money flows in (to the guides) and the game flows out. The guiding system should be eliminated.