

Ill-advised Land Use Planning Hit by Game Official

Ill-advised land use planning could prohibit or restrict hunting and fishing on approximately 90 million acres of Alaska's prime wildlife habitat, a State Fish and Game Department official said.

James Harper, director of the Game Division, called the potential loss of hunting and fishing territory through development of parks "a serious crisis which in most cases is absolutely unnecessary."

Lands involved are largely those controlled by governmental agencies such as the Departments of the Interior, Agriculture and Defense, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, but some private property is included.

"Large parks, recreation areas, or wilderness areas need not mean the end of hunting and fishing on affected lands," he added. "By zoning areas for prime scenic quality, public safety and seasonal use, most recreational pursuits can and should be continued."

Harper termed the threat posed by restricted land use "the result of our society's inability to adequately provide long-term land control and to recognize the need for land use and resource planning which takes into account compatible uses."

"The decade of the Sixties witnessed the meteoric rise of conservation as a political and sociological issue and the present crisis is due to the seemingly irreconcilable philosophies of preservationists and developers,"

Harper said.

"Both camps must use archaic and unworkable land laws. To prevent overdevelopment, the public is countering with the establishment of inviolate sanctuaries-inviolate not only to industry but in many cases to sportsmen and general recreationists as well," he said.

"The Alaska Department of Fish and Game does not oppose the conservation concepts being presented," Harper said, "but the dogmatic adherence to the antiquated rules and regulations governing fish and game resource management within these areas is questionable."

Harper suggested long term land zoning as one means of preserving wildlife areas for the outdoorsman.

"Most recreational pursuits need not be eliminated from these areas," he said. "Statewide land and resource planning can be accomplished. Our quality environment can be protected. All true conservationists, and that includes preservationists, developers, guides and the general sportsman, must work together for the common good."

Harper urged all sportsmen to become aware of what is happening in the land use and conservation areas.

"Question ill-planned urban growth and economic development as well as irrational and ill-planned preservation. Demand statewide land use planning that considers all resources and their

users and manages Alaska's lands accordingly," he urged.

Harper said the land lost to hunting and/or fishing now or which may be lost in the future includes:

National Parks Service— 7.5 million acres closed to hunting, 6 million acres proposed for closure.

Department of Defense—296,000 acres closed to hunting, 1.4 million acres restricted.

State Parks and Recreation Areas— approximately 50,000 acres closed to discharge of firearms. approximately 2 million acres proposed for closure or severely restricted hunting.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—550,000 acres closed to hunting 7 million acres restricted. All refuges and ranges are scheduled for a wilderness study which could severely reduce access and use in all 20 million acres of this system in Alaska.

Board of Fish and Game—24,000 acres closed to hunting, 146,000 acres restricted, 860,000 acres closed to hunting species or groups of species.

Native lands—890,000 acres already closed to general public hunting, 2 million acres restricted. The Native Land Claims settlement could give local residents exclusive hunting and fishing rights to 40 million acres.

National Forests— Unknown amounts of land sought by local and national wilderness councils for wilderness areas could be restricted.

Private lands— 18.3 million acres, or 5 per cent of the state, closed or restricted.

Harper noted that there is some overlap in these areas. Also fishing is permitted in most of the areas but access limitations often concentrate the activity.

"The 90 million acres which could be lost to hunting and fishing encompass some of the most accessible and most productive fish and wildlife habitat in the state. Closing or heavily restricting use within these areas will prevent good resource management. Surpluses of fish and wildlife cannot be stockpiled and these resources should be managed on a continuous, rather than a sporadic, basis," Harper said.