

# State boards want subsistence solutions

BY NANCY HARVEY

BETHEL--They called it a Fish and Game Public Meeting, but most of those present recognized it as a close encounter of the third kind.

The official reason was a joint meeting of the Alaska Boards of Fisheries and Game to accept formal public presentations on proposed changes in the regulatory system.

Fish and Game Commissioner Ron Skoog, along with representatives from each of the boards and staffs, arrived in Bethel on February 27 for four days of public hearings to discuss the various fish and game decentralization proposals, some currently before the State Legislature. The fish and game meetings followed on the heels of the two-day AVCP Caucus and most representatives stayed in Bethel to present testimony.

But, board members seemed reluctant to hear the kind of

testimony being presented. Some members felt they had heard all they needed to hear about subsistence and problems encountered with state fish and game management.

"We've heard all the problems before," one board member told the Tundra Times. "We want to hear recommendations and solutions to the problems."

Commissioner Skoog told those present that one problem "is how we regulate subsistence need, protect fish and wildlife and allow for other uses of fish and wildlife at the same time."

Skoog said there have not been problems until recently in satisfying the needs of subsistence users, and that there have been very few restrictions on people in rural communities so far.

"Subsistence use too will have to be regulated so we can protect fish and wildlife," Skoog continued. "Not everyone needs fish and wildlife for consump-

tive uses. We have to identify subsistence users."

Skoog said the biggest problem is there is not enough op-

portunity for the public to participate in the setting of regulations, and said there are three options available in the decen-

tralization of fish and game management:

--Keep the present two board system and expand the local advisory committees to be more effective. This would involve

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# ● Fish and game boards weary of subsistence talk

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holding more board meetings in the rural areas and providing more adequate funding of committees;

--Adopt the proposal presented by the State Administration to establish five regional councils to consider regulatory changes and work closely with the local advisory committees; and

--Set up more regional councils such as proposed in Rep. Nels Anderson's bill to establish 12 regional boards along the lines of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Skoog recommended as few boards as possible, saying if there were too many, the system wouldn't work.

Following two days of public testimony which seemingly

made little impact on board members, things began to pick up the morning of the third day.

Tony Vaska of Bethel told the boards: "When the Yupik managed the resources there was much more available. It was only when outside interests came and harvested the resources that it began to decline, until finally it no longer exists in some areas."

"Your regulations are exterminating our culture, you are committing genocide, the extinction of our culture. Too often you consider us to be a 'special interest.' We are not a special interest, we are a cultural whole."

"I am totally opposed to the use of our animals and fish for another culture's sport and re-

creation when we are in dire need of these same resources for food physically and culturally. In light of this, and in light of your conservation concepts, sport hunting and fishing is counter to the utilization and wise use of very scarce resources. Such obvious waste and conspicuous consumption practices should not even be tolerated by you who preach conservation of resources," Vaska continued.

"It is indeed interesting that the State of Alaska is screaming for more freedom from the grasp of federal control on its resources and people when the State of Alaska is not willing to give local control to the local subsistence councils. The State of Alaska has given little real

support to its Native people. It has been up to the Federal government to adequately support the Native people. It took an Act of Congress to pass the Land Claims Act when the Statehood Act ignored Natives altogether. Thus, in its responsibility as a trustee for Native people, I look to the Federal government for continued support of our needs, not the State of Alaska until it proves itself ultimately."

Members of the newly established RurAL CAP Statewide Subsistence Committee also testified before the joint boards,

offering suggestions and ideas from different parts of the state.

But, perhaps the feelings of many of those attending the meeting can best be summed up in a statement made by Art Demmert of Craig: "What the people have said here comes straight from their hearts. Subsistence is different where I come from, yet it's the same too."

The Fish and Game saga continues this week in Kodiak when the department holds its fifth regional workshop.