

# Key issues include marine mammals, IHS

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for the Tundra Times

Many events are occurring at this time which should be causing great concern among the Alaska Native community. Our right to exist in peace and evolve in our own way, based on our great and varied heritage is in serious jeopardy.

Following are updates on some of the issues which most affect our ability to survive as distinct cultures.

## REGULATIONS GOVERNING ELIGIBILITY FOR IHS HEALTH SERVICES:

Free health care is one of the primary benefits Alaska Natives and American Indians received from the U.S. government in return for the taking of almost all of our lands and other basic rights.

The rights of many Alaska Natives to obtain health care are in danger of being lost under the new, and final, guidelines relating to eligibility. These new guidelines are intended to take effect in March 1988.

Basically, the blood quantum requirement is dropped. In order to be, or remain, eligible for services an Alaska Native must verify that he/she either belongs to a regional or village corporation or is a member of a federally recognized Native government.

Many Alaska Natives will lose the health benefits they have had access to since birth. Many of our children will never obtain the benefits they are entitled to. Many Alaska Natives never enrolled under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and even if the corporations have the option of again opening their rolls, there is no guarantee they will do so. The same scenario holds true for the children born after the last enrollment (the so called afterborns).

While the regulations have a built-in one-year grace period for Native

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people to enroll with a federally recognized Indian Reorganization Act government, this is impossible for many of our people since many of our villages have never been recognized. Even some which were recognized have been deleted for incomprehensible reasons.

In addition, under the regulations contractual health care services will be much more difficult for many of us to obtain. Even though these regulations are being billed as final many members of Congress have expressed grave concern, in large part because of the issues mentioned above.

It is imperative that all of us, especially village governments, village corporations and others write to our congressional delegation and other members of Congress who are on committees which review IHS regulations and law and give them our views on the various aspects of the eligibility section of the regulations.

Prior to making written comments, however, we should read and become acquainted with the regulations. Time is of the essence. Once the objectionable regulations are removed there are many good and beneficial features to be found in these regulations. The published regulations can be found in Volume 52, No. 179 of the *Federal Register*, dated Sept. 16, 1987, beginning on page 35044, and in 42 CFR, part 36 (Indian Health Service).

## MARINE MAMMAL MANAGEMENT

Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act Native people are guaranteed the exclusive right to hunt and use most marine mammals. The MMPA allows for the federal government to transfer management of marine mammals to the coastal states under certain guidelines. These guidelines are as follows:

- Subsistence uses will be the priority consumptive use.
- Other uses must not adversely affect subsistence.
- Uses other than for subsistence will, "to the maximum extent practicable, provide economic opportunities for the residents of the rural coastal villages of Alaska who engage in subsistence uses of that species."

The state of Alaska is leaning toward requesting that management for walrus, sea otter, and polar bear be given to the state. If this request is made and granted, even given the three requirements mentioned above, the ramifications can be severe for coastal Alaska Native residents.

Of particular concern is the fact that the state will in all likelihood eliminate exclusive Native hunting of the three species of marine mammals.

Even if the state were to attempt to primarily manage marine mammals for the benefit Native people, pressure from sports hunters, animal protectionists, and others could have very adverse effects on Native coastal residents. And of course, given Alaska's everchanging political climate, the future can bring anything and everything. This entire idea of state management is many faceted and should be studied by each village and region affected.

For example, some villages may be happy to use state management to thin out the otter population, while other villages can't afford to have people chasing walrus all over the place.

Village councils and individuals need to meet — now — to develop a position which reflects the needs of each village.

The village's opinion needs to be expressed with a village resolution. The resolution should be sent to the U.F. Fish & Wildlife Service, Marine Mammal Office; and to Lloyd Lowry, Marine Mammals Coordinator, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Fairbanks.

Putting all of this before you during the holiday season is not my idea of a good time. However, it happens that all of these very critical issues are converging at the same time. It is imperative that we act on each issue now. It seems that everything is coming to a head, and we are once again in danger of becoming spectators of our destiny rather than participants.

This is a good season for all of us to pray, together, for guidance in how best to act on behalf of our ancestors, our children, our common respective cultures.

Let's remember to act in our Native way, for the common good of our people, not the selfish concerns of our personal egos.

From my family to yours, Happy New Year!