

# Game Board decides subsistence priority in 236 game proposals

by Joan Nockels

for the Tundra Times

Members of the Alaska Board of Game last week determined subsistence priority in 236 proposals, setting regional and area game regulations.

The key decision made in each proposal was whether a rural community or area residents used the game resource in a traditional and customary manner. For example, people allowed to take part in the Game Management Subunit 20(B) subsistence moose hunt include rural residents of subunit 20(B) — Tanana and Nenana.

Although the board used a set of eight criteria listed in the new subsistence law to determine customary and traditional use, one of the board members disagreed with the criteria system.

Sidney Huntington said that subsistence designations based on the eight criteria are not what the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act promised. He said that with an influx in rural populations, the customary and traditional use designations may not serve the community they were set up to serve — Alaska Natives.

The eight criteria include: a long-term, consistent pattern of use; a use pattern recurring in specific seasons; methods or means of harvest that are efficient and economic; a reasonable accessibility to a resource from the user's residence; a traditional means for handling, preparing and storing a resource; a handing down of knowledge of hunting skills between generations; a sharing or communal distribution of the take; and a use pattern which provides economic, cultural and nutritional needs.

Customary and traditional use of game was decided for those species specifically addressed in the proposals the board considered.

"All criteria are fairly easy to document," said Brenda Johnson, board chairman. "I think they are excellent and usable."

Larri Spengler, assistant attorney general assigned to the Boards of Fisheries and Game, said the Game Board need not apply the eight criteria as a checklist, but as part of a weighing process instead. For example, if fulfillment of one criteria is "completely lacking," she said, "it may be a factor. But if

another significant criteria is prominent, it may outweigh that absence."

This is important when deciding customary and traditional use for introduced species, she said.

The process of making subsistence determinations throughout the state for all game resources is expected to take three to four years to fine tune.

Before addressing each proposal, the board decided which rural residents have a proven customary and traditional use of the game a proposal regulates. Determinations are based on information the Alaska Department of Fish & Game Subsistence Division, local Advisory Committee representatives and board members themselves provide.

Subsistence designations will be listed in the hunting regulations book available to the public in about 12 weeks.

While the criteria and the public process may be one means for defining subsistence eligibility, budget constraints and lack of community knowledge of the subsistence eligibility process may be drawbacks.

The board often has to make subsistence use designations without adequate data. Johnson said that in these instances, all seven board members bring expertise and personal knowledge of game resource use, allowing them to make effective decisions.

Board member Nick Jackson and Johnson, however, are concerned about the reaction of those communities that — for lack of data — were designated as having no customary and traditional use of a resource.

"There will be people who have felt left out, but they don't have to be left out," Johnson said. "It may take extra effort in this area so that any communities left out know they can come back to us."

The Subsistence Division budget has been cut by a third over a two-year period since Fiscal Year 1986, thereby limiting the amount of research the staff can undertake.

Because of those cuts, Johnson said rural people must take an active part in the advisory committee system.

At the same time, officials said that since game populations levels are sustainable, the Game Board has extended season and bag limits for subsistence and general hunts in this session more than restricting them.