

1986: A Year of Challenges

1986 has already proven to be a year of accomplishments as well as a year of challenges for Alaska Natives in dealing with the issues of amending the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, ensuring that the rights of tribal governments are protected, resolving the definitions of subsistence and dealing with federal budget cutbacks.

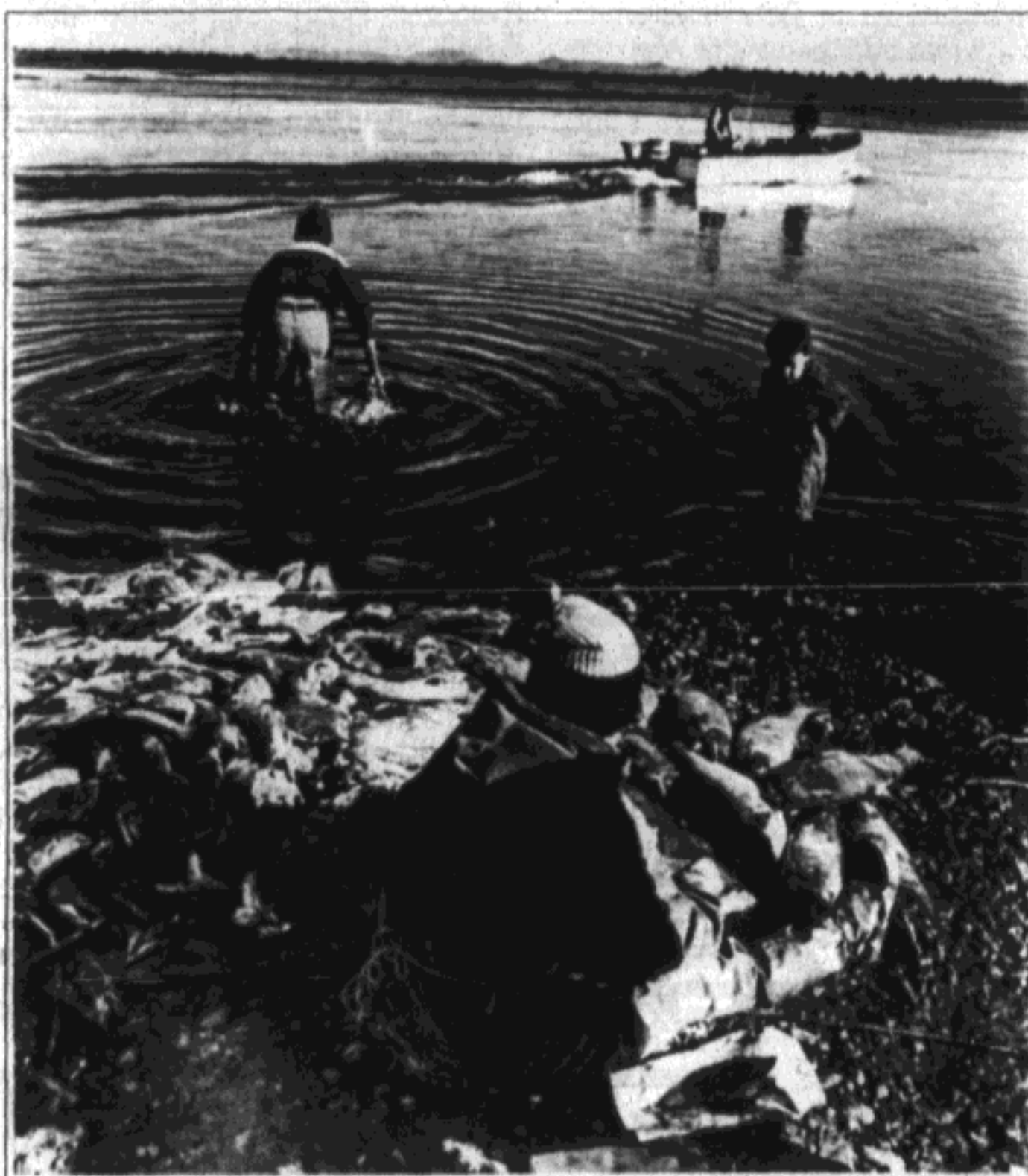
AFN's major accomplishment has been the successful introduction by the Alaska Congressional delegation of identical bills in both the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate amending ANCSA to deal with 1991 issues.

Also accomplished in January was the appointment by the AFN board and first meeting of the AFN Committee on Tribal Governments. Members of that committee made a commitment to meet monthly and have recommendations before the AFN delegation at the October convention on how to best ensure the rights of tribal governments are protected.

But challenging Alaska Natives this year is the unresolved issue of subsistence being dealt with by the Alaska Legislature this session.

Also challenging Alaska Natives this year is President Reagan's budget for 1987 which proposes major cuts in Bureau of Indian Affairs programs in the areas of education and social services.

1991 presents several fundamental challenges to Alaska's Natives and their continued ownership of ANCSA lands. The issues revolve around stock alienation, land protection and the extension of benefits to Natives born after passage of ANCSA in 1971. AFN has been working for



An Alaska Native family fishes for salmon along one of Interior Alaska's rivers.

Tundra Times Photo

more than three years to draft 1991 amendments to ANCSA, and this year it is hoped Congress will adopt the changes decided on by delegates to various AFN conventions.

On February 7 the Alaska Senators Ted Stevens and Frank Murkowski, Rep. Don Young with the cosponsorship of Rep. Udall, in-

troduced a bill amending the ANCSA. The House version of the 1991 bill was referred to the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, on which Young is the ranking Republican member. The Senate version was referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, of which Murkowski is a member.

"This legislation represents the beginning of the legislative process to

amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act to address concerns raised by 1991," Sen. Murkowski said. "It is a package of options from which the Native corporations can select to continue to manage their land and stock assets. Options include the ability of Native corporations to issue different classes of stock including stock for Natives born after 1971 and to elders and the ability to vote to eliminate stock alienability restrictions in 1991."

The AFN Committee on Tribal Governments met the end of January and began the task put before them by the AFN delegation of determining ways to protect the right of Native self-government.

AFN committee members recognize that all across Alaska in the past several years there has occurred a steady erosion of local control. In some ways villagers' rights to self-government and their responsibility to take care of themselves have been taken away by external forces surrounding them. A reassertion of tribal self-government is perceived by many village people as a way to regain that lost control.

The AFN Committee on Tribal Government, composed of 10 members representing regional Native non-profit associations, regional village ANCSA corporations, IRA and tribal governments and the United Tribes of Alaska, plans to meet regularly and present its strategy and recommendations to the AFN Convention in October.

Subsistence is a challenge Alaska's Natives have faced before. This past December AFN commissioned a poll to determine how the majority of Alaska felt about the subsistence issue and specifically, if rural

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Outgoing AFN Chairman Charlie Johnson congratulates Glenn Fredericks and Oliver Levitt as newly elected Cochairmen.
photo by Calista

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Alaskans should be provided a priority for subsistence use over urban Alaskans.

The poll, conducted by Hellenthall and Associates, found that 60 percent of those surveyed in both urban and rural areas, support a rural subsistence priority. The poll results confirm the vote of the people in 1982 when the vast majority of Alaskans voted that the subsistence way of life in rural Alaska should be protected by state law.

Because of these findings, and the increased pressure by the federal government to come up with some solution by June, the Native com-

munity believes the best way to solve the legal problem is to simply limit the definition of subsistence uses to hunting and fishing by rural Alaskans.

Another significant challenge recently brought to light is President Reagan's proposed 1987 budget in which \$12.4 million in programs for Alaska are either being cut or eliminated. This proposed budget is a priority of the AFN Human Resources Board who upon hearing of the cuts held a teleconference to determine just what the cuts mean to Alaska Natives.

1986 could be a year of decision for Alaska's Natives. AFN, through the support for all Natives, plans to work towards making those decisions the Natives' best interest.