



Secrecy on subsistence is wrong

Anyone who thought federal management of fish and game resources on federal lands in Alaska might be an improvement over state management must certainly question that view in light of recent federal actions.

It seems incredible, but officials of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service still refuse to make public their draft plan for subsistence regulations in the state. This comes after a version of the plan was leaked to an Anchorage newspaper earlier this month and after officials of the agency commented on that earlier draft in detail to reporters.

These same officials met recently with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. They said they will focus on cooperation with the state if they are forced to take over fish and game management July 1.

This takeover will occur unless Alaska legislators — who recently failed to support presenting a constitutional amendment to the people to bring Alaska law into compliance with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act — or Gov. Steve Cowper call a special session.

We are left wondering: If Native people — those most directly affected by this takeover — can't even get their hands on a copy of these regulations, just what is in store for Alaska?

We're also wondering why a process that will affect many Alaskans in one way or another must be done in secret. These regulations have been under discussion for months. Why can't we all see what they are and comment on them?

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, recently told reporters in a press conference in his Anchorage office that he believes the process should not be secret. We agree heartily, and we hope he will help ensure that this shroud of secrecy is lifted and that all Alaskans will get a chance to see what is in store for them.

This should have been done long before now, but it certainly must be done as soon as possible before July 1.

We'd also like to find out just what official is responsible for deciding this process had to be done in secret in the first place. Whoever this official is, he or she should be required to give the public an accounting of just why such an important process was done furtively.