

# Alaska loses under federal management

by Rep. Eileen MacLean  
for the Tundra Times

This legislative session has brought many difficult but rewarding challenges as well as disappointments.

Inupiat Paitot  
People's Heritage

## OPINION

Through my positions as chair of the Bush Caucus and the Community and Regional Affairs Committee and co-chair of the School Performance Committee, I have learned about the meaning of leadership and the importance of unity. Unity brings strength.

I have concentrated on building a strong coalition among members of these associations to fight for the needs of rural Alaskans. Every decision we made entailed a cost or a sacrifice. But, we made these decisions consciously and once they were made it was crucial for us to stand behind them.

This is not to say that we don't disagree, but we looked for areas to compromise and worked together toward solutions.

### Subsistence

The day before the session adjourned, May 6, an historical moment occurred. On a 20-to-20 vote, the Alaska House of Representatives failed to pass a subsistence amendment to the Alaska Constitution.

A constitutional amendment was the only solution available to Alaskans for the retention of state management of fish and wildlife.

Although polls showed support for a rural preference by a 2-to-1 margin, there were not the necessary 27 House votes on that fateful Sunday night to pass out the subsistence measure, House Joint Resolution 74.

Because the Legislature did not pass HJR 74, there will be no vote of the people in November to determine whether there should be a rural preference.

The state will not be able to come into compliance with federal law for



over two years — until the next statewide election when the issue may be revisited.

Beginning July 1, there will be federal management of fish and wildlife over two-thirds of Alaska. The state will lose opportunities that the state currently provides for hunting and fishing.

The measure the House failed to pass would have provided a preference for subsistence uses by rural residents which did not preclude subsistence use by residents in non-rural areas. It would have allowed Alaska voters to retain state management of fish and wildlife on all Alaska public lands. It would have allowed Alaska voters to decide the fate of subsistence.

Naturally I was disappointed in the House vote. Many legislators failed to see that this is as much a non-Native issue as it is a Native issue.

Sports hunters and sports fishermen failed to see how much they will lose should federal takeover occur. The vote disregards the effects of having a dual system of fish and wildlife management as well as denies Alaska voters the opportunity to decide whether they want more government control in their lives.

It also reflects the inherent difficulty of trying to resolve complex issues in this legislative process. Because of the demands of having to address many issues, most legislators did not have the time to learn the social and legal

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intricacies of subsistence.

A special session may provide them with that opportunity. The governor has intimated that he would hold a special session on subsistence, but he has not committed to that prospect.

### Other bills

Regardless of the disappointment of not resolving the subsistence dilemma, several of my bills that will positively affect rural areas of the state passed by the Legislature this session. They include:

- House Bill 101, which could potentially increase state municipal aid from \$25,000 to \$40,000. The bill passed two minutes before adjournment of the legislative session. This increase will help many smaller communities, in which there is little if any tax base, provide vital services such as police and fire protection, road maintenance, health care and a safe and healthy water supply and septic system.

In the last few years, reductions in the municipal assistance and revenue sharing programs have hit those small communities the most.

The Senate Community and Regional Affairs Committee added a new section that would increase the entitlement for each municipality for roads from \$2,500 to \$3,000 if at least \$41,472,000 is appropriated for the revenue sharing program.

- HB 159, which will exempt for a two-year period, the assessment of "in

place natural resources." During the two-year period, the Department of Community and Regional Affairs, with consultation from the Department of Revenue and the Alaska Municipal League will conduct a study of various options of taxing these resources, such as coal, timber, gold, gravel, peat, lead or even animal herds, including but not limited to a complete exemption.

I introduced this bill in reaction to pressure that has been exerted on both the state and municipal assessors to either remove from statute the requirement to tax undeveloped resources or to find a way to assess their value.

- HB 469 and House Concurrent Resolution 46, which embrace four out of five school performance committee recommendations. They include creating a special interagency committee to coordinate health and family service programs related to school performance, having mandated state goals of education, establishing mandated measures of achievement and providing incentives for the improvement of school performance.

The work of the joint committee is not over. This interim we will hold meetings to continue our work on improving school performance in Alaska. In addition, I intend to continue working to find solutions to unresolved issues from last session as well as research and draft new legislation for next year that will benefit rural Alaskans.