

Sackett Bill Revised

On Tuesday, March 6, the Alaska State Senate passed a revised version of Senator John Sackett's Subsistence Hunting Bill by a vote of 11 to 8. The original bill which caused a furor of controversy and met with strong opposition from sports hunters served to dramatize the legitimate concerns underlying the issues.

"So often," said Senator Sackett, "we introduce legislation and it's just by-passed as being unimportant until you take some drastic action to direct attention to the concept or legislation."

Sackett said the purpose of his original proposal was two-fold — "First, to the legislature, and also to the Department of Fish and Game and to their Board to recognize the need for

a certain amount of protection to people who subsist off the land."

The new bill does not require that the state set aside 25 mile radius zones for protection of subsistence around each rural village as originally proposed, but instead, gives authority to the State Fish and Game Commissioner to establish zones based on need and at the request of a specific area.

It also allows other hunters and fishermen access to the area if it is determined that subsistence needs are being adequately met and there is no conflict. Overall, the new version of the bill has more built in flexibility based on actual need, game population, and season.

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The bill must still be considered by the House before final acceptance but it has paved the way for a serious study of subsistence needs throughout the state, not only for native people but also for non-native people as well who Sackett said "have a long history of residence in the bush."