

# Subsistence Vs. Development

*(Editor's Note: This story is another article in a continuing dialogue on the subsistence issue. Comments are invited from our readers on the matter of developing Native owned lands and ensuring a subsistence economy — T.R.)*

By MARGE BAUMAN

ANCHORAGE—"I'm qualified to know what subsistence is," said the panel discussion member from Galena.

"I've lived it for 57 years and that's all of my life."

James Huntington paused briefly, as if waiting for the full attention of the convention of the Alaska Federation of Natives Inc. He had it and he went on.

"A subsistence life is an Indian way of life," he said. "It is a person who uses the land. . . the trees for his house and his snowshoes. . . and the land for berries. . . to hunt. . . to trap and to fish.

"The Indian way of life is a contented way of life. Although it was hard, it was a good life," said the Athabascan leader, an outspoken supporter of the subsistence lifestyle.

As Huntington spoke, several hundred delegates to the convention looked up and listened intently. In the midst of speeches on pipeline impact and the details of the land claims settlement, here was a subject to which nobody needed an introduction.

"The Indian knows if he kills

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# Subsistence...

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off everything now there will be nothing left," Huntington said. "The white man came here over 100 years ago and he's still determined that we live his way of life. . . The white man's way of life is based on dollars. The Indian's way of life is not based on the dollar," he said.

Those who came to Alaska for gold and other natural resources got too caught up with the money, he said. "They were too concerned for the almighty dollar. . . got it too close to their eyes and they couldn't see past the dollar sign," he said.

From his boyhood, Huntington recalled the rivers and streams of Alaska, "when the fish were millions upon million." He charged that the fishing industry had ruined itself over greed for the dollar and that too late the federal and state governments were waking up to that fact.

The constitution says we're all equal, but they don't treat us equal, he said. "If we don't want roads, why do they shove them down our throats?"

"Let's stop this damn greediness and get down to the business of thinking. . . and find out what's best for the villages," he said.

"The people in the village have every right to live like they want to. If people want to come into the city and live like a white man, fine and dandy, but if he wants to stay in the village and live like an Indian, he has that right. That's the best life anyway," he said.

Executive director John Schaeffer of NANA Regional Corporation Inc., another panel member, also spoke strongly for the subsistence lifestyle. "Those of us who live in the bush, who live off the land, we are conservationists. We want to be," he said. "We may not be able to

continue subsistence forever, but as long as we can we'll try to preserve it," he said.

"We are not against roads," Schaeffer said. "Each village would like to have a road from the airport to the village. Beyond that, we'll have to take a harder look."

Perhaps the great difference between Huntington and Schaeffer and fellow panel members from the state legislature Frank Murkowski and Tom Fink was their attitude toward subsistence.

Fink bluntly predicted that in another 20 years the Native subsistence hunter of today would be called a sportsman.

Murkowski talked a great deal about how the land claims settlement would enhance private development of the state.

Time and time again, since passage of the land claims act this debate over subsistence versus economic development has come into play. Always the Native is being asked to change his lifestyle, from his clothing and language to the foods he eats and the manner in which he educates his children. . . in the name of progress.

So it has been with the land claims, a settlement which took the Alaskan Natives a few years to gain and will take many more years to protect. For the debate between subsistence and economic development goes on daily, every time a youngster at school away from home cries for his family in the village and every time business on behalf of the people forces Native men and women to travel far from home.

So when Huntington speaks out for subsistence rights, of a proud and good heritage, the people listen. It is simply the gut voice of the people asking the right of self-determination.