

# Sackett's Bill Raises Controversy

A proposed bill which has raised the hackles on people throughout the state is the controversial Senate Bill 99, proposed by Senator John Sackett of Galena. SB 99 relates to protection of subsistence hunting.

Senator Sackett proposed establishing subsistence zones around rural communities in which low-income residents have traditionally depended upon fish and game resources for food and clothing, issuing special subsistence permits for hunting, fishing, and trapping in these areas, and prohibiting the use of aircraft for hunting purposes.

The bill recommends a 25 mile radius around each rural village, defined until further clarification as those villages listed in the Alaska Native Land Claims Act.

Sackett brought to the attention of the Legislature that the "Alaska Native Land Claims Act was in part enacted to protect traditional subsistence usage of the land by the Alaska Natives."

The Secretary of the Interior is also charged with protecting the rights of Alaska Natives in subsistence hunting in the interim period before actual title to their lands is conveyed.

In fact, however, these rights

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have not been adequately protected, and have become more and more an issue within the state, while sports hunters and aircraft hunters infringed on areas immediately around native villages.

Fish and Game Commissioner James W. Brooks has admitted that "unless the sport hunter and the subsistence hunter can work together there will be problems."

While admitting that SB 99 has merit, Brooks is concerned that it does not adequately represent the interest of all groups of Alaskans.

"What people should do," said Brooks, "is examine the bill in light of its effects on all elements of the public and then suggest to their legislators such amendments necessary to improve it."

The bill appears to be doomed in its present form, but the issue raised is by no means over. Sackett will probably submit an amended form in an effort to force the state to take some positive action before next hunting season.

Sackett's home village of Galena saw a storm of controversy last fall when white airplane hunters continually flew into that area for moose.

Angry villagers, after warning the hunter to stay away from Galena, punctured the floats on one of the offending planes and set it adrift on the river.

Other villages in the Tanana Chiefs region suffered from similar invasion by outside hunters. The village of Minto, accessible via a new road was dismayed to find a mass influx of sports hunters Labor Day Weekend, over two hundred cars in two days, each carrying 3 or 4 hunters.

After the weekend madness, disheartened villagers took photographs of the huge amounts of litter left by the thoughtless outsiders — trash, beer cans, shell boxes. But the

most saddening litter were carcasses of animals left to rot, while hunters took only the trophy.

"We think trophy hunting is all right," said an outspoken Native. "But why not give the meat to someone who needs it for food?"

"You're lucky if they even took the horns," said Mitch Dementieff, chief of Nenana. "In our area, we came across carcasses that have been shot by someone riding around on a snowgo and they haven't even bothered to take the horns, much less the meat."

Chief Andrew Isaac of Dot Lake described the traditional way of hunting. "In my young time," he said, "I use my legs, I go 40 miles, 50 miles, 60 miles. I see a bunch of sheep coming in, bunch of caribou, bunch of moose."

Today, the game is not so plentiful. It is hunted by machine. Andrew Isaac spoke of the people who fly over the land after game, and drive out on snow-machines. He advised the young men not to lose the old skills of hunting.

"They are teaching you people to make a living," he said. "But I see 20 years ahead, maybe 50 years hard life for you."

Subsistence hunting is still a way of life for many Alaska Native people. It is a way of life for other Alaskans too. Sackett's bill is not discriminatory as to race. The criteria for subsistence permit he suggests is need. It is making a living off the land.

No one owns the game of the state. But there are priorities, and there are differences between the man who hunts to hang a pair of horns on his wall and the man who hunts to feed a family.

Senate Bill 99 is an attempt to make some distinction between those two.