

# Subsistence still confusing after takeover Boundaries unclear

by Holly F. Reimer

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The federal takeover of hunting and fishing management on federal lands in Alaska is causing confusion in some parts of the state, while in other areas the switch has practically gone unnoticed.

Federal management is required as a result of the Alaska Supreme Court decision late last year that Alaska's rural subsistence priority was invalid.

The Alaska Legislature failed to enact legislation this summer, so the takeover took effect July 1.

Steve Behnke, director of the Division of Subsistence for the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, said the whole situation since federal takeover has been a series of complications and uncertainties.

Part of the reason for the confusion is that in some parts of the state hunters aren't sure whether they are on state or federal lands simply because there are no marked boundaries. The other problem, he said, is the land might be a Native allotment, and Native allotments are federally regulated.

In other parts of the state — where big portions are clearly state or federal — following regulations is easy.

Bruce Batten, public affairs officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska Region, said they — the federal agency — more or less adopted the state's hunting and fishing regulations.

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More than 35 junior high youth from the Anchorage area attended the Johnson O'Malley Subsistence Camp this summer, according to the Cook Inlet Tribal Council. The camp was held in Seldovia, and campers arrived via ferry from Homer in July for the week-long camp. Above, Bruce Lord, left, and Benjamin Eben keep the camp stocked in firewood.

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He said they had to make changes to comply with federal regulations, and the agency also plans to make more changes in the future.

On the state side, Behnke said, with the new regulations, prospective hunters are required to fill out an application form which asks personal information about history of hunting and why they are hunting. This application includes questions about dependency on getting game for nutritional needs and where the person lives.

These applications are then graded with the highest scores going to those who more or less rely on hunting game as a source of food.

On the federal side, Batten said, hunting permits are being given strictly to rural residents.

He said around the Minto Flats area moose hunters are very confused about what land is what.

"There are places we believed were under state jurisdiction, so we put our regulations into place and had people fill out the applications and rank them accordingly. This was in July," he said.

"But we got word in August from the Federal Subsistence Board that certain Native allotments were under federal jurisdiction so there was a postponement for the hunt," he said.



Behnke said since there are no boundaries marked it's extremely difficult to operate the state hunts because the federal and state hunts overlap each other, which also adds to the confusion.

The other problem is keeping herds safe. Only a certain amount of game can be taken, but the state agencies have to wait to get the count from the federal hunts before they can decide how much game can be allocated for the state hunts.

Mike Walleri, general counsel for the Tanana Chiefs Conference in Fairbanks, said although there have been some minor problems since the federal takeover, things haven't changed very much.

"We've seen very little difference

because the feds have implemented a temporary program," Walleri said during a telephone conversation.

"I think we'll start seeing a difference in the winter hunt," he predicted.

He said there have been complications with different hunts in the area because the lands are mostly state owned and the federal lands are Native allotments.

He said on the Native allotments it's up to the allottees to give permission who can and who cannot hunt on their land.

This allotment situation, Walleri said, will most likely wind up being a big issue in the future for federal officials because it could be discriminatory if Natives don't let

whites hunt on their land.

Regarding the Nelchina Caribou herd, he said the federal government hasn't made an effort to protect the herd.

"The herd is 15 to 20 percent over-harvested since the feds have taken over management," he said.

The protection of different herds, he predicted, will also become a major issue in the future.

Roy Ewan, president of Ahna Inc., said hunters in his region are not getting enough game to feed their families this year because the dual regulations are so confusing.

"There are so many different permits it's very confusing for the average hunter," he said. "Otherwise once you get it figured out it's not that bad."

Ewan said to benefit the subsistence hunter, management of the state's fish and game should be under one authority.

During the Alaska Federation of Natives annual convention this October, subsistence will be a priority said Dorothy Larson, executive vice president of AFN.

"Right now we're developing a strategy for the convention. This will be an opportunity to figure out where we are and where we're going," she said.