

# Editorial

## Toxic truth, toxic consequences

Kaktovik is a unique community, the only one located in the supposedly pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. However, residents there have discovered that pristine can be a very relative term. Like many villages across the state, they are worried about tons of toxic waste left behind by reckless agencies—chiefly the Dept. of Defense—in a widespread mockery of environmental justice.

Why is it that indigenous lands always look so empty, so unproductive to the Outsiders? We're not just talking about scenery here—these are the lands that feed and nurture our people, that define our cultures and very being. The Arctic tundra was never a wasteland until DOD arrived to build the airfields of World War II and the early warning radar facilities of the Cold War.

It's certainly true, but certainly not defensible, that environmental regulation was not a high priority during those innocent years of long ago. This has become something of a self-justifying mantra of agency spin doctors trying to explain the sheer volume and toxicity of the garbage left behind.

Here's a little test to see how plausible these claims of innocence are: If those generals and project managers didn't think this stuff was toxic, why didn't they take it home and store it in their backyards, let their kids play around all those drums of carcinogens.

Too expensive to transport back to the states? Funny you should mention money. Today, just as the momentum of cleanup begins to build, we are faced with a new crisis: The agencies that took years to accept responsibility for the mess they made are now being robbed of funds to do the job by a penny-pinching Congress. The result is that many projects, such as those in Kaktovik, are being put off for years. In other cases, remedies are being cut back from removal or full cleanup to simply burying the toxic hot spots.

In any case, it boils down to years more of continued exposure of Alaska's indigenous peoples to a wide range of hazards they neither asked for nor created.

Alaska Natives, like Native Americans across the nation, have often given their lives in defense of their country. Their patriotism deserves a better thanks than being exposed for the rest of their lives to the poisonous leachates of moldering defense installations.

## Common sense fish marketing

Our thanks to Sen. Al Adams of Kotzebue for introducing Senate Bill 255. This measure would amend state statutes by allowing the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute to promote Alaska seafood on a regional basis. Currently, ASMI must use generic phrases, like Alaska sockeye salmon, Alaska scallops. Under the Adams proposal, seafood could be promoted under labels such as Kuskokwim kings or Kvichak River sockeyes.

According to a sponsor statement provided by Sen. Adams:

"The existing framework for marketing salmon produced in Alaska waters assumes that generic product promotions will increase overall sales, thereby providing benefits to fishermen from all regions of the state. While this works to some extent and is a necessary part of an overall marketing program, regional disparities in the costs of production and transportation require that in certain areas niche marketing efforts be undertaken. Promotion by brand names will still be prohibited."

Our thanks as well to Representatives Irene Nicholia, Richard Foster, Ivan Ivan and Don Long for co-sponsoring a companion bill, HB 504, in their chamber.