

Hard Winters Seriously Reduce Moose Herd

By LAEL MORGAN

GALENA — Last fall white hunters flying to the interior in search of moose had the pontoons of their plane punctured and the machine set adrift by Galena residents who did not welcome intrusion into their subsistence hunting area.

The State Troopers and Federal Aviation Agency were contacted by the incident was reportedly settled by a fist fight and did not end up in court.

This season, however, it has become apparent that moose are well worth fighting for. Two hard winters have cut the moose severely in many areas of the state and game experts predict it will take about two years to bring back happy hunting.

Ronald Somerville, regional game supervisor of State Fish in Anchorage reports the count was so far off in the Copper River Basin the regular season had to be curtailed and there was no cow season.

The Susitna River area was similarly hit and hunting was only "so so" on the Kenai peninsula.

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"It was the heavy snows and real cold weather. We never really had any spring this last year," Somerville observes. "It affects the calf crop so it will be at least another year or two. Maybe the cow is so weak she walks off and leaves the calf or they abort early."

"You can't drop them greens or hay at that point. It would kill um. You just have to weather it out."

Tony Smith of the Fairbanks area notes only a slight drop in hunting in this area, although negative reports have come from Galena and the Yakutat region.

Somerville, who's lived in Alaska 33 years, says he's seen similar lean periods in years past.

"We're fortunate from the standpoint that it's showed up in the counts and we've reacted by curtailing the season," he said.

As for the problem of trespassing hunters versus subsistence hunters, solution may be beyond the current powers of the Fish and Game authorities.

To fill the gap, State Sen. John Sackett (who also heads Tanana Chiefs) has drafted a bill for introduction into the coming legislature that would establish subsistence hunting and fishing zones around rural communities.

The act as currently written, establishes a rural community as any with a population of less than 4,000 that is more than 30 miles from a non-rural community. The zone would have a 50 mile radius and non-subsistence hunting would be allowed if protection of subsistence hunters could be insured.

Subsistence hunting is defined as hunting and fishing for consumption by the hunter and members of his family or household and by domestic animals of the household.

However, meat the fish which is taken for subsistence may be bartered or given to other persons for personal or domestic animal consumption.

If passed the act would be effective July 1, 1973.