

Subsistence clears hurdle in Congress

By NANCY HARVEY and JEFF RICHARDSON

A guarantee of priority use of federal land in Alaska by subsistence hunters and fishermen made significant headway in Congress Monday. By unanimous voice vote, the House Subcommittee on General Oversight and Alaska Lands approved the subsistence section of a draft bill that would set aside about 100 million acres of federal land in Alaska as national parks, refuges, forests and wild and scenic rivers.

Subcommittee Chairman John Seiberling called the clear sailing of the subsistence section, known as Title 7, a "miracle" and commended the efforts of Alaska Congressman Don Young. Members of the Subcommittee staff also commented on the "pleasing and unusual display of participation by rural people in this matter of great importance to them."

The staff remarks were prompted by letters and telegrams received by the Subcommittee from 43 villages and a large number of individuals in support of strong federal protection of subsistence land use priority. Representatives of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Rural Alaska Community Action Program and Native regional corporations were all on hand to advance the

subsistence cause.

The language of Title 7 embodies six principles advocated by the Native federation and Rural CAP:

1. That Congress clearly state its responsibility to protect subsistence options for rural Alaskans.
2. That Federal oversight be exercised on state resource management.
3. That authority for management be decentralized to regional and sub-regional levels as condition of permitting State management of Federal land.
4. That subsistence protection cover all Federal land in Alaska, not just new d-2 parks, etc.
5. That the option of cooperative management is available.
6. That resource allocation based on subsistence needs be the highest priority use of Alaska's natural resources.

Commenting on the approved Title 7 language, Congressman Young called it "a pretty good piece of legislation" and said, "I think we've arrived at a pretty good decision."

Other than two amendments which he plans to introduce this week, Young seems in complete support of the Title 7 subsistence language.

Young will ask an amendment to allow the State of Alaska to establish an appropriate number of fish and game management regions. As the approved section reads now, the state must establish between five and 12 regions to provide for local and regional input concerning subsistence management.

Young's second amendment will ask the federal government to provide funding for the implementation of provisions in Title 7. As the title is written, the state estimates it will cost anywhere from \$600,000 to \$1 million to establish the regional subsistence councils.

But, the battle for subsistence protection is far from over.

Following approval of the entire federal d-2 land bill before the Subcommittee, it will be sent to the full House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs chaired by Congressman Morris Udall. From there it will be referred to the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee and its Subcommittee on Fish, Wildlife and Environment. Once approved by the full Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee, the bill will probably go to a full vote of the House.

Work on d-2 legislation by a Senate committee has only just begun.

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Congressman Young foresees a possible "roadblock and slight problem" in the Fish and Wildlife Subcommittee, and says he may have to defend the subsistence provisions once the bill reaches that stage. Young is a member of both the Subcommittee and the full Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries.

Before acting on the subsistence section of the draft d-2 bill, the Seiberling Subcommittee waded through several other sections dealing with national parks, wildlife refuges and other conservation units.

Although the Subcommittee left undisturbed the outside boundaries of park proposals in the draft d-2 bill, Young succeeded in re-classifying some park land as national preserves status. National preserves are still managed by the Park Service but permit more extensive land use, such as recreational hunting.

The legislation approved by the Subcommittee would set aside 45 million acres in new parks and park additions.

The Arctic Slope Regional Corp. was successful in cutting the size of the proposed Gates of the Arctic National Park in order to facilitate its access to potential oil and gas lands.

Total land area approved by the Subcommittee for classification as parks, wildlife refuges, forests and wild and scenic rivers comprises about 99 million acres, down from about 115 million acres in the original H.R. 39 chosen as the starting point for Subcommittee work.

The Subcommittee will apparently take up controversial sections of the d-2 bill dealing with wilderness classification and minerals late this week.