

Subsistence zones rejected by Game Board

From Our Anchorage Bureau

It's not that fish and game authorities in Alaska do not like subsistence hunters, it's just that they don't like the way the legislature decided to protect subsistence hunters from the ravages of airborne and mechanized sport hunters.

* Last spring, the legislature

clarified legislation that authorizes the Board of Game to set up subsistence hunting protection areas in game units or subunits. Such a zone can be created at the request of residents of a game management unit, either through their local Fish & Game advisory committee or by petition.

At a long session, beginning

March 29, the Board rejected three petitions for subsistence zones outright and modified two others.

According to Board member Chuck Evans, the three rejected proposals, all from the Bristol Bay region, were unacceptable because the villagers petitioning for the zone refused to include Native-selected land in the zone.

More Homework

"We suggested that they take them home and do some more homework. They people insisted they want to keep their lands out of the subsistence zone. They were just thrown out on that basis," Evans said.

Evans suggested the people may have been trying to protect their guiding businesses as well

as their food source by keeping lands in the area where guiding could be continued.

The other two proposals covered areas along the Yukon River.

"Their overwhelming problem was aerial hunting. They feel they're helpless," Evans commented.

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Subsistence ...

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In these cases, the Board of Game again avoided setting up a subsistence zone. Instead, they created a controlled use area and within these areas outlawed the use of aircraft "in any manner for the hunting of moose."

According to Evans, this protects the moose from over-hunting by outsiders better than the new subsistence zone law.

"If a guy has a moose aboard, he's wrong. The big problem is to get the protection officer there and the people cooperating with him," Evans said.

Enforcement Aid

He admitted that enforcement is sometimes not adequate to meet the need, but encouraged local residents to be the "eyes and ears" for enforcement officers.

Although the Game Board did not like the subsistence zone proposals, Evans denied the board was unsympathetic to subsistence problems.

"We don't like the subsistence zone approach that much. It doesn't do that much for them," Evans said. He added you could get the same protection under existing laws and regulations "without going through this ritual."

Evans is not the only one doubtful about the subsistence zones.

Defining Subsistence

The Department of Fish and Game has long resisted creating a definition of subsistence maintaining that fish and wild

life belong to everyone in the state. They have managed fish and wildlife on the assumption that these resources must be divided among users on the basis of need.

Although skirting an actual definition of subsistence which might seem to give too much recognition to a special class of users and thus be unconstitutional, the state does have a subsistence policy. Under this policy, it is recognized that rural residents have a great need for wildlife resources and that to ignore that need would be unfair.

Because of the subsistence policy, and existing game laws, one staff member of the Department of Fish and Game commented, "We feel that the framework for allowing for a separate type of use is already there without infringing on the rest of the public which has a right to that resource."

The same staffer suggested that the new subsistence zone law encouraged local people to think they can have exclusive use of fish and wildlife.

Allocate Resource

Despite this doubt on the part of Fish and Game personnel and apparent confusion about how the subsistence zones were to be created, "It was up to the board as to how they want to implement this law," the staffer commented. He concluded, "How do you allocate a resource that belongs to everyone?"