

State Fish & Game consensus misses 1st base

It's still not clear what happened last week at the Department of Fish and Game workshop in Anchorage. But it's increasingly clear Alaskans have not reached a consensus on how the State should handle fish and game management.

State officials, Native representatives and sportsmen locked antlers for two days in a meeting supposedly called to continue discussions on the State's plan for decentralization of fish and game management.

Instead, participants did little more than bicker and exchange inflammatory remarks, causing one disgusted representative to suggest, "Why don't we just do away with the Department of Fish and Game and let everyone do what they want. In five years we won't have any more problems."

The meeting, called by Fish and Game Commissioner Ron Skoog, was the second in a series of State efforts to reach some sort of agreement on fish and wildlife management prior to mark-up of d-2 legislation beginning January 16.

Although Skoog acknowledges, "we'll never reach complete consensus," he says the State is, "attempting to show Congress we do have the capability to manage our resources for the benefit of our citizens."

The State fears that Congress may pass National Interest (d-2) lands legislation that will give federal agencies authority to manage fish and game in Alaska. A draft d-2 bill, based on H.R. 39, the Udall bill, prepared by the House Subcommittee on General Oversight and Alaska Land calls for the creation of 12 regional subsistence zones. Within the zones will be local and regional boards and an overall Alaska Subsistence Management Council composed of representatives from the 12 regions. Strict federal oversight is also mandated in the bill.

The Subcommittee draft further calls for the State to, within one year of enactment, come up with an extensive plan for fish and wildlife management.

The workshop last week was held to discuss a new state plan for fish and game management that the Hammond Administration hopes would satisfy Congress. The plan involves the decentralization of fish and game policy-making, although final decisions would rest with the state fish and game boards. Subsistence use of fish and game resources would be reaffirmed.

One of the State's biggest objections to the Subcommittee draft, other than continuing federal oversight authority, is the projected cost of implementing such a plan.

Although it is possible the Federal Government would pick up the tab should the Subcommittee draft, or a similar form of the bill, be adopted; it is also feasible the burden of paying for implementation may fall on the State's shoulders.

State officials are estimating one years cost for putting together such a plan as required by the draft would run over \$5 million, yet John Shively of NANA Regional Corporation felt this was "more than is needed to implement H.R. 39."

The two day workshop got off to a bad start. A poorly planned agenda coupled with a delayed flight from Juneau with meeting "props" aboard, left the first day's proceedings disorganized and confusing.

Three workshop groups were formed the first afternoon to discuss the present system of fish and game management; the State's proposal; and other concepts and ideas concerning management.

Although the groups themselves were unable to reach consensus positions, it was the feeling of some that the present system should be retained but made more efficient.

Recommendations for improving the current system included a revision of procedures for selection of members to the boards of fish and game. It was felt board members should be members of the local advisory committees, and that the boards should have more administrative powers to include fiscal and personnel authority.

It was also suggested the local advisory committees be funded and that regional coordinators be hired. Additionally, all staff proposals should be presented to the local advisory committees for a 60-day review period.

Some also recommended members of the master boards be salaried at \$15,000 annually.

In discussing the State concept of regional advisory councils, Representative Al Osterback of Sand Point told participants he wasn't interested in talking to advisory councils but wanted to talk to those in authority.

He suggested increased funding to permit the boards of fish and game to hold meetings on the local level.

"Get a feeling of what the people want," Osterback said. "We want to talk to the Commissioner and board members, not regional councils."

Although the State's proposal calls for five regional councils encompassing Southeast; Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, AHTNA, Kodiak, Bristol Bay, Aleutians, a sweep of the Yukon from the Canadian border to the coast, and north of the Yukon, suggestions for revisions were abundant.

"Make it seven regions, splitting the Arctic and Yukon regions," said one participant.

"Someone suggested 'cut Bristol Bay off at False Pass.' Another recommended combining game management units 11 and 13 to form a separate region. One Anchorage resident said, "12 regions at a minimum."

Dick Gunlogson of the Alaska Professional Hunters Association told participants the State's proposal "scars the hell out of us because we're excluded as an industry."

"(The State's proposal) gives primary control of the resources to the local areas," Gunlogson said.

"Just because we're not residents of an area doesn't mean we shouldn't have a voice in what goes on," he continued.

"We consider ourselves every bit as much a subsistence user as anyone. We make our bread and butter from the industry," commented another professional hunter.

"I have no objection to guides being subsistence users," responded Jake Gregory of Bristol Bay.

"Let them be a resident where they guide."

The third group discussing new concepts for fish and game management came up with several recommendations.

George Allen of Rural CAP, spokesman for the group, said there should be shared authority to set regulations. Additionally,

the regional councils should have statutory authority and the number of regional councils should be based on a study and hearing process.

Allen suggested there was not a need for a subsistence management plan, but rather a plan for the management of wildlife within the regions. Collectively these plans would formulate a state policy.

The closing afternoon of the workshop, Geoff Haynes of the State Department of Law presented a series of "subsistence user permit standards" developed by a group of Fish and Game biologists. The standards could be used to identify possible subsistence users.

Haynes made it clear the recommendations were for discussion purposes only, and the standards may only be necessary for some parts of the State and only certain species.

It was unclear as to what would happen with the recommendations which included:

1. Age.
2. Residency (a minimum of 12 months within the state).
3. Physical disability.
4. Past participation in subsistence activities.
5. Difficulty in obtaining protein food supply.
6. Income.
7. Longevity in the area (possibly a minimum of 15 years).
8. Severe hardship (such as a natural disaster affecting a person's ability to provide his family with food).
9. Availability of food resources that could be retained from a commercial catch.
10. Availability of alternative subsistence permits or other privileges.
11. Willingness of applicant to combine with another family unit to share one household limit. (A moose permit applicant may want to share with a salmon permit applicant).
12. Opportunity to take an equivalent amount of recreation-

al use.

13. Applicant's past history of fish and game violation.

14. Lottery (when there are more applicants than there are resources).

15. Allocation based on aboriginal title.

Haynes said sooner or later determinations would have to be made as to who would qualify as a subsistence user.

"There are more people than resources," Haynes said.

"The State will have to do it whether H.R. 39 passes or not."

It was unclear what would happen with the suggested criteria to identify subsistence users. It was not known whether

the criteria were only to be used as discussion tools by the participants, or whether they would be presented in the form of recommendations before the boards of fish and game.

Commissioner Skoog expects to hold another, similar, workshop in Fairbanks. Skoog described the Anchorage workshop as, "very good."

"It's good to bring people of different opinions together to express their views," Skoog said.

Although the state would like to present the workshops to the House Subcommittee as evidence it has developed a consensus fish and game plan, such a consensus clearly does not exist.