

## What will happen to HB 960?

Rural Alaskans have been fighting the subsistence battle on two fronts—one in Washington, D.C., the other in Juneau. This week, nearly a year's worth of subsistence work will be voted up or voted down by the state House of Representatives. The work we are referring to is the result of months of effort by a special House committee on subsistence, ably chaired by Rep. Nels Anderson of Dillingham; its name is House Bill 960.

House Bill 960 is a legislative attempt to come to grips with previous failures of the State of Alaska to manage fish and game resources with sufficient regard for those citizens who rely most heavily on those resources for their very livelihood. It is an attempt to plug many of the loopholes that anti-subsistence bureaucrats have used to subvert even the modest subsistence commitments of previous state Administrations.

At the outset, the bill goes beyond any other legislative foray into this sensitive subject by stating the clear need to manage fish and game resources for the benefit of all Alaskans, while at the same time recognizing that given the scarcity of some of those resources, some users have a greater need for fish and game than others, a perfectly sound and pragmatic philosophy, long overdue for implementation.

From a management standpoint, the bill would create within the Department of Fish and Game a division of subsistence hunting and fishing which would complement the existing divisions of game, sport fisheries and commercial fisheries, recognizing at long last that subsistence hunting and fishing is not a rural hobby unworthy of professional management attention. The division would serve a similar function to other divisions by providing solid, accurate data on subsistence dependence, subsistence technology, as well as subsistence habitat and species to the Legislature and the Board of Fish and Game and make subsistence policy recommendations.

The bill also specifies the duties of the Fish and Game Boards by affirming previous state policy that subsistence use of fish and game shall be the priority use of those resources in the event of conflict brought on by resource scarcity. Under the act, subsistence users would be determined according, in order, to customary and direct dependence upon fish and game resources, local residency and availability of alternative resources. The bill would also beef up the authority of the Board of Game to designate subsistence hunting zones, a provision demanded by furious rural Alaskans who have vainly tried and failed repeatedly to petition the creation of such zones, despite a law authorizing subsistence zones that has been on the books for several years. This provision closes several loopholes in the old law and improves the chances that the will of rural Alaskans shall be done.

Lastly, the bill would make permanent the interim committee on subsistence which would provide legislative monitoring of state subsistence policy on a fulltime basis. Although we regard passage of the entire bill as essential to bringing about credible state subsistence management, we are particularly supportive of this provision. We have said before, and we would like to think we need not say it much more, that the past performance of the state in meeting its subsistence management obligations to rural Alaskans is too poor and the subversion of rural efforts to change that dismal situation too flagrant, to allow fish and game management, under any Administration, to continue without oversight by the closest thing to the voice of the people—the Legislature. It is in the finest tradition of the American system of checks and balances that this proposal has been wrought. There is nothing radical or faintly amiss in the notion that administrators, from governors to commissioners on down, should be tracked by a

legislative watchdog. This is especially true in the case of subsistence management, a case in which the performance of administrators has fallen below the legal minimum.

Governor Hammond indicated to us a few short weeks ago that he was now looking to the Legislature for direction on the subsistence issue. We feel this bill provides that direction, in the right direction. We trust the State House this week will move House Bill 960 one long step closer to the governor's desk for signature.

J.R.R.