

Summit told 'feds are watching'

By LINDA LORD-JENKINS

Persons representing all sides of the "subsistence issue" met to put forth their positions last weekend and were told that no matter what side of the issue they were on, they had better remember that any plan must meet with federal approval or the federal government will take control over fish and game management.

Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Ronald Skoog gave that warning in a low-key presentation to the 10-member panel of pro- and anti-subsistence representatives, legislators, and others.

Skoog said the group should recognize that federal D-2 legislation mandates the continuation of some form of subsistence, "or the federal government will step in."

Skoog said the state administration "intends to protect the state's

authority and responsibility for management of the fish and wildlife resources and if we do not comply with the (D-2) legislation, the federal government will step in. Either we meet the Title 8 mandate or they will take steps to set up the regulatory process."

Skoog outlined the state's historical view of subsistence activities before the issue was on the books. "Alaska has recognized that Alaska historically and prehistorically always has been closely associated with utilization of fish and wildlife resources in the state. ...Few people will argue that taking fish and wildlife for personal use is wrong. But the problem is where to draw the line.

"The subsistence economic system continues to be the dominant economic form in rural Alaska. The need to take fish and wildlife is a

very important part of the rural economy but we also must recognize the importance of providing for other uses as well."

He said that there are many areas which have a strong commercial fishing industry and subsistence community.

Skoog warned that the problems between the two uses have to be worked out and some form of subsistence must be maintained or the federal government will step in.

As Skoog spoke, a representative from the Alaska Public Radio Network circulated a portion of an interview recorded with U. S. Secretary of the Interior James Watt who spoke about subsistence.

The interview, conducted by APRN reporter Patty Ginsburg on

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Aug. 15, asked Watt, "Will the Reagan administration, will you, change the federal policies on what land should be protected for subsistence use?"

Watt answered, "The federal policies are quite clear on this, as are so many of the issues that are supposedly controversial. Recent legislation has taken care of that. The legislation here calls for the State of Alaska to establish the subsistence program, Terry (Miller) and the governor are working on that with the state leadership and we expect they will submit a program to us that will be acceptable and that we will approve. If it is not a program that is acceptable to us we then, of course, will have to implement our own federal subsistence program. A subsistence program will be carried out. If it has to be a federal one, it will be. We do not expect it to be a federal one. We figure the state is better able to handle it effectively."

Follow-up question: What if the initiative succeeds? What would be your philosophy for filling that void?

Watt: "Then under statutory authorities I would have to move under the federal authorities."

Question: What would you pay attention to in doing that? How would you go about that?

Watt: "That would be speculative at this time, that I'm not prepared to respond to that."

Despite Skoog's comments, the executive director of the Alaska sportsman's council stated that his group has enough signatures on a petition to force an initiative to repeal the subsistence law.

Sportsman's council executive director Tom Scarborough said the state-

wide petition drive has gathered 70,000 signatures, 3,000 more than necessary to force the vote on the matter. Scarborough said his group intends to see the vote against subsistence and wasn't interested in talking about any compromise on the matter.

The "Subsistence summit," sponsored by several members of the House of Representatives who are closest to the issue, was held to get representatives of all sides of the issue talking to one another.

The meeting included House representatives Ramona Barnes and Ken Fanning who had been identified as being in favor of abolishing the subsistence laws. Rep. Al Adams of Kotzebue, the unofficial leader of the bush caucus which is in favor of continuation of subsistence, and Rep. Eric Sutcliffe who, at the beginning of the meeting, announced he had taken great pains to steer clear of the entire debate.

Despite the past stands of the legislators on the issues, all have agreed to approach the question of subsistence with an open mind and try to work out an agreement that is favorable to all parties concerned.

Other persons present included state Senator Frank Ferguson, who is president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Rep. Vic Fischer of Anchorage, a representative of U. S. Senator Ted Stevens, and two other AFN representatives, Martin Moore, who also represented the Calista Regional Corp., and Charlie Johnson of the Bering Straights Native Corp.

One group that was invited, the Alaskans for Equal Hunting and Fishing Rights, led by Sam McDowell of

Anchorage, did not accept the invitation to attend, stating that they were legally blocked from attending such a meeting because it did not allow for public comment.

Under the rules of procedure established by the group, only persons who had been invited were able to speak. All others were asked to have the person closest to representing their position speak for them.

The meeting was classed as an organizational one in which each group would state their position for the record and then would discuss matters to be taken up at several subsequent meetings.

Ferguson read a position statement from the AFN stating that 10 criteria established last year by the Department of Fish and Games to define subsistence users is sufficient to protect both traditional subsistence dependent villages and the commercial and sport fishermen.

The criteria focused the "subsistence users" definition—"only on those geographically identifiable rural communities where community, rather than individual, harvest patterns are distinct and play a major role in the economic system of the village."

Because the Cook Inlet is one main hotspot of dispute regarding subsistence fishing, the AFN identified only three rural communities which would be entitled to subsistence priority: Tyonek, English Bay, and Port Graham.

Ferguson said that this approach protected subsistence users while at the same time ensured adequate and fair access to the Cook Inlet salmon by sport and commercial fishermen.

He said this method of classifi-



Nelson Angapak, right, and Martin Moore talk during a break in discussions at last weekend's "subsistence summit" held in Anchorage. Both are from Calista Region.

cation would guarantee that sport and commercial fishermen would not be overrun by persons claiming to be entitled to subsistence "priority."

AFN supports the Fish and Game provisions which also state that subsistence is never defined on a racial basis which means that all rural Alaskans—Native and non-Native—will be allowed equal opportunities.

Ferguson said, however, that the AFN regards subsistence priority as a non-negotiable necessity for the protection of Alaska's rural communities.

(The entire statement given by Ferguson is printed on page 6.)

Ferguson's statement was answered by a hard-line statement from Scarborough. He said that the Sports-

man's council met in October of 1980 and voted to ask the Alaskan Legislature to repeal the existing subsistence statute and replace it with one that states that "Fish and wildlife are guaranteed to all the people of the state for common use and there shall be no discrimination based on race, sex, economic status, local residency, past use of the resource, lack of alternative resources, or any other factor which permits some Alaskan residents to qualify to the exclusion of any others."

He said the group would participate in any discussion of several areas of concern to their group about

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