

# Legislators take no action on subsistence bill

## Failure ensures federal takeover

by Geoff Kennedy  
for the Tundra Times

The 1990 Legislature has adjourned, but the suspense over subsistence lingers on.

A last-day attempt to pass a constitutional amendment fell three votes short in the state House Tuesday. A constitutional amendment requires a two-thirds vote of both houses of the Legislature.

The action would have required approval by 27 House members, but only 24 members voted for a motion to allow another vote. The vote May 6, 20 to 20, had fallen seven votes short.

Gov. Steve Cowper hasn't decided whether to call a special session of the

continued on page eighteen



Photo by Michael Lacey

*The National Park Service is working with other federal agencies to develop subsistence regulations for federal lands in Alaska. Not affected will be areas such as Katmai National Park — shown above is the view across Naknek Lake — where subsistence hunting currently is not allowed. It is allowed, however, in the Katmai National Preserve.*

# • Leaders react to Legislature's inaction

continued from page one

enough," said Julie Kitka, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

The Legislature's failure to resolve the issue shows "a lack of understanding about the threat of a federal takeover," Kitka said. "Federal judges and federal bureaucrats will be making decisions (about Alaska fish and game matters) and that's poor public policy."

Rep. Lyman Hoffman, D-Bethel, said he was "real disappointed" about the Legislature's inaction.

"We fought long and hard to take control over our own destiny" when Alaska campaigned to become a state, Hoffman said, and now the state's inaction relinquishes much of that control to the federal government."

During the 1990 Legislature, Hoffman proposed a constitutional amendment that would allow the state to enact a subsistence law in accord with federal law. Earlier in the session, Rep. Kay Wallis, D-Fort Yukon, had proposed a constitutional amendment providing a Native preference, and Rep. George Jacko, D-Pedro Bay, had

proposed a rural preference amendment.

"Unfortunately, we didn't get there from here," Jacko said. He blamed Republican lawmakers for killing subsistence bills, and he predicted voters will react by electing more Democrats to the Legislature.

"My long-range concern is for the resource being managed," he said. "What scares me about federal management is that we don't know if our opinions would be heard. Too many people in Washington, D.C., don't know about Alaska."

Animal-rights activists in other states could threaten the subsistence lifestyles of Alaska Natives, Jacko said.

Several Southeast Alaskans reacted differently.

"It's one of those situations where you want to wait until the dust clears," said Grand President Richard Stitt of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. "My personal inclination is to view it as not being bad. It probably has elements of being a good situation."

Stitt hopes the federal government will do a better job in cooperating with

the Native community than the state has.

"There was a window of opportunity for the state to resolve differences with the Native community. We might like life under the federal government," he said.

The state has shown a "callous indifference" to the concerns of Alaska Natives, he said.

"We were looking at a partnership position with the state. Now that position is approaching adversarial," Stitt said. "A takeover by the federal government seems inevitable, (but) the ball is still in the Legislature's court."

Eric Davenport, the director of business administration for the Tlingit and Haida Central Council also believes the state let Natives down.

"We're very disappointed in the state's inaction to take a stand and deal proactively with the issue," he said.

The state had its chance and lost it, and now it's our turn, said Robert Willard, president of the Southeast Native Subsistence Commission.

"It's unfortunate that the state of Alaska has relinquished control of its fish and game because of just 4 per-

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*'My long-range concern is for the resource being managed.'*

—George Jacko

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cent of its resources. The Native community gave them every opportunity to keep control," he said. "We supported the state all along."

Natives supported Alaska's wish to assume control of its own fish and game resources when it became a state in 1959, as well as in 1978, 1982 and 1986 when the state dealt with subsistence legislation, Willard said.

Myron Naneng, president of the Bethel-based Association of Village Council Presidents, said the inaction of the Legislature signifies the state's failure to recognize the uniqueness of its Native peoples.

"The state will now be in a position where it will have to recognize the unique position our culture has in the state," Naneng said.