

# Late thaw complicates subsistence hunts

by Bob Koweluk

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Villagers' subsistence lifestyle has changed some over the years, especially since the coming of the white man and the technology he brought with him. Natives today use guns, aluminum boats, outboard motors, synthetic plastic ropes and other things. These changes do not affect the villagers' dependence on a subsistence lifestyle. In today's villages there are stores which sell goods, but at a high price. There are few jobs there.

John Paul Jones, 39, a Yupik, explained some of the problems of Natives living a subsistence lifestyle in the Yukon-Kuskowwim Delta region. Jones, who is originally from Chevak is now living in Bethel

and is working for the Association of Village Council presidents as its Tribal Operations Officer.

"People living in other regions of Alaska have to realize that this spring has been so cold that the people living on the coastal areas of our region who would normally have some fresh seal meat by now do not have the meat," Jones said. "I would imagine that a lot of villages along the coast would have by now pretty near depleted the fish and other food they put up for winter last year. They're not getting fresh food such as seals or birds because of the cold weather. There hasn't been any open water and the young ice is a little too dangerous to walk over to try to hunt for seals. But I heard that there's open water now and I hear that the birds have

come there the last couple days and the men are out hunting them."

Hunters from the regions say that the geese which nest in the Delta region should have been seen some three weeks ago. Instead this year they arrived later than expected in pairs, or small, widely separated groups, after the weather had warmed.

"The people who live in the coastal areas really rely on the birds for food in the spring. These people haven't really gotten these birds until the latter part of last week. And this is really late. I remember when I was a kid, when we used to start seeing the birds on the latter part of April. Now it's becoming the later part of May when the people are starting to get them.

"I think the people are going to go with the plan even though there are hardships," Jones said.

Alaska Native subsistence hunters have agreed to work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the California Fish and Game Department and

the National Audubon Society in an effort to help goose populations which nest in their region increase in numbers.

Native subsistence hunters have voluntarily agreed to a total ban on the taking of the Cackling Canada Goose during both spring and fall hunts. They have also agreed not to take any of the goose species' eggs until such time as the goose populations are determined to have increased enough. At that time the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will allow Natives to continue their traditional take of goose eggs. Natives have also agreed not to take any species of geese while these birds are nesting or moulting.

Traditional spring and fall hunts except for the Cackling Canada Goose, are being allowed under the goose management plan.

The AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee's Chairman, Matthew Beans, has been traveling with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials to the villages in the region. Beans and the wildlife officers have been explaining the plan.

The success of the plan is important. Native subsistence waterfowl hunts are technically il-

legal. The Native hunts were left out during negotiations of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act signed by the U.S. Government. The USFWS has relaxed its attitude in the enforcement of the ban and is supporting an amendment to the treaty which would include the traditional hunts. There have been several incidents in the past when the wildlife service had tried to enforce the ban on traditional takes of the birds. Just last year two sport hunting groups filed a suit which would force the fish and wildlife service to cite Native hunters caught hunting these birds.

U.S. District Court Judge James A. von der Heydt has put off a decision on the case until this coming fall. In his stay order, the judge took into consideration the Natives' unique situation. The judge wrote that "...under geographical and other unique circumstances involved in this case, if there is to be success in saving the species that are the concerns of this lawsuit, it must be through cooperation of all parties and a workable agreement as the 1985 draft plan..." In November the court will take a look at how well this plan has worked.