

Goveyes lawmakers on subsistence

BY NANCY HARVEY

It's a quiet Saturday afternoon in Juneau. On the third floor of the State Capitol Governor Jay Hammond prepares to leave for Washington, D.C.; in some circles now referred to as the Eastern Front.

Armed only with two commissioners, one for fish and game and one for natural resources, Hammond will once again wage battle with Congress in an attempt to convince lawmakers the State is capable of managing fish and game resources in the best interests of all Alaskans. A point some beg to differ with.

But Washington isn't the only place concerned with the state's ability to manage fish and game resources. On the home front, the issue has become a volatile one as state officials search for a consensus position to satisfy both subsistence user and sportsman alike.

Cupping his hand to his ear as if to listen very carefully, the governor motions towards the legislative chambers and says he's waiting for a sign from the legislature before implementing any plans to decentralize state fish and game management, a concept fiercely advocated by rural Alaskans.

In an exclusive interview with the Tundra Times Hammond said he's willing to throw his support around the regional council proposal being "floated" by state fish and game officials--unless somebody can show him something better.

The proposal Hammond refers to (although he repeatedly stresses it is not the "Hammond" proposal) made its debut last December when the Department of Fish and Game began a series of workshops to discuss the future of state fish and game management. The proposal, which many assumed Hammond supported, involves the creation of five regional councils which would have no more than advisory powers in making recommendations to the state fish and game boards. All final decision authority would remain with the statewide boards of fish and game. Since the proposal requires no statutory changes, it could be implemented through executive order of the governor without legislative

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at level through the establishment of regional councils comprised of local residents.

"If they (Congress) say and demand by law that we regionalize and upgrade, I can recognize the need for doing that. The people who oppose it here in Alaska, like some of the urban sportsmen who think this might inhibit some of their activities, had better look at the alternatives," Hammond said.

"I'm a little concerned with Congress mandating how we structure the boards and how they operate, but my prime concern is with the oversight feature," he continued.

The oversight feature Hammond refers to is found in Title VII of H.R. 39, the d-2 bill being considered by the U.S. House of Representatives. Title VII provides for federal oversight to ensure the state complies with the intent of the Act to protect subsistence. The State is given an 18-month period to come up with a workable plan to manage fish and game resources on all lands under state jurisdiction, with subsistence uses having the highest priority for use of the resources.

The so-called Hammond proposal has received little support from Alaska Natives, sportsmen, and even the joint boards of fish and game. Meeting in early April, the joint boards voted in support of a resolution calling for retention of the existing structure. Alaska Natives and sportsmen have attended in force the half-dozen "road shows" hosted by the Department of Fish and Game to mainly express discontentment with the current system and to offer some suggestions for remedying the situation.

Now, while the Department of Fish and Game is compiling the information gathered at the regional workshops, the governor is looking to the legislature for input and direction.

"I think it's imperative that the legislature—if they feel (the proposal) meets their needs and concerns—come up with a consensus to: one, provide the monies to implement the regional council program, and two, direct, urge and support us in implementing it administratively, which we can do. If we don't get the money or if the legislature is opposed and if the people of the State aren't supportive, it's going to be very difficult to implement effectively."

The Legislature's Interim Committee on Subsistence last week completed four days of public teleconference hearings in Juneau, Bethel, Anchorage, Nome, Ketchikan and Fairbanks on subsistence legislation, including a bill which would decentralize the boards of fish and game into 12 joint boards, and legislation creating a division of subsistence within the Department of Fish and Game.

Although public testimony was not explicit as to the exact number of boards needed to effectively manage resources, the overwhelming consensus was in favor of decentralizing authority into the hands of the people most affected by allocation and management of fish and game resources. The public hearings also gave a resounding verbal endorsement of the committee's bill to create a division of subsistence.

● Hammond

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approval, although the legislature must appropriate funds to insure the proposal's success.

State officials, including the governor, have readily admitted the idea of decentralizing state fish and game management in such a way as to upgrade local input has become increasingly attractive when faced with federal d-2 legislation mandating regional participation and federal oversight. Congressional d-2 legislation currently making its way through a second House Committee and bound for floor action in mid-May, calls for more participation at the region-