

# Subsistence lawsuit dropped by Knowles

by Jeff Richardson  
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Gov. Tony Knowles has decided to drop the state's lawsuit against the United States challenging federal management of fish and game on federal lands.

According to a story published in the Anchorage Daily News on January 24, 1995, Attorney General Bruce Botelho said the suit was being dropped, not because it lacked legal merit, but because it was threatening to rural residents who felt the federal law is the only effective protection they have against competing sport harvests and other threats to their subsistence livelihood.

Knowles told the *Tundra Times* he'll be meeting this week with Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and the state's Congressional delegation to discuss the issue.

"I'm going to bring it to a con-

clusion that will have two parts to it. One, subsistence is a way of life, it will be respected and instituted in Alaska. Two, it's important for all Alaskans to maintain their control over fish and game. I will not rest until we have satisfied those two goals," said Knowles.

The governor has consistently said he wants to give Alaskans a chance to vote on a constitutional amendment giving rural residents priority access to fish and game for subsistence in the event of scarce resources. Such an amendment would put the state in compliance with federal law giving rural residents a subsistence priority on federal lands - the same law that Knowles has decided not to challenge.

The state's ability to regain management authority over fish and game on federal lands is contingent

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upon some form of compliance. Previous efforts to achieve compliance with the federal law have been declared unconstitutional by the Alaska Supreme Court, leaving an amendment as the only, or at least one of few remaining options to solve the problem.

However, the conservative leadership of the state legislature

has steadfastly refused to put a constitutional amendment regarding subsistence on the ballot. Their strategy was to pursue a legal challenge to the federal law, rather than find a way to conform to it. In fact, they are looking for a way to continue the lawsuit despite the governor's decision.

Note: Editor Anna M. Pickett contributed to this story.

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