

# We've got to fight for subsistence now

by Willie Goodwin Jr.  
for the Tundra Times

KOTZEBUE — The recent Alaska Federation of Natives Convention darkly underlined the importance of protecting subsistence in Alaska.

One concern focused on the methods of determining communities that fall within the federal subsistence criteria.

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## OPINION

Proposals to disqualify cities such as Sitka and Saxman that happened to fall within the 2,500 and 7,000 population levels brings to even greater light the problems associated with federal management.

Defining subsistence by population ignores the cultural engine that drives subsistence activities just as importantly as the need for food. It also sets a ridiculous — although real — possibility that an unrelated population boost could tilt the scales and cause a community that was a subsistence area one year not to be one the next. The opposite also could occur.

The AFN convention highlighted the absolute necessity of early passage of legislation to allow for a public vote on the rural subsistence preference. After the Legislature failed in this respect last session, the federal government reluctantly began the process to manage fish and game on federal lands.

My assessment is that once the federal "foot is in the door" and they become equipped to manage these resources that it will become increasingly difficult to return management back to the state.

From both a historical and future perspective, the current situation reflects a breach of Alaskan ethics in general and Native Alaskan philosophy in particular. The premise of the statehood initiative was based on Alaska's wish to take control of its own renewable resources.

In the same vein, our future — as a state and as a cultural group — is based on continued efforts to self-manage resources and lessen dependence on federal intervention. Allowing the federal government to return to fish and game management belies that philosophy.

Federal intervention requires a massive bureaucratic and financial investment by the federal government.

The effort required to return to state management will be directly proportional to the amount of time that the federal government has been allowed to entrench itself.

Another concern of federal management has to do with the distance and perspective of the federal government. Under state management, we developed a system that provided for local and individual input.

Fish and game advisory committees allowed ideas and desires on the local level to be heard with a greater voice on the statewide fish and game boards. Even individuals had the opportunity to submit proposals for change in the system.

Because of our intimate involvement in the process, the results were even — if not exactly to our liking — at least understandable.

Federal management brings a new scenario where decisions are crafted in Washington, D.C. Although public

hearings may be available for input, this process lacks local involvement at the design stage and therefore will necessarily lack local credibility with the end product.

Finally, the government is highly subject to pressures from nationwide lobbying powers that far outweigh community or cultural interests.

Anti-hunting, environmental, oil, gas, timber and mineral lobbies exert enormous pressure on the federal front that will be difficult to counter when subsistence topics are on the table.

Those groups have more time, more money, are well organized and are in the right place to sway public policy away from policies designed to protect our lifestyles.

It is inevitable that at some point, subsistence interests are going to be in direct opposition to those interests. The likelihood of our waging a successful fight seems meager.

*Willie Goodwin Jr. is the mayor of Kotzebue and the land manager for Kikiktagrak Inupiat Corp.*

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