

Subsistence law survives board vote

A motion calling for repeal of the state's subsistence law was defeated by a narrow margin at a joint meeting of the State Boards of Fish and Game last week.

The repeal issue was raised by Game Board member Jim Rearden of Homer who said the law pitted recreational hunters against subsistence users and urban against rural Alaskans. The law essentially gives subsistence users priority in the harvesting of fish and game where populations are limited.

The boards voted 8 - 6 against the measure, but several members called for modifications of the law to make it more workable. The action came during a time when the subsistence law has been under pressure in the legislature from sport hunting groups.

The Board of Fish and Game meeting in Anchorage over the past couple of weeks, acted on several proposals concerning subsistence use of various game herds in Alaska.

In one such action the board established a permit hunt for the Nelchina caribou herd which gives priority to subsistence hunters.

The Department of Fish and Game will offer 1,600 permits for caribou in the Nelchina basin. The first 150 of those will be for subsistence hunters only. The subsistence permits will be offered by drawing to permanent residents in Game Units 13 and 14 except 14c, the Anchorage area. To qualify for a permit, a person must be 12 years of age or older, live in a home where fish and game not commercially purchased make up more than half the meat and fish diet and households earning a gross annual income of 12,000 or less. If the department re-

ceives more than 150 applications for the subsistence permits, the extra applicants will be included in the drawing for the remaining 1,450 permits. Only 5 percent of the permits will be issued to nonresidents.

Two seasons were set in the Nelchina basin for caribou, Aug. 20 to Sept. 20 and Jan. 1 to Feb. 28. Only antlerless caribou may be taken during the winter months.

The department estimates the Nelchina herd at about 10,000 animals and predicts a doubling of the herd in the next three years or so. Last year hunters took about 630 caribou, a number department biologists say can be maintained without hurting the herd.

The board did establish a controlled use area for moose hunt-

ing in the upper Kuskokwim drainage east of McGrath. The group had considered and rejected a proposal to limit the area to subsistence hunting by residents.

The controlled use area, proposed by the McGrath Fish and Game Advisory Committee prohibits the use of aircraft for moose hunting. The restriction would effectively restrict access to the area where the department has noted a decline in the moose population. Most area residents do not use aircraft but rely on boats or other modes of transportation.

After the prohibition was adopted, Game Board member Sidney Huntington of Galena called for increased enforcement by the Fish and Game Wildlife Division of the Department of

Public Safety.

Declaring the area a subsistence zone would have excluded nonresidents from hunting there, but would have allowed use of aircraft. The McGrath advisory committee reported it attached greater weight to limiting aircraft, than to restricting who could hunt in the area.

Much of the section falls within the 525,000 acre Bear Creek burn area where new growth is expected to increase forage for moose over the next few years and subsequently bring and increase in the herd.

The boards were meeting in Anchorage to consider dozens of proposals concerning game regulations, season quotas in commercial fishing, herd status reports, seasons and bag limits.

One of the prime issues to be

decided was the status of Commercial crabbing in Norton Sound where the department had recommended a quota of 2.5 to 5 million pounds, but local organizations concerned with a reported decline in subsistence crab catches were asking for a quota of zero to 1 million pounds. Also under consideration was whether to close commercial blue crab fishing around St. Lawrence Island.

The Department of Fish and Game also has announced the appointment of Dennis D. Kelso as chief of the Subsistence Section. He had been regional supervisor for the Interior. Kelso, a Harvard Law School graduate, is, according to the department, an authority on legal questions concerning subsistence use on public lands.



A prime subsistence game animal, the caribou became the focus of attention in the Nelchina basin.