

Governor reveals Fish & Game subsistence proposal

By NANCY HARVEY

"Management of Alaska's fish and wildlife resources is a vital concern to most Alaskans."

Using this statement as a premise, Governor Jay Hammond has unveiled a plan to begin the decentralization of fish and game management.

Hammond's proposal is an effort to prevent the federal government, through National Interest (d-2) lands legislation, from taking away state control of fish and game. Congressional leaders, responding to complaints from rural Alaskans about poor state response to subsistence hunting and fishing needs, have told the Hammond administration it must demonstrate better subsistence management or face a greater federal role.

Hammond readily acknowledges the present system of fish and game management has been increasingly inadequate in providing for public input and participation.

"The Boards of Fisheries and Game and the Department of Fish and Game have the responsibility for protecting and perpetuating these resources while at the same time providing for their utilization by the public," Hammond said in a letter to interested parties.

"Yet the regulatory system in use seems inadequate to en-

compass these needs, to inspire public trust, and to permit active participation by the public in the promulgation of regulations."

The overall proposal is broken into five major areas.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The proposal addresses the need for public participation by retaining the existing local advisory committee system and by establishing a new system of "regional councils."

The five councils would represent the areas of: Southeast; Cook Inlet, Chugach, Ahtna; Kodiak, Aleutians, Bristol Bay; the Yukon River area extending from the border to the coast; and north of the Yukon River.

All regulatory proposals affecting the regions and all proposals of a statewide nature will be processed by the Boards and sent to appropriate local committees and regional councils for review.

Regional councils will consider local committee recommendations together with public and agency comments in the development of their recommendations to be submitted to the appropriate board.

It is the "stated intent" the boards will follow the recommendations of the regional councils, except for specific reasons, which may include: a regional council recommendation

not supported by evidence; there are conflicting recommendations from regional councils on the same matter; there is a need for statewide uniformity on a particular matter, which would not be achieved if the councils recommendation was followed; the action recommended would be inconsistent with the Constitution or laws of the State or Federal Government; and the action recommended by a council would be contrary to the public interest, conservation of resources, or would be inconsistent with duties and obligations of the boards.

FINANCIAL COMMITMENT

The plan proposes to pay travel costs for local committee members to attend local committee meetings; for participation of local committee chairmen to attend regional council meetings; and for regional council chairmen to attend meetings of the Boards of Fish and Game.

PREPARATION OF SUBSISTENCE PLANS

The proposal specifies the local committees will cooperate with regional councils in the preparation of a proposed subsistence management plan, together with implementing regulations, for the region.

Subsistence use will continue to be the top priority of use of fish and wildlife resources.

STATE AGENCY STAFF SUPPORT

The administration supports the appropriation of funds for five regional staff coordinators within the Department of Fish and Game. The coordinators would work closely with the local committees and regional councils and provide technical and scientific expertise as requested.

Governor Hammond and Fish and Game Commissioner Skoog presented the proposal to a broad group of Alaskans in mid-December for their review and comments, and received a lukewarm response.

Representatives of the Alaska

Federation of Natives, Inc., Rural CAP; and several regional and non-profit corporations attended the meeting, along with conservationists, sportsmen and federal representatives.

The overall reaction of participants was, at best, guarded following the full day workshop. A straw poll resulted in an overwhelming "let's wait and see" reaction.

A two day State sponsored workshop is being held this week to further discuss the proposal. State officials are looking towards some sort of compromise plan prior to mark-up on d-2 legislation, now slated for January 20, 1978.