

Ulmer presses tough quest for subsistence consensus

AFN preps formal response to 'concept'

by Jeff Richardson
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For several months, Lt. Gov. Fran Ulmer and her advisers have been conducting what's been termed a campaign of quiet diplomacy to resolve the state's most divisive issue: subsistence. Along with her advisers, she has been trying to identify the ingredients of a possible statewide consensus.

On December 5, Ulmer brought the fruits of her quiet diplomacy to the Alaska Federation of Natives Board of Directors. After an afternoon of briefing and questions, several directors said privately that the response was unenthusiastic. However, AFN President Julie Kitka declined comment until a formal, written response could be completed.

It is reflective of the tensions underlying the issue that Ulmer has worked to reduce expectations about her efforts so far. For example, the document she provided to AFN was called a concept, rather than a proposal. *Tundra*

Times has obtained a copy of the draft concept, which contains the following key elements:

- A subsistence preference for Category I rural communities as defined by state law. Residents of Category II (larger) communities would have an opportunity to qualify for the preference on an individual basis by demonstrating customary subsistence use of a particular fish stock or game population;

- The preference would not apply statewide to all fish and game populations, but only those for which customary and traditional use by the community or individual could be demonstrated;

- People who qualify for the preference could only exercise the preference in areas where they had practiced customary and traditional usage;

- The state boards of game and fish would still be responsible for customary and traditional use determinations;

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Page 8, please

Ulmer subsistence 'concept' . . .

Continued from page 1

yield and harvestable surplus would still be used. Personal use regulations and educational hunts would still be permitted. The Tier I/II system would still be used where there was sufficient surplus to satisfy the needs of all user groups;

- Those qualifying for a subsistence priority would be afforded a "reasonable opportunity" to harvest, and fish and game managers would retain flexibility

to meet this commitment;

- While the state boards of fish and game would retain management authority, a state system of regional subsistence advisory councils, as well the local fish and game advisory committees, would have a substantial voice.

Ulmer's concept contemplates changes in the state constitution, state statutes and the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act to put these policy changes into effect.

Both Ulmer and legal counsel Julian Mason, were unavailable for comment on this story due to holiday schedules. However, Ulmer wrote a commentary on the concept that was distributed to media on December 22 (see page 2). In it she stated:

"Later articles will explain in more detail each of these parts as well as comments we hear along the way. Throughout this process all Alaskans must be familiar with the issues and sensitive to the com-

peting values that must be accommodated. No constituency can have its way entirely; every party must participate in good faith give-and-take. Others' motives and points of view, even if different from our own, must be respected. Because our congressional delegation has said it will not change ANILCA without an Alaskan consensus, no solution will work without widespread support; nor can a plan work that is not a complete package that balances competing

interests and links each component to all others."

Although AFN's formal response was to have been transmitted to Ulmer before Christmas, the organization's office was closed the week between Christmas and New Year's and no further comment was available at press time from AFN officials.

Tundra Times will provide additional coverage early in the year on this issue.