

Natives speak on subsistence

By JEFFREY R. RICHARDSON

The right of Alaska Natives to hunt and fish for a living, which may be the most hotly-debated, emotional issue since the fight for statehood, came before the Alaska Federation of Natives Convention last Friday.

Following remarks by Alaska's Congressman Don Young, a panel was introduced to the convention which discussed subsistence problems around the state caused by over-hunting, poor resource management, wastage of wildlife resources, and lack of local village control in resource management.

The panel consisted of representatives from the federal Fish and Wildlife Service, the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game and Native organizations.

Although the subsistence discussion remained under control, feelings ran high as Native people made it clear they would continue subsistence hunting whether or not federal and state regulations permitted them to.

Although State of Alaska, representative Bob Hinman, insisted that subsistence users of wildlife resources were given top priority under state policy so long as it was biologically possible to allow any taking of fish and game, pointed out that the Dept. of Fish and Game sometimes lacks the ability to carry out its duties because of lack of funds.

Although the panelists could not always agree on the best way to treat the subsistence issue, all cautioned that any effort to define what subsistence is should be a very careful process. Phil Smith, Director of the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, an agency set up to facilitate input from rural Alaska into the governmental process, commented: that one response to Congressional attempts to define subsistence is that "subsistence is a word that's being imposed on a lifestyle from people who don't, who cannot appreciate the value of that lifestyle."

Gordon Watson, area director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska pointed out: that the word subsistence appeared in its most significant recent form in the land claims act. He said:

"I think that the word subsistence, where it appears in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, what it meant, what Congress intended by the use of that word is what we're trying to figure out right now."

However, AFN representative Dave Case took strong exception to Watson's remark, stating that the legislative history of the land claims act is very clear on this point and that it is "unthinkable" that Congress and the Native negotiators intended to waive hunting and fishing rights for Native people.

The subsistence discussion intensified when opened up for audience participation. One man, a resident of southeastern Alaska, said taking away subsistence rights from Natives was like taking rice away from Oriental people or taking the cocktail hour away from bureaucrats.

The health director for the Cook Inlet Native Association, pointed out the mental health problems occurring among Alaska Natives as a result of the destruction of the subsistence way of life. She added that many Alaska Natives, particularly older people, were known to suffer from physical health problems as a result of dietary changes brought about by the changes in hunting and fishing patterns.

Several speakers were openly hostile to the government representatives. One suggested that someday, some hunter's floatplane "will never make it out of the bush."

letters

Dear Chris,

What's happening to Tundra Times? The front page on the Oct. 6, 1976 issue prominently showed pictures of people that I believe indicates to the general public that the paper is no longer interested in the aboriginal people of Alaska. Let's see more of our people on the front page!

Thanks for your time and consideration.

Patsy Aamodt
Box 68
Barrow, Alaska 99723

Ed. reply:

Dear Patsy:

Have faith in the Tundra Times! We have gone through a staff change. We have not nor will we ever forget the aboriginal people of Alaska.

We'd also like to add a special thanks for Agnes Griffith's help on this issue.

Tundra Times
Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Dear Sir:

We are studying about the Alaskan tundra. Please send information about the break up, freeze up months, day light months, growing months, dark months and other seasonal changes, and how they go in order. Thank you for your aid.

Yours truly,

Third grade
Pinellas Park Elementary
School
Pinellas Park, FLA 33564

Alaska Native Claims textbook serial

(Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of excerpts from the Alaska Native Land Claims book. Published and released by the Alaska Native Foundation in 1976, it is our hope that our reprints may further the understanding of the claims settlement act. The book was also made possible by a Ford Foundation grant. Robert D. Arnold edited the text. The authors are: Janet Archibald; Margie Bauman; Nancy Yaw Davis; Robert A. Frederick; Paul Gaskin; John Havelock; Gary Holthaus; Chris McNeil; Thomas Richards, Jr.; Howard Rock and Rosita Worl.)

THE ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT: AN INTRODUCTION

Congressional passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in late 1971 could, perhaps, be considered an ending of more than a century of endeavor by the Native people of the state to secure to ourselves our lands. But this settlement is more than an ending; it is a beginning and, in Alaska and elsewhere, swells generated by this historic act are washing unexpected shores.

Working together, reasonable men had compromised to arrive at what appeared to be the best possible resolution of the land claims issue. Like any compromise, it made no one entirely happy. It provided that new paths must be trod, sometimes by people who were uncertain as to just where these paths would lead. Today — four years after passage — we see some destinations more clearly.

No Alaskan — Native or non-Native — is unaffected by the settlement. To some it has meant money and title to lands and the growing assurance that comes from waging a successful fight and becoming a little more a master of one's own fate; to others it means they are no longer so free to move across the face of Alaska as millions of acres become private property.

There was economic as well as social impact. Millions of settlement dollars were funneled into the Alaskan economy in the form of both short-term purchases and long-term business enterprises. The land freeze was lifted and the door opened to construction of the Alaska pipeline and resumption of state land selection. Land use planning was mandated and millions of federal acres were set aside to await this planning.

In the villages, where subsistence living had been a way of life for generations, little appeared to be changed, but increasing concern was being voiced that this way of living would soon be irretrievably lost. In larger communities, there was much talk of corporations and stockholders, boards of directors and annual meetings. Speculators waited in the wings to acquire settlement dollars and lands. Most were quietly put aside.

But it was not in Alaska alone that the impact of the settlement was felt. The Native people of Canada were stirring. They watched with interest what was happening across the border and began to organize and to voice their own claims to the lands they had used since earliest days.

Across half an ocean, the people who had settled the Hawaiian Islands and greeted the European when he came late to their shores, began to call for their own settlement.

Both these causes have the expressed support of Alaska's Native people. Just what settlement either of these groups is likely to win is unclear at this time, but the winds of change are blowing.

Whatever the future holds, assuredly there will be change, brought about by passage of the Alaska Native Land Claims Act.

Emil Notti, President
Alaska Native Foundation

November, 1975
Anchorage, Alaska



EMIL NOTTI AND Bob Arnold review the lay out of the claims text.

—Photo By SUE GAMACHE

Fates mark 22nd

Dr. and Mrs. Hugh Fate, Jr. will celebrate their 22nd wedding anniversary on October 29.

"Bud" is a Fairbanks dentist and serves on the University of Alaska Board of Regents. Mary Jane is a Native civic leader and a Tundra Times board member. They have four children.