

Publisher's Notes

SUBSISTENCE NEEDS COOL HEADS

Most Alaskans are uneasy about the issue of Subsistence because it is one which lends itself readily to the issue of racism, and racism is an ugly subject under any circumstances.

Right now, there are more hot heads than cool ones publicly discussing Subsistence, and many of them are spoiling for a fight. If this nonsense continues, a confrontation may well end up on the doorstep of the next Legislative session, and no one will come out a winner.

The whole business came about because the Board of Game had to promulgate emergency regulations in June of this year because the Courts had overturned the 1982 Subsistence law, and the Alaska State Legislature failed miserably to find an acceptable alternative, although it could have.

No one affected by the emergency regulations has been very happy with the results although the results have been at times more imagined than real. Some sports hunters are imagining that they are being deprived of some "rights" and have been using this situation as an excuse to fan the flames of racism in Alaska.

Sam McDowell, who wears several hats, among them being head of the Constitution League Defense, is well known for his boorish behavior when discussing Subsistence and "Sportsmen's Rights." Mr. McDowell outdid himself last week by appearing before the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce in a debate with Don Mitchell of the Alaska Federation of Natives. McDowell resorted to name calling, outright false accusations and racist remarks. What possible good can come of such behavior anyway?

McDowell's reactions to the Subsistence regulations are nothing short of irresponsible and destructive and he is not doing his constituents any good. McDowell is not alone, however. There are others like William Hendrickson, who used to represent the "Alaska Whitemen's Association" and is now head of the "Waterfowl" group.

McDowell, Hendrickson and their ilk are using the opportunity to express their dislike for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and for the way that Alaska Natives live. It is unfortunate that anyone considers it necessary to give them a forum for this type of diatribe.

But a forum has been what the radical Sportsmen have had lately, not only through the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, but last week with Senator Mitch Abood's hearings.

Senator Abood has held his hearings in Anchorage where most of the unhappy sportmen live and will be holding more hearings in Fairbanks where others like McDowell and his group will have an opportunity to deliver their destructive rhetoric. There are opportunities for rural subsistence users to testify via the teleconferencing system; that is, if they can find the time to get to the centers which are located some distances from fish camps.

If the issue is important enough to Senator Abood, he should be holding some of the hearings in places like Bethel and Kotzebue, places he considers other than "rural."

Senator Abood, if he is sincere about his wish to find an acceptable answer to the Subsistence turmoil will have to do a bit more than sitting and listening to unhappy sportsmen who don't want the Tier 2 regulations.

Perhaps the Secretary of the Interior, who will have to act if the State of Alaska cannot, should appoint a special committee to determine whether the Federal Government needs to step into the Subsistence matter.