

Alaska Historical Society

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Kivgling Against Commercial Taking of Arctic Char

Kivalina People Fear Depletion Of Arctic Char

The village of Kivalina in Northwest Alaska has come out against the purported plan of the State Department of Fish and Game to take 200,000 pounds of Arctic char this fall from Wulik River for commercial purposes.

Rep. William L. (Willie) Hensley has taken the side of the Kivalina people and voiced his concern in a letter to Gov. Walter J. Hickel.

Hensley said that he feels that the taking of char out of the Wulik River would be an ill-advised move. He said he had gone to Kivalina and had a town meeting to discuss the possibility of the commercial operation and to find the feeling

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of the Kivalina people.

"They are against a large taking of char," Hensley told the governor. "The river is like a cache to the village of Kivalina—when the caribou are scarce, they have fish. When the seals are scarce, there is fish. They do not want to think that one day the fish may not be there—and this may happen if a commercial taking occurs and the resource depleted beyond normal reproductive capacity."

The people of Kivalina, Hensley said, have fished the river for generations and the fish keep coming back.

"There have not been accurate counts on the Wulik by the game biologists. Therefore, I request that if there has been an announcement consenting to a 200,000 pound taking, it be rescinded.

"I feel that the amount to be taken for sale should be left to the people of Kivalina. They will sell that amount that they will not use. After all, perhaps they, more than anyone, know how much fishing can safely be done," said Willie Hensley.

Rep. Hensley said in private communication with the Tundra Times that the Kotzebue Fisheries Coop will be willing to work with Kivalina people to determine the amount the village would wish to sell.

"But what I'm afraid of is a lot of pressure from commercial fishing—and subsistence fishing both, one the resource and it's ability to come back," Hensley said.