

Unfair reports

Well, it's happened again — two or three times in the past month actually. Once again, reporters from Outside publications have come to Alaska seeking the "truth" about the last frontier, and left with their own views on how life should be in Barrow, Kotzebue, and in the numerous other villages.

Alaska villages and Natives have been taking it in the ear of late and it isn't fair.

The legacy that Joe McGinnis wrought in his book, "Going to Extremes," with its slanted view of life in Barrow has extended to Kotzebue and to Alaska Natives in general.

First, McGinnis described Barrow as if the act of walking down the street will lead to an untimely and violent death.

Then people Outside got interested in Alaska.

So, a phalanx of reporters has been trooping through the state finding "unusual" uncomfortable facts of Alaskan life to come up with.

The writer for a Wisconsin-based magazine called "Snowmobile" blasted Kotzebue (which, by the way, was dubbed All-American City) because of lack of vegetation, the lack of television and radios in the hotel, and unattractive buildings.

According to the Boston Globe, Barrow had the temerity to have expensive drinking water and food.

And most recently, a writer for the Los Angeles Times has written a report about illegal game trade on lands owned by Native Americans.

Unfortunately, that report was published on Nov. 23 in the Anchorage Daily News.

The report about which we speak, was headlined "Illegal goods flow from Native lands," and spoke of trade in illegal ivory sales, eagle feathers and other sales of illegally taken game animals.

First of all, the term Native in Alaska is the catch-all phrase used to describe Alaskan Eskimos, Athabascans, Aleuts, Yup'iks, Tlingits, Haida, Koniag, Chugach, Eyak and others.

But on close examination of the story, NOT ONE specific instance of Native Alaskan involvement in the illegal trade was cited. Furthermore, the report for the most part cited unnamed federal authorities speaking about the allegedly illegal trade being participated in by Natives.

The report talked of WHITE traders receiving large amounts of ivory and fur and other animal parts from SOMEONE and while it implies that those "someones" were Native, not one instance of Native involvement was cited.

We do not pretend to believe that everyone involved in illegal game trade is non-Native. Certainly there are some.

What we object to is this and other reports painting ALL Natives with the broad, untruthful brush of being slovenly, of being alcoholic gun slingers (as in the Kotzebue article) or of being slaughterers for profit, as in the Los Angeles Times article.

Once again, we find that people are looking at Natives through biased and snowblinded eyes and the Natives of Alaska are being treated unfairly.

While it might be easy to discount these unfair reports as simply the work product of a sloppy writer, remember that much of what the public believes about Alaska Natives comes from just such reports.