

Board names subsistence areas

by G.D. Renkes

for the Tundra Times

Great chunks of Alaska were determined to be "rural" by the Joint Board of Fisheries and Game during a public meeting in Anchorage last week.

That gives those who live in those areas subsistence use of fish and game and eliminates subsistence privileges for those who don't.

Rural determinations were made for the North Slope, Seward Peninsula, Kodiak Island, much of the Alaska Peninsula, Nome, Barrow, Kotzebue and Bethel.

An area west of Cook Inlet including the village of Tyonek, and the roadless villages of English Bay and Port Graham on the Kenai Peninsula were also declared rural.

Determined to be non-rural was the greater Anchorage area bounded by Game Management Unit 14, from Talkeetna to Portage Creek, including Chickaloon.

Also considered non-rural by the board are Kenai Peninsula communities connected by roads.

The rural versus non-rural designations for the Kenai were hotly debated. That non-rural designation didn't make sense to Native board member

Jessie Foster.

"I'm unaware of information that, where a community has a road, it takes care of all peoples' needs," he said.

Designations for the remaining portions of the Kenai Peninsula, Copper River Basin, Prince William Sound and the Interior will be considered by the board during its next Anchorage meeting beginning Jan. 17.

On Jan. 5, the board will meet in Sitka to make rural and non-rural designations for Southeast.

Under the state's new subsistence law passed last May, the board must find that the use of particular fish stocks and game populations by rural residents is "customary and traditional."

If that is the finding, residents of the designated rural area are eligible for subsistence hunting and fishing for those fish and animals under special regulations designed for the area.

The new law defines a rural area as a place where the "non-commercial, customary and traditional use of fish or game for personal or family consumption is a principal characteristic of the economy."

To identify those areas, the board examined such things as communities' income, employment, businesses,

population growth, distance from urban areas, and boundaries and levels of use of fish and game.

Foster said the board is taking a "different approach" under the new law:

"Where the separate boards used to consider people and their resources, now the Joint Board is classifying all communities," he explained.

"What is happening here is that the Joint Board is limiting what the Board of Fisheries and Board of Game can consider.

"Where a community has been designated rural, a board can consider customary and traditional uses of the resource," he said.

"On the other hand, where a community is determined to be non-rural, the boards can only consider sport and commercial uses."

During the Anchorage meeting, many board members expressed concern about not having sufficient information to make rural and non-rural designations.

Brenda Johnson, chairperson for the Board of Game, urged the Joint Board to declare communities can petition the board for a change at any time.

Fish and Game Department spokesman Jon Lyman said it's impor-

tant for people to know "The determinations are not set into stone."

He explained the Joint Board's designations are being made with minimum information and said communities may call relevant facts to the board's attention for later redeterminations.

After an area has been classified rural, the Boards of Fisheries and Game, during their normal separate meetings, will determine whether specific fish stocks and game populations can sustain a harvest.

Those boards also must determine whether the fish and animals have been customarily and traditionally used by area residents for food, shelter and clothing or the other purposes listed in the law.

Eight special criteria recently approved by the legislature will be used to make that determination.

Each local board must authorize subsistence fishing or hunting regulations under which rural area residents can use resources for subsistence.

If there is a surplus of fish and game after subsistence uses are provided for, the Board of Fisheries may adopt commercial, personal use or sport fishing regulations, and the Board of Game may adopt general hunting regulations.