

Kitka: Subsistence ruling cause for great concern

The recent decision of the Alaska Supreme Court invalidating a long-standing rural subsistence priority is, in the words of the new president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, "a profound disappointment which causes us great concern for the future of Alaska."

Julie Kitka, in a recent statement, characterized the situation as a fish and game crisis.

"For years, Native leadership at the village, regional and statewide level has consistently supported a unified, comprehensive system of statewide fish and game management under the jurisdiction of the State of Alaska.

"We have worked for a decade to keep management of fish and game in Alaskan hands and to keep federal involvement at a minimum," she said.

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Kitka pointed out that in 1982 the Alaska Native community was successful after campaigning hard to defeat a ballot initiative which would have repealed the Legislature's statutory subsistence preference.

"In 1985 and 1986, after the State Supreme Court issued its Madison decision, we went all out to secure legislative changes so that Alaskan statutes could be brought into compliance with federal law.

"If we had failed in either of these efforts, state law would undoubtedly have been found to be out of compliance with federal law," she said, "and we would have witnessed a federal takeover of fish and game management on those 60 percent of Alaska's lands which are in federal ownership."

Kitka said the secretary of the Department of the Interior would have become the de facto commissioner of fish and game over almost two-thirds of Alaska.

"This would have created a divided system without adequate resources to manage the species and habitats which migrate across the state without regard to land ownership.

"The Native community has worked consistently with governors, legislators, commissioners and members of the boards of fish and game toward two mutually reinforcing goals: to protect the subsistence



economy on which the lifestyles of all rural Alaskans depend and to do so within the context of the unified state management system," she said.

Kitka said that until now that effort has succeeded. Today, however, she said that in light of the court's decision, the goals may no longer be compatible.

"Alaska's court system has spoken, and the 1990 fishing season will soon be upon us," she said.

Kitka noted that in a recent letter to Gov. Cowper, she indicated that AFN has no choice but to inquire of the Interior secretary his plans for assuming his responsibility under Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

"However, we look forward to working with the secretary and the governor to resolve this situation," she said.

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