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Babbitt says solve subsistence first

Interior Secretary says he must move quickly

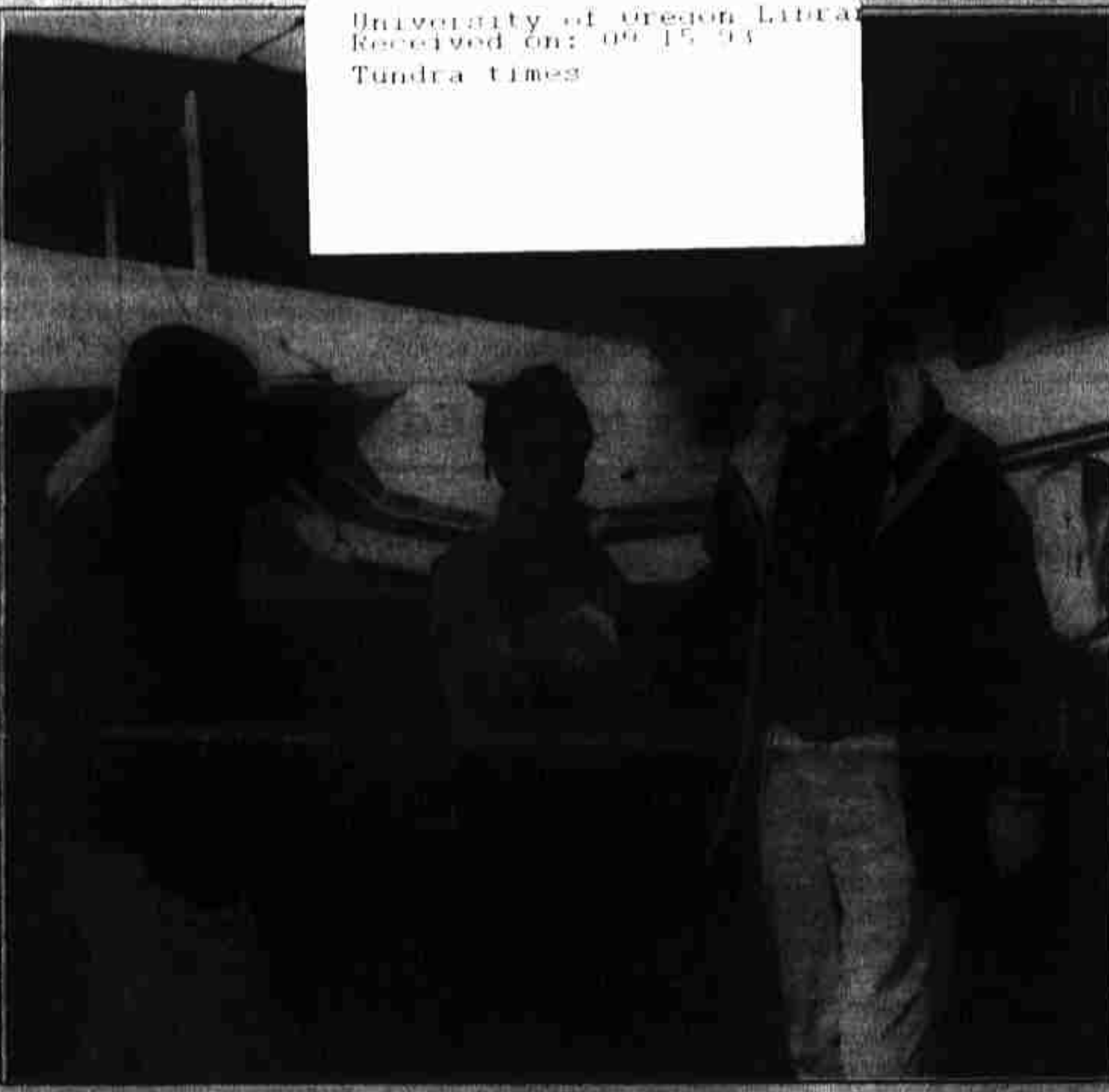
By Jeff Richardson

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt told the *Tundra Times* in Dillingham last week that resolving the subsistence issue should be his top priority. Emerging from private consultations with the Alaska Federation of Natives for an informal press conference with reporters excluded from the session, Babbitt said:

"I think I have an obligation under federal law to simply guarantee that the rural residents of this state, including the Natives, have a right to subsistence hunting and fishing. Now, we had originally hoped that it could all be worked out under the leadership of the state government. It doesn't appear that, at least in the short run, that's going to be possible. And I think that imposes an obligation on me under federal law, to work out and work toward a more comprehensive system of subsistence regulation. It's complicated, but that doesn't mean it has to take forever. I've got an obligation to act expeditiously."

When asked by the *Tundra Times* which of the many Alaskan issues confronting his department he felt should be a priority, Babbitt responded, "I think the subsistence issue, because it is an issue of life and livelihood, is certainly the most urgent. There are lots of other issues, certainly . . . but the subsistence issue is one that I think is coming at us from every angle pretty incessantly."

Babbitt supports buybacks
Babbitt's remarks came about halfway through an official three-
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Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Ada Deer are welcomed by Togiak residents as they arrive for consultations with local leaders. For more on the Babbitt, please turn to page 6.
Photo by Jeff Richardson

Babbitt and Deer Expedition
Part I:
Subsistence first
Next Issues:
Lunch with Babbitt
Dialogue with Deer
Part II:
What Next?

Middle Yukon villages angered by fishing limits

by Jeff Richardson

Village residents along the middle Yukon River are angered by an economic crisis stemming from severe restrictions on chum salmon harvests. In Kaltag, commercial fishing limits have left a growing number of residents short of funds to pay electric bills and other basic living expenses.

Even when chum runs are light, the middle Yukon usually sees 5-8 days of commercial fishing for chum roe. This year, there was one 12-hour opening and one 9-hour opening. Despite higher roe prices, most fishermen are averaging an estimated \$2,000 for the season, less than half of what they've been making in recent years.

With the loss of income, subsistence fishing is even more important than usual, but even these harvests have been restricted this summer, prompting concerns about village food supplies.

To make the situation even more frustrating, Kaltag residents contend there have actually been more chums than reported by the Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game

(ADFG) and that while their harvest has been cut dramatically, incidental catch of chums both up and downstream by villages targeting other species has continued.

While the run had a slow start, said Richard Burnham, a Kaltag fisherman, after July 4 "the fish just started pouring in."

"People are saying 'They're catching chums below us and above us. Why is fish and game telling us we can't catch chums at all?'" said Burnham. "This is the only fishery we have. When we have a disaster on summer chums, that's it for us."

Burnham said Kaltag is a willing party to a four-year-old conservation plan for the fishery, but has long-standing concerns about the state's ability to produce reliable data to carry out the plan's objectives. Local fishermen contend that extrapolations based on data from aerial surveys are faulty

because overcast, overhanging vegetation and only sporadic flights make state estimates highly suspect.

In fact, Kaltag developed its own fish counting program, with
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This Just In . . .

Governor Walter J. Hickel has awarded \$445,479 in grants under the Governor's Grants for Substance Abuse Prevention program to more than 16 groups statewide fighting drug and alcohol abuse.

Among grants and recipients include:

- \$20,776 to Kuspuk School District in Aniak for a program called "K-ROCK 94 - Kids Reach Out to Community and Kids," a school district mini-conference led by district teachers and a guest disk jockey to build awareness among students about substance abuse.
- \$22,000 to Cultural Heritage and Education Institute in Fairbanks for "Tana-Na-De Where is the Path?" to provide community-based activities in the village of Minto to enhance Athabascan cultural awareness and general community well-being as a deterrent to high risk substance abuse behaviors.
- \$10,000 to YWCA of Anchorage for "Native Mother-Daughter Program," designed to help Native girls and their mothers build self-esteem, family support for education, and knowledge of the damaging effects of substance abuse.

Other recipients include the North Slope Borough, Hoonah City School District, Wrangell School District and Lower Kuskokwim School District.

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