CHANGING COURSE:
FISH & GAME MAN AGEMENT IN ALASKA

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R
ising a nucleus is easy
days. Just walking
into a crowded room
and mentioning "d-2 lands"
ought to do the trick, and if not,
try "subsistence," or "fish and
game management." These
issues are closely related and they all
provide plenty of room for dif-
f erent opinions. In fact, when the
whole face of fish and game management
in Alaska is changing in response to
the new million acres.

As Alaska's population grows,
an increasing number of com-
plexities develop in the business
of fish and wildlife management. It
must be simple—fewer people,
there was plenty for every-
one. Now, there are no easy deci-
sions. Many questions must be
answered before fishing and hunt-
ing can be allowed. For instance,
what kind of use is most appro-
riate? Can the animal or fish
population support an open season?
For how long? What effect will it
have on other species?

As the possibility of future
acres becomes more apparent,
new questions arise. Who has the
right to hunt and fish when there
is no longer enough to go around?
Is the most valid use of fish and
game for "subsistence?" What is
subsistence? Does it include selling
animals or parts of animals for the
peck you need for other necessities
or is it only subsistence when you
eat or wear what you catch?
Should Alaskan Natives be granted
special rights because of their
traditional lifestyle? What about
other people who hunt and fish?
How long does it take to create a
tradition?

THE ANCSA EFFECT
In 1971 the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)
complicated things even more. In
1977 (H.R.), it contained
provision requiring Congress
to evaluate millions of acres of Federal
land in Alaska for possible inclusion
into four Federal systems: National
Parks, Forests, Wildlife Refuges,
and Wild and Scenic River System.
The amount of land involved could
be over one million acres.

When Congress acts on the d-2
issue, it will also be deciding how
the wildlife on all that land will
be managed, and by whom. Unless
Congressional concerns (primarily
related to providing rural people
who depend on wildlife hunting
and fishing with the assumption
that their concerns are being considered)
are addressed, the management
could well decide that fish and
game on Alaska's public lands
should be managed under a system
altogether separate from the system
on other Alaskan lands and
different from that used on public
lands throughout the nation.

That, in the opinion of the State's
wildlife experts, could be disas-
trous.

Many of Alaska's animals and
fish are migratory to some degree.
When these species cross man-made
boundaries, conflicting systems of
management often find a way to
break down this problem.

The relationship between
wildlife and its environment is a
delicate one. While man's influence
cannot be eliminated, his manage-
ment practices can and must be
consistent. Clearly, the best answer
from the standpoint of the fish and
game would be to have one system for all
of Alaska's lands.

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE
Fish and game management in
Alaska is now guided by one of the
most democratic systems in the
United States. By means of hear-
brings, informational meetings, active
substitution of proposals and other
methods, a determined effort is
made to consult the State's citizens
before decisions are made. Even,
sometimes, principles are sometimes,
many people, especially in
rural Alaska, feel that
their concerns and desires
are not really considered
in the present regulatory systems.
They feel as though they receive
only lip service from the State
government and the Boards of
Fisheries and Game. Not all of this
problem can be blamed on Alaska's
huge size and poor communica-
tions. There may indeed be inequ
ities built into the present system.
The State government has not
addressed regional concerns about
this communications problem,
and about the subsistence
question, too. Right now, it's doing
something about it, and trying to
do it in time to keep Congress from
creating a separate management
system. Congress, meanwhile, is
keeping a close eye on the State's
efforts.

REORGANIZATION
As a first step, the Alaska
Department of Fish and Game is
working on a major reorganization
which is intended to improve its
operating efficiency and solve its
responsiveness to all Alaskan
citizens. One proposed change
would be the addition of a new
Deputy Commissioner for Program
Management, who would then
handle many administrative details
now falling on the shoulders of the
Commissioner. Another part of
the reorganization is a proposal
to place all of the fisheries
related divisions—Sport Fish,
Commercial Fisheries, and Fisheries
Rehabilitation—Entitlement and
Development—under the existing
Deputy Commissioner, whose
position

WHAT'S AHEAD
As of this writing, the State
decided to explore all three
avenues more thoroughly. More
workshops were planned to seek
the opinions of the people
throughout the State. The
subject is far too important for
anything less.

The number of possibil-
ties with regard to fish
and game management in
Alaska seems almost end-
less. Although the State is at
this time pursuing only the
three proposals mentioned here,
new ones could be added or old
ones deleted at any time. In addition,
other ideas are being con-
sidered in the Alaska Legislature,
and of course, in Congress. Ever-
more may still surface in the
days to come.

Each meeting the State holds
increases the body of available
knowledge about what people
in Alaska really want. Soon, the
final decisions will have to be made.
Whatever the result, one thing is
sure: The new State management
system will be the people's choice,
not that of a few individuals.

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