

88-49-131

Sadie Neakok

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Barrow, Alaska

Series: Potlatch series

1977

Jeff Kennedy said Sadie Neakok will talk about justice and subsistence.

Galveston Flood by Tom Rush

Jeff Kennedy said during Sadie Neakok's career as a court magistrate in the Barrow area she had to balance the rights for Natives to hunt and fish for a living with the rights and the obligations of the state, national and international laws. On this recording she recalls an attempt of the United States government to enforce the migratory bird treaty. The migratory bird treaty banned the hunting of waterfowl during the times of the year when they flew over the northern regions. Sadie Neakok recalls Alaska hunting regulations before statehood.

Sadie Neakok said the old laws stated that a Native of Alaska would not be restricted from taking any animal if he was hungry. There was no crime committed. When Alaska became a state the state evaluated each district for maintenance of rules. Subsistence hunting wasn't fully touched when Alaska first became a state. The state started putting seasons on waterfowl, moose, caribou, and seal. The trapping season has always been from the first of December to April in the northern area. You can't trap other than that area. If they trapped out of season you couldn't sell their hides they had to be used for their own garments. That didn't have any bearing on the breaking of law. In 1962-63 the state got interested in regulating the waterfowl in the northern area even though the state said they would not take part in changing some of the laws among the Native people. They did take a big step in trying to enforce the waterfowl like the eider, the geese and mallards. She said for this area they had no open season when the waterfowl came. They come into this area from May until September and then they didn't have any more. When the whaling season is poor waterfowl is the only fresh meat available up there. At the time it was being enforced by the state there could be no taking of waterfowl. They didn't have an open season. This was a treaty between Mexico, United States and Canada. Under the treaty the seasons were open from September until May for the waterfowl. Up where they are and in parts of Canada they get it out of season. This was a big change and they didn't know how to cope with it. State Game Commission personnel were sent up to their area to enforce the act. The thing that solved their problem was every man, woman and child at the time committed themselves for the taking of waterfowl whenever an arrest was made. People were depending on her to decide what steps to take. Up till the time that the waterfowl situation was moved to outside she always felt guilty because she took an oath not to participate in the uprising or whatever when she took the position of magistrate. But she said you are there also to help. Any

problem area that might be solved you don't do it behind your people – the people that you work with. You do not betray your people. She gets so involved in the solution. Getting to the core of the problem was her main concern. So many of her people were charged with violations where they have had no education in that part of the law. They hadn't been put on restrictions with their subsistence hunting and all of a sudden people were getting arrested for violations.

Sadie Neakok said moose rarely wander into their area. The people didn't know what to do in their situation when they learned there was a season for moose. The rule violators wrote letters themselves to the Game Commission. In two cases the game wardens came up and arrested people without warning. The people came from large homes and they needed the meat. When everyone was guilty of hunting waterfowl in the spring she notified the government office of the problem. Every person in the community self-committed themselves. The game warden was furious about it. The legislature met and made it neutral for them to hunt the waterfowl out of season. The game warden would still come up and demand a duck stamp. Some people did buy the stamp to comply.

Song by Peter LaFarge.

Jeff Kennedy said Sadie Neakok talks about a more recent subsistence hunting problem.

Sadie Neakok said caribou are plentiful up here in their area. Because of so many reports of the herds diminishing last year the game commission felt that the Natives should not take caribou anymore. There were restrictions on hunting after a certain date. She started telling the people up North and telling them to comply with the rules. When the rules were made they were promised that someone from the government office would come up with food stamps to help the Natives supplement their diet with items they are not used to. Now there is the question about hunting whales. They know there are more whales than the bowhead numbers they have been told. She said the bowhead whale is their source of subsistence during the whaling season. She talked about the length of the spring whaling season. They also have a chance of whaling in the fall. She talked about the conditions during the fall whaling season.

Song by Chet Atkins