

The Alaska Conservation Society Board has labored to get its thinking in order on subsistence. In 1976 the Board adopted a position statement on subsistence, recognizing that translating it into political action would be a long process. This article sets forth the Board's basic thoughts at this time. Ed.

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# Subsistence: A Starting Point

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## — LIFE STYLES —

A wide spectrum of life styles has developed from many different cultural roots in Alaska. This spectrum ranges from life styles derived from hunter-gatherer economies, whose social organizations and cultural patterns were shaped largely by the biological and physical environment in which they evolved, to those derived primarily from western-industrial economies, whose social organization and cultural patterns have evolved in directions that lead to the separation of the individual from direct ties and experiences with the land and its resources. Indeed, it is this very mix of life styles that contributes to Alaska's uniqueness among the fifty states. THIS DIVERSITY OF LIFE STYLES IS AN ASSET TO ALASKA AND AMERICAN SOCIETY AT-LARGE.

Three important qualities to this spectrum of life styles are relevant to decisions regarding the disposition of (d) (2) lands and the agencies that will manage them. Each of these qualities can be visualized as a continuum. They are (1) a resource dependency continuum with direct use of local resources at one end and indirect use of distant, highly processed resources at the other; (2) an energy consumption continuum characterized by labor intensive acquisition of resources at one end and highly mechanized acquisition, processing and transportation of resources at the other end; and (3) a psychological continuum ranging from a feeling of self-sufficiency and independence at one end to a feeling of being part-of-the-system and having dependence on others for basic needs at the other end.

## — SUBSISTENCE —

Subsistence life styles are a complex mixture of traditionally native, traditionally non-native and completely new elements that vary tremendously from place to place, from one individual to another and from one year to the next. Therefore, THERE IS NO RATIONAL NOR FAIR BASIS FOR SHARPLY OR PERMANENTLY DEFINING "ALASKAN" NOR "SUBSISTENCE" LIFE STYLES. Still many people depend greatly upon natural resources for personal consumptive use; and for them subsistence living is culturally *the* way of life. Of necessity or by choice, they live off the land. To a great degree — they subsist.



BURBOT CATCH

Dick Bishop

Activities in support of this life style include hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering traditional natural foods, fuels and other materials. These pursuits figure prominently in the whole spectrum of Alaskan life styles, and to this extent, Alaskans are a part of their local ecosystem.

Historically throughout Alaska, hunting and gathering societies were distributed at low densities as mandated by the productivity and characteristics of the ecosystems. To be successful at subsistence living, these people must have had the dedication, knowledge and skills which, in essence, made them "professionals."

THE ALASKA CONSERVATION SOCIETY SUPPORTS THE CONCEPTS OF SUBSISTENCE USE OF NATURAL RESOURCES FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

1. There are people with strong cultural affinities for subsistence living among both natives and non-natives. The bases for these affinities differ in many ways.
2. The existence of viable subsistence life styles provides our society at-large with an added and positive element of diversity which enriches both subsistence users and others.
3. Subsistence life styles, *properly pursued*, are environmentally less disruptive or destructive than life styles associated with modern agrarian/industrial societies. Subsistence activities can be an ecologically sound means of supporting people in rural Alaska.
4. Subsistence use remains an economic necessity for many rural Alaskans.
5. Subsistence use has always been a natural part of true wilderness, contrary to today's popular notion of wilderness as "a place where animals live, but people only visit."

## — HUNTING —

Hunting, fishing and trapping are pursuits that figure prominently in virtually the whole spectrum of Alaskan life styles. However, given the current mobility of individuals with respect to life styles, some people exploit living resources for different reasons at different times. Similarly, the use of a given species can, at different times, be for different purposes by the same person. This is true with respect to hunting, trapping and fishing. For these and other reasons, attempts to distinguish among commercial-sport-subsistence fishing or subsistence-sport-trophy hunting as practiced by many Alaskans have been unsuccessful or at least fraught with conflict. The material, physical and psychological rewards of these pursuits are all of importance, the degree of each depending on circumstances.

Although fishing is of great importance, and the factors affecting fish populations and aquatic habitats are, in a broad sense, quite similar to those affecting birds and mammals, discussions of fishing do not currently engender the temperature of debate that hunting and trapping do. Currently, attention within Alaska and nationally is focused primarily on the issue of hunting.

Hunting wild game is a pursuit as old as mankind, in fact, hunting was crucial to man's evolutionary development. However, relatively few people in modern life are confronted with the necessity of hunting or gathering food, nor with the reality that their life depends upon the death of other living things. Hunting brings this relationship into sharp focus and emphasizes man's need for a responsible attitude toward other species and their habitat.

For hunting and subsistence to survive as positive elements, some hard realities must be recognized and reckoned with.

## — MANAGEMENT —

1. Biological productivity. The basic long-term productivity of much Alaskan land is relatively low, and the abundance of plants and animals varies dramatically over any period of years. Hunting and other wildland uses must be regulated flexibly and in accord with these basic principles or neither the wildland uses nor the wildland resources will survive in a healthy condition.

2. Human population density. For subsistence life styles with a high direct dependence on hunting and gathering to be perpetuated, low densities of users in relation to resources must be maintained. As human populations rise in Alaska the proportion of people engaging in subsistence must fall. In the past, availability of resources limited human numbers, but today many of these historical constraints on human population have been removed. Therefore, regulations are necessary to insure that increased human use does not damage wildland resources. Regulations are natural only for those living primitively.

3. Modern technology. Technology has increased the efficiency of all hunters. Improperly employed, this technology has and will continue to have detrimental effects on wildlife and its habitat. Regulation of methods and means will continue to be a necessity.

HUNTING, TRAPPING, FISHING AND MANY OTHER CONSUMPTIVE USES SUCH AS LOGGING ARE UNLIKELY TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH THE MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PHILOSOPHIES OF NATIONAL PARKS AND MONUMENTS. MOREOVER, NO OTHER CLASSIFICATION THAN PARKS AND MONUMENTS COULD SERVE AS WILDLIFE SANCTUARIES IN ALASKA. THEREFORE, WHERE HUNTING IS TO BE PERMITTED, WE RECOMMEND THAT OTHER LAND MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES BE ESTABLISHED, SUCH AS PRESERVES OR REFUGES, WHICH ALSO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE WATERSHED, HABITAT AND WILDLIFE PROTECTION.

Although we feel that hunting and trapping should not be permitted in Parks and Monuments, hunting and trapping subject to appropriate State regulations and State and Federal controls should be permitted in all other federal land categories.

Because of the contribution of hunting to Alaskan life styles through its economic, physical and psychological challenges and rewards, hunting in its various forms should be provided for in land ownership and management. Hunting is very important among the array of potential wildland uses. Again, a continuum exists between hunting as a dominant, desirable use of wildlife in some circumstances at one extreme to those situations, where lands such as national parks and monuments, may serve as game sanctuaries at the other end.

The basic existing regulatory regime for hunting, trapping and fishing is appropriate to conserve and protect fish and wildlife in Alaska and to allocate resource use among various users. Legally and historically the State of Alaska has had the responsibility for wildlife management. State regulation promulgated with federal cooperation would be the most appropriate scheme to regulate the entire spectrum of hunting, trapping and fishing uses effectively and equitably. We oppose federal legislation which would control the taking of wildlife in Alaska because federal laws would be a more static scheme applied to a necessarily dynamic management situation.

Land in Alaska is being divided into smaller and smaller parcels under a variety of ownerships, resulting in a proliferation of management goals and policies. This trend is generally incompatible with habitat management and the conditions required for many of the existing life styles in Alaska and could lead to the destruction of these, unless a new and imaginative approach to land and resource management is adopted, one which can overcome the inherent deficiencies of an uncoordinated mosaic of policies. To achieve coordination of land use and resource management in accord with ecosystem and life style protection will require an unprecedented level of cooperation among federal, state and private groups.



MARTEN

John Burns



MARTEN SET

John Burns

### FAR-FLUNG EFFECTS OF (d) (2) LEGISLATION

"Hundreds of millions of songbirds, shorebirds and waterfowl nest in our brief arctic and subarctic summers before migrating to wintering areas on six different continents. These birds are a source of recreation, food, information and satisfaction to observers, hunters, scientists and others around the globe. Their economic worth in terms of money expended by those 'using' them is substantial." — Charles Callison, Audubon Society.

### BARGAIN

The Richard King Mellon Foundation has just given \$4 million to the Nature Conservancy to buy 100 small islands in Currituck County, North Carolina, for bird protection. This is the largest single foundation cash grant ever given to a private conservation organization in the U.S. That makes the millions of acres of wetlands to be designated as new refuges in Alaska in HR 39 seem pretty much like a bargain.