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To: fek9wnr@yahoo.com

Subject: clips

Hey Todd,

We receive a news "clips" file every morning. Do you get these? If not I bet we could add you to this list. This article you probably saw from the ADN today.

Board preserves Nelchina subsistence caribou hunt

CARIBOU: Fish and game board denies Mat-Su residents' proposal to get rid of Tier II permits and expand the harvest.

By JAMES HALPIN

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A proposal that had many rural Alaskans outraged at a perceived attack on their hunting rights failed to pass muster at a state board meeting Monday.

The Alaska Joint Board of Fisheries and Game decided by a thin margin to kill a proposal to open a swath of land south of the Alaska Range, where the Nelchina caribou herd roams, to more hunters.

By killing the proposal, the board kept one of only a few road-accessible caribou herds in the state off-limits to those ineligible for so-called Tier II subsistence permits.

"I see people concerned because they feel like their birthright is being ripped out from underneath them," said Game Board Chairman Cliff Judkins, who supported the proposal. The proposal came from Mat-Su residents who advise the boards. They pitched the idea as a fix for the legally troubled system for dividing the popular caribou harvest.

The years-old debate focuses on whether some hunters are being treated fairly because they don't qualify for the same hunts as other Alaskans.

All Alaskans are considered subsistence hunters under state law. When demand for a resource is particularly high, the state can limit access to Tier II hunters, who are chosen under point systems that consider such factors as place of residence, cost of living and alternative resources.

The Nelchina caribou fall under a Tier II hunt.

Thousands of the Nelchina caribou are killed each year in the area covered by the proposal, though only about 13 percent of successful hunters live in the Copper River basin, on the eastern side of the hunt area, according to Department of Fish and Game numbers presented at the meeting.

"Why is it likely to benefit current nonsubsistence users and hurt subsistence users?" asked Game Board member Ben Grussendorf, who opposed the proposal. "That should get one to start thinking pretty seriously about what our duty is by law."

The state's permit system has been the subject of controversy for years.

To assuage the complaints in 2005, the board considered a similar proposal that would have opened the easy-access hunt for everyone, though with a few catches.

People who signed up for the hunt wouldn't be allowed hunt or trap anywhere else in Alaska. They would have had to salvage every scrap of meat, and couldn't use certain motorized vehicles -- including airplanes, RVs and some ATVs -- during their hunts.

That proposal failed, and today applicants receive points based on their responses to questions including how much food and gas cost in their towns, how many days they fished or hunted during the previous year and the number of years they have hunted the animal.

Last year, the state added income level to the requirements for drawing a permit to hunt in the Copper River area, though that condition is being challenged in court.

The land in question is located between the Parks, Glenn and Richardson highways. That its

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borders are roadways where people live was also of concern to opponents.

"It's just too extreme to advance," Grussendorf said.

The process of changing the regulations has already dragged on for years, Grussendorf said, "and all we've done is make people more and more upset with us."

Much of the Copper River basin traditionally belonged to the Ahtna Athabascans, though only about 25 percent of the residents there were Natives in 2000, according to Department of Fish and Game statistics that were presented.

"There will always be a certain number of residents in these communities that are going to be completely dependent on subsistence hunting," said board member Paul Johnson.

Last year, 3,740 people stalked the Nelchina herd, with 277 of them from the Copper River basin.

In previous years, as many as 13,000 have hunted the herd, and the number of basin residents involved has always been a fraction of the total.

Ending the Tier II hunting simply won't solve the problem, Johnson said, because subsistence lifestyles are the norm in rural Alaska, even if the residents live on the road system.

The basin had a population of about 3,362 in 2006, and many of those people rely on a mixed subsistence-cash economy, according to the report. Year-round employment is the exception.

"It's a dire need for us," said Wilbur Joe, who attended the meeting to represent his village of Kluti-kaah. "We were all holding our breaths. It's a serious matter for us; our subsistence is our lifestyle."

In 1999, 52 percent of adults in the basin were not working, and 16 percent were unemployed, according to the report. More than a third of the households made less than \$25,000 a year.

And surveys conducted during the past 20 years have shown more than 90 percent of basin households harvest and use wildlife for personal use, the report said.

"I don't think another year is going to produce some new information that's going to change anything," said member Vince Webster.

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