

*US Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources*

*September 19, 2013 Hearing*

*Testimony by Ana Hoffman*

Quyana keleglua mana arrcaralria qalaruteksartusqelluku. Subsistence in Yup'ik is nerangnaqsaraput. It means our way of gathering food.

On Sept 7 of this year, my son shot a bull moose. Once we got all of the meat into the boat, including the heart, liver, tongue and nose, we waited while he tossed the moose beard into the tall trees to ensure continued success on future hunts. We were able to spend a week up river because the school district, recognizing attendance drops dramatically during moose hunting season, has established a fall break to accommodate subsistence.

The length of the Kuskowkim River we traveled from Bethel to McGrath required only one general harvest tag thirteen years ago. Today, it requires four: general harvest ticket, registration RM 615, tier II, registration RM 650 and one section is closed. The subsistence hunter in Rural Alaska works hard to stay informed about governing laws and regulatory changes. Without monuments or land marks, hunters and fishermen learn the unit boundaries and the applicable harvest restrictions in order to be in compliance. By in large, we are a regulation following people.

Last summer there was an act of civil disobedience near Bethel, after having observed a seven day closure, a number of Yup'ik fisherman decided to fish for Chinook salmon. This was the first significant incidence in Alaska in over sixty years. During the state court trials, the judge found that subsistence activities related to hunting and fishing are deeply rooted in the religious beliefs of the Yup'ik culture and that the subsistence fishing for Chinook salmon and the attendant activities are religiously based conduct. Despite these findings the District court affirmed the State's authority to restrict subsistence fishing and the case is now on appeal.

The State's subsistence law requires the Boards of Fisheries and Game to establish an amount necessary for subsistence of fish and game resources. In essence, this should be the baseline. What we see happening oftentimes is achieving the amount needed for subsistence is not known until we are subsisting. As a result, the subsistence user, whose cultural, social, economic, and physical livelihood is at stake, is bearing the brunt of conservation.

Bethel is the hub community of villages along the Yukon, Kuskokwim and Johnson rivers. Each of these villages is strategically located in direct relationship to specific food sources. Forty years ago, Senator Edward Kennedy visited my mother's home village of Nunapitchuak, he had dry fish and tea with my grandparents. The village is known for its proximity to white fish, black fish and pike. It is because of the continued access to subsistence hunting and fishing that the villages remain in existence today.

If you walk into any classroom in rural Alaska and ask the students what they ate for dinner, they will likely answer soup. But it is not French onion or vegetable beef. It is fish soup, moose soup, caribou soup, seal soup, swan soup, walrus soup, goose soup, beaver soup, and crane soup all accompanied with dry fish. This is our sustenance.

In 2010 the State of Alaska gathered statistics about subsistence harvesting. Subsistence food harvests represent just over 1% of the fish and game harvested annually in Alaska, the commercial fisheries harvests over 98%. Of the non-commercial harvests of food, the studies showed the average urban resident harvests 23 pounds per person per year, the rural resident harvests 316 pounds per person per year. In Western Alaska, where I am from, we harvest 490 pounds per person per year. There is no Costco or Walmart in our area of Alaska, it is the rivers, lakes, ocean and wilderness that feed us.

Last week, I walked out to my mom's native allotment just outside of Bethel to pick berries. Along the way, I came across Fritz Jimmie, Neal Japhet and Ray Landlord they were bird hunting. They noticed my bucket and pointed out which way I should go to find the biggest black berries. As I walked across the tundra, I looked back and saw them, three boys ages 10, 11, and 12 sitting at the edge of a lake in the middle of southwestern Alaska waiting for the migratory birds to land. It is their rights we all aim to protect.