



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

1689 C Street, Suite 100
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-5151

Kim Elton
Senior Advisor for Alaska Affairs

Speech given at the Annual Alaska Federation of Natives Convention
October 23, 2009

Well, you've just heard from two Department of the Interior rock stars—Secretary Ken Salazar and Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs, Larry EchoHawk.

I'm privileged to be a part of the team that works with them. Here in the hall with me are two others who are part of the senior policy team: Wizi Garriott a Senior Advisor to Larry EchoHawk and Pat Pourchot, the Secretary's Special Assistant for Alaska Affairs, based here in Anchorage.

The three of us, along with others, have just been charged by Secretary Salazar to work with you and other stakeholders on a subsistence mission that bumps us out of the past three decades and is designed to meet the challenges of the next three decades.

This review is not simply structural; we will not ignore leadership or budget issues.

A fundamental premise will be that we can no longer expect the state to regain subsistence management on federal lands. We are here to stay so we have the obligation to provide the best management system that we possibly can.

An important part of this secretarial charge is to not just work with you on crafting our blueprint but to craft it quickly. The Secretary understands that in January the subsistence board will again kick into high gear and a clear subsistence road map must be in place by then.

As you just heard from the Secretary and Assistant Secretary a few moments ago, this administration's subsistence road map will not be developed from the top down. His management policies will be informed by the people who have to live with his policies—by you and others.

With your help, at the end of the next few months we will have in place a subsistence management plan that will operate based on several principals, including:

- Decision-making based on science and traditional knowledge;
- An understanding of the practice and importance of subsistence; and, most importantly
- A commitment to the ANILCA subsistence mandate—the promise made in law will not be compromised or relegated to a low priority status in this administration.

Subsistence is a secretarial responsibility and the chair of the subsistence board serves at the pleasure of the Secretary. In a few months, at the end of this process, the Secretary will match his subsistence policy, crafted with your help, to a board chair who can best help us fulfill our subsistence obligations.

Let me be clear, there is no pre-determined chair waiting in the wings. In the next few months, he will select a chair he feels will not let this administration's subsistence policy, based on law and science and the input of stakeholders, later be trumped by personality or politics. Any leadership suggestions you and others have will be helpful.

On the budget side—over time inflation and cuts have eroded the subsistence management budget. This means less money while the challenges grow. This has forced change that may not be helpful.

For example, do the regional advisory councils have the capacity to fulfill their mandates, do we have the capacity to get the science we need to make management decisions to increase benefits for subsistence users, or do we have the management resources to work with all parties to effectively provide the subsistence preferences called for in Title VIII of ANILCA?

I want to end with an observation.

The history of subsistence management from ANILCA onward seems to run in ten year cycles:

- In the 1980s, the state managed resources on all lands for a subsistence priority until the McDowell decision at the end of the 80s;
- During the 1990s, the federal government managed for subsistence on federal lands on a “temporary” basis—just until the state could amend the Alaska constitution; and
- Over the last decade or so, federal management has been in a limbo phase—reactive to the push and pull of outside forces and with efforts tainted too often by toxic remarks made by those seeking a political goal that doesn’t mesh with federal law.

This next decade, we won’t be pretending that federal management is temporary.

We won’t have a timid, ‘in limbo’, management scheme where we make easy decisions and avoid difficult decisions.

We will fulfill our obligations informed by the law and by the people protected by the law.

We look forward to the next 30 years.

It will be hard, there is no perfect solution that works for everyone in this room or outside this room. But there potentially are much better approaches than we’ve used until now and we ask you to help us find them because, as you heard from the Secretary a few minutes ago he wants a new approach informed from the bottom up and not the top down.

Thank you for your time and your patience today. and thank you in advance for the time and the patience you’ll give over the next few months as we try to shed a divisive past and craft a better future on this and other issues.