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The Government of Hunting: the Language of Regulation and its Effect on Hunters

Abstract:

In the circumpolar North, hunting and fishing are intertwined with the cultural, spiritual and physical lives of the Indigenous peoples of the area. Yet, control over these resources and the means through which they can be utilized have increasingly come under control of nation-states, through centralized systems of game management. In Alaska, authority over wild resources on state and private lands all fall under the control of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and its associated Board of Game. This system is built on a specific view of the world. A world in which land can be divided into mapped units, hunting times can be set on a calendar, and hunters themselves can be grouped by location of residency (residents of the state and non-resident) with no regard given to their motives for hunting (sport hunting vs. subsistence, etc.) In order to hunt legally, both Native and non-Native hunters must acknowledge and abide by this division of space, time and definitions of hunting and hunters promoted by regulations and embedded in language.

This project seeks to identify the discrepancies that exist between the view of hunting held by state game management in Alaska and that of rural hunters as exhibited in this language. This will be done by careful examination of one specific situation, that of the Central Kuskokwim region. Interviews conducted in the communities of Aniak and Crooked Creek will be examined to identify management terminology used by rural hunters and the meanings they attribute to such language. These results will then be compared to the state's use of the same terms to locate discrepancies and convergences in meaning. These differences are significant for two principle reasons: 1) the use of same management terminology by both groups may mask differences in meanings; 2) the use of different terminology by rural hunters can indicate aspects of hunting that are obvious to hunters but may not be apparent to management, pointing out areas of hunting that may need more attention from management and aiding in its ability to understand and better manage game. On a broader level this project is a study in the governmentality of hunting. An examination into how the notion of hunting as well as the practice itself is proscribed by the state system of game management through hunting regulations (Foucault 1980, 1995).