

## Rural Classifications Up For Debate Statewide

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

In the world of subsistence harvesting, at least within federal lands and waters, rural and non-rural classifications mean everything. Basically, rural communities are entitled to the land, and are first in line for consuming natural resources. Kodiak's long-standing rural label has been called into question in the past, and according to Pamela Bumsted, could be questioned again in the near future.

Bumsted is the environmental Project Manager for Sun's Tribe of Kodiak, but also works with various individuals, governments and organizations regarding rural and non-rural definitions. She said the Federal Subsistence Board is currently reviewing who is eligible to use federal lands for subsistence.

"They have had criteria in the past to enable them to figure out rural and who is not. The process has not gone to everybody's satisfaction, so in 2009 they said we need to have an idea of how you're going to determine this and in 2012 they actually issued a request for comments."

Bumsted said the board is collecting comments about what the criteria for rural labels should be, and will later use those criteria to reevaluate rural communities around the state. So while Kodiak's status isn't in jeopardy right now, Bumsted said it could be if the board favors rural requirements that Kodiak can't meet.

"Ever since 1990 Kodiak and Sitka both have always been rural, however they've always had scrutiny put on them. And many people will remember in 2006 how upsetting it was to everyone when they were going to scrutinize Kodiak once again. And that's why it's so important for people in Kodiak, and the archipelago as a whole, to look very carefully at what would be an easier set of criteria to use. Perhaps one that's fairer, represents standard population descriptions, or something that is broadly recognized and not idiosyncratic."

She said the classification has often been determined by population numbers, and hopefully that will change in the new criteria. Some folks have suggested increasing the allowable population threshold, or doing

away with it as a requirement all together. Other suggestions consider looking at subsistence calorically, as in the number of calories communities derive from local foods.

“We need something which is going to be fair, something which is pretty obvious, maybe, you know, backed by sound research. And also recognizes the fact that Kodiak is an island. That we do have issues of food security and also looking at the history of all of this, with the intent is to make sure that people that who are depend or use local resources can continue to use them.”

Comments on the rural criteria will be accepted until November 1, and will be reviewed during the April 2014 Federal Subsistence Board meeting. The board’s recommendations will then go to the Secretaries of Interior and Agriculture for a final review and decision.

“And then the next step, after that, after the secretaries accept or reject the criteria which had been suggested, is then they will be doing those determinations, following those criteria.”

She said it’s important for people get involved with the process now, because it will come down the line and affect Kodiak in the future. Bumsted is planning a community meeting in September so folks can learn more about the review process and how to submit comments.