

Notes from April 22, 2006 Stakeholder Meeting

Excerpt

Requested information:

Do visitor numbers impact rural status (resources and environment category)?

Will the visitor industry affect rural status (community issues category)?

Does Sitka have enough services/resources for visitor accommodations, and does it (visitor infrastructure) jeopardize rural status (visitor experience category)?

Q&A after presentation, from the meeting notes:

Q: There's a presumption that as the economy becomes more mainstream, non-isolated, the possibility/probability of rural lifestyle diminishes?

A: Fed looks at those things as well. Yes.

Q: In terms of population, do you think the board who designates looks at temporary residents v. permanent?

A: No – very clear they're looking at permanent residence.

Q: Does it look at percentages of how the economy is split to make a decision?

A: There's not really an answer to that – they look at prevailing direction, what's in existence now, what's changed, how things have evolved, what are the trends – can't look at particular cap or measurement.

Q: But if # of cruise ships stays the same – does that make a difference?

A: Don't want to speak to that. But I did ask about dock – it probably doesn't make a difference whether we have a dock or not, but if the dock leads to more changes and additions, that might. Ketch has tried to get rural status – but with a population of 15000 people, and being in the service sector in such a large way, they probably won't ever get rural designation

Q: It seems they're looking at the need of the community to remain rural so we have access to resources. Is our subsistence usage being tracked? If the nature of the community changes and people aren't using subsistence as much...are they looking at that at all?

A: F&G does a lot of that, and Forest service too. That does play a role; we should encourage our community to keep up their permits. STA also tracks subsistence closely and keeps records.

SH comment: Everybody places high importance on rural status; subsistence permits are much more liberal than other fishery resources, but things can be depleted; we need to think about what the

resources around us can support.

Q: The mill being open versus closed – did you say that helped or hindered?

A: Mill brought industrial characteristics, but the community was also smaller. The mill closing actually helped Sitka's rural status; if we were to open another industry, that could also affect status.

Q: Do you get a feel for what factors they put an emphasis on in making decisions?

A: In handout – since these points were made by the board, these are the sorts of things that carried the day. But the decisions are based on collective aggregate – there's no one right answer.

SH comment: John Littlefield knows this topic inside and out – sits on local advisory board, most knowledgeable – if the group wanted to know more, we could approach him.

Q: Do you have any sense that subsistence might go away?

I don't think in our lifetimes. But in 30 years, imagine what Anchorage could be like – the whole definition of rural could change, relative to what else is happening around the state.

Point of clarification – the way the subsistence law works – subsistence users take priorities. If there's overuse of any resource, subsistence is the last to go; all other types of fishing/hunting will drop out before subsistence.

Subsistence was supposed to be instituted by the state – 15 yrs from when law passed they still hadn't implemented, so it was taken back to federal. Now the feds make the decision on federal public land and water.

Q: Is there a connection between subsistence use, rural status and the high volume of competing user groups?

A: When wildlife managers step in and say we have a problem, such as a diminished or depleted species, there's a hierarchy of who drops out – subsistence is last. If subsistence ends, that means that species has reached rock bottom – no one else is fishing it either.

Q: What's the time lapse?

A: Every 10 years rural status is reviewed, but fish and wildlife managers track fish and wildlife levels all the time, as do the local boards. If someone from Sitka says there's a problem with a species, they bring that to the attention of the board – decisions can be made at any time.

Processing the topics:

Question 1: Do visitor numbers affect rural status?

Does everyone understand what was presented on this topic? Yes.

Anything we should not retain from Greg's report on this topic? No.

Are there any other questions or more information needed? No.

The group has reached consensus on this item, and a red dot is placed on that card in the R&E category. There is much cheering and jubilation.

Question 2: Will visitor industry affect rural status?

Does everyone understand what was presented on this topic? Yes.

Anything we should not retain from Greg's report on this topic? No.

Are there any other questions or more information needed?

- It was said that infrastructure related to the visitor industry may affect our rural status – I'd like to know what kind of infrastructure they're talking about.
- Also under development of economy – tourism is already part of our economy– how could tourism make our economy more or less diverse and make it shift?

(Someone comments that those questions were answered in the report, and that we don't really know how the board would rule on those things.)

But because there are still questions on this topic, this item is taken back to the committee for one more week to try to find the answer to those questions.

Question 3: Does Sitka have enough services/resources for visitor accommodations, and does it (visitor infrastructure) jeopardize rural status?

Does everyone understand what was presented on this topic? Yes.

Anything we should not retain from Greg's report on this topic? No.

Are there any other questions or more information needed?

- Part A of question, which is also being worked on by business committee
- Part B of committee will go to John Littlefield to clarify by environment committee.