

Our Heritage Matters

It was about 40 years ago I landed in Kipnuk, a small native village in southwestern Alaska. My passengers were to attend meetings at the school lasting several hours so I had time to kill in the village. Soon after striking out for town, a foul smell permeated the air. I followed my nose into the center of town where I came upon an old man attending a washtub full of brown foaming liquid on top of a roaring fire. As I approached, I queried, "Whatcha got cooking?" The attendant, a native Aleut, in very broken English, proudly explained to me his son had killed a walrus and the meat was being processed to provide for the family. It was then I noticed his wife, tucked into a small shed, busy with an ulu, prepping more walrus to add to the washtub.

This family was living as their forefathers had done for centuries. Providing sustenance for the family to sustain their lives from the natural world around them. We often refer to it as "Our Heritage." Some interpret the phrase in a very narrow form meaning, "to do as we have done in the past. "Heritage," however is much more than that.

Living IN the natural world is much different than observing that world from the outside, ...LOOKING IN. Many Vermonters choose to live IN our natural world following multiple previous generations. Their home is not defined by the four walls of their house, but by the woods, fields and streams that surround them. We hunt, fish, and trap, because that is a natural extension of living outside the four walls that define our house. We are one with our wilderness surroundings. The way we live our lives defines who we are as much as our blood type or DNA. Our heritage, is more than generations of a lifestyle or doing the same things our ancestors did in the past. It is our lives, our soul, our very being.

"Outsiders," those looking in to the natural world rather than being a part of it, will never understand how much every animal harvested, (hunted, fished, or trapped), is revered and respected by those of us that harvest them. We care just as much about the wellbeing of wildlife as any "anti" ever did. We do not like to see any animal, wild or domestic, suffer. When we harvest an animal, we do it expeditiously and as painlessly as possible. Certainly, with more respect than the millions of pigs, chickens, and cows that are butchered daily. But sustaining our lives by utilizing the natural resources around us are what makes us who we are. Being one with nature sustains our body as well as our soul.

From an outsider's perspective, the impulse is to ban participation, limit access, and prevent harvest of all our natural resources whether it be wildlife or forest. Post it, put a fence around it, prohibit hunting, trapping, and halt the harvesting of any wood products. Our renewable resources are far better off with purposeful management to prevent damage to infrastructure and crops, keep numbers in balance to prevent disease, and allow selective forest harvesting for better yields and a more diverse forest. Those of us that live IN the natural world, play an indispensable role in that purposeful management.

We allow the Aleuts to harvest whales and walrus because it's their heritage. The harvests are an inseparable part of who they are. It provides sustenance for both body and soul. It's no different with Vermonters who live WITHIN their natural surroundings except the Vermont legislature doesn't protect those that hunt, shoot, and trap. To the contrary, they have an annual "open season" on us, pandering to every anti with a grievance to bear. Countless bills, every session, attempt to strip us of the very essence that makes us who we are. Can't they see, they are destroying a culture that is the fabric of Vermont? Who do they think cleared the land with an ax and crosscut saw? How do they think that stone wall out back that stretches over the mountain got there if not for handpicked rocks, a stone boat, and an ox. The

tools may have changed over the years but the individuals that made Vermont what it is, still live on today generations later and are unjustly under a constant attack simply for generational longevity.

There have been several recent incidents where Vermont law has intentionally been violated. Title 10, section 4708 clearly states "A person shall not intentionally interfere with the lawful taking of fish or wildlife..." and goes on to specify what actions are illegal. The illegal behavior is being addressed but the statute falls short of what is needed to stop the coordinated hatred, harassment, and bullying by a small group of anti activist. Sportsmen and women's Facebook posts are maliciously attacked by a coordinated deluge of "replies" intended to assassinate the poster's character and ruin their business. Some media outlets display the antis' ads for the revenue regardless of the fact the ads are inaccurate or unfairly demonize a group of Vermonters. Modern day tactics are being used to "intentionally interfere" with the lawful pursuit of game. Current statutes should be updated to reflect the use of social media and modern tactics meant to bully, demonize, and interfere with Sportsmen and women. It's time for the legislature to acknowledge our existence, our heritage, our livelihoods and move to protect our culture, and our businesses rather than try to destroy them. Our heritage matters too!

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