

Requested by Chairman Spraker

RC 036

2/20/18

Ptarmigan and Alaska hare C&T finding in GMU 9E

Hazel Nelson -This summarizes my experience of customary and traditional subsistence harvesting of ptarmigan and rabbit as family activity early in life in Egegik, Alaska.

During the 60's and early 70's when my older siblings were going to school in Aleknagik and Dillingham I was responsible to tend the subsistence net that was placed along the willow stand that grew along the old jeep trail between our homestead and the Columbia Wards Cannery on the North side of the Egegik River. The net was older gillnet gear that was no longer used in salmon fishing. My Mother and I would begin by bringing the gear into the middle of the line of willows and then tying the upper end of the web several feet up on a willow bough and although the bottom of the web still had leadline along its length, that bottom end would also be tied off to the base of willow boughs along its length. We would then slowly move forward winding the mesh among the willows keeping the top and bottom of the mesh untangled so that when we reached the end of the piece of webbing, we had created a wall of mesh that was well camouflaged and held well, along the bottom about 15-20 feet long, maybe longer.

We would check the net every morning and would sometimes find both ptarmigan and rabbit at the same time but invariably one or the other. Sometimes the rabbit would be dead and already frozen and sometimes still alive. It was easier to untangle them when they were dead but the live ones were hard to kill because they were strong. I've been thumped by their feet while trying to untangle them and to this day I don't like seeing rabbits hopping around. We had rabbit a lot when I was young, enough that I told my parents that when I grow up I will never eat it again.

Ptarmigan was very different. They didn't tangle as badly in the gillnet and were usually dead but I did wring some ptarmigan necks in my youth when they were found still alive in the net.

My parents also enjoyed Ptarmigan hunting with a .22 or .410 as well and my job was to retrieve them. Watching me chase down any wounded ptarmigan provided family entertainment. We would gut them and they would be eaten right away, either plucked or skinned. Extra ptarmigan would hang in our cache or we would bring them to our cousins to share and we received these small game from them when they were harvested in abundance.

My memories are mostly of our mother in charge of hunting small game and all kinds of birds in general and us kids helping and learning how to hunt small game including how she set snares and small traps.

I encourage people to check the regulations for current allowable ways to harvest small game but that is how my family harvested them in the 60's and 70's.