

## Refuge trapper violates game laws

by Gary Titus

Animal trapping is perhaps one of the first methods of hunting. Traps were used by central European people to hunt mammoths thousands of years ago. Today the fur bearers are smaller, less dangerous, and better managed. Wildlife biologists support the use of regulated trapping for sustained harvest of some species of furbearers as an effective management tool, as a legitimate recreational activity, and for subsistence.

The trapping season for this winter on the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is quickly coming to an end. This year was a difficult year for trappers because of light snow fall, rain and long stretches of below zero temperatures. Trappers on the Refuge must first take a class which covers ethics, methods of take, fur bearer's biology and regulations. The classes are well attended and are only required to be taken once, although many show up year after year. As a law enforcement officer, I have seen few violations this year and few complaints. Overall the trappers on the Refuge are a law abiding group but that wasn't always the situation.

Going back to the year 1911, when the Kenai Peninsula was sparsely settled, trapping was an occupation. The only game warden for the Peninsula, Christopher Shea, was located in Seward, Alaska. He patrolled his territory by dog team in the winter and by boats or on foot the rest of the year, making monthly reports to the Governor of the Territory. In his October 1911 report, he reported that his district was unusually free from complaints and had only a few minor violations. With but one exception, that exception was a man by the name of King Thurman. This is his story.

The trapper life followed a yearly cycle of activities. In the fall, before freeze-up, they moved to their cabins on rivers or lakes, taking a winter's grubstake with them. Work began in earnest after the first hard freeze. Then traps and snares were set, and the trappers began their winter routine of checking the trapline, returning to the cabin with the catch, skinning the animals, stretching the furs, and starting out once more to check and re-set the traps. Summers were spent at mining camps or commercial fishing.

Thurman followed this routine: he trapped on the Chickaloon and Rat (now Thurman) Creek drainages

and had several line cabins placed a day's travel apart. During the summer he traveled between his main cabin on the Kenai River and Rat Creek where he mined for gold. He first came to the attention of the Warden in October of 1911 when a complaint was filed stating that Thurman was setting his dogs loose on moose and feeding moose meat to his dogs. On November 2<sup>nd</sup> Thurman was arrested for violating the game law and was transported to Seward, arriving on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. The next day, at the preliminary hearing, he pled not guilty and demanded a jury trial and asked the court to appoint an attorney to defend him. The trial was set for November 6<sup>th</sup>. The witnesses testified and the evidence supported the violation. The jury adjourned to deliberate and after two hours they brought in a verdict of not guilty, which shocked the warden and even surprised Thurman.

In January of 1913, Thurman once again attracted the attention of the new Game Warden, J. Tolman, this time he was suspected of killing moose and poisoning the carcass to kill fur bearing animals. In March Deputy Marshal Evans, E. Chamberlin and Tolman left Seward with two dog teams and the search for Thurman was on. They found his trapping partner, Kulin on Swan Lake. At first Kulin said very little concerning the whereabouts of Thurman, but later told them he was out on his trap line. The trapline and cabin Thurman was using was downstream and that if Thurman got suspicious he would avoid the cabin.

They continued downstream, finding the cabin and laying the trap to catch Thurman. The plan was for the deputy and Chamberlin to take the dog teams and head back to Swan Lake, leaving Tolman at the cabin to capture Thurman. After a two hour wait Tolman heard a team of dogs come in and stop in front of the cabin. Thinking that it was Thurman with his sled he opened the door to grab him only to find the dogs and a sled. Thurman was suspicious and had jumped off the sled at the edge of the clearing where he could observe the cabin, upon seeing the warden he left in a hurry. Tolman seized the dogs, sled and gear.

King Thurman turned himself in on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and pled guilty and was fined \$100.00 or 50 days for killing a female yearling moose; he chose the 50 days. Dur-

ing this time he wrote a letter to the Governor to inform his honor that the game of the Kenai Peninsula was being wantonly destroyed and that he has always tried to abide by the law. It was in his own interest to preserve the game and although he would hate to see a game preserve set aside he felt it must be done if the game was to be preserved for future generations. Thurman also wrote that he was caused a great deal of trouble since his sled and gear was taken by the war-

den, leaving him afoot.

King Thurman continued his trapping and mining lifestyle for two more years until the fateful day he met the bear. But that's another story.

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