

# Cowper: State seeks quick decision on caribou hunt

JUNEAU — Gov. Steve Cowper said recently the state will pursue a quick decision in a recent legal case over subsistence caribou hunting in which the state will argue it should make management decisions about Alaska fish and wildlife rather than federal courts.

The state will seek a summary judgment in a case in which U.S. District Court Judge H. Russel Holland ordered a caribou hunt for the village of Kwethluk, overturning a decision of the state Board of Game. The board had refused to permit the hunt because of a management decision to allow the caribou herd to grow to a size that will support a higher sustainable level of harvest.

"Fortunately, the judge's decision in this case will not cause severe damage to the Kilbuck caribou herd," Cowper said. "We're concerned with the precedent of having courts decide how Alaska should conserve and manage its fish and game. This is a dangerous precedent that we've got to settle now."

The state request will not affect the Kwethluk hunt. At issue is a March decision by the Board of Game which recognized an emergency in Kwethluk, but which denied the hunt to allow the caribou herd to grow.

Hunting on the Kilbuck herd has been prohibited since 1985, and the

herd has grown from about 150 animals to the current 1,400. The board, based on advice from state game biologists and local interest groups, decided to continue the moratorium to promote future growth.

Holland on April 2 overruled the board, and two days later ordered the state to issue permits for the hunt.

