

CARIBOU PROBE DELAY DENIED

Alyeska Spokesman Hits Conservationist's Research Delay Charge

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Staff Writer

Alyeska Pipeline Service Company refuted charges Monday that they are withholding results of a simulated pipeline-caribou crossing study co-sponsored by British Petroleum Co. (BP), Alyeska, and the U.S. Bureau of Sport Fish and Wildlife.

The charges were leveled by Jim Kowalsky, Fairbanks representative of the Friends of the Earth organization, in a letter dated June 1 to Dr. Robert Wheeler, manager of Environmental Affairs for Alyeska.

Kowalsky said the caribou-pipeline study "has not been forthcoming due to continued stalling and delaying tactics on the part of Alyeska Pipeline Service Company."

He further charged that the final version as submitted by the principal investigator on the study "has languished in your hands for some delay now, and has finally been sent back for the second set of editorial revisions."

Dr. Wheeler countered with the statement that "There is no final version as yet and the idea of Alyeska withholding the report is absolutely not the case."

"We want to see this information publicized and we want to see it done as soon as possible."

"We've waited seven months

to get the report from the University (of Alaska)," said Wheeler, "and the University has only waited one and $\frac{1}{4}$ months for our comments back."

The study was begun in the summer of 1971 and the field work was completed last August. Sections of simulated pipeline were set up on the North Slope to determine the effect of a barrier-like pipeline on the migration habits of caribou, a main food source for some twenty Eskimo villages in the north.

The residents of Anaktuvuk Pass, for example rely heavily on caribou, consuming about one caribou a week, and utilizing the skins for footwear, clothing, and the small but growing industry of mask-making.

There are thirteen caribou herds in Alaska of which about three will be intercepted by the proposed pipeline. The total population of caribou in the state numbers around 542,000.

The pipeline crossing-caribou study, said Kowalsky, "is of

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considerable interest to those of us who are extremely concerned for the future of these great herds of free-ranging animals on the North Slope, and the barrier of their normal movement presented by a 48 inch pipeline and networks of feeder lines."

Kowalsky reminded Dr. Wheeler that at the University of Alaska Science Conference last August, Wheeler himself

stated that Alyeska "encourages scientists working on your projects to publish their findings as quickly as possible."

Wheeler said he found Kowalsky's charges "most disturbing" and emphasized that there was no stalling and no final report.

"The field work was completed only last August," said Dr. Wheeler, "and sometime in February the first report was

prepared. At this meeting it was agreed by all parties to the study that the next report would still be in a draft form. We received this second report in April."

After receipt of the second draft, the parties returned comments.

"BP had one or two comments," said Wheeler, "and we had seven or eight. These were sent by Telex to the University with the note that as soon as these matters were looked at, we think the report will be ready."

In naming the parties to the study, Wheeler confirmed the participation of BP, Alyeska and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Sport Fish and Wildlife.

"ARCO and EXXON may have contributed some funds to the study," he stated, "but I think these have all been channeled through BP."

Although there has been no public dissemination of the information gained in the study throughout the state of Alaska, a preliminary report was presented at a scientific conference in Calgary, Canada, last year, and these early results were not encouraging.

Tundra Times reporter Lael Morgan reported that a large number of caribou expected failed to appear in the area under study, leading some scientists to the conclusion that activity on the Slope had already disturbed normal migration patterns.

On the 1707 which did appear, 83 per cent were diverted from their original course, the majority turned back in the direction from which they came, and the rest detoured around the mock-up rather than use the ramps and underpasses designed for crossing.

Kowalsky also cited the data released at Calgary as indicating "very substantial problems with the design of your pipe and the ability of caribou to cross in migration or otherwise cope with it as an obstacle."

He urged Wheeler and the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company to release the facts to the public without "continued delay."

In Monday's interview, Dr. Wheeler stated that the report, approximately 40 pages long, "should be out very shortly. I hope in the next couple of weeks."

For the Eskimo residents of the North Slope, the results of the caribou study are far more than a matter of scientific curiosity. It's a matter of next year's groceries.