

NORTH STAR III MEETING TOPIC

Native Representatives, BIA, GAO to Weigh Fate of Famous Vessel

By NORMA BOWKETT
Staff Writer

Bureau of Indian Affairs officials and Alaska native representatives will meet with General Accounting Office officials in Anchorage Friday to make their wishes known concerning the future of BIA supply ship North Star III.

As a result of Alaska natives writing letters opposing the withdrawal of North Star III from Alaskan waters, BIA officials have invited area representatives from Barrow, Norton Sound and Bethel to present their ideas at a BIA exit interview with a GAO audit team which is considering recommending that BIA no longer use the North Star III in Alaska, according to John Moore, Assistant Area Director for BIA. Moore will also be in attendance at the meeting.

In response to a query from the Tundra Times, Moore explained that a GAO audit team has written a letter informing BIA officials that the team is considering recommending that use of the North Star III be discontinued because the government can carry supplies to coastal communities "cheaper by contract carrier."

A suggested carrier, Moore said, is one which currently moves freight for the Coast Guard and White Alice.

The exit interview, Moore said, will give BIA officials and Alaska natives an opportunity for rebuttal.

What the team is saying, Moore said, is that \$191,000 can be saved per year by using a contract carrier.

But, Moore said, "we have no indication from the Secretary's office or the Commissioner's office—or from Congress—that the amount, quality and kind of services is to be changed.

"Until we get this kind of recommendation," he continued, "we have no choice but to support what the letters of the native people say they continue to want."

Basically, Moore said, the
(Continued on Page 6)

North Star

(Continued from page 1)

North Star III, which has serviced communities for over half a century, guarantees delivery to the communities for which the freight is intended.

"Commercial carriers don't do that," he said, pointing out that a clause in contracts with commercial carriers allows the carriers to deliver freight to the nearest port if weather conditions are bad. Then, Moore said, "it's up to the person who has the freight to move it to where it is needed."

Alaskan "tide, wind, water and weather conditions do not make this feasible in any year" along the coastal regions of Alaska, Moore said.

In fact, Moore said, it was because BIA could not find commercial carriers who would guarantee delivery to schools in Alaska, that BIA began to operate the North Star III here.

Throughout the years, he said, the program has grown to the point where personnel from the supply ship have provided special services in the communities they service.

Examples?

The North Star III provides "engineers to go ashore and repair village lights plants," Moore said, "at no additional cost to the community except parts..."

Personnel from the ship install bulk fuel tanks or radio antennas in communities, and the ship provides "transportation for persons for medical care," he added.

"We don't believe" the government can service these communities cheaper by contract carrier, Moore said, if "we are to provide the kind of services the North Star III has historically provided for the coastal communities."

In addition, Moore said, BIA officials "also have a difference of opinion" (with the GAO audit team) on what "the discharge point is for some communities."

As an example, Moore cited the village of Wales. The audit team's rationale is, he said, "Why should two ships go to the same port?" But, Moore, said, the North Star III goes to Wales. The contract carrier "goes to Tin City, several miles north, in deep water, with good anchorage."

The only way residents of Wales can get their supplies to that community from Tin City, Moore said, is by "small craft—or by waiting till freeze up and going overland.

"Either way," he emphasized, "it is an additional cost to the people of Wales."