

# **Kaktovik seeks role in ANWR development**

**by Jeff Richardson**  
*Tundra Times staff*

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By the time the question of opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil development has been resolved, the village of Kaktovik may have gone through its entire cadre of adult leadership. Several Kaktovik mayors have traveled to Washington in recent years to tell their community's side of the ANWR story. This is not a reflection on political turnover in Kaktovik, but on the nagging complexity of an issue that has dragged on for years and years.

## **Kaktovik: Let us run the show**

Sometimes, the outline of Kaktovik's story is lost in the rhetorical crossfire of fiercely competitive national interest groups. The mainstream media is prone to lump the community's position with that of other Inupiat organizations who have joined forces with the oil industry to try and open the refuge to oil exploration.

This year, it has fallen to Mayor George Tagarook to explain that Kaktovik supports drilling for oil in the refuge, on one major condition. That condition is that the village of about 250 be placed at the helm of a regulatory structure to ensure it will be done safely and in conformance with traditional Inupiat knowledge of local resources and conditions dating back thousands of years. Kaktovik, situated on the Beaufort Sea coast east of Prudhoe Bay, is the only community actually located in the refuge.

## **ANWR is not empty**

This consensus position was hammered out in Kaktovik several years ago. It was an arduous process prompted in part by the pressure to take a position on ANWR and secure a more stable economic future, but also by other concerns. Residents resented statements suggesting that the refuge was an empty wilderness devoid of human

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# ANWR milestone nears . . .

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activity. In fact, the area is dotted with gravesites and camps, and traversed by a network of trails actively used by the Inupiat today. It was, and remains, *their home*. Having witnessed research teams harassing wildlife, they are skeptical about how well government agencies will monitor industrial development.

Residents of Kaktovik rely both on the marine resources of the Beaufort Sea, including bowhead whales, and the wildlife of the refuge, including the Porcupine caribou herd, for a large portion of their livelihood.

## **Clinton vows a veto**

With Congress again set to vote on the ANWR issue, Tagarook has been in Washington, monitoring developments and pressing

Kaktovik's case that no one is better suited to oversee drilling activities than those living adjacent to the scene of industrial activity and dependent on the resources put at risk by that development. Although President Clinton has vowed to veto any measure that would allow drilling in the refuge, Tagarook met with Vice President Al Gore, among many others.

## **What Congress may do**

While the timing is yet unclear, both the U.S. House and Senate are set to vote any day on measures that would not only authorize, but require, that the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge be opened for oil exploration and development. The House version of the language is said to be more strongly pro-development.

The ANWR-opening measure

will be part of a large bill developed to reduce the federal budget deficit. Earlier this summer, Congress voted to include funds expected to be raised from leasing ANWR lands as part of the federal income that will help reduce that deficit.

After the language passes both chambers, differences will have to be worked out in a conference committee.

## **Young cites environmental protections**

According to Rep. Don Young, the House ANWR language contains several stipulations designed to address environmental concerns. In a prepared statement, Young said House language would:

- require the Secretary of Interior to establish development rules that would protect wildlife, habitat and subsistence uses in the refuge;
- authorize the Secretary to close portions of the Arctic coastal

plain on a seasonal basis to protect caribou calving grounds and other wildlife considerations;

- authorize the Secretary, in consultation with the State of Alaska and North Slope Borough, to place up to 30,000 acres of the coastal plain in protective status and to develop guidelines for siting industrial activities to minimize impacts;

- make \$5 million available to communities affected adversely by ANWR development.