

Caribou restrictions present danger

By EBEN HOPSON

(Mr. Hopson is Mayor of the North Slope Borough)

Within the past week a young Barrow boy, 16, was rescued after nearly freezing to death on the tundra. He was rescued after being spotted by Barrow bush pilot Joe Felder who risked his life to make a risky landing in dangerous wind, ice and snow conditions. The boy told his rescuer that he was so hot that he had nearly discarded his parka just before he spotted his rescue plane. Yet the temperature at the time was -25° , with a 25 knot wind. The boy was walking back to town after his snow machine broke down 15 miles out of Barrow.

The boy had been missed by his family when he failed to return with the family snow machine with which he had said he was going to a nearby lake to get water for the family water barrel. Instead, the boy really used the snow machine to hunt for caribou. His family needed the meat. So, without telling anyone where he was going, he went out alone to hunt. He didn't want anyone to know that he was going to break the law. He was afraid that he might be arrested. He didn't have a permit to hunt caribou. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game had transformed him from a hunter into a poacher on his own land.

The young hunter was young and inexperienced. His fear of being branded a criminal caused him to take the dangerous risk of hunting alone on a snow machine in very cold weather with nobody's knowledge of his true whereabouts. This year there are caribou all around us in such numbers that few can remember in the past. It is not right to cause our children to sneak around behind our backs to hunt for meat for our families.

I regard the present caribou hunting restrictions to constitute a danger to our community that other young people will hunt secretly at risk to their lives. If we do lose one of our young people in this way, I will instruct our Director of Public Safety to prevent State Fish and Game officers from enforcing the State's caribou hunting restrictions. As Mayor of the North Slope Borough, I must choose between honoring the questionable judgment of our State game biologists, or protecting our citizens. I will choose public protection.