

Hickel Seeks Transfer Of Nunivak Musk Ox

Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel announced his approval of plans to transfer musk ox from Nunivak Island.

As the second phase of the transplant program, it is planned to move about 100 musk ox from Nunivak Island to the Arctic North Slope in the spring of 1970.

The first phase of the program, completed this last year, moved 48 of the animals from Nunivak Island to Barter Island.

This plan comes as a result of a study just completed by the Bureau of Sport Fish and Wildlife.

The musk ox reduction program on Nunivak Island is part of a long range plan to restore the animal on its native range in Northern Alaska.

Nunivak Island, 18 miles off the Alaska Coast on the Bering Sea, was set aside as a National Wildlife Refuge under an executive order signed by President Hoover in 1929.

The musk ox herd on the island now numbering about 750 was developed from 34 animals purchased in Greenland and placed on the island in 1936.

The planned removal program of 100 animals per year will reduce the present population of the herd. Removal criteria will favor the removal of more males than females with a planned re-

duction in productivity on the island.

This will tend to stabilize the present herd and, with the transplant of new animals on the North Slope, Alaska musk ox will be secure from the chance of a disastrous loss in the Nunivak herd.

Musk ox will be captured on Nunivak in March. All capture and handling of the animals on the island will be done by Eskimo residents using snowmobiles. Animals will be transported to Mekoryuk via sled.

Materials have been purchased for the construction of a 1 quarter acre corral and holding pens to accommodate the musk ox at Mekoryuk. Construction will be accomplished by local hire under the supervision of the Bureau of Sport Fish and Wildlife personnel.

An effort will be made to capture family herds as a unit. Although it will be necessary to move to many of the animals shortly after capture, an attempt will be made to hold as many as possible until June as this is a more favorable release time.

Recent discussions with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game officials indicate that this transplant program is in agreement with their management plans.