

# Migratory bird treaty and its implications for subsistence

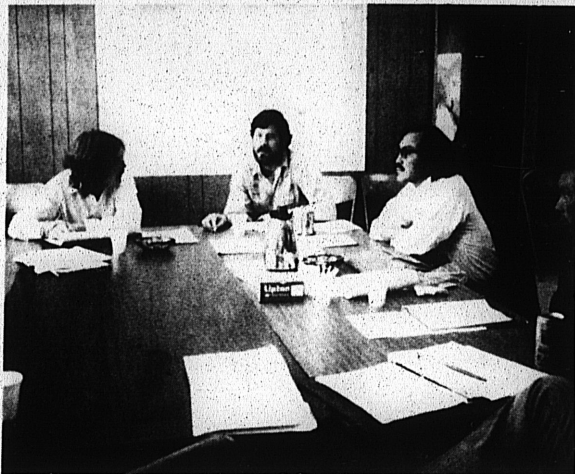
"I'm discouraged," said David Friday of Chevak, president of Nunam Kitluksisti. "I just feel kind of numb." Friday's comments followed a meeting in Washington, D.C., last week to discuss the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and its implications for Native subsistence hunters.

At the heart of the problem is a 1916 treaty between the United States and Great Britain which prohibits the taking of migratory waterfowl, including ducks and geese, from March 10 to September 1.

Spring hunting of the birds is a major mainstay of the subsistence diet in many villages because fish and game caches are low as are the supplies of most village stores.

The meeting in U.S. Senator Ted Stevens' office was called at the request of Nunam Kitlutsisti (a Bethel-based Native non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving subsistence, which is supported in large part by RurALCAP). It included representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of State, Senator Gravel's staff and Senator Stevens' staff. As well, RurALCAP director, Phil Smith, and Friday were in attendance.

There was general agreement at the meeting that a problem existed; however, no one seemed to have a simple solution. U.S.F.W.S. representatives pointed out that they are under



**REPRESENTATIVES DISCUSS** state proposal. Jack Easterbrook, RurALCAP; Tom McKenna, Mauneluk; Willie Goodwin, Kotzebue; Morris Kiyutelluk, Nome.

increasing pressure to enforce the provisions of the law, even though they are aware of the subsistence need. Short of revising the treaty, which they are afraid would "emasculate it," there is no foreseeable relief.

The State Department representative stated that the present treaty is not open to interpretation and any attempt to deviate from the letter of the law would actually involve a "conspiracy to obstruct justice."

After the meeting, there were long faces all around. "Unless something is done," stated Friday, "things will get worse. I wish the federal government would act now to make sure our hunting rights are not taken away."