

# Porcupine herd commission formed

By BILL HESS

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In what one observer described as a "love-test," representatives from several communities in Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada gathered in Arctic Village early this month and formed a commission to protect the Porcupine caribou herd.

Villagers of both nations living within the region have long depended upon the Porcupine

herd, which numbers about 120,000 animals, for much of their subsistence. Although the population of the animals has remained stable for decades, development in the region could have damaging effects on the herd.

Users of the herd have long sought an international treaty or agreement between the two nations which would assure them a voice in the management of the animals. The governments in Juneau, Washington D.C. and Ottawa have been slow to respond.

The International Porcupine Caribou Commission was formed at the Arctic Village meeting to push for an international agreement, and to assure that users of the herd will have the voice they seek.

In the charter agreement, the commission is charged and empowered to "develop appropriate goals and strategies to protect and maintain the health and productivity of the caribou herd and its habitat" and to "protect and defend the rights of signatory user groups, villages, bands and communities, and their members to har-

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vest Porcupine caribou for their traditional, cultural or nutritional use."

The commission's charter also gives it the authority to develop a management plan for the herd, undertake research, review and monitor the conservation and management of the entire habitat of the herd and "take all actions necessary to protect and ensure its continued productivity," develop a predator management plan and raise funds.

The charter was drafted by Robert Childers, who has been working as a consultant for Rural Alaska Community Action Program and the Alaska delegation, the sponsors of the meeting, and Mike Walleri of Tanana Chiefs Conference. They worked from a rough draft drawn up by themselves and Spud Williams of Beaver, Joe Jacquot of Whitehorse, Yukon; Jude Henzler of RurAL CAP and others.

Resolutions calling for the ratification of the commission are being presented to the villages from the international region. The commission, whose members have yet to be chosen, will be composed of eight members; four from the U.S., and four from Canada. Each country will have a co-chairperson.

The charter was signed by 12 delegates from the United States, and four from Canada.

Representatives at the meeting passed three resolutions, the first calling for a U.S.-Canada convention to conserve migratory caribou. Under terms of the resolution, at least one-half of each country's delegation to the convention would be appointed from nominees made by the IPCC.

Jude Henzler, the director of natural resources at RurAL CAP, noted that a need for an international consensus is growing more critical. He pointed out that oil interests next spring plan to begin producing crushed rock in Northern Yukon to build gravel

islands for drilling platforms in the Beaufort Sea.

This activity would take place in herds' calving areas and, coupled with other expected development in the area, would create more access to the region, allowing more competition in hunting the caribou from other users.

"The Canadian delegates say the Canadian federal government is interested in giving their local people a voice," Henzler noted, expressing his doubts that the U.S. is ready to do the same. Ronald Skoog, Alaska Commissioner of Fish and Game under former Governor Jay Hammond, had expressed reluctance to take any action to begin international negotiations until Native land claims in Canada are resolved.

The second resolution voiced support of the IPCC for the Association of Village Council Presidents' request for a five-year delay in oil and gas leasing in Norton Sound. It is feared that oil and gas activities in the Sound could have a harmful effect on animals in and around the Sound, including the salmon which migrate up the Yukon River and its tributaries to spawn.

Most of the users of the Porcupine herd also depend upon the fish of the Yukon and its tributaries.

The third resolution expressed the "warmest appreciation" to Chief Allen Tritt and the Village Council of Arctic Village, and to the Gwich'in people of the Venetie Tribal Government.

Representatives from Kaktovik, Arctic Village, Venetie, Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik, Beaver, Stevens Village, The North Slope Borough, Gwich'in Gwitchen Ginkhye, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Old Crow, Dawson, Mayo Council of Yukon Indians and RurAL CAP attended.

A lack of funds prevented Aklavik, Fort McPherson, the Dene Nation and the Committee of Original Peoples Entitlement, all in Canada, from coming.



Arctic Village, scene of meeting to form the International Porcupine Caribou Commission. (Photo by Bill Dubay)