

# ADF&G levels inflammatory charges against rural citizens

STATEMENT—in response to the Alaska Department of Fish & Game testimony presented to the Alaska Legislature on May 17, as reported by the Associated Press.

We are dismayed that the Alaska Department of Fish & Game has once again levelled inflammatory charges against Alaska's rural citizens.

Biologist Davis' comments before the Legislature can do nothing but accelerate the disintegration of the traditional lifestyle in the villages, and obviate the possibility of responsible and enlightened dialogue on the issue.

The press release indicates that Davis counted 380 carcasses on May 6th. It further states that in late March a ground survey revealed that 77 out of 152 caribou were "untouched".

What Mr. Davis apparently failed to point out was the logical inconsistency of drawing conclusions based on two different types of surveys conducted six weeks apart.

He also failed to mention that ADF&G personnel had broadcast a threat to close the season in March, thereby encouraging local users to increase their pressure on the herd prior to the anticipated closure. Also, it is well known that many hunters leave their kills and return for them at a later date, knowing full well that the meat is preserved and frozen in the meantime.

It is these inconsistencies, coupled with ADF&G's own admission that they don't really know what the herd size was in 1970 or what it is in 1976 that leads us to brand the report as inflammatory, and unnecessarily damaging to the rural people of Alaska.

It seems as if the Department is locked in to their numbers and is valiantly searching for a scapegoat.

Maybe they should look further than merely pointing to wolves and man. Historically, the herd size has fluctuated with severe declines having been noted in the late 1890's and again in the 1930's.

A cyclical decline, which might have been predicted for the early 1970's, may have been forestalled by intensive predator control in the 60's.

Migration patterns, as well, seem to be shifting as a result of pipeline construction. This factor must certainly be considered when herd population is determined.

Our agency has never condoned wanton waste of any Alaskan resource. There may be some evidence to support the allegations of ADF&G regarding the Arctic caribou herd; however, blasting Native subsistence use as a primary cause in the decline of the herd is a form of wanton waste in itself.

We have long advocated that management of resources be more a function of the local people. As well, enforcement at the local level has been a goal that we have sought for some time. Our petitions, letters, and resolutions have fallen on deaf ears.

If they had been attended to, today's situation would not exist, and those whose very livelihood depends upon the resources would be secure in the knowledge that they would be adequately protected.

The ADF&G statement throws the question of responsible management and protection of resources directly into the political arena and exacerbates tensions that should not exist. It paints a distorted picture of true traditional resource users and conjures up images of irresponsibility that reflects on the entire rural population.

We had hoped that the Department would be more discreet especially following action by the Board of Game in late March; however, there is apparently less responsibility in the Department than we thought there was.

Lest the legislature take hasty action prior to assessing the facts relating to the decline of the herd, we would ask that a special interim committee be established to work with local people to devise more appropriate management and protection measures for the future. Obviously, relying on the Department for direction will result in a continuation of policies that don't work.