

Villagers to discuss Porcupine Caribou treaty

Villagers who depend on the porcupine caribou herd will be gathering for a meeting in Arctic Village this month to discuss the prospects of an international treaty designed to protect the herd and its habitat.

The 135,000 animals of the herd range across a large area stretching from Northeast Alaska, through the northern reaches of Canada's Yukon Territory and into the Northwest Territories.

Although the herd is healthy, subsistence users of the porcupine caribou in both the United States and Canada want to place safeguards on them before any damage is done.

The meeting was announced

by Jonathan Solomon, chairman of the Porcupine Caribou Commission. Although some Canadians are expected, the meeting is basically intended for Alaskan villagers, and hopefully the different state officials who have been invited along with the North Slope Borough to discuss the proposal for an international agreement to protect the herd.

Although the proposed agreement has not been finalized, it basically calls for standards to be set protecting the herd and its habitat, and for measures to assure that the different national, state, provincial and community governments involved work with the PCC.

In past years, the State of Alaska has shown some reluctance to support an international treaty because of fears that

state jurisdiction over the animals when they are in Alaska would be weakened. The proposed agreement, however, would not alter state authority. Bill Sheffield last fall said he supported such an agreement.

Although the herd is in no danger now, their calving grounds along the Beaufort Sea overlap areas where interest in oil and mineral exploitation is high.

The herd is now in the Chandalar River drainage area in Alaska, and in the Richardson and Ogilvie Mountains of the Yukon Territory.

Alaskan villages which depend on the herd include Kaktovik, Venetie, Arctic Village, and the communities of the Yukon Flats.