

# Togiak residents sound off about reindeer and marine mammal hunting

Although the Bristol Bay shore was battered by an early fall storm the day before, the sun shone down on Togiak last Thursday for the visit of Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

Togiak Bay, encircled by green tundra sloping down from nearby hills, glittered as a stiff breeze riffled its waters. Offshore islands seemed to drift in a distant mist as overhead clouds seemed to roll away to make way for the two federal amphibian planes that circled on approach to the community of about 625.

Accompanied by assistant secretary for Indian affairs Ada Deer and Bristol Bay Native Corp. director Harold Samuelsen, Babbitt met for a little more than an hour with Togiak elders and representatives of the community's city council and traditional council. They pressed Babbitt with longstanding grievances about state management of walrus at the Round Island Sanctuary and the decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to

slaughter reindeer on Hagemeister Island. The agency contends the reindeer have seriously overgrazed the island, which it manages.

Togiak residents have been precluded from traditional walrus hunting at Round Island, and are seeking to assume ownership of the reindeer remaining at Hagemeister. But efforts to negotiate with USFWS have produced a tangle of frustration and bad feeling. A new deadline for their final removal is fast approaching.

The meeting was warm, dignified and reserved.

"We of the traditional council are willing to work with the federal government (but) we're tired of being railroaded," said chairman Moses Kritz.

Babbitt listened intently to comments and asked a few questions. He made no commitment regarding the reindeer, although another showdown seems imminent without Babbitt's intervention.

"I'll give serious consideration to the Hagemeister issue," Babbitt



Gary Carlo of Togiak provides documentation on the Hagemeister reindeer to Dave Van Note, special assistant to Secretary Babbitt.

said.

On subsistence issues generally, he said he could not guarantee 100 percent satisfaction with his decisions, but

promised to communicate with Natives on the issue.

"I will take a direct and personal interest in all the subsistence issues," he said.