

Russ Musk Ox Despite Suit

By LAEL MORGAN
Alaska Magazine
Despite protest and a law suit

filed by concerned Alaskans, 40
Nunivak Island musk ox were
shipped to Russia early this

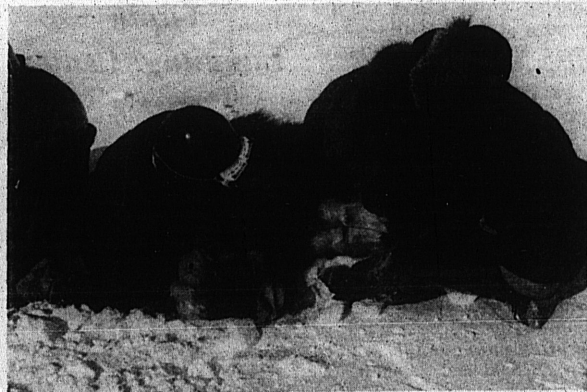
month as part of a trade
agreement instituted by Richard
Nixon in 1972.

However, as a result of the suit, the court decided control of the animals lay with the Commissioner of the State Department of Fish and Game (despite the fact the animals are on a federal preserve) and Governor Jay Hammond said he would back the Board of Fish and Game in any direction it gave the Commissioner.

The Commissioner immediately ordered the State Police to defend the herd (which was milling around in Bethel by a waiting Russian transport) while the Board made up its mind whether or not to honor Nixon's commitment.

Reluctantly, the Board gave its consent but only after Attorney General Avrum Gross had assured

(Continued on Page 6)



MUSK OX FOR RUSSIA — This is the first musk ox caught on Nunivak Island for shipment to Russia. Forty of the wooly animals were rounded up for the shipment.

Nunivak Musk Ox...

(Continued from Page 1)

it such permission would mean recognition of state control over the musk ox remaining on Nunivak, and if such control was not recognized by the federal government, the state would take the matter to court.

As a result of the incident, the Fish and Game Board last week approved a Provisional Musk Ox Policy requiring "proposals for management are to be submitted to the residents of the areas directly affected and their comments and recommendations are to be transmitted to the Board."

The Nunivak herd is to be managed on a sustained yield basis for the purpose of producing the maximum number of animals for suitable transplant.

And, the policy states, "whenever overage and non productive animals are selected by the staff for removal, disposal of meat to local residents is to be given primary consideration.

"Disposal of meat, hides, horns and hair may be undertaken by whatever methods will produce the greatest monetary return to the state to enhance the further development of Alaska's musk ox program."

However, Nunivak hunts may be considered and Board Chairman Ivan Thorall is currently studying regulations by which Native people might be employed as guides if hunts are chosen as a means of thinning the herd.

The Board has contacted Yupiktak Bista, a nonprofit arm of the Association of Village Council Presidents in the Nunivak area, and asked for their recommendations in dealing with musk ox management.

A portion of the Board's travel budget has also been allocated for a member or members to visit the area this summer for talks with local people.

In addition, the Provisional Musk Ox Policy concerns itself with the status of the University of Alaska Musk Ox herd. The University has been experimenting with the domestication of musk ox for a dozen years.

The policy directs "proposed release of animals of this herd to private ownership will be carefully evaluated and the board consider ecological problems of the local people.."