

Second conference focuses on census

Evaluating the population counting techniques of biologists who study the bowhead whale will be a major part of the Second Annual Conference on the Biology of the Bowhead Whale which is being sponsored by the North Slope Borough.

The conference will be held in Anchorage on March 7, 8 and 9 and will focus on the census techniques for determining the number of bowhead in the Western Arctic Ocean.

Major objectives of the conference are to review methods now used for counting the bowhead whale; evaluating methods and information about estimates of bowhead population structures; evaluating methods and information now used to study basic aspects of the basic biology of the whale, such as behavior and vocalization of the bowhead.

The conference is once again expected to draw a wide

range of participants from subsistence bowhead hunters to scientists to managers of the bowhead.

Twenty scientific papers will be presented. Half will deal with population assessment and the other half with basic biology such as behavior and morphology.

After the scientific papers are presented, two group discussion sessions will be held. Bruce Krogman from the Marine Mammal Institute will conduct the discussion on population assessment and Thomas Albert, science advisor to the North Slope Borough, will lead the discussion of basic biology.

Written reports containing the summaries of the scientific papers and the group discussions will be published following the conference.

The North Slope Borough sponsored such a conference last year. The historic meeting marked the first time that

scientists, who had been responsible for most of the "official" whale census figures, had met to talk and exchange ideas with whaling captains, whose lives were most affected by those census

As a result of that meeting scientists and the Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission decided to join efforts to study the bowhead population.

This last spring found scientists interspersed with observer assistants who came from the North Slope instead of Colleges from Outside.

In one momentous instant observers witnessed what appeared to be the birth of a bowhead. Observers reached a final estimated whale population census of about 3,400. Previous estimates hovered at about 2,500.

Papers to be presented include one on ice camp procedures in support of a visual census program; bowhead vocalization to determine whale distribution; using underwater bowhead sounds to determine distribution of the whales; minimum population estimates; migratory patterns.

Population estimates and distribution aerial survey efforts in the Canadian Beaufort; stock identity in the Western Arctic; food and food habits of the bowhead; aspects of reproduction tract, digestive tract, skin and respiratory tract of the bowhead; and preliminary findings of the bowhead whale;

seismic vessel monitoring program in the fall of 1982.

North Slope Borough Mayor Eugene Brower will present an overview to the conference on the first day.

The conference will be held at the Anchorage Westward Hilton Hotel.