

# U.S., USSR to select people for border panel

by Holly F. Hallam

Tundra Times reporter

Agreements which allow visa free travel between Alaska and the Soviet Far East will be implemented and officially in operation when the two countries iron out the last details — picking their border commissions to monitor border activity.

The agreements, one to allow visa free travel with a passport only, and the other, to establish a six-member border commission, were signed by U.S. and Soviet officials in Wyoming last September. The agreements call for a border com-

of three  
Soviets.

nt generally

d on page four

ALASKA  
NEWSPAPER  
Dec 11, 1989

# • Pacts authorize only Alaska Native travel

continued from Page One

would authorize only Native people in Alaska or the Soviet Union to travel back and forth visa free.

Jessica Gavora, a legislative aide at Sen. Frank Murkowski's Washington, D.C., office, said the visa free travel is basically for Native people, although it doesn't specifically say that in the agreement.

She said the criteria include people who reside in the Seward Peninsula area and the North who have cultural, linguistic or family ties with Native people who live in the Soviet Far East.

"So it narrows it down to Natives, but it doesn't actually state that," she said.

She said the idea of the border com-

mission came at the request of the Soviets. She said evidently they already have similar commissions for other countries bordering the USSR.

Caleb Pungowiyi, a Yupik Eskimo who works for the City of Kotzebue and who has been involved with Soviet-Alaska relations for many years, said there are three main reasons that visa free travel is very important to the Native people of the Seward Peninsula, St. Lawrence Island and the Diomedes islands.

Traditions and family relationships with people of the North were two key issues, he said.

Pungowiyi also has relatives on the other side of the Bering Strait. During the historic Friendship Flight in June 1988 Pungowiyi met an aunt.

"The second reason is the continuation of exchange, cultural and trade, that used to exist between the two countries before 1948."

Before 1948 it was common to see Soviets in Native villages in Alaska who were there to trade goods or just visit relatives.

"And the third reason that is not identified in the agreement is the recognition of indigenous people's right to freely go over," Pungowiyi said.

He said the importance of that is the renewal of the Alaska Natives' right to be able to travel freely back and forth as they did before the border closed in 1948.

Last February, while a group of about 72 Soviets was visiting Alaska

during the return Friendship Flight, Pungowiyi, who then was president of Kawerak Inc. in Nome, was responsible for delivering the agreements in their Yupik and English versions. He also delivered them during the Alaska Federation of Natives annual convention last October.

Pungowiyi also said the Soviets have been more supportive of the whole visa free idea than the Americans.

"It's surprising that their side would be more supportive," Pungowiyi said.

He said the Americans may be a little more cautious because of what is going on with Soviet relations in other parts of the world.

Branson Tungiyon, mayor of Gambell on St. Lawrence Island, said

continued on page five

# • Visa free travel pacts

continued from page four  
the people of Gambell are very excited about the agreements.

He said they want to be able to travel to the Soviet Far East by their traditional skin boats.

The people of St. Lawrence Island are very close to Soviet-Alaska issues. Last summer Tungiyan said they received two groups of Soviet Eskimos.

"There was no language barrier whatsoever," he said.

Although the agreements have been officially signed and people are just waiting for border commission appointments, a group of about 35 St. Lawrence residents had planned a trip to the other side of the strait.

The trip was scheduled for Dec. 4, but because of new developments in air regulations their trip has been cancelled.

"We are concerned about the government bureaucracies that are hampering our hopes of visiting," Tungiyan said.

Tungiyen said they have already

taken steps to try and get this dispute resolved.

"We have already written letters to the FAA, to people in Washington, D.C., and also to Russian officials as well to urge them to get this resolved," he said.

Kathy Tarr, regional manager for the Alaska State Chamber of Commerce in Anchorage, said these agreements are just the first step.

"Although right now these agreements don't directly affect the chamber, it probably will in the future."

She was referring to people other than Alaska Natives who have indicated an interest in going across the Bering Strait.

She said these agreements also just a beginning of what people can do when they join together in a common cause.

"The two governments didn't just get together and say, 'Hey, this would really be neat' — to let Natives visit each other. This came from the people," she said.