

USSR - Native Exchange Approved

NANA Reindeer herders to be in Siberia this summer

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Four members of the NANA Regional Corporation will be spending a month in Siberia this summer to study management techniques applied to reindeer and wild caribou. They will be accompanied by two specialists in reindeer and caribou research from the University of Alaska. NANA intends to send Doug Sheldon (Herd manager), Johnson Stalker (Chief Herder), and Nick Landis, a NANA planner who is fluent in the Russian language. The fourth traveller has not yet been chosen. The team will leave Alaska in mid-August for their around-the world trip to the USSR.

The six from the United States will join Soviet scientists and Native Soviet Herdsmen at the remote Siberian cities of Norilsk, and Yakutsk for a detailed look at problems and practices associated with the management of animals which are so important in the far northern reaches of both nations. The USSR's extreme North Agricultural Research Institute at Norilsk, and the Yakutsk Agricultural University, probe such concerns to successful reindeer herding as disease control, breeding biology, range nutrition, and protection, and aerial censusing and herding techniques. Methods of isolating wild caribou from the domestic reindeer herds are also part of their program. The USSR's Siberian herds are estimated at approximately 3.5 million reindeer.

The trip was first suggested in 1975 by spokesman for the NANA Corporation during a visit of Soviet reindeer specialists to Kotzebue. International arrangements and details for the trip were worked out jointly by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Cecil D. Andrus, the State of Alaska, and Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska. the visit will take place under the US-USSR Environmental Agreement of 1972. This visit will be the first working scientific cooperation between the Native of the Soviet Union and Alaska.

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There is also a possibility that the NANA representatives will take part in an all-native conference in Norilsk.

The Native people of inner-Siberia have lived with and depended upon reindeer herding longer than any other arctic culture. They also occupy one of the coldest regions on earth.

"NANA's interest in reindeer herding dates back to 1975 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs model herd of some 900 animals from Nome. With the addition of some stock purchased from local herders, and a good 1977 calf crop, the present NANA herd is estimated to be 3,6000 animals.

According to NANA spokesmen, the corporation's interest in reindeer herding is to supply an alternative source of fresh meat during periods of caribou scarcity. There is no intention of displacing caribou from their normal habitat. Thus far, the NANA herd has wintered near the villages of Candle and Deering, south of and spends summers on the Baldwin Peninsula near Kotzebue.

In the Soviet Union, large numbers of wild caribou have been displaced from their range by intensive reindeer herding practices, as well as industrial encroachment. Near Norilsk, for example, a special fence has been constructed 30 miles in length to guide reindeer away from the city and lead them to the mountains. In the same region, a 27-inch gas pipeline also serves to deflect the herds.

The challenge of developing a reindeer resource in Alaska will be to control the size and range of herds so that which will benefit local people as a meat supplement, yet not endanger the free-roaming caribou herds that have sustained Native people for countless thousands of years. NANA's trip into the hinterlands of Siberia will be a major step in meeting that challenge.