

State opposes treaty

Juneau—Amid growing signs that the Federal Government is firmly committed to the development of an international treaty on caribou with Canada, the State has announced firm opposition to the proposed treaty.

Dr. Ronald O. Skoog, Commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game—and an expert on Alaska caribou—released a "Decisions Memorandum" approved by Governor Jay S. Hammond and four other Alaska Commissioners that details the State's policy on the development of a caribou treaty.

Skoog is the State's representative on the U.S. negotiating team for the treaty. He said, "We've been involved for several years with meetings and preliminary discussions with Federal officials on this treaty. What was needed was a clear declaration of State policy — now we have it."

The treaty as proposed by U.S. and Canadian authorities would establish a bi-lateral commission to oversee management of caribou in northeastern Alaska. Primary emphasis is placed on the 110,000-animal Porcupine caribou herd, but the treaty could apparently also cover the Steese-Forty-mile herd and the Chisana herd.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials have conducted public hearings in various parts of the State on

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Constantly on the move, caribou from the great Porcupine Herd regularly migrate between Alaska and Canada. The State of Alaska is strongly resisting a proposed treaty which would affect the management of approximately 120,000 caribou in Alaska.

(Photo By LEN RUE, JR.)

● Caribou

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the proposed treaty. A draft Environmental Impact Statement was developed and circulated for comment which drew strongly critical comments from the Department of Fish and Game.

Among the stronest criticisms Koog makes of the proposed treaty is that it would exert strong Federal control over taking of caribou in Alaska but not in Canada. Present Canadian law does not allow its government to control take by Native peoples and the treaty would not alter this situation. The bulk of the harvest of the Porcupine caribou herd presently occurs in Canada and the development of the Dempster Highway in the Yukon has created concern over possible future increases in hunting pressure.

The State policy strongly emphasizes the State's basic opposition to a treaty, citing the good cooperation which currently exists between Alaska and Yukon Territory caribou managers. "We simply don't need a treaty at this time," said Skoog. "The treaty would be of little benefit to Alaskans or the caribou and would result in Federal pre-emption of yet another tradi-

tional prerogative of the State - management of its own game resources," he added.

If a treaty is developed, the State policy makes the following points:

1. The treaty should involve itself with caribou habitat on Federal lands consistent with provisions of the Senate-passed version of the Alaska lands legisla-

tion.

2. The Treaty Commission should have authority only to set national quotas and should not have regulatory powers.

3. There should be no pre-emption of State authority to manage wildlife.

4. The treaty should apply only to caribou.

5. The treaty should apply only to Federal holdings, not State or private lands.

6. The treaty should apply equally to both na-

tions.

7. Subsistence use should be recognized, but the Commission should have no overlapping authority over subsistence uses.

8. No treaty or convention should be adopted before the Alaska lands issue is settled.

Copies of the full text of the State's position on the caribou treaty are available upon request from Department of Fish and Game, Subport Building, Juneau, 99801.
