

CAP SPONSORS 15 AT MAMMAL HEARINGS

RurAL CAP Brings 8 From Nome-Bering Area 7 from Kotzebue Area

In opposition to the way in which the current sea mammal legislation is worded, Rural Alaska Community Action Program has sponsored seven people from the Kotzebue area and eight from the Nome-Bering Straits region to testify at the hearings which were conducted in Nome and Bethel on May 11 and 12.

The agency staff prepared background material and obtained input from whalers of Point Hope, Wainwright and Barrow in an effort to ensure that the age old Inupiat cultural heritage is not destroyed.

Although populated centers such as Kotzebue and Nome are becoming more wage-earning oriented, many of the outlying villages in the Bering Sea, Kotzebue Sound and Arctic Sea regions rely heavily on a relatively small cash economy that is derived from arts and craft items.

Most Eskimos still make their own parkas and mukluks, the soles of which are made of oogruk, the heavy hide of the whale that is admirably suited to this use. Mukluks are the winter footgear of most northern Alaskans.

Also testifying at the hearings was Elmer Armstrong, Sr., from Kotzebue, President of the State RurAL CAP Board of Directors and president of the Kikiktugruk Area Community Development Corporation.

RurAL CAP was represented by John Shively, Executive Director, who was to testify at the Bethel hearing. He listed three major areas of concern in the statement which was to be presented at the hearing.

The first would be legislation placing a moratorium on sea mammals, the second is elimination of arts and crafts industry, and the third is the moratorium on the killing of bowhead whales under the endangered species act.

With regard to the moratorium on sea mammals, Shively said that it was felt that management of the resources would be

avored because almost all species were increasing in number, with the possible exception of the polar bear.

The director stated that the agency is in total support of an amendment that would protect the Alaska Natives' right to hunt sea mammals for use in traditional arts and crafts industries.

The major animal involved here is the walrus, he commented, and their number has been increasing in Alaska. He felt that prohibiting the sale of arts and craft items in interstate commerce was not desirable because generally, items sold out of state brought higher prices, and elimination of this market would mean they would have to kill more animals to make the same income.

Concern that the bowhead whale may be placed on the endangered species list was voiced and Shively mentioned that there is no actual count as to their number.

It was suggested that any sea mammal bill should provide a section for the counting of these whales in a combined effort of Alaska Natives and wildlife management specialists, and also a section that would allow for research to provide for more effective hunting techniques to reduce the loss which may take place when whales are hit but not captured.

"In closing," he said, "I would like to stress very strongly that hunting of sea mammals is more than just a means of gathering food, although this in itself would be reason enough to allow continued subsistence hunting of sea mammals by Alaska Natives.

"The animals, particularly the bowhead whale, have a great cultural significance to the Natives of this state. Elimination of hunting of sea mammals would be a major step toward destroying the culture of the Alaska Native The Alaska Native traditional hunting rights must be protected."