

North Slope Borough hosts first elders conference

by MARGIE BAUMAN

Elders from the Eskimo villages dotting Alaska's North Slope are as concerned as ever about effects of offshore oil development on marine wildlife and would like to see it halted until there are guarantees against damage.

That was one of the strongest statements to emerge Friday at Barrow, as the elders conference sponsored by the North Slope Borough wound up a five-day session.

"They know for sure that oil kills wildlife and they are very concerned," said Ernie Frankson who is chairman of the Borough commission on ancestry and culture. Frankson told the Tundra Times that the elders discussed the changing migration pattern of bowhead whales and felt that oil spills might be one reason for the gradual westward movement in the bowheads' travels.

The elders know that an increase in population can cause this, that the bowheads can be shoved away from their habitat by development, but they feel that oil spills may figure in this movement too, Frankson said.

Armed with invitations from the North Slope Borough, or sponsorship from local governments, the elders came from Kaktovik, Anaktuvuk Pass, Point Hope, Nuiqsut, Atkasuk, and Wainwright to join relatives at Barrow, who were their hosts for the week.

Inuit history from beginning

All aspects of the Inuit history on the arctic slope were discussed, including the major cussed, including the major movements of communities as

they are today, Frankson said. "We discussed the geneology of the people, village relationships, land ue inventory, hunting on land and on the ocean, trapping, food and clothing preparation, ice movements, survival techniques, and identification of old tools and clothing preparation, he said.

"And we found we have the same stories as (Native) people all over Alaska," about the history of our land, he said.

The conference sought to go back to the beginnings of the history of the land and the people, using archeological data to back up oral history.

Much of the history of the Inuit people is found, of course,

in the songs and dances performed at the potlatches and this too was part of the elders conference. To round out the schedule, the commission on ancestry and culture also included films in the evening programs.

"The people really enjoyed the entire week," Frankson said.

Regional history gathered at the conference will have many uses, not the least of which is inclusion in the school program, Frankson stated. To follow up on what historical information was learned at this session, another elders conference will probably be sponsored by the Borough next year, he said.