

Natives establish caribou commission

Native leaders from two countries met in the Yukon Territory last week to combine forces and establish a special commission to protect a migratory caribou herd.

Delegates representing Natives in Northeastern Alaska and Northwestern Canada gathered at Old Crow to express their concerns about the future of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which migrates across the international boundary. The 110,000 animals in the herd are not only vital to the people for subsistence purposes, but for religious and cultural reasons as well.

The leaders reached a consensus that the national, state and provincial governments have been lax in creating an international caribou treaty.

Development of regional resources could reduce the herd. "It seems that the main concern of the state is to control Native hunting when the

herd declines," notes Bob Childers of Anchorage, a participant in the meeting. "We disagree. The herd should be protected from this decline."

The resolution calling for the establishment of the "International Porcupine Caribou Commission," stated that the Native people of the region "have customarily and traditionally harvested migratory caribou for their nutritional, cultural and other essential needs."

International agreements protecting subsistence rights were quoted, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which states "in those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons . . . shall not be denied the right . . . to enjoy their own culture, to protect and practice their own religion, or use their own language.