

Opposition mounts to Bering Sea OCS sale

The Tanadgusix Corporation, Native village corporation for St. Paul in the Pribilof Islands, has asked that OCS oil and gas lease sales for tracts in the Bering Sea be indefinitely postponed.

The St. Paul position is similar to that of

The Aleut Corporation, which has asked that no Bering Sea OCS sales be held, and the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) regional Yupik organization, which seeks a postponement of a final decision by the Interior Secretary to allow Yupik villages

to closely study possible OCS impacts.

The position of St. Paul on OCS leasing was presenting by Larry Merculieff at "scoping" hearings held there last week by the Bureau of Land Management's Alaska OCS Office.

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FIRST UMNAK ROUND-UP — Aleuts from St. George and St. Paul Islands accomplished the first successful roundup of reindeer on Umnak Island, in the Fox Islands of the Aleutian Chain, last weekend. They were assisted in the effort by NANA Regional Corporation Director Raymond Lee, of Buckland, and by a turbojet-powered helicopter. Gilbert Kashevarof, St. George Tanaq Director, right, tags a young bull, assisted by rancher Stan Taggares of Yakima, Washington. For more photographs and the story, see the current Spring Special Issue of the Tundra Times.

—Tundra Times Photograph by T. Richards, Jr.

● mounting opposition to Bering Sea OCS sale

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Merculieff is president of Tanadgusix and Chairman of the Board of the Aleut Corporation.

Merculieff stated, "It is the position of the Tanadgusix Corporation that the OCS lease sale scheduled for the St. George and Navaron Basins be postponed indefinitely pending development of certain data."

He added, "We naturally maintain the same position with regard to the Northern and Southern Aleutian shelf areas should they be scheduled in the near future."

Merculieff said information about OCS oil and gas impact on waterfowl and marine mammal populations, ice pack movements, winds and currents and tides, Bering Sea fish populations and the ecosystem's food chain was insufficient and virtually non-existent.

Further, the Aleut leader stated, information on on-shore staging areas and impact on Aleut village and culture has not been developed.

"Planning funds to answer some of the thousands of questions have yet to be made available to any village in the Aleutians or the Pribilofs, so that quality input can be made by the people who live in this region," Merculieff said.



LARRY MERCULIEFF

(ANDY KLAMSER Photo)

The Aleut Corporation board chairman also questioned the ability of current technology to predict the impact of oil spills. By example, he noted that the affect of a minor diesel oil spill, which occurred at St. Paul harbor during the wreck of a Japanese fishing vessel

last November, has still not been determined by governmental experts.

"If we have such problems of prediction of oil spill impacts on such an isolated oil spill, how can it be done for the entire Bering Sea? Impossible," he stated.

Merculieff also expressed serious concerns about social and economic impacts on Natives of the Aleut region from OCS oil and gas development. "Only 1,600 Aleuts reside in the Aleutians who can be considered the last remaining, and therefore irreplaceable, core of foundation of the Aleut culture."

He said that five Aleut villages have died since the Second World War, and two others are threatened with extinction. The influx of nonresidents in the new industry is a direct threat, he noted. Additionally, many young Aleuts would acquire new skills which would force them to leave their island communities to seek jobs elsewhere as the OCS work winds down, Merculieff added.

"Any draft EIS (environmental impact statement) which excludes any of these issues or inadequately answers the questions we have raised here will be deficient and unacceptable, thus causing us to continue our opposition to the proposed OCS sales by necessity," Merculieff concluded.