

Caribou agreement to ease subsistence restraints

by Louise Sagmoen

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At Ft. Yukon the Porcupine River branches away from the Yukon, and meanders northwest into Canada. Knowing no boundaries, caribou frequently travel along the river near Ft. Yukon or the Canadian settlement of Old Crow. The people who hunt the caribou know the boundaries and custom agents from Canada and America.

Speaking of Indian and Eskimo subsistence hunters along American and Canadian boundaries Bob Childers explained, "They shouldn't have trouble with hunting licenses in other countries. They want to be able to trade among their families."

Childers works for the Alaska

delegation of the International Porcupine Caribou Commission. Other delegation members are subsistence users from the Alaskan villages of Ft. Yukon, Kaktovik, Beaver and Arctic Village. Jonathon Solomon of Ft. Yukon is chairman of the board. Nolan Solomon, Kaktovik, Paul Williams, Beaver and Sarah James of Arctic Village are board members who advise the International Porcupine Caribou Commission (IPCC) which was first suggested in 1976 by the late Eben Hopson.

Although the Alaska international commission was created in 1982 to ease the subsistence users problem an agreement between the United States and Canada has never taken place. But by the end of October the Canadian

government signed an agreement for their country.

The Government of Canada said, "An agreement to protect the porcupine caribou herd and its habitat in northern Canada was signed by representatives of the federal and territorial governments and several northern Native associations. This agreement is the culmination of ten years of negotiations. The historic signing of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement was held in Old Crow, Yukon's most northerly settlement." Alaskan representatives at the signing were Childers and Solomon of Ft. Yukon.

The Canadian government also noted the significance of the agreement in relationship to Alaska. "The porcupine caribou herd migrates across territorial and international boundaries, from northeast Alaska across Yukon and into the northern part of the Northwest Territories. This agreement is particularly important as it will provide a basis for negotiations with the United States on a bilateral porcupine caribou agreement."

American representative Childers agreed saying, "This is the starting gap for international talks. Now things should pick up quickly. Negotiations for an international agreement should take place in less than a year. IPCC has been working hard with state to be ready by 1986."

Childers explained what Alaska's requests would be in an international agreement. "IPCC is calling on the U.S. and Canada for free passage

modeled after the Kickapoo Indians in Texas and Mexico. What we want is the right for free local passage for traditional hunting and subsistence bartering." Childers said many Alaskan subsistence hunters run into an international boundary before finding caribou. Hunters should have the right to continue hunting in another country according to Childers. He said Natives must also have the right to bring their fresh caribou meat back to the U.S.

Some of the highlights of Canada's Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement include the main objectives to recognize the special relationship between Native users and the caribou. Another main objective is prioritizing the rights of Native hunters and allowing Natives to participate in the herd's management plans. Included in the agreement is "Native users shall have a preferential right to harvest porcupine caribou subject to laws of general application concerning conservation, public safety and the terms of the agreement." Another section states, "Native users will, however, be permitted to sell the non-edible parts of legally harvested porcupine caribou."

The Canadian Native villages which were included in the agreement were Old Crow, Dawson, Mayo, Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Arctic Red River, Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. Some of the Alaskan communities involved with IPCC include Ft. Yukon, Kaktovik, Beaver and Arctic Village.



photo by Robert Belous