

# Commission to seek Porcupine caribou treaty

By Bill Hess  
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Representatives of several Alaskan, Yukon and Northwest Territories villages are gathering together in Arctic Village this week to form a commission to look after the interests of traditional users of the Porcupine Caribou herd.

The herd, which numbers about 120,000 animals, migrates annually through regions of Alaska and two Canadian

territories. The people in the villages of the region have long been interested in reaching an international treaty on the management and protection of the herd. Although the treaty idea has faced many obstacles, the commission will be charged with finding ways to make it a reality.

Jude Henzler, coordinator of Research and Technical Development at RurAL CAP,

one of the delegates to the meeting, said that in the past, Alaska has been reluctant to get involved in a treaty with Canada. One reason, said Henzler, was that a few years ago it did not seem necessary to have such management of the herd.

While other caribou herds in the state have had great fluctuations in population, the Porcupine herd has remained remarkably stable over the

years, Henzler noted.

Alaska was also reluctant to join with the Canadians, said Henzler, because that government has no method to control the Native take of caribou, and it is Native people who are the greatest utilizers of the herd.

Now development is about to begin on the Northern Canadian coast, in the traditional calving areas for the herd. Oil development will be taking place offshore and gravel for

the drilling islands will be quarried from the areas sought out by the herd to bear their young, Henzler noted.

Not only has the need for herd been made more clear, but Canadian Natives have in international protection of the herd been made more clear, but Canadian Natives have in at least one instance reached agreements for controls of herds they are dependent on, Henzler noted also.

Bob Childers, another delegate, noted that another major obstacle in the past has been "the reluctance of Fish and Game policy makers to work with the people up there to develop an agreement which will meet everyone's needs." With a new governor taking office, Childers said there is optimism that a more favorable attitude will develop in state government.

Childers, who has long been involved in the Porcupine herd, noted that the commission will represent the users of the herd, and will probably be small in numbers.

Communities being represented at the meeting include Aklivak, Fort McPherson, Old Crow, Dawson and Mayo in Canada, as well as the Council of Yukon Indians and the Dene Nation.

Kaktovik, Arctic Village, Venetie, Fort Yukon, Chalkyitsik, Beaver, and possibly other Yukon Flats villages will be represented from Alaska, along with Tanana Chiefs Conference, the North Slope Borough, and the Three G's village corporations.