

# North Slope students learn BLM skills

by Sharon Durgan Wilson

for the Tundra Times

Making a career decision can be quite difficult for a high school student unless he or she has had some hands-on experience in a few different fields.

The Bureau of Land Management is sponsoring a program that enables high school juniors and seniors in rural areas to sample the many different career fields associated with natural resource management.

BLM's Arctic District sponsored a pilot program for "hosted workers" for six weeks this summer — the first of its kind in BLM-Alaska. State Director Mike Penfold, a strong proponent of the program, expects the program to expand to other districts in Alaska in the future.

Hosted workers are volunteers who work for BLM while being paid by someone else. In this case, the Bureau of Indian Affairs paid William Okakok of Point Hope and Richard Williams of Barrow a salary while they worked for BLM, paid their airfare to and from Fairbanks and gave them a subsistence allowance to their BLM host family for room and board.

BLM initiated the program to provide work experience and broader knowledge of multiple-use resource management responsibilities for rural Alaskan students.

At the same time, the state director hopes that it will strengthen BLM's relations with Native and rural Alaskan communities and strengthen the bond between the BIA, the North Slope Borough, oil companies and BLM as they strive toward a common goal: exposing rural Alaskan students to resource management career fields while improving their chances for advanced education and future employment.

The hosted workers gained hands-on experience in a variety of resource management fields during the summer. Okakok and Williams worked with the many different specialists in the Arctic District, learning a little about each discipline.

The two students:

- Learned to interpret and plot lake



Richard Williams, left, and William Okakok work in the BLM Arctic District.

Photo by John Cook

depths on maps from side-looking aerial radar imagery.

- Participated in archeological excavations, learning the techniques and principles of magnetometry.

- Tracked radio-collared caribou and put the information on maps and overlays.

- Conducted fish surveys.

- Assisted in locating and evaluating

recreational opportunities in an undeveloped area.

- Learned methods of putting scientific information into computers.

Students holding a 3.0 grade point average or higher applied to the North Slope Borough School District for the BLM program last winter. The school district staff conducted the preliminary screening for grades, attitude and self-

expression.

Arctic District staff conducted personal interviews of students recommended by the school district, looking for students with the initiative to gain new experience, an eagerness to learn and a willingness to leave home to gain that experience.

The hosted workers enjoyed the program and said they would highly recommend other students taking advantage of the opportunity in the future.

"Living and working in Fairbanks was strange at first — it was a new environment filled with new people," Williams said. "But after helping the different staff members around the office and in the field with their projects, we got to know them and were more comfortable. It's the same in any new situation."

Arctic District Manager Tom Dean, an enthusiastic supporter of the program, said that his staff developed it to provide resource management experience for rural Alaskan students from their junior year of high school through their college years. Dean intends to have two juniors and two seniors working with the Arctic District staff in 1988.

"The students did a great job this summer," Dean said. "They were exposed to new fields, ideas and concepts. They learned new skills and contributed quality work to BLM projects. All the supervisors enjoyed working with them and are looking forward to continuing next year."

Echoing Dean's sentiments, both Okakok and Williams said they would like to return to the program next year and requested additional career fields they would like to work in. BLM staff members will visit rural schools this winter to advertise the program, and the hosted workers have agreed to accompany them and share their feelings about the program with other students.

Those who would like further information about the program may contact Robert H. Jones, Equal Opportunity Officer, BLM Alaska State Office, 701 C St., Box 13, Anchorage 99513; telephone, 271-5066.