

Natives want more protection

By LUCY ALBEITA

The draft International Caribou Treaty between Canada and the United States was the topic of discussion last month in Fairbanks. Canadian and Alaskan Natives attended the meeting hosted by Tanana Chiefs Conference on September 24th and 25th.

Delegates represented areas where Natives have traditionally and still depend on the caribou that migrate between the United States and Canada. They included Kaktovik, Arctic Village, Venetie, Old Crow, Sachs Harbor and Whitehorse.

Also present were members of C.O.P.E. - the Committee for Original People's Entitlement and of C.Y.I. - Council of Yukon Indians.

Two joint statements were signed by all the representatives. The first, a Joint Statement of Objectives and Principles for Protection of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, covered four major areas:

1. That the Porcupine herd must be protected and managed as a whole,
2. That the herd's habitat

in both countries must be protected,

3. That the Native peoples in both countries must be

involved in the land and wildlife management for the herd,

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● **Development may damage caribou**

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4. That the rights, cultures and lifestyles of the Native peoples who depend on the Porcupine herd must be recognized and protected.

A second resolution supported wilderness status for the Arctic National Wildlife Range. Representatives felt this area must be protected because it includes the calving of the herd. The grounds are critical to the continued productivity of the herd they maintain.

Concern was expressed over Senate Bill 9, now in the United States Senate Energy Committee which proposes opening the

coastal plain (and the calving grounds) of the Wildlife Range to oil and gas exploration.

Andy Carpenter of C.O.P.E. outlined the problem: "Some areas you can protect, but once development begins in the area you don't know how the development might harm the caribou. We're saying that the whole thing is sensitive as far as development is concerned."

Jonathan Solomon, of Gwitcha-Gwitchen-Ginkhye Corporation, believes "the wording of the whole treaty is not strong enough to protect the habitat of the Porcupine caribou herd." All agreed the treaty needed much stronger language for

sound protection of the herd.

Bob Childers, consultant for the group, is in Washington, D.C. keeping watch on a U.S. - Canadian technical session on the treaty. The resolutions drawn up as a result of the Fairbanks meeting will be relayed to that group.