

88-49-87

Willie Goodwin, Jim Kowalsky, and Tom Scarborough speak at the Caribou Conference held at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in Fairbanks, Alaska on December 4, 1976

Series: Potlatch series

Moses Wassillie, moderator

Moses Wassillie said the conference on the future and survival of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd was held in the Wood Center on the campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Willie Goodwin from Kotzebue said his people have been hunting caribou for thousands of years. He said the older people at home have observed the decline of the caribou herd. They have seen huge populations. This decline is not different and they predicted that it would happen. That is one of the reasons the reindeer herd was established that they have now. Elders don't understand why the federal and state government are getting all panicky about the decline. Some of the people in the village would rather hunt and fish instead of having a job. It is what they know best. He said they are going to own land and they aren't sure whether it will be kept in wild lands or developed. They have a percentage of people in their village who depend on the land that they have to worry about.

Willie Goodwin said there are caribou passing within a mile of the village of Selawik and the people are just watching them. They can't start hunting the bulls until maybe the middle of January or February. That is when they start getting fat. They may just have a season of about a month and a half. They are not any good to them right now because they are too skinny. The people did follow the regulations closely. The public works (state?) is flying over the herd daily when the weather permits.

Moses Wassillie said Willie continued to talk about the hungry wolf and how the permit system is working in the villages. Willie said when they made their request to the Board of Game to determine need they took all of these things into consideration. They took into consideration

what kinds of resources were available to each village. They took each household and determined which ones were on welfare, which ones did not have a hunter in the family, and who was too old to hunt. They determined by formula for each village how to allocate the permits. He said he would like to say if nothing is done about the wolf right now they will get people sometime. The wolf is getting hungry. He has heard about twenty or thirty wolves in a pack going after a hunter. He said if his grandfather had a snow machine and a rifle during his time he would have utilized them.

Song by Melonie

Moses Wassillie said Jim Kowalsky talked about the preservation of the habitat, subsistence needs of the Natives and who will assume the responsibility. Jim Kowalsky said he is interested to see who will strive for solutions that are solid and long lasting and who will settle for the cosmetic politically popular band-aid. Concerns over the wasting of caribou, bag limits, improvement of hunting methods, more regulations and the plea to continue to harvest caribou as a necessity of culture and diet are going to be meaningless in the long run unless someone is willing to face the long-term needs of the caribou and its habitat. He means the preservation of the habitat not the race in state government and Congress to see who can stack the most multiple uses of these lands. He talked about the Susitna Hydroelectric Power project. Environmental impact statements indicate that habitat will be destroyed. The Army Engineers who would build the dam say that caribou are strong swimmers. The governor endorses the project. The delegation tells congress let's build it. The Fish and Game says it has to restore the moose by spending money to shoot all the wolves in the upper Susitna. He said they would restore the herd and then put the habitat under water or part of it. He said another indicator of the lack of concern for wildlife habitat is the state's proposed barley project at Big Delta. Some sheep range would be displaced. He discussed the proposal for the gas pipeline across the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. He talked about provisions in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act and about protection of the land used by subsistence users by the Secretary of the Interior.

Song by Melanie

Moses Wassillie said Tom Scarborough represented the viewpoint of the sport hunter. Tom Scarborough said sport hunters are few in numbers. He said there are just a few residents and many non-residents who do this. In some countries they are prohibited from taking back anything except the antlers. He considers this type of hunter strictly a sport hunter. He described a resident hunter. He is one that observes game laws, respects the landowner's property, uses the proper types of firearms, and knows how to care for the game he may take. Scarborough said he asked the Fish and Game Department for some figures about how many hunting licenses have

been sold in the past years. He said these figures have been fairly stable and a little bit slightly declining since about 1970. In 1975 there were 64,722 sport hunting licenses sold. 5,006 of these are what the state classifies as subsistence licenses. You have to prove you have a certain income to be eligible for these licenses. A significant amount of money paid for licenses and tags comes from non-residents. The cost of the tags has greatly increased with the last legislature. The Department of Fish and Game is financed solely on the monies received from licenses and matching federal monies. Federal matching funds come from the Pittman-Robertson Fund. It puts an eleven percent tax on all monies for rifles, ammunition and hand loading equipment. It is divided among the 50 states depending upon how much is matched. There is also a handgun tax and archery equipment tax which is only used for wildlife management. He said it is apparent that the ability for the Department of Fish and Game to function comes solely from their ability to provide some reason for an individual to buy a hunting license. This greatly affects their decisions in doing things and their management policies.

Song by Jimmy Spheris

Moses Wassillie said the former Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, Max Brewer, talked about the question of whether energy development and caribou can co-exist. Max Brewer said he has been asked whether caribou and mineral resource development can co-exist. He said his answer is yes. Not to co-exist on the same acres of ground, but to co-exist in reasonable proximity. The closeness depends on what development and what the caribou's activity would be. He talked about an airstrip at Umea. For three days they couldn't land any airplanes because they couldn't chase any caribou off of the airstrip. He said the caribou would use drill pads and roads to escape mosquitoes. He said some of man's activities could occur in a caribou area without destroying either the caribou or the habitat. He said there must be knowledge of the demands of each and requirements of each. He said mining as far as the Western Arctic Caribou herd is concerned couldn't be expected to be all that big of a problem. To get at the mining there has to be an infrastructure of transportation corridor. Mining by its very nature tends to be a rather localized operation. Some good hunting in British Columbia is in the mining area. Oil and gas exploration is not an extensive operation. The drilling of single wells is widespread and there is very little development of infrastructure because you don't build an expensive road to drill one well. He commends programs that occur locally. They do not make a tremendous impact. He said if something were to be found it could make a considerable impact. It is difficult to determine what that impact might be unless you know where it is going to be found. Oil, gas and minerals aren't found in the most convenient places for man. He said it is a process to get them out. He said some of the areas are rather small. There may be well pads, airstrips and borrow areas that are 5-20 acres. These are areas of destroyed habitat as far as caribou are concerned. There is also damaged habitat involved.