

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT ISSUED ON PROPOSED CARIBOU CONSERVATION AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE U.S. AND CANADA

A draft environmental impact statement on a proposed agreement between the United States and Canada for conserving caribou that migrate between Alaska and the Yukon Territory has been issued by the U.S. Department of State. The statement was prepared with the cooperation of the Department of the Interior.

Caribou regularly cross the international boundary during annual migrations between their summer range in Alaska and wintering areas in Canada. Three international caribou herds have been identified for possible inclusion under the agreement. The Porcupine Herd, now numbering around 100,000, is the largest of the three and comprises about 95 percent of the caribou that have regularly crossed the border in recent years. Two other herds--the Fortymile Herd and the Chisana Herd--also have been identified for possible inclusion.

The report, "Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Agreement Between the United States and Canada for the Conservation of Migratory Caribou," discusses the possible effects of establishing or not establishing an international agreement for caribou conservation. The report identifies the various points that such a convention might cover and discusses the environmental effects of the alternatives. Among the factors considered are which herds might best be covered by the agreement, alternative approaches to habitat protection and caribou management, use of caribou for subsistence and sport hunting, and alternatives for establishing a commission or international body to aid in implementation of the agreement. The final form of the agreement would have to be determined by negotiations between the United States and Canada.

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The need for an agreement has been recognized by wildlife officials in both countries because of rapidly changing economic, technological, and social conditions in the North. According to the report, a bilateral convention is essential for the well-being of the caribou and of the local people who depend on caribou for food. A convention would improve data collection and allow better coordination of scientific research, and would make it possible to allocate harvest fairly between the two countries.

Without an agreement, the report says, there will be no formal mechanism for coordinating and promoting conservation of these international caribou herds. A decline in caribou populations or alterations in movements of the caribou herds could create hardships for people who depend on caribou for food and also could affect other species that feed on caribou, such as wolves, grizzly bears, and wolverines.

Copies of the report are available by contacting William H. Mansfield, Office of Environment and Health, Department of State, Washington, D.C. 20520. A limited number of copies are also available from the Area Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 East Tudor Road, Anchorage, Alaska 99503.

Public comments are invited and should be submitted to Mr. Mansfield at the above address by June 17, 1980.

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