trator Warren Muir. On 16 May, some 100 EPA employees, including a number of scientists in the toxic substances program, joined in signing a letter to Biles that sings his praises and criticizes Muir and Assistant Administrator Steve Jellineck, chief of the program overall. "We believe . . . that the circumstances that led to your resignation reflect a serious mistake in judgment on the part of OPTS management," the letter said.

Some who signed the letter, and perhaps many, agree with Biles' view that Muir involves himself too much in administrative details and does not delegate authority to the extent necessary for the running of a large, complex regulatory program.

Jellineck says it was "an excrutiating situation" that could only be resolved by Biles stepping aside. "I would much prefer to see him [Biles] still there, but it just wasn't going to work," he says.

Under a reorganization plan still awaiting final approval, Jellineck has given Muir responsibilities once divided among three deputy administrators. "His is more of a directive style [than Biles'], but once a program is put together, he is a delegator," Jellineck says.

The present discontent in the toxic substances program may reflect no more than a passing bureaucratic perturbation. But some of Biles' partisans believe that it is a sign of a crippling weakness in one of EPA's most important and demanding programs.

Hostages in the Arctic: The Porcupine Caribou

Among the last big, free-ranging herds of ungulates left on earth are the caribou herds of the North American arctic, and one of the largest is the Porcupine herd that migrates between northeast Alaska and Canada's Yukon Territory. By late June, the United States and Canada are expected to begin negotiating a treaty aimed at protecting this migratory herd of some 100,000 animals.

Although U.S. and Canadian officials are said to be basically in agreement as to what the treaty should provide, prospects for success in the negotiations appear clouded by a lack of consensus among the players on the American side. In particular, the state of Alaska and the Alaskan congressional delegation may not yet be ready to go along with such a treaty. In part this is because the Alaskans resent efforts by the Carter Administration to push through the House-passed Alaskan lands bill that would have far more of the state preserved as wilderness, parks, and wildlife refuges than they believe is desirable.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Photo

"It's possible that the caribou treaty could be held hostage," says Rod Moore, an aide to Representative Don Young of Alaska.

Moore indicated that there is also concern on the part of Alaskan officials and natives that a treaty might result in unreasonable and unfair restrictions on the taking of caribou for subsistence use. The International Whaling Commission's ban of a few years ago on the taking of bowhead whales is cited as a case in point.

The Porcupine herd is at the moment believed to be healthy and stable, but, as many wildlife biologists view the matter, the proposed treaty cannot come any too soon. Oil and gas exploration and development in the Arctic could eventually put the Porcupine herd and other large herds in jeopardy. Populations of some other herds have collapsed in the past at least partly from alteration of their habitat and overhunting. For example, the Fortymile herd of east central Alaska and the Yukon, now down to some 4000 caribou, is a surviving remnant of the enormous Yukon-Tanana herd which in the 1920's is said to have numbered a half million animals.

The Porcupine herd has its calving grounds and summer range on the Arctic slope of Alaska and the Yukon. Most of the herd winters in the boreal forests to the south of the Brooks Range and the British Mountains, with one major migration route crossing the Porcupine River, a Yukon tributary from which the herd takes its name. So far, the greater part of this vast area remains little changed.

A draft of "principles" to guide the treaty negotiations is now being circulated for comment. A six-member caribou commission, half U.S. and half Canadian, would be created to monitor the Porcupine herd's size and stability, decide how many caribou can be taken each year, and apportion the take between Alaskans and Canadians. In Alaska, the state fish and game agency would continue to regulate hunting, with subsistence users to be accorded priority over sports hunters. The commission's recommendations on these matters would be binding unless either government, following prescribed procedures, chose to take formal exception.

The commission would also make recommendations with respect to habitat protection, but these would not be binding. The thinking on this point is that decisions having to do with such major questions as oil and gas development will inevitably be decided at the highest levels of government.

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William A. Hayne has been trying, with limited success, to develop a consensus among all the American interests to be affected by the treaty: the state of Alaska, the natives, the sports hunters, and the environmental groups. Each of these interests, together with the Alaskan congressional delegation, has been invited to be represented on the U.S. delegation that will negotiate with the Canadians. But unless things soon take a more positive turn within the next few weeks, the negotiations may fail, not from differences with the Canadians, but from dissent on the American side by the Alaskans and possibly others.

Luther J. Carter