LETTER FROM
FRANK N. WICKER
TO HON. ROBERT C. SCHENCK,
WITH
Copy of report made to the Solicitor of the Treasury relative to the Islands of St. Paul and St. George, Alaska.

December 14, 1869.—Referred to the Committee of Ways and Means and ordered to be printed.

Office of the Special Agent Treasury Department, Sitka, Alaska, November 4, 1869.

Sir: I have the honor herewith to transmit copy of my report to the Hon. Solicitor of the Treasury, on the Islands of St. Paul and St. George, in this Territory.

Having recently returned from a visit to that highly interesting section of our country, and in view of the fact that the mail steamer leaves here to-day, I have been compelled to omit many interesting facts connected with said islands.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
FRANK N. WICKER,
Special Agent Treasury Department, in charge of Alaska.

Hon. Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means,
House of Representatives of the United States, Washington, D. C.

Office of the Special Agent Treasury Department, Sitka, Alaska, November 4, 1869.

Sir: In compliance with your request that I would furnish such general information relative to the seal fisheries on the Islands of St. Paul and St. George as would assist the government in determining some policy to be adopted that would best protect the fur-bearing
animals resorting to said islands, and at the same time secure to the
government the largest revenue, I have the honor to submit the following
facts in relation to the islands, and the outline of two bills, either one of
which would, I think, if accepted, meet the end desired. The island of
St. Paul, the largest and most important, contains eight seal rookeries
although the entire coast line of the island (about eighteen miles long)
is covered to some extent with these valuable animals.

These rookeries are located in such manner that the island could be
divided in three divisions, each about equal in extent and important.
The island contains about two hundred inhabitants, Aleutians, who
subsist entirely on seal meat; and such other articles of food and cloth-
ing as their requirements demand are procured from traders on the
island in exchange for the fur-seal skins, for which they are allowed
forty cents each.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand male seals can be killed annu-
ally, during the season, without detriment; the natives only being
employed in the killing.

Although the present law, which prohibits the killing, (act of Con-
gress approved July 27, 1868,) is ostensibly in force, it is notoriously
silent in regard to the disposition of such skins as may have been taken
from animals killed in violation of the law. From a personal inspection
of the island during the month of September, I am convinced that over
one hundred thousand fur-seals have been killed this season, and the
skins sold to traders; and as the killing season continues until about
the first day of December, operations will undoubtedly be carried on
until the close of the season. And the only benefit derived by the gov-
ernment is the privilege of paying officials to remain on the islands.

St. George Island, lying about thirty miles to the south of St. Paul,
in the Behring Sea, is much smaller and of less importance. Forty
thousand animals could be killed on this island without injury to the
government. The facts in relation to St. Paul are equally and propor-
tionately true of St. George.

I would recommend the passage of a bill authorizing the Secretary of
the Treasury to employ the natives residing on the islands in killing the
fur-seals and curing the skins, paying them therefor good liberal prices
in goods, which shall be sent to the islands and disposed of at fixed
rates; that all traders and others not employed by the government be
removed from the islands, and that for any buildings or other improve-
ments put upon the islands by private parties, there shall be appraisers
appointed to assess the value of such improvements, and the amount so
assessed shall be paid by the government to the parties having valid
claim to the same. That all skins collected shall be stored on the islands
in store-houses provided for that purpose, and there remain until
the following season, when they shall be shipped to San Francisco or
some other central point, and then be disposed of at public sale to the
highest bidder, and the proceeds of such sale, after deducting all ex-
penses incurred, shall be deposited to the credit of the United States.

The inspectors to be appointed under the provisions of this bill to
receive liberal salaries, and give bonds for the faithful performance of
such duties as shall be assigned them. This, with careful and judicious
management, would, in addition to the payment of all expenses, return
the government a revenue of over five hundred thousand dollars annu-
ally.

The habits and peculiarities of the fur-seals are such that any deviation
from the old established customs adopted by the Russians would have
a tendency to drive them away from their rookeries; consequently the necessity of surrounding this mine of wealth with the strong arm of government, but at the same time does away with private monopolies which are always obnoxious to the people.

In case this proposition should fail to elicit the attention of Congress I would most respectfully submit the following, viz:

That the Secretary of the Treasury shall be authorized to lease the islands for a period of not less than twenty years to the highest bidder, provided six months notice shall have been given, in order that capitalists may have an opportunity of gaining such information relative to the value of the islands as will assist them in bidding for the same; all bids to be accompanied with a bond of sufficient amount to protect the government in case the regulations and restrictions imposed under the said lease should not be complied with. Bonds for treble the amount should be exacted for the year in which the said lease expires.

One hundred and twenty-five thousand seals may be killed on the island of St. Paul and forty thousand on the island of St. George, provided that no female seal or pup under one year old shall be killed, and that in no instance shall guns or fire-arms be employed.

In addition to the forfeiture of all skins, the bonds shall be liable for any infraction or deviation from such regulations as may be prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury. The islands should be leased separately to the highest responsible bidders, and in addition to the annual rental fee a tax should be levied and collected on each skin taken under such lease.

Aleutians from the adjacent islands or mainland should not be employed in killing the fur-seal unless under special permit from the Secretary of the Treasury.

Respectfully submitted.

FRANK N. WICKER,
Special Agent Treasury Department, in charge of Alaska.

Hon. E. C. BANFIELD,
Solicitor of the Treasury, Washington, D. C.