

AFN, Inc. Telecommunications Committee Meets

Opts recommendations For construction of 37-site earth stations

The recently formed Telecommunications Committee of the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. held its second meeting in Anchorage January 15 & 16. Members of this advisory committee to the Governor's Office of Telecommunications represent all the non-profit regional corporations. Their selection was coordinated by the AFN.

At the January meeting, Matt Jamin of the Kodiak Area Native Association was elected Chairman, with Verl Purbaugh of the Aleut League elected Vice-Chairman.

The committee made final site recommendations for construction of 37 earth stations during 1976, from sites proposed by the State and RCA Alascom. Five sites were also selected for probable construction, with three additional sites to have VHF land links with nearby earth stations.

Twenty earth stations will be completed by March of this year. The construction of the approved 42 earth stations next summer, with the three VHF links, will provide a total of 65 Alaskan communities with earth station long-distance telephone and emergency medical service by late 1976. All 65 have no existing communications.

The committee also established preliminary criteria for selecting the remaining sites for earth stations to be constructed in 1977.

Suggested criteria calls for site selection based on community population, adequacy of existing telephone service, accessibility, and whether or not the community has a health aide and primary or secondary schools that could benefit from earth station service.

A resolution passed by the committee calls for the State to fund more than the now planned 100 earth stations to be installed throughout the State. The committee also resolved that RCA Alascom should not be granted the 35% interim rate increase it is requesting of the Alaska Public Utilities Commission.

In future meetings, the committee will finalize recommendations for 1977 earth station site selection, plan for upgrading existing

communications in communities not affected by the earth station program, and study the long-term role of satellite communication for rural television and other data transmission.

Lino Barril, Office of Telecommunications community liaison manager, observes that the committee is serious about their work.

"There are a lot of knowledgeable and dedicated people on the committee," he says, "who won't be rubber stamps. Their recommendations are in keeping with the goals and policies of the regions, and that's what we need."

The Office of Telecommunication's Deputy Director George Shaginaw adds, "Our Office has been encouraging the regional corporations to independently establish a planning committee. At its annual convention in October the AFN passed a resolution calling for such a committee, and took the initiative to get it organized."

"The AFN Telecommunications committee is a strong and independent group," Shaginaw adds, "and we are looking to them for advice and recommendations that will help us plan the best communications system to meet everyone's needs. Our Office doesn't want to make communications decisions for anyone; we need advice from rural and regional people."

The committee will meet monthly during the legislative session, then bi-monthly. Funding for the first meeting in December was provided by RurALCAP; the Office of Telecommunications funded the January meeting. Legislation is soon to be introduced to independently fund the Telecommunications Committee during 1976.

Committee members, appointed by their own regional associations, are: Chairman Matt Jamin, Kodiak Area Natives; Vice-Chairman Verl Purbaugh, Aleut League; Sam Fortier, Bristol Bay Natives; Jake Miller, AHTNA; Frank Smith, Cook Inlet Natives; Lynn Chambers, Kawerak; Stan Jones, Mauneluk; Paul Sherry, Tanana Chiefs; Steve Boyett, Yupik Tak Bista. The Tlingit-Haida Central Council, Arctic Slope Natives and North Pacific Rim Natives have not yet appointed their representatives.