

# Research Zeroes in on Bush Viable Economy

"Viable" is fast becoming a red-letter word for Alaskan bush communities.

To the economist, a viable town is growing or has an economic potential. To the native community, being viable means the difference between getting federal funds for self-help under the Native Housing Bill or dying out.

Few native communities qualify today as viable areas. Young men leave to find work and don't come back. The postmaster is just about the only person in the village employed year-around.

How does a community become viable? The University of Alaska's Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research has received two grants to study this question.

The first grant was awarded by the Department of Commerce for a "Northwest Alaska Regional Development Study."

"Under this project, the natural and human resources of northwest Alaska will be analyzed and courses of action recommended for the area," said Victor Fischer, institute director.

"The study is designed to assist the federal field committee in its planning activities. We think this overall approach will bring

the best results and see this type of study applied to every region of Alaska."

The Institute is asking natives for help in making the study and in deciding policies and programs.

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"We have already held preliminary meetings with leaders of native associations and council representatives," Fischer said. "This has seldom been done in Alaska. The standard approach has been to do things 'for' the natives."

The Northwest Study will take in communities from Unalakleet to Barrow, including Nome and Kotzebue.

The second grant was made by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries for a study of the St. Paul community in the Pribiloff Islands. The community is now governed by the federal government.

Under the Fur Seal Act, residents can set up their own townsite provided "the Secretary of the Interior is satisfied that a viable self-governing community, which is capable of providing adequate municipal services, is established or will be established."

"The purpose of the St. Paul study is to provide the secretary with a factual basis for making a decision," Fischer explained and he added:

"Both of these studies will help set a pattern for the rest of the state in regards to economic development potentials and the best means by which these potentials can be realized."