

Line Report Buries Impact on Natives

This month, hearings will be held in Washington and later in Anchorage on the Environmental Impact of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

The preliminary draft of the Environmental Impact Statement prepared by the Department of the Interior has been available since the end of January—close to three hundred pages which examine the impact of a pipeline on the ecology of Alaska. (Copies of the report are available from the Bureau of Land Management. Cost-\$3.00 each.)

The impact of the pipeline on Alaska's Native people is buried in among the hundreds of pages, scattered between the impact of oil spillage of domestic fishing and the damage to wildlife patterns in the area north of the Brooks Range.

William Byler, head of the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc. in New York called the Tundra Times to comment on the "shabby documentation" in the report on the treatment of Alaskan Natives.

What Mr. Byler has noticed, along with other observers of the Native scene, is the lack of any tie-in between examinations on the influence of the pipeline on hunting and fishing and the effect of this influence on the life style of many Alaskan Natives.

One resident of the North, an Eskimo who was brought up in Point Hope, described the

"pristine quality" of the land of his birth. With clear streams,

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no air pollution, the wilderness encroaches upon the doorposts of the small Native communities.

"The only identifiable negative cultural influence that could be associated with the implementation of the project would be a reduction in remnant hunting and fishing cultures that still characterize some Native groups," reports the Interior Department survey.

There would be at least two reasons for this reduction. The first reason is fairly positive.

"Generally improved economic conditions that would result from the production of oil and its related economic return would have the potential of considerably upgrading public services, health care, education and vocational training in rural areas."

Also, the report goes on, "the construction phase of the project would provide on-the-job vocational training to Alaska residents. Such improved opportunities might cause Alaskan Natives to leave the villages.

The other reason for a reduction in subsistence economy

would probably be the damages to fishing and wildlife which are inevitable if civilization, pollution, and oil spillage come to Alaska's wilderness.

Primarily, there will be effects from construction work on the wildlife in the areas. Some of these effects may be reversible once construction ends when the area loses its temporary population and noise and pollution incident to any construction project.

"Construction activity will have an adverse effect on the wildlife inhabiting the areas adjacent to the pipeline route by disturbing the normal behavioral patterns of those animals. These effects will be most pronounced on those wildlife which tend to be intolerant of human activities."

The very presence of above ground pipeline may disturb caribou migrations. "Oil pollution accidents" and the dispersal of "treated sewage effluent" into streams, lakes and rivers in the vicinity of construction camps will have an "as yet not completely understood" effect on

the wildlife, fish and environment.

"In general," the report concludes in its summary of negative environmental impacts, "there would be increased levels of pollution resulting from the presence of increased numbers of people.

"The reduction of wilderness area, wildlife habitat, and degradation of scenic values along the pipeline right-of-way, though all proportionally small, must be counted as environmental costs. There is a probability that some oil spills will occur even under the most stringent enforcement."

While most of the influence of environmental pollution is measured in terms of recreational aspects, little is said in the report on the influence of deceased wildlife, damage to the tundra and potential pollution in streams and rivers on the subsistence economy.

One observer pointed out the report fails to document the use of the Yukon fishery by Natives for subsistence.

In some villages, fishing co-

operatives are weakly beginning. Perhaps there should be more concern for the impact of the pipeline on the Native people, commented William Byler of the AAI in New York.

He suggested some kind of understanding or provision for an indemnity to be paid to Natives for oil spills if they destroy fishing areas—not just fines to be paid to the federal government.

The report documents positive as well as negative impacts of the pipeline. One requirement for any permit to be granted is that the "permittee" shall submit proposals to the Secretary of the Interior regarding recruitment, testing, training, placement, employment and job counseling of Alaska Natives.

The pipeline constructor will be required to create pre-employment and on-the-job training for Alaska Natives and to employ those who complete their training program successfully.

"Although some of the job opportunities created by the development of Alaska oil resources will be filled by people who

come to Alaska from other states, training programs for native Alaskans are expected to increase the number of jobs available to them," the document reports.

In addition, the report cited that Alyeska Pipeline has voluntarily instituted a program to contract with native owned and operated corporations to insure native participation in pipeline construction.

Yet, despite the benefits, the report agrees there will be some substantial disruption of the wilderness.

"It is clearly recognized that no stipulation can alter the fundamental change that development would bring to this area. Whether this transition is adverse or advantageous is a matter of value judgement."