

THREAT: OFFSHORE OIL LEASING

Federal Venture Would Not Allow Local or State Control, Et Cetera

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Results of hearings on federal off-shore oil leasing, held February 3 and 4 in Anchorage, have caused considerable unrest in coastal Native communities. According to current law, there would be no local or state control on where exploration and drilling were carried out and no revenues gained locally from leasing.

Yakutat, a Tlingit village which still depends heavily on hunting and fishing, stands to be hardest hit as the only handy deep water port on the Alaska Gulf with a jet air strip.

According to environmental statements, the population of Yakutat would normally reach 400 by 1985 but with off-shore oil activity it could hit 4,600.

"Development at the scale forecast will amount to cultural genocide," warned Byron Mallott, Yakutat native and former

Commissioner of Community and Regional Affairs, who spoke on behalf of Yakutat's Mayor Larry Powell.

"The traditional Tlingit values will be lost and the lifestyle of the residents of this community, so prized by whites and Natives alike, will deteriorate and the community altered to reflect just another industrial town."

Mallott was followed by Larry Mercurieff of the Aleut Corporation who pointed out that comparatively little is known about sea ice conditions and volatile activity of his earthquake prone country and that current information on the eco-system is merely a resource inventory.

Richard Janson, executive director of the Chugach Native Association, reported little was known about earthquake faults and there was little drilling information in his area. In addition, he testified that drilling platforms would greatly interfere with fishing and become hazards to navigation. Roger Lang, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, maintained that if the federal government is to receive the benefits of drilling, it should also foot the expense of impact.

"We ought to forego revenue sharing of drilling profits in favor of impact funding," he suggested. "A village with as small a population as Yakutat would get maybe \$50 on a population revenue sharing basis but impact funds could be directed."

As to the possibility of an oil spill in that area, Lang could only shudder at the thought.

"It would screw up the only

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good year-round fishing any of us have," he said.

With the hearings came testimony that Texas had lost some \$60 million and Louisiana some \$30 million because of the impact on their shores of outer continental shelf drilling.

Gov. Jay Hammond worried about impact and also federal leasing would lessen Alaskan chances of making any money on its own lease sales.

The most provocative testimony, however, came from

Jerry McCutcheon who asked why the Department of Interior had selected Alaska as its next leasing target when the state was considered the most hazardous place to drill and was 5,000 miles from where oil was needed.

"Is it because you thought you had a governor you thought you could deal with and a legislature you could control?" he asked.

But his question hung unanswered at the end of the hearings.