

Editorials haven't changed in Alaska

by Paul Swetzof
for the *Tundra Times*

Looking at old magazines and other reading materials provides historical perspective. I've acquired the October, 1944 edition of *The Alaska Sportsman* which later changed its name to *Alaska Magazine*. The editorial in this issue demonstrates while the words used to present a point of view often change, the message from yesterday to today can remain the same.

Some non-Natives have taken the position they are as entitled to the use and occupancy of the lands and waters stolen from Alaska Natives as the Natives themselves. Today's editorials appearing in such publications as "The Voice of the Times," (published in the editorial section of the *Anchorage Daily News*) prints the same message as I found in the 1944 *Alaska Sportsman* editorial. The words

are couched but the message is the same.

The following editorial, found under the heading "Main Trails and Bypaths" from the October, 1944 edition of the *Alaska Sportsman* is printed in its entirety:

"For more than seventy-five years, since Alaska was purchased from Russia by the United States, while people have been coming to the territory with the assurance by their Government that the land was open for development and that the use of its resources was open to all citizens alike.

"These white people have spent their time, money, and initiative in developing the Territory. They mined its minerals; cut its timber into lumber; caught millions of pounds of halibut, salmon, cods, and other fishes each year, which they canned, froze, or shipped fresh to the markets in the states. Heretofore these vast resources had been used only in a non-com-

mercial way, by the Indians, for their own limited needs.

"Now the Department of the Interior comes forth with the strange declaration that all the lands occupied by the Indians before the white man came-with the exception of patented lands-actually are still the exclusive property of the Indians and Eskimos. Furthermore, the Department of the Interior is holding hearings in three Southeastern Alaska areas on petitions of the Indians for the exclusive use and occupancy of nearly one fourth of the valuable islands and mainland of Southeastern Alaska, including the watersheds and 'the waters and submerged lands for a distance of three thousand feet from said shores.' Six smaller areas in the north have recently been declared Indian reservations.

"This 'turning over the country back to the Indians' is for the

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avowed purpose of 'developing the economic welfare of the Indians in Alaska.' If the Indians of Kake, Hydaburg, and Klawock are able to prove aboriginal occupancy of the vast areas they claim as a result of the stand of the Department of the Interior, then all of Alaska may eventually be proved to have been occupied by aboriginals; and the whites in Alaska, if they wish to remain, will have to ask for the setting aside of reservations for themselves.

"It is true that, under international law, which declares that conquerors or discoverers shall not disturb the aboriginal inhabitants in their occupancy of land, the Indians in Alaska may have some claim to having been dispossessed without payment or treaty, but their rights to exclusive occupancy have long been extinguished by acts and regulations of the Government itself. And have the white people who have in-

vested their lives in the development of Alaska no rights whatever?

"It is manifestly far-fetched, unfair, and preposterous to prohibit the white people from the use of Alaska's resources through the establishment of land and water reservations. The Department of the Interior is exceeding the intent and authority granted it by Congress in proposing to make such vast reservations of the Territorial lands and waterway. If the Indians have just claims to the country, they should be presented to the United States Court of Claims, and their legality established in the proper way. Under the bureaucratic method employed by the Department of the Interior, the white people have no recourse to the courts to present their side of the question. The United States Congress itself has opened the way for the Indians and Eskimos to sue the Government in the court of Claims."

The situation hasn't changed. The same bunch, and many of their sons and daughters, still be-

lieve and promote the view that if you overrun Natives by sheer numbers and exploit the resources on Native lands and waters, they have a right to keep what they stole. These people then declare that Natives who dare to lay claim to their lands and waters are holding up progress, denying non-Natives their "rights," or are racist.

Let's get honest here. The views displayed in his editorial are the same views displayed today. They are based on two, often overlapping premises, greed and racism, with greed being the most common. If these folks were honest, they would say the truth, which is: "We want and we're taking what you have, what we don't want we'll 'give' to you, and if we later find what we gave you to be of value, we reserve the right to take it back."

Since the above editorial mentioned it, I don't see a problem reclaiming our lands and waters and, being a generous person in the tradition of my people, giving non-Natives, say the core of Anchorage, in reservation status.