

NANA, Interior trade land for Red Dog

The Associated Press

Washington — The construction of a world-class zinc mining operation in Northwest Alaska took a "giant step forward" Monday with the disclosure of a land exchange agreement between a Native regional corporation and the federal government, an official with the Native firm said today.

"The trade is a good, healthy giant step forward but a decision on production of the mine has still not been reached yet," said Pat Pourchot of NANA Regional Corp.

NANA and the Department of Interior agreed to a land swap that will give the Native corporation the access route it needs to get minerals from its Red Dog mine to tidewater.

The exchange, involving more than 200,000 acres, enables the National Park Service to consolidate its holdings in the Cape Krusenstern National Monument.

Assuming the project gets the final go-ahead later this year, construction of the mine operation could begin in 1985 with production starting up two years later, Pourchot said. It could be in operation for about 50 years.

When it is in operation, the mine is expected to generate about 400 full-time jobs and 20 to 30 seasonal jobs, with most of those employed coming from the local labor force.

Pourchot said minerals at Red Dog include about 17 percent zinc, 5 percent lead and large traces of barite and silver. The

mine would be an open pit mine but the pit would be relatively small — about one square mile across — because the minerals are so close to the ground. The mine, owned jointly by NANA and Cominco Alaska, is located about 90 miles north of Kotzebue in the Delong Mountains.

Sierra Club spokesman Jack Hession said the move circumvents the Alaska lands act. He predicted Congress would ask a lot of questions before agreeing to the deal.

"This will give us the access we need for the mining project," said Don Argetsinger, vice president of the Kotzebue-based re-

gional Native corporation. It gives NANA title to land between the Red Dog Mine and a proposed port.

The federal government will transfer about 95,000 acres in the northern part of the monument to NANA, which will give up about 101,000 acres in the northeast section. NANA also will give up about 2,000 acres south of the proposed port on the Chukchi Sea.

Dick Stenmark, chief of land and mineral resources for the park service in Alaska, said it will be easier to manage the monument with all privately held lands lumped together.

The park service also gains

important musk oxen and caribou habitat and archaeological sites, he said.

Hession's objections center on public review of development plans for the acreage. He said the Alaska lands act requires Congress approve roads that will traverse public lands.

Stenmark said the federal government will continue to be sure that no environmental damage is done if NANA builds a road.

But Hession said restrictions on transportation corridors built on park lands are much stricter than those that cut through privately owned land.