

- GALENA AREA CURRENTS - Native Materials for Housing Program

By JOHN SACKETT

The concept that Alaska's rural people will have the opportunity available to them to have decent housing by which to build and care for their families and the fact that this is a now program and not a pipe dream in the distant future is difficult to realize.

For years now different people have talked and talked about the plight of the rural people and how they were the forgotten part of a prosperous nation, but nothing was even done except on a piece meal basis.

With the implementation of the new housing program created and approved by the Nixon Administration we will finally see a program of great building equal in part only to the great need. 1,200 houses will be built in the coming two years and Senator Ted Stevens told a recent housing conference in Anchorage that there is an excellent possibility that an additional 1,200 homes will be approved after that.

Based on the number of houses that have been built in villages under the present remote housing program of the Alaska State Housing Authority of 20-30 homes per village this will mean that 60-100 villages throughout Alaska will be able to participate. Together with the 40 or so villages already receiving houses this will just about cover the entire need.

The type of construction anticipated in the houses will be of vital importance in the coming months as various people in the higher echelon of government decide whether to use material from the states, pre-cut houses, or utilizing our native materials.

Three years ago as an executive member of remote housing I pushed for at least partial use of our native materials such as three sided logs and lumber and 2 X 4 type material cut by mills in interior Alaska. I was a lone voice at the time and so all material and millions of dollars were spent on contractors in Seattle. The reasoning then was that lumber outside was cheaper; however over a three year period the costs have risen 40% and good timber still stands along the Tanana, Yukon, and Kuskokwim.

Today interior Alaska has absolutely no industry and its only resource is timber. If people are interested in trying to create something other than dependancy on governmental agencies for the people in the interior then there has to be a concerted effort made by all to request the Alaska State Housing Authority, AFN, and the governor's office to require the use of native materials.

Remember, there are no existing market and nothing forthcoming so it takes a building concept envisioned by this remote housing to make work available to a large group of people, and we will all lose if over \$10,000,000 is again sent to a group of contractors outside the state.

While housing is excellent it is not enough to keep a family alive. It is my sincere hope that through the participation of the native people in the decision making phase of construction that every effort will be made to search out all available resources in building and hopefully this project will become something more than building houses.