

State & Natives dispute Admiralty timber, land use

(Courtesy of ALASKA EMPIRE)

Anyone who still clings to hope that the Hammond administration wants to help settle the long fight over timber harvesting on Admiralty Island can forget them now.

A statement filed by Commissioner of Natural Resources Guy Martin outlining the state's position on a land selection dispute between three Southeast Alaska native corporations reads like the Sierra Club Bulletin.

The state's position is essentially that the Juneau and Sitka urban Native corporations created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act should not be permitted to select central Admiralty Island land because Native ownership and planned timber cutting would harm the area's delicate environment.

Forgetting for now the fundamental question of why the Hammond administration feels it has the right and reason to intervene in a selection dispute between the urban corporations of Juneau and Sitka and Angoon's Native village corporation—a dispute which the Interior Department is charged with settling—Martin's brief filed with Interior says plainly that the Hammond administration is opposed to Admiralty logging.

In each area under question, Martin's brief describes at length the wildlife and recreational values and decries the likely damage of logging operations planned by Native corporations. In each case the state urges that the federal government retain the areas for public ownership.

In one instance Martin's brief refers for further description to a similar brief filed by the Sierra Club.

And, if you haven't already guessed, the state urges the Interior Department to delay the land selection process until a complete environmental impact statement is prepared, despite the fact that such statements are not required by law for Native land selections.

Finally, Martin's brief refers to the urban Native corporations as if they were the Skunk Works or some other environmentally unsavory organization. Of the Tlingit Indians of Juneau and Sitka Martin says: "It is thus not Native corporate ownership of central Admiralty that concerns the state. Rather, it is ownership of this immensely valuable recreation and fishing area by corporations with no past or present commitment to the land other than for commercial purposes." No sir, let's not have those nasty Natives messing up our land. After all, everybody knows that Tlingit Indians never cared about the land.

Like we said, if anyone had any doubts about how the present state administration feel about development in Southeast Alaska, they shouldn't now.