



AFN PRESIDENT--Last Saturday, AFN President Donald R. Wright addressed the Republican convention in Fairbanks. Wright's eloquent speech had apparent clarifying effect on the capa-

city audience. Wright's address and that of Senator Ted Stevens cleared the air a great deal in regard to Alaska native land claims.

--LAEL MORGAN Photograph

Wright, Murkowski Address Confab

FAIRBANKS--The Alaska Natives land claim is a real estate transaction, not a welfare vehicle, Don Wright, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives told members of the Republican Central District Convention last week.

But how much of that real estate should belong to the state, wondered Frank Murkowski president of Alaska National Bank and former commissioner of Economic Development for the state.

It was not a debate, just an "information session" which, most participants agreed, helped clear the air on the land claims issue.

Murkowski's fear was that the

native claim would take so much land there would be little left for the government which still

has 77 million acres to select of a land dowry received at state-

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Wright, Murkowski . . .

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hood.

"With the approximate 265 million acres under 3,000 foot elevation less than 26 million already selected by the state, we have a remaining acreage within the state below 3,000 foot elevation of 239 million acres," he said.

However, he noted with alarm, that 151 million acres of this is set aside in perpetuity for federal agencies leaving only 88 million clear.

"Under the Alaska Federation of Natives proposal they would receive a preference selection over the state so when the Land Freeze was lifted and the state were free to go ahead with the balance of their selection of 77 million acres there would only be a remaining area of 28 million acres below the 3,000 foot elevation which is considered the habitable land within the state."

"We'll take Mt. McKinley if you don't want it," Wright assured him with a smile. "Permit us to bring 60 million acres into private ownership without stepping on anybody's toes."

The native leader maintained his people have a chance to penetrate federal reserves that the state can not. That half the 60 million acres they seek surrounding their villages lies in federally controlled areas such as the Rampart flood plain and game preserves.

Wright went thoroughly into the history of the claims, citing previous attempts at settlement by such men as Wickersham and the late Sen. Bob Bartlett and established legal precedent for settlement.

He also estimated that every dollar the natives spent turns over four times within the state and eight times outside.

It was Wright's first major address in this area. He flew from Washington, D. C. to make

the appearance and was well received by Murkowski as well as convention members.