

Aniak opposes BLM mineral proposal

by Esther Donhauser

Aniak Correspondent

The federal government is planning to open up as much as 3.5 million acres in the Kuskokwim region for mineral development and settlement in the next few years. Hearings were held in Aniak last week to gauge local feeling, and while few villagers showed up at the meeting, those who did expressed apprehension over the plan, and some misgivings that a greater effort was not made to find out how the people felt.

Herman Morgan objected to opening up the land at all. He argued that if U.S. Bureau of Land management officials had gone house to house they would have found most long-term residents against any openings.

Plans call for opening the Iditarod and George River area, for mineral leasing, mineral location, and sale or lease for settlement within that area.

Mineral leasing and Entry will not begin for 5 years. This decision will affect the villages of Upper and Lower Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, Crooked Creek, Red Devil, Sleetmute, Stony River, Anvik, Shageluk, Grayling and Holy Cross.

It will directly affect Aniak because some of the land being opened up on January 1st, 1985 is right across the river from Aniak.

The meeting, which was held on June 11th, was attended by only a few locals, although the primary purpose of BLM personal being out here was to explain what lands would open up, and to get local input.

The Proposed Actions that BLM will take are 1) Mineral Leasing- Land leasing for oil and gas exploration and drilling, 2) Mineral Entry- Land available for Mine Claims, hardrock and placer mines, 3) Settlement- land available for homesites, trade and manufacturing, and Headquarter Sites.

Under Mineral Leasing guidelines they should not open any lands that would affect subsistence usage.

Under Mineral Entry they would open all lands not presently open to mining except along the Oskawalik River. Under the Settlement BLM would open all lands under Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA).

BLM has committed themselves to opening land in the Block for Settlement purposes. Robert Conquergood, area manager of the BLM, said

"It's in the public interest," he stated. This can be done in two ways, either under the laws permitting homesites, or under the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA).

At this time BLM is supporting settlement under FLPMA. Under laws permitting homesites, anyone is allowed to come in and stake parcels of land, without screening from BLM or approval from nearby villages.

Under FLPMA anyone in the U.S. can apply for land, however BLM would hold a hearing on it, and if the applicant meets their approval and the approval of those concerned, they would get that land.

According to Conquergood, in this way, "We have better control in maintaining the kind of lifestyle folks want out here."

Kevin Meyers, Natural re-

source specialist stated that, "Less than 5 percent of this land is habitable." Local resident Ray Peterson responded by saying that they were doing a study on subsistence and the report was not completed yet.

He also stated that Pike Lake was used a lot for subsistence. "We try to be real sensitive to the people out here, to get land, applicants would have to do so in an approved manner.

We've done an assessment against the environmental and social impact. Areas with the most concentrated use will be eliminated from Mineral Leasing," Meyers said.

"We're you're managers, before we manage others. We're not above changing our decisions," he added.