

Land deal signed

The Secretary of Interior, Cecil D. Andrus and two Alaska Native Corporation, Cook Inlet Region, Inc., and Salmatof Native Associations, Inc., have signed an out-of-court settlement that when approved by Congress will enable Salmatof to receive land and other benefits under the Alaska Native Settlement Act.

The 1971 Settlement Act listed 205 villages including Salmatof as potentially eligible for benefits; however, Salmatof is one of several villages that encountered legal disputes regarding that eligibility. After eight years, an out-of-court settlement has been reached that will end the litigation for this village and resolve the long-standing uncertainty.

Secretary Andrus indicated his pleasure at signing the agreement. "I am pleased that this dispute is finally being resolved. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cook Inlet and Salmatof have successfully completed six months of difficult negotiations to reach this settlement. We look forward now to working with these Native Corporations to obtain the necessary Congressional approval, and I hope that this agreement will be a foundation for a better working relationship."

Roy Huhndorf, President, of Cook Inlet Region, Inc., which assisted in negotiating the Salmatof agreement, expressed appreciation for the cooperation of Secretary Andrus and Leo Krulitz, the Secretary's chief attorney, for encouraging a negotiated settlement. Huhndorf also saluted the people of Salmatof for their patience and endurance during this period of uncertainty. "Eight years is an eternity when people are

seeking to have their rights to land confirmed," he said. Mr. Huhndorf singled out Ralph A. (Andy) Johnson, President of Salmatof and past president of Cook Inlet for his leadership of the Salmatof Natives during the litigation and negotiations.

Mr. Johnson said, "In the last eight years there have been many times that I was discouraged. But this agreement makes up for much of those unhappy times. Now, finally, the people of Salmatof will receive their rights under the Settlement Act and can begin to plan for the future."

A major issue in the negotiations was the status of 57,400 acres of land selected by Salmatof that are presently within the Kenai National Moose Range south of Anchorage. If Salmatof had received title to those selections, any development would have been subject to restrictions imposed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the Range.

Under the agreement, however, Salmatof will relinquish most selections within the Moose Range particularly those of environmental significance, and in return will receive title to 16,535 acres of its Moose Range selections which are to be removed by Congress from the Range and FWS restrictions.

The Agreement also specifies easements that will assure public rights of access to the Kenai River.

Salmatof will also receive approximately 34,000 acres of land that are outside the Moose Range to be processed by the Department of Interior according to normal administrative procedures. The selections include some land on the Kenai Peninsula and on the west coast

of Cook Inlet, near Tuxedni Bay.

Forrest Gerard Assistant secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs and Juanita Alvarez, a Special Assistant for the Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks, agreed that the settlement is an affirmation that the federal government and natives can successfully work out their differences.

"This odyssey shows that negotiations, rather than court fights may be the quickest way to reach just solutions and and surmount slower administrative and judicial processes," said Assistant Secretary Gerard. "Now that we have an agreement, we should do everything possible to have the agreement legislatively approved by the U.S. Congress as soon as possible."

There are 127 members of Salmatof Native Association, making it one of the largest Native Village Corporations within the boundaries of Cook Inlet Region.

"This agreement," Mr. Huhndorf concluded, "continues Cook Inlet's policy of seeking accords with the United States which place productive lands in private hands, recognize environmental concerns and help realize for the Alaska Natives their just settlement under the Native Claims Act."