

## ***Editorial Comment—***

# **Natives' Knowledge of Their Lands Is Vital**

Alaskan Natives at long last seem to have put their feet in the door, so to speak, as far as their knowledge of their environments are concerned. They will be given a chance to have their input in the operation of at least one United States agency. We will comment further on this in the editorial.

Through the years in the past, it became downright discouraging when the powers that be refuse to recognize the Alaskan Natives' knowledge of their lands — who know their areas intimately through centuries of give and take in a country that is, and has been, severe, dangerous and inhospitable. This land has been a testing area where stout hearts and persevering souls had grappled endlessly from times immemorial to wrest ways of life best suited to enable the Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts to learn to live in harmony with their grudging environments. They have done this very well indeed and thereof lays the rich knowledge of what the land is all about.

This is an important fact that should be tapped to further understandings in plans for the future. Insights can be gained for great deal better approaches in efforts to perpetuate rich resources such as Alaska's unequalled animal heritage so all can benefit far into the future. There are land uses that need to be settled so we ourselves and those in the future can be secure in the use of our lands. This, we believe, can be attained to the best possible extent by consultations and inputs by our Native citizens. Technical knowledge alone from Washington or elsewhere cannot begin to solve everything. This is a common knowledge judging from past mistakes in approaches to problems emanating from, more or less, sub-tropical Washington.

Look at the efforts to solve the miserable housing situation in Alaska. Designs for dwellings have been assigned firms situated in southern states by people who have no knowledge how severe Alaskan climate can be. They invariably produce dwellings that would work well in the southern states.

When these houses arrive in the Arctic areas and put to use, they have always proved to be almost useless. This is money going straight down the drain. From here on, why not involve Alaskans, both White and Native, in the designs and constructions of dwellings because Alaskans know how to build them.

Along this line, although it does not concern housing, there is a promising idea at long last that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is beginning to move to utilize some Native individuals' knowledge of game situations within the state. With its considerable expertise FWS has gained through the years of its operation in the State of Alaska, this step should be a definite plus to wisely administer its vast responsibilities within its agency's assignments. It could not help but give that entity the nod of approval from the Native people. We hope that FWS will persevere forward and continue to tap the good knowledge of Native folks in the way of environmental matters. Setting a good example in this venture can be a vast step toward getting things done for the good of all Alaskans.

—H.R.