

Natives face loss in reapportionment

by Holly F. Reimer

Tundra Times reporter

Alaska Native populations have declined substantially since statehood just 32 years ago, and the Native community is now facing a possible loss of representation in the next reapportionment of voting districts.

Every 10 years the state of Alaska reapportions its districts to ensure that

each person gets an equal vote according to the current population, and if predictions of the latest 1990 census are accurate, Alaska's voting districts could be changed so that there are fewer districts with Alaska Native majorities.

Public hearings are being held throughout the state by the Alaska Reapportionment Board to gather in-

formation about how citizens will react if a district were to encompass a community or if it were to diminish portions of a district or community.

This process calls for the governor to appoint a five-member board to redraw Alaska House and Senate districts, according to the state and federal constitutions, but the statewide hearings are held before any lines are

drawn.

Mike Bradner, executive director of the reapportionment board, said it's the board's duty to first figure out what problems will arise before any lines are drawn on the map.

As an example, Bradner looked at the Southeast portion of the state. He said this is an area where the popula-

continued on page twenty-two

• Reapportionment to affect Natives

continued from page one

tion has been declining since statehood, especially in the past 10 years.

If there is enough of a decline in this particular area, either a district will have to gain a portion of population from another area or join partially or altogether with another area, he said.

According to the Alaska Constitution, each district in the state has to be "equal," which means each district has to be populated evenly, or at least in a 10 percent range from one another.

In the case of Southeast's population decline, Bradner said, public hearings are conducted to find out what the public wants and doesn't want in a voting district.

"We want to avoid major dislikes if possible. Most people want to see a plan, but don't want to have a plan," Bradner said.

Bradner said Alaska also has the smallest bicameral legislature in the nation. There are 20 members in the Senate and 40 in the House. Only two other states have a Senate and House of less than 30 and 60.

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He said this has never created a serious problem for Alaska, but Alaska's ethnic based districts have also fallen from about 12 at statehood to perhaps five after 1990.

"Only two states are below us. If we had 60 House members we could have more rural districts," he said.

Bradner said the reapportionment board will exhaust every opportunity before reducing ethnic districts.

The board doesn't have the power to create more seats in the House, but Bradner said the board can act as a vehicle to recommend expansion for consideration and bring this to the public's attention.

Meetings scheduled for this week include two on Wednesday. One is at 1:30 p.m. in the Nome City Council chambers, and the other is at 7:30

p.m. in the Kotzebue City Council chambers.

On Thursday, there is a meeting at the Barrow City Council chambers at 1:30 p.m.

Bradner said meetings are also scheduled to be held in Kodiak, Dillingham and Unalaska in mid-November.

Members of the board include Marlene Johnson of Hoonah, Lisa Parker of Anchorage, Chuck Robinson of Kenai, Gene Peltola of Bethel and Karen Parr of Fairbanks.