

*"I may not agree with a word you say but I will defend unto death your right to say it." - Voltaire*

**Editorial—**

# **What Could Happen If Freeze Is Lifted**

U.S. District Court Judge James A. Von Der Heydt's ruling that orders the Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall to lift the land freeze in Alaska was understandably jolting to the native leaders who saw it as a threat to lands around native settlements in Alaska.

If the ruling is binding, we see dangers to the native people's lands they traditionally used and occupied because the lifting of the land freeze would allow the state to select lands possibly before the land claims settlement is affected by Congress. In such an eventuality, the state would bear watching as to the procedures it would follow in selecting lands.

The native leaders had learned by experience that the state land selection program can threaten land areas where the native people traditionally used them for sustenance to support their villages. This was proven where the village of Minto near Fairbanks was concerned.

Back about 1962, oil companies filed for oil leases in the Minto and Nenana areas and soon thereafter, oil speculators got into action. The state also began to make plans to withdraw land. Some tracts of land were blocked out and some of these proved to be in the Minto land claim area. Some of these tracts were in the process of being tentatively approved for title by the Department of the Interior's Fairbanks District Bureau of Land Management. There had been little or no consultation with the people of Minto prior to the attempted land withdrawal in the area where the Minto people claimed land.

The Minto people had to make a new claim to lands they traditionally used for support of their village because two prior claims were either inaccurately drawn up and one was lost either in Juneau or Washington, D. C. Thus the land assertion by Minto people with which they asked hearings but which they never got. Subsequently, other land assertions followed. The state in fact, by its land withdrawal tactics, triggered the imposition of the land freeze by the Interior Department.

Judge Von Der Heydt's action leads us to believe that a high level conference be held with the participation of the Alaska Federation of Natives, the state, and the Interior Department. The conference should discuss guidelines to protect the lands traditionally used by the native people of Alaska. The meeting should certainly take place if the Judge's order will be binding to have Secretary Udall lift the freeze.

If it is to be, there should be a policy by the state to fully consult with the native people as to the areas of land the state wishes to withdraw. This is no idle wish. Perhaps a watchdog committee should be established. The protection of the lands that had been extremely vital to the native people from time immemorial is a profound need if fairness is to prevail.