

Arctic research a necessity for cultural survival

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The famous "Alaska Lands Bill" (Public Law 96-487) is a very lengthy and very complex piece of legislation. Among its many provisions is one entitled "Arctic Research Study," which the general Alaskan public is hardly aware of, but which could be of tremendous importance to the people of Alaska's north and west coasts, and especially to the residents of the North Slope.

This section stipulates that the Secretary of the Interior, together with the Secretaries of Defense and Energy, shall carry out an extensive study of "the mission, facilities and administration" of the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory (NARL) at Point Barrow. It contains over a dozen paragraphs, but in summary it calls for a study of how NARL operated, what it accomplished, and how it might be reorganized and operated in order to expedite resource development in the arctic.

As usual, of course, the legislation states that — or suggests that — development in the Arctic must "minimize the impact on the environment and the culture of the Native people."

It also suggests that Arctic research should play a part in developing a comprehensive Arctic policy for the federal government, and refers to such specific objectives as developing ways for dealing with oil spills and other hazards associated with resource development.

Finally, the bill invites comments from all parties concern-

ed, including state and local governments.

It is unfortunate that this section of the Lands Bill has received too little attention among the general Alaska public, for it could, if taken seriously by the administration, help to prevent or solve many of the serious problems which oil and gas development will bring to the Arctic and its people.

An extensive program of scientific research, on a highly intense scale, is absolutely necessary in order for technology to catch up with the massive industrialization which threatens to impact the Arctic and its seas.

Industry, the federal government, and to a lesser extent the state government, are moving massive mechanical forces into the Arctic without understanding the true nature of the Arctic's natural forces, or what effect those forces may have upon the entire northern hemisphere.

But our first worry, of course, is what effect industrial activity will have upon land and marine animals, birds and other game, and upon the people themselves. Part of the answer lies in science and technology, but only part.

In order to have real meaning, and accomplish a long-range good, the scientists and technicians must understand that when we talk about preserving "Native culture" we are talking about preserving people's ability to live productive lives. They must understand that "culture" means our economy, our spiritual values, our self esteem — and more. Those are the things we fear are threatened by oil development, not just our social habits, our

way of dressing or our traditional entertainments.

So the North Slope Borough is answering the government's invitation to respond to the Lands Bill and its references to Arctic research. Part of our response consists of recommendations submitted at our request by the Science Advisory Committee of the AEWG, a group comprised mostly of scientists from the University of Alaska.

This group is recommending that the government do much more than merely reactivate NARL. It suggests the formation of a full-fledged Arctic National Research Laboratory, well funded, to be managed by the National Science Foundation with strong guidance from a National Arctic Science Board.

The board's membership would be drawn from local, state and federal government, industry and the scientific community. It would operate under a "clear mandate from the federal and state governments" to coordinate and promote scientific research in the Arctic, exchange information with other interested nations, and distribute its findings in a manner which can be understood by the general public.

The second part of the Borough's response is an attempt to stress the importance of the human values which will be impacted by Arctic development. While the law makes reference to "Native culture", such references too often make the words sound like just another item on a list, along with ice, snow, water, tundra, wind and currents.

In our response we are em-

phasizing that the North Slope community is just as real and just as valuable as any other American community in New York or Nebraska or Texas. And we are emphasizing that we want to take part in the science research program and in the planning of resource development in our homeland.

The fact that we even need to mention it is an indication of just how urgently we need to work to make the Arctic research program a working reality.

Senator Frank Murkowski has just introduced a bill, co-sponsored by Senators Stevens and Jackson, to fund an Arctic research program which would be

guided by a Research Council consisting of the Secretaries of Interior, Energy and Commerce.

We believe the broader sponsorship suggested by our Science Advisory Committee would be more effective — with members drawn from state and local government and from the science community itself — but Senator Murkowski's bill is a strong move toward the kind of program we need.

The need for the program is urgent, and we of the North Slope Borough urge other Native organizations, groups and individuals to make their opinions known to our congressional delegation.