

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

Tundra Times



Owned, controlled and edited by Eskimo, Indian, Aleut Publishing Company, a corporation of Alaska natives. Published at Fairbanks, Alaska, weekly, on Wednesdays.

Address all mail to Box 1287, Fairbanks, Alaska, 99707. Telephone 452-2244.

Second class postage paid at Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

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Regular Mail (Including Alaska, Canada and other states)	1 Year \$10.00	6 Months \$ 5.50
Air Mail (Including Alaska, Canada and other states)	1 Year \$21.00	6 Months \$12.00

Member of the American Indian Press Association

MY GREAT LAND

(EDITOR'S NOTE: There are many views regarding the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). Some people are for it, others said it fell short of what Alaska Natives need. MY GREAT LAND is written by a young woman 18 years old. A strong feeling? Yes. But it does make interesting reading "Because she can't and won't accept the general opinion of the settlement act," as someone close to her expressed it.)

* * *

By SHARON GRAY

ALASKA! My Great Land! MINE! Mine? Perhaps that's something I should have thought of before, before the white man claimed her as his own. COME! I said, there is room for us all! How generous I was, how ignorant.

They came. The Russians, trappers, fishers, traders. They took what they wanted, did what they wanted, and then sold us. WHAT! we said, You can not sell our great land, We were here first! Quiet Native, we will settle this matter with you later.

Sewards Folly. HA! GOLD! Twas not folly after all. More came, many more. Come! I said, there is room for us all. Could I not see yet? All I could see was vast lands, mountains, hills, rivers, not yet tread upon. I was so blind.

Americans, they called themselves, and with them came their American way of life. Neat! Easy! I said, I must have this life of luxury. I will still be an Eskimo, but I will just make my life a little easier. And so I did. Poor deprived Eskimos they called us. They didn't understand, I was happy, I lived off my land, I lived in the beauty and peace of my great land. I was rich!

Poor deprived Eskimos, we must educate them in our way of life. They stole our children and sent them to lands we had never seen or heard of before . . . to educate them in the American way of life. Few returned. They had forgotten how to live the way they used to. Life was hard in the village and they were of little use. Still we managed to survive.

OIL! More came, roads, buildings, bridges, progress. STOP! We said, we must make our claim before it is too late! Look what is happening to our Great Land! We confronted our government with our case. Hmm, they said, you are right, we will settle this matter right away. Alaska must progress! It was too late. We were handed this piece of paper called "AN ACT." This ACT was the settlement. AN ACT drew lines all over our beautiful land, AN ACT incorporated our people in this bewildering white man's way of doing business, AN ACT infected our minds with dreams of money, AN ACT will be our death.

Is this true? How could this fair and just settlement granted us by our wonderful fair and just government be our death? How could they do this to us? It was so easy. Few of them have ever been in Alaska. None of them are capable of understanding how we feel about our land, how important it is to our way of living. They can not understand, and better yet they just don't care. Why should they? They wouldn't be benefitting in anyway if they had given us a fair and just settlement, fair and just under terms acceptable to us anyway. Sometimes I wonder if what their definition of "fair and just" is.

So what will happen to my people now that their culture must die in order for them to survive? Aboriginal rights to subsistence hunting and fishing are hereby extinguished in accordance to this ACT. In other words, my people who have lived off their land all their lives may no longer do so. They must conform to these white man corporations to make a living. I wonder who dreamed that this was a fair and just way of making a settlement with us by kicking our culture out the door and saying, "okay, we've given you what you wanted now don't bother us about aboriginal claims anymore." How are the Natives going to run their corporations efficiently enough to make a profit when they don't know anything about running a corporation, or even what a corporation is? I wonder?

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Letters from Here and There

Letter Explains Situation in Bristol Bay

Chogging Limited
P.O. Box 216
Dillingham, Alaska 99576
May 26, 1975

Mr. Howard Rock
Tundra Times
P.O. Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska 99707

ATTENTION: Jeff Richardson

Dear Mr. Rock:

This letter explains a situation in Bristol Bay that indicates the traditional phenomena of "speaks with forked tongue" is not dead. Specifically we are discussing the Snake Lake Hatchery site. But perhaps we are addressing a more wide reaching frame of mind. Essentially the State of Alaska has problems with the idea that Native lands are private property. The result is that a project designed to remedy the decline of Bristol Bay Salmon stocks could be lost in the shuffle of changing administrations and vague negotiations. We invite your attention to this matter. Possible a good airing of viewpoints would clear the air and promote a more forthright statement of positions.

First off, we introduce the players. Lake Nunavagluk (Snake Lake) is located about 17 air miles northwest of Dillingham. Once it and its many feeder streams produced a rich run of salmon. But the ravages of man and most spectacularly the Beluga whale have reduced this spawn to a trickle. The lake is drained by the Snake River which meanders haphazardly southward more than 20 miles before it empties into a point on the Nushagak River more properly described as Nushagak Bay. A review of the map shows why the Belugas have such a field day on the Snake Lake. Rather than entering the Bay in a myriad of braided streamlets the Snake Lake has a single deep channel. Thus the Salmon smolt have only one choice of entry into their future home and the gaping jaws of large packs of Beluga have rather easy pickings.

The result of this course is a decimated salmon spawn. Enter FRED, a division of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. FRED rehabilitates spawning systems such as Snake Lake when they are depleted to the point of no return. That is when there are not enough natural returners to keep the system alive. Snake Lakes fits FRED's criteria. FRED applies to BLM for a Public Works Lease and moves ahead with plans to develop a rearing station on the Lake. When asked for comment the village corporation responds favorably but points out that the lands are village selected and requests that they be a party to the negotiations in view of this fact.

At this point the action becomes fast and furious. The State pushes an eight mile road into the proposed site. This road work is accomplished without benefit of a R-O-W and thus is in trespass on public lands throughout its construction. Village feelings are saved by the promise of a fish rearing station and the suggestion that Native concurrence on the road is a trade off. By not protesting the village tacitly approves the road project even though the chosen route promises erosion, washouts, and impassable road much of the year.

At the same time the BLM decides that a public works lease applications is not the best vehicle for accomplishing the location of this FRED project. It seems that a public works lease requires a mini environmental impact statement called an environmental Analysis Record. After watching the State gouge their way across the countryside the BLM chooses to interim convey the site to the village and let the village handle the impact in its own way. In itself this sounds pretty reasonable. Even though the village is taking over late in the game at least now the future owner of the lands will be taking control. The BLM promise of Interim Conveyance fits the self-management of village lands idea pretty well. So the village receives a promise of I.C., the BLM interim management function fades, the State proceeds with their road project and FRED starts rearing fish. Meanwhile, FRED and the village discuss lease terms. Representing the village is the council and it's attorney. Bob Lebida and Vern Roberts act for Fish and Game. Most of the terms are hammered out quickly. The State is so eager to proceed and even though the village demands are complete no

serious difficulties emerge. One sticking point does appear. However it falls between the village and regional corporations over who gets what from the gravel sale proceeds. It matters not to the people from FRED but draft after draft travels around the horn while the complex provisions of revenue sharing are explored by the Native corporations. Finally an agreement is reached that directs gravel revenue to the regional corporations. Throughout this hassle FRED waited patiently reminding the Natives from time to time that time for action was dwindling. Now it was time to sign.

But wait. A new wrinkle appears. Early in the lease talks the village has offered to exchange the lands at Snake Lake for other State lands of equal acreage. The State rebuffed that offer on unspecified grounds. It just complicated things too much. But now serious legislative action churned towards a Wood-Tikchik State Park. Hearings in Dillingham indicated to Ted Smith and Resource Committee Chairman, Nels Anderson that the people who lived in the Wood River drainage were not comfortable with the Park concept. Smith, the leading park advocate, found out about Chogging's one time desire for a land exchange. Seeing a way to gather local support for the Park bill he urged the State to reconsider. The object, as viewed by Smith, would be to exchange such lands within the proposed Park boundaries that the village corporation would be in a position to benefit from park development planning. Such an exchange would at least partially commit the village to the park concept.

So the State reconsidered and reversed their position by offering to discuss the land exchange. Throughout it all FRED waited patiently as time ticked off. Since a lease agreeable to all parties had already been framed the exchange discussion merely prolonged the matter. The village was faced with a choice. Either sign the completed lease or explore the possibilities of a trade. We decided to attend a meeting with the State Division of Lands, Division of Parks, and the Department of Fish and Game to discuss the trade. The parties met at the Division of Lands office in Anchorage. A number of surprises presented themselves. First, the exchange would be for equal value lands rather than equal acreage. Second, the status of lands desired was in question due to a number of other filings that preceded those of the State. Third, the development potential of the available lands could not be ascertained until a summer field examination could be conducted. Fourth, the State views gravel differently than the regional corporation and an exchange would have to be on their terms because of statutory considerations. All of these difficulties made an exchange even more risky than the traditional bird in the hand, two in the bush. Added of course was the weight of village sentiment against the Park. At this point Dale Tubbs, Deputy Director of Lands for the State, suggested that the exchange talks be put off until some of these foggy areas were cleared up. Why not sign the lease said Tubbs and we'll work on an exchange when we have more information. Chogging agreed. Bristol Bay Native Corporation agreed too. The Division of Parks thought the proposal was reasonable as well. But not to Fish and Game.

Vern Roberts represented Fish and Game folks at this meeting. He apologized at the outset and stated that he had no power to negotiate. Then he said, "No land exchange, no Snake Lake project." Everyone gasped. What about the lease that we worked out? That was a differed administration. It is totally unacceptable now. A number of caucuses were held in order to remind Roberts about the bounds of good faith in bargaining. But his position was not subject to change. He suggested some changes in the lease that might make it acceptable. No promises. Then he reminded those in the meeting that the monies appropriated for the Snake Lake project would revert to the general fund if action wasn't taken by June 30.

Since the meeting the State has been tightlipped. Although the village returned the signed lease agreement there has been no action. While passing through town Carl Rosier, Director of the Commercial Fishery Division stated the new state demands. They wanted a 20 year rather than a 10 year lease. They wanted no 5 year appraisal clause. They wanted the price of gravel reduced. No comments were offered on the status of the original agreement. But the message was clear. Play ball or the dollars intended to

remedy the Bristol Bay fish disaster would be spent somewhere else. When asked to put their position in writing, the State refused. When asked about the good faith character of the original discussions, the State avoided comment. All in all the State seemed to be teaching the village corporation a lesson in power politics. On the federal-front the village fared almost as badly. Remember when BLM was going to interim convey the lands so the village could manage their own affairs? Well that was the story that the village believed while they were allowing the State to build the road and develop the fish rearing site. But now, nine months later, no I.C. has issued. The BLM gave up management control but never relinquished the lands. So no one was in charge. The results are development that avoided impact analysis and it seems a long road to nowhere. The village corporation doesn't have anything but a lot of costs from all the meetings and attorneys and the like. The village also seems to be blamed locally for not coming up with a deal because fish are really important here. So its a good hard lesson in land management. But what the hell does it prove?

For instance, the Department of Fish and Game wanted the gravel price lowered. Bristol Bay Native Corporation responded by topping 70 cents per yard from the price. Fish and Game wants the term of a lease doubled. But the village recognizes that the Department has a poor record of employing Natives in the State even though so many of them depend on a fish based lifestyle. Maybe after ten years the fish rearing station could come under Native non-profit corporation management as allowed by the State law. Even if not why was 10 years acceptable at one point for funding purposes and now it is not. Finally, the State does not like the 5 year reappraisal clause. The concept was borrowed from the State's own land lease format. So if it is not a good idea why don't they put a better one in writing. We think we are being handled in a capricious manner by these people. What do you think?

As it stands the whole thing will die in less than a month. Monies once aimed at rebuilding Bristol Bay and the Nushagak drainage salmon runs will be used for another purpose. We think both the BLM and the State have taken advantage of a village corporation that is brand new in the land management business. But there must be another side to the story. The names and phone numbers of the major participants are listed so you can track the story down.

Alaska Division of Lands - Dale Tubbs - 279-5577

Bureau of Land Management - Al Curt - 344-9861

Fish and Game - Vern Roberts - 465-4120

Alaska Division of Parks - Neil Johansson - 274-4676

We look forward to your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
William Tennyson
President

cc: Mr. William Johnson - BBNC Land Planner

Mr. Jack Moores - BBNC Engineering Geologist
Representative Nels Anderson
Representative of District No. 16

Letter of Appreciation

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
HEALTH SERVICES AND
MENTAL HEALTH
ADMINISTRATION

PHS Alaska Native Hospital
Bethel, Alaska 99559
May 30, 1975

PHS Hospital
Bethel Service Unit

Letter of Appreciation:

I would like to take this opportunity to commend you for the job well done during the busy months of school activities. Being your work supervisor, I have noted certain things worthy of mention.

You have presented a very pleasant attitude toward accepting instructions and carrying them out. Your pleasant personality and attitude displayed daily has been accepted most warmly by the patients and staff. Not just the desire to perform the job, but the

(Continued on Page 11)