

# Chugach Natives begin selections hearings

By DABNEY CANNELOS

Tundra Times Reporter

The results of a Chugach region study now under way could enable Chugach Natives Inc. to become the significant

owner of prime forest lands in the state of Alaska.

Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Chugach Natives Inc. was allotted the surface and subsurface rights to

336,000 acres to compensate for "land loss" based on the difference between the lands Chugach Natives would have received in relation to the state land area and lands its village corporations received according to population.

The original ANCSA prohibited Chugach Natives from selecting lands from within the Chugach National Forest which surrounds most of the villages. Therefore, the corporation selected all of the lands near Ice Worm Peak, Port Nellie Juan, Keystone Glacier, Nelson Bay, Bremner River, Controller Bay, Carbon Mountain, the Gulf of Alaska sections "A", "B", and "C," and Icy Bay. These lands were termed "deficiency lands." They totalled 2 million acres. A 1978 proposal to select Latouche Island, and Knight Island was rejected but lands on these islands are new under consideration for selection.

Chugach Natives immediately came into conflict with the federal government when the Department of Interior proposed Bremner River for inclusion in the proposed Wrangell-St. Elias National Monument. Icy Bay was included only after lengthy Supreme Court litigations with Sealaska. Lands on Latouche Islands were claimed by private land owners. Many other areas were contested by environmentalists as well.

On top of these problems, 70 percent of the "deficiency lands" were covered with permanent ice and snow.

In 1977, Chugach Natives proposed that it relinquish its claims to Bremner River in exchange for more favorable selections within the Chugach National Forest, on an acre per acre basis.

This caused further conflicts between the Department of Interior which manages the national parks and the Department of Agriculture which manages the national forests.

"To resolve these conflicts, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), passed on Dec. 2, 1980, directed federal officials (Secretary of the Interior, Secretary of Agriculture, the Alaska Land Use Council) in conjunction with the corporation and the state of Alaska to hold three public hearings on Chugach regional land use patterns, including one hearing in Anchorage," said corporation Chairman Edgar Blatchford recently. "The Participants were also directed to submit a report to President Reagan within one year of the bill's passage."

The first public hearing was held in the Chugach region last month.

The regional study committee plans to hold its Anchorage hearing at 7 p.m., May 7th in the Wendler Junior High School Cafeteria.

The public will be asked to present oral and written information on land ownership and use patterns within the region and will also be asked to identify lands which can be made available for conveyance to Chugach Natives Inc., to consider offering Chugach lands outside the region and to study the possibility of a cash settlement.

According to Blatchford, the

regional study report must be submitted to congress by President Reagan no later than Dec. 2. Conveyance of the corporation's lands should start shortly thereafter.

Blatchford is optimistic that Chugach Natives Inc. can, with the conveyance of its lands, become one of the most solid Native corporations in this state.

"The lands we have selected are rich in mineral content," Blatchford said.

Chugach Natives Inc. and the Chugach National Forest recently requested permission from the Bureau of Land Management to develop coal lands which have not yet been conveyed to the corporation.

CNI recently announced an agreement with a consortium of four major Korean companies to explore the Bering River coal beds in the Carbon Mountain area about 70 miles east of Cordova. The Korean group, called the Korean Alaskan Development Co. agreed to spend \$750,000 in a joint drilling study, including lab work and helicopter contracting. Preliminary work was expected to begin May 1 with actual drilling starting in June.

The firms expect to drill 20 holes in the 70,000-acre area.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is reviewing a permit application for the exploration and preparing an environmental analysis. BLM approval is needed before work can commence.