

RurAL CAP

Q-A Column

On Land Begins

RurAL CAP will commence this week the first in a series of questions and answers on land claims, developed by the Alaska Federation of Natives to further public knowledge of the land claims issue.

The entire series of questions and answers was developed originally as a syllabus for a number of seminars on land claims, which lack of funding unfortunately necessitated abandoning.

The series of questions will be continued in the Tundra Times page of the RurAL CAP next week probably at the rate of two or three questions at a time.

RurAL CAP Executive Director Byron Mallott and AFN Deputy Director Al Ketzler feel, however, that the questions and answers are in themselves worthy of publication, and that they will assist in a better understanding of the entire land rights issue.

Question 1. WHO OWNS ALASKA?

Answer: That depends on what you mean by "own." The Alaska Native people were here before everyone else so originally they must have owned Alaska. When the Russians began moving in after Vitus Bering had "discovered" Alaska in 1741, they took over and used a very small part of the land, but even they, officially at least, recognized prior Native use and occupancy.

When the United States bought Alaska from Russia in 1867, it too, officially recognized prior Native claims—although on the ground these weren't always protected.

According to the rules we've lived by in Alaska for thousands of years, which the United States has so far agreed to recognize, we've had the idea that we Natives, the Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians are the real owners.

Question 2. HOW MUCH OF THE LAND DO NATIVE ALASKANS NOW USE AND OCCUPY?

Answer: The Native people have laid claims to 340 million acres of land, asserting aboriginal title on the basis of their having used and occupied at least that amount of land in Alaska for thousands of years. A large part of that acreage is still being used by Native Alaskans in the same way their forefathers used it, although it would be difficult to statistically analyze that usage.

The natives are willing to accept a settlement of only 40 mil-

(Continued on page 6)

RurAL CAP . . .

(Continued from page 2)

lion acres of those lands, on condition of being compensated in cash and royalties for the balance. While this figure is considerably below what is now needed by 37,400 Natives living in rural areas, with the money they are asking for they hope to develop the smaller portion of land more intensely, and change their way of life sufficiently to manage successfully on smaller space.