

# Interior details land exchange with Natives

by Steve Pilkington

for the Tundra Times

Hundreds of thousands of acres of valuable habitat lands in Alaska have been offered by six Alaska Native groups in exchange for subsurface acreage in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The land trade would involve 891,000 acres of land within National Wildlife Refuges, owned by the Alaska Native corporations, in exchange for 166,000 acres of subsurface lands in ANWR.

The trade will be on a value-for-value basis, instead of the acre-for-acre exchanges, which in the past have sometimes resulted in unequal values in land trades, according to Department of Interior officials.

"We're not engaged in any sort of giveaway," Assistant Interior Secretary Bill Horn said in an Interior briefing last week.

The negotiations between the corporations and Interior, conducted mostly in private through the past two years, have been seen by many as an attempt to convince Congress to open ANWR to oil companies for drilling.

Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., a key congressman opposed to the trade, has said that the negotiations for the trade were "unauthorized."

Legally, Interior could have completed the exchange without consulting Congress, Horn said, but the department wanted "to get the type of im-

# • Horn: We're getting benefits

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portant public scrutiny that an issue of this magnitude deserves."

And according to Horn, the Native corporations approached Interior with the trade proposition in an effort to take part in the subsurface profits which may become available in some of ANWR's oil-rich lands if drilling is allowed.

"The corporations came to us in an exchange mode," he said.

When asked if completion of the exchange might pressure Congress into opening ANWR to oil companies for drilling, Horn said: "That's a possibility, dependent, of course, on what Congress does."

During the negotiations, the Native corporations identified those lands which they wanted in ANWR, Horn said.

"We went after high priority areas, pursuing what we see as a unique opportunity to increase the lands for the wildlife refuge system."

But even in light of the concerns of some congressional members, Horn feels that both sides of the exchange

will benefit if Congress approves of the trade.

"It's an opportunity to help with the resource front and also increase the holdings of the Fish and Wildlife Service," said Horn.

"We're getting immediate benefits, whereas some of theirs will be future benefits," he said.

The Native corporations involved in the negotiations and the amount each is offering for trade include:

- Koniag Inc., 112,000 acres.
- Doyon Ltd, 220,000.
- Gana-A'Yoo Ltd., 56,000 acres.
- Native Lands Group, a limited partnership consisting of a subsidiary of Cook Inlet Region Inc., The Aleut Corp. and several village corporations in the Cook Inlet and Calista regions. The Native Lands Group is offering, 298,000 acres.

- Akhiok-Kaguyak Inc., 115,000 acres.

- Old Harbor Native Corp., 90,000 acres.

These six entities represent 18 Native corporations involved in the lands trade agreement.

The value of the 891,000 acres has

been listed as \$538.7 million, and the average value is \$602 per acre.

During the past two months, the corporations and the department agreed on the value and acreage each corporation intends to convey to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

They also agreed on the environmental stipulations to protect the refuge resources, and that the department would allocate a limited number of tracts within the Coastal Plain of ANWR.

The number of Coastal Plain tracts involved is 503, which leaves about 85 percent of the remaining tracts available for competitive leasing.

The trade agreement, in light of the fact that Horn feels optimistic about its progress, will most likely be ready for congressional vote within a year, he said.

"Even if we worked full steam ahead, we wouldn't be ready until about January or February of 1988."

Currently, the department has slowed the progress of the trade in order for members of Congress to be able to visit some of the lands involved in the exchange.