

Hearings held on subsistence crisis



PLANNERS OF bilingual/multicultural conference in meeting at Anchorage School District—left to right—Lydia Hays, conference coordinator—Tsuguo Arai, consultant—Martha Jack, western regional resource center—and Edna Lamebull, director of Indian Education Program, Anchorage School District. Bilingual/Multicultural conference will be going on February 7-9 at the Anchorage Westward Hotel.

—PHOTO BY HAROLD SCHETZLE

Alaska National Interest Land bills

By LAURY ROBERTS
Juneau Correspondent

Native interests are treated favorably in some of the new Alaska National Interest Land bills, slated to come before Congress again this year; and points of difference should be readily resolved in the bargaining process.

The lands issue has dragged on for more than seven years since December 1971 when the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was approved by Congress to clear the way for the trans-Alaska pipeline. Section d(2) of the act mandated the Secretary of the Interior withdraw under four classifications public domain in Alaska to be confirmed by Congress by December of 1978.

The battle over the number of acres and manner of land classification in the withdrawals has been on a congressional hold since last October after a compromise version of the Senate and House bills failed to make it to the floor for a full vote.

Alaska lands bills were immediately introduced in both houses of Congress when it convened in January. And, it appears that Alaskan natives should get what they want, particularly through the Senate version.

The three main areas of concern are settlement act land conveyances and exchanges, state control of fish and game resources with subsistence the priority use, and technical amendments to ANCSA.

Of the 44 million acres to which natives are to receive title, only about 7 million acres have been conveyed so far. The new House bill which builds on the national monuments already withdrawn by Pres. Jimmy Carter, does not include a provision conveyance as did last year's version. However, according to John Katz, special counsel to Gov. Jay Hammond, some benefits of the former title are now spread elsewhere in the revised bill.

Those benefits include an extended tax moratorium on un-

developed native land which will run from the date of conveyance, rather than the date of enactment. Katz says the house bill doesn't include the conveyance mechanism because sponsor Rep. Mo Udall (D-Arizona), figures the transfer can be taken care of administratively, through the recent reorganized Bureau of Land Management. However, native corporations may want the legislative conveyance process included in any new land bills.

Steve Silver, legislative assistant to Sen. Ted Stevens, says the Senate version ignores the monument status of withdrawn lands and is based on the bill marked up by the senate energy committee last year. Silver says the Senate bill prioritizes and speeds up native land transfers and confirms areas that have to be selected, such as acreage adjacent to villages.

The Senate bill is preferable when it comes to authorizing land selections and exchanges, it lists specific site amendments, while the House version fails to consummate exchange rights.

However, language affecting the Goldbelt and Shee Atika land swaps in Southeast is included in HB 39.

A preference for subsistence resource users is codified in both bills. The House measure requires federal monitoring of fish and game management, whereby a state plan must be approved by the Secretary of Interior. This section is less restrictive than last year's version and appears to have the support of the Alaska Federation of Natives.

The Senate proposal does not unleash a federal watchdog, but provides for regional fish and game boards set up by state or federal government. Only under the Senate version could the courts intervene if subsistence users feel they are slighted.

About 20 ANCSA amendments agreed to among AFN, the federal-state land use planning commission, the state and the Interior department are covered in both measures. But HB 39 excludes amendments which authorize land convey-

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By LONE E. JANSON

"If Ahtna had realized that the subsistence lifestyle of its shareholders was vulnerable to the extent that the last four years has demonstrated, the Ahtna/Alyeska Omnibus Agreement would have explicitly covered subsistence or never been signed."

That statement was part of the testimony presented by Ahtna, Inc., the Native corporation for the Copper Center area during recent hearings into the subsistence crisis in that area.

Two hearings were held by Department of Interior representatives at places about forty miles apart, with a reportedly good turnout at both hearings. The inquiries came in response to repeated protests and several law suits against the Interior Department alleging that a subsistence crisis now exists on the upper Copper River due to the combined effects of pipeline construction and massive layoffs by Alyeska's contractor for maintenance of the pipeline.

The layoffs occurred in October, when Alyeska failed to award the maintenance contract to Meridian Contracting Corporation, a subsidiary of Ahtna. Meridian had the highest proportion of Native hire of any comparable contractor in the state, and with the award of the maintenance to an outside firm, 34 of 37 Ahtna Natives working on the line were laid off.

The timing of the loss of jobs, combined with the exceptionally poor year for Copper River fishing, the recent decline in hunting, and the chronic unemployment in the area, has brought on a subsistence crisis in the area.

Two lawsuits have been filed against the Interior Department to compel the department to draft regulations covering application for relief in such a crisis, and asking for assistance in the emergency.

One suit was filed by Ahtna, Inc., the other by the "Copper River Four," four elderly Copper River Natives arrested last summer for subsistence fishing during a closure they had not heard about. The Copper River at the time was closed to subsistence fishing, except on weekends, but was left open for sports fishing all week. All four of the men were over 65 years of age.

A large crowd attended the hearings, one of which was held at Glenrich, near the Tok Cut-off, and the other at the Ahtna Lodge. There was a strong feel-

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