

Chugach Natives should look for other land: study group

Chugach Natives Inc. has been urged to look in areas other than the Chugach National Forest and Prince William Sound or take a cash or compensation instead of the land granted them in the 1971 Native Claims Settlement Act.

Those informal recommendations came at a recent public hearing of the Chugach Region Study group which was formed to resolve the problem of dividing Native claims land.

The problem facing Chugach is that much of the land in the allotted area is taken up by the national forest and the state has claim to much of the rest.

According to Patrick Ander-

son, president of the Anchorage Native Caucus, most of the remaining land that could be claimed by Chugach is on mountain tops and glaciers.

The corporation has been joined in its fight to claim land by the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) and Sealaska Corp.

Speaking to study group members from CNI, the Department of Interior, the Department of Agriculture and the State of Alaska, AFN Chairman Nelson Angapak said "After 10 years, the Chugach Natives are still struggling for their land. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) promised the cor-

porations a land base. Sealaska, Cook Inlet, Koniag set the principles of the act by filing their land base suits. If Chugach citizens want a land base within their region, then we shall have to help them work for a land base."

Roger Lang, the Director of Shareholder Relations for Sealaska Corp. backed Angapak's testimony.

"Congress intended to have Natives own lands that were economically viable. You people seem to be afraid of that. I wouldn't be afraid to give Chugach all of the lands. If you want to keep the area pristine, do it. Pristine is what we left you. You

goofed it up," Lang declared.

"I represent a corporation which spent 4½ million dollars to see that a tree would not fall in the water. That's more than any forest industry has ever done," Lang stated.

The Native organizations' remarks did not come as a surprise to the study committee.

According to Section 1429 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Chugach Natives will receive 1/3 of their entitlement or up to 33,000 acres of lands selected from within the Chugach National Forest area if the study group cannot work out a

"fair and just" settlement for CNI.

In order to formulate a settlement, the study group must hold hearings within the Chugach region and Anchorage. It must then decide which lands within the region CNI can select, which lands outside the region might be available and whether or not to offer a cash settlement for the balance of lands unavailable.

One hundred eighty people attended a study group hearing in Cordova on May 5, 1981.

"The meeting lasted until 12:30 a.m." said David Dahl, a

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representative from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, who participated at the hearing. "Most of the non-Natives testified in favor of a cash settlement because they were afraid the lands would be restricted once they fell into Native hands."

Thirty-eight people attended a Seward hearing on May 6.

"In Seward, however, the non-Natives testified in favor of

CNI, Dahl reported. Seward is surrounded by State owned land selections and has no where to grow unless Chugach is allowed to select lands in the area."

At the Anchorage hearing, Robert Mintz, the Executive Director of Trustees for Alaska said "We really support a fair and just land settlement for Chugach Natives, but we also support maintaining, as far as possible, the integrity of the

Chugach National Forest. This can only be achieved by public ownership."

Mintz recommended that the study group look at land trades with the state, a cash settlement and resource development elsewhere.

Jack Hession, President of the Alaska Sierra Club, said "I am glad to see the state participating in this study because Chugach would not have a problem if the state had not decided

to select further lands in the region."

"The Sierra Club does not see any conservation units in Prince William Sound," Hession continued. "We would like to see legitimate areas for permanent designation. For instance, we think the Copper River should be designated a wild and scenic river."

Hession also recommended that the group look at Bureau of Land Management lands, state lands, cash settlement and oil and gas leases.

"Corporations aren't conservationists," said Dale Bondurant of the Isaac Walton League. "Corporations withdraw lands for development. To say people as a race are automatic conservationists denies the rest of us

the right to say it. We're conservationists as individuals."

"We gave up 12 million acres of our land for 339,000 acres but we haven't even received that. We have had to use our Alaska Native Fund money to fight for our lands instead of developing the corporation. I do not see how we can survive without a land base within our region" said one Native at the hearing.

The study group recommendations must be on President Reagan's desk by early December.

Written testimony for the study should be addressed to the Chugach Lands Study Group, USDA Forest Service, 2221 E. Northern Lights Blvd., Suite 230, Anchorage, AK 99504.