

OCS studies reviewed by AFN

The Department of Interior proposes a major, and perhaps definitive study of the Outer Continental Shelf which may well determine the uses and abuses of this resource in Alaska for many years to come.

Entitled, "The Prediction and Evaluation of the Effects of Alaska Outer Continental Shelf Petroleum Development Upon the Physical, Social and Economic Environments Within Alaska at the State, Regional and Community Levels. .," the study will be funded on a multiple phase basis with phase I commencing on or after July 19, 1976, and will focus on the Gulf of Alaska and the Beaufort Seas.

Mrs. Paula Rasmus, AFN Inc. representative, attended a pre-bid conference in San Francisco on July 10, and found that Interior had little interest in Alaska Native participation in the study. Spokesman for the BLM, Mr. J.A. Rourke, stated that the department had adequate information as well as an in-house staff of experts dealing with Native problems and OCS.

There was some surprise and not a little consternation when an Alaskan Native showed up at the conference which caused several major potential bidders to contact AFN for more information on Alaska Native intent with respect to the Interior study.

As a result of this interest and concern, a special meeting of potential bidders and other interested persons was held in the AFN conference room in Anchorage on June 21, 1976.

Attending the conference were representatives of Williams Brothers Engineering Company, presently engaged in a comprehensive resource study of the Navajo nation; Mr. Lee Gorsuch, executive director of the Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research of the University of Alaska; Coopers and Lybrand, Inc.; Alaska Resource Sciences Corporation; Alaska Consultants, Inc.; Stanford Research Institute and ESCA-Tech, Inc..

Of those attending, only ISEGR indicated an intent to bid the contract as a prime contractor. Mr. Gorsuch cited the highly complex demands of the study together with its inadequate funding (\$810,000) and stated that his organization would submit a bid primarily to assure Alaskan interests.

The economic and social impact of massive exploration of the Outer Continental Shelf upon the coastal regions of the state will be severe. A great deal of data is unknown but coastal towns and villages, not to mention the salmon breeding streams and lakes in the vicinity of such activity will be affected.

"This is so important," stated Gordon Jackson, executive vice president for Human Resources at AFN, "that we are taking this matter to our board." The AFN

board will be given a complete summary of the proposed Interior study with several recommendations for Native participation and oversight.

According to a BLM spokesman, the forthcoming study will be one of several, each designed to study one or more of the proposed off-shore leasing areas and the effect of petroleum development on their respective coastal areas.

Presumably, previous studies covering several of the same aspects of the present studies will be used as a basis for further investigation, but observers at the June 19th pre-bid conference noted more than a little duplication.

"None of the studies so far," noted AFN President Sam Kito, Jr., "have given sufficient attention to what happens to the coastal villages and their life-styles when the big oil rigs start pumping. If BLM has all of the data it needs on Native involvement in OCS studies we would sure like to see it," said Kito, noting that previous Environmental Impact

statements involving Native lands "were a little light" on sociological and anthropological impact with respect to affected Alaska Natives.

"We're not saying that Interior is trying to run on by us," said Kito, "but we intend to see to it that the Alaskan Natives affected by these studies get the attention they deserve in this and all future studies." It should be noted that over 70 per cent of the land to be impacted by OCS is Native land.