

Anchorage district forms special land conveyance team

A special team from the Anchorage district has been appointed by the Bureau of Land Management to process land selections of corporations within the Calista Native region.

Anchorage District Manager Richard Tindall said a 12-man team of realty specialists on the district staff will handle the task of legally adjudicating the village claims made under the terms of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement act, which provided 40 million acres of land to Alaska's Native peoples.

Normally, the adjudication of a land claim is performed at the state office level of the BLM organization, while any field work on the claim is handled by district level personnel.

The Anchorage district assumed the role of processing Calista's selections as its part in a special effort to speed up the transfer of land to the village corporations.

All of the team members have had training in land laws and several have worked as adjudicators. Several team members, such as Joe Labay, team leader, are on the staff of the McGrath Resource Area which includes all of the Calista region.

To tackle the task of processing the claims of Calista's 56 villages, team members will be assigned to work on one of five sub-groups, said Labay.

Team members will devote approximately 50% of their time during the coming year to the project and the remainder of their time to other lands work.

Adjudication is the process of reviewing the land applications for completeness and accuracy.

Under the Settlement Act village corporations must select certain parcels of land and may not select certain others.

An adjudicator will check the legal description and map in the application to see that all of the requirements of the Settlement Act have been met.

In addition, the adjudicator must also determine if there are any other claims to the land, assess their validity and prepare an opinion on the conflicting claims.

At present, all village corporations within the region have been visited by BLM district personnel for the purpose of reviewing easement recommendations made by the public and various state and federal agencies.

All but nine villages, Platinum, Mountain Village, Andreafsky, Pilot Station Quinghok, St. Marys, Pitka's Point, Eek and Goodnews Bay, have been reviewed by the Easement Task Force.

Five other villages, Meykoruk, Chefornak, Akiak, Upper Kalskag and Lime Village, have been partially adjudicated. They will soon receive a Notice of Proposed Easements.

This formal notice is published in the newspaper and sent to the agencies and individuals who made easement recommendations so that they may review them along with the village.

Comments on the easements should be submitted to the Joint Federal-State Land-Use Planning Commission, which also reviews the easements.

The Anchorage District team will be responsible for adjudicating the selections of the 51 villages which have been reviewed by the Easement Task Force.

Labay says the approach will be to group applications to form large, contiguous parcels of land and process them so that Notices of Proposed Easements can be prepared.

"Our primary goal is to prepare all of the notices by October 1," he says. "However, some of the more complicated selections or those with many conflicting claims may take longer to process."

During the 90-day comment period for the village, the public and the land-use planning commission, team members will resume work on other lands cases such as native allotment applications.

After the final legal work is completed the cases will be turned over to the BLM's Alaska State Office for issuance of a document called an "interim

conveyance."

This document gives the new owner full right and title to the land until it can be surveyed and a "patent" or title document is issued by the Secretary of the Interior.

Progress reports will be made throughout the coming months, said District Manager Tindall, so that Calista area residents can stay informed on the project.