

BLM Pores Over Maps Despite Clouding Issues

By JEFF RICHARDSON

Did you ever wonder what happened to your village land selection application?

Poring over maps and papers, ten men and women at the state headquarters of the Bureau of Land Management in Anchorage have the tedious job of checking and re-checking the applications for accuracy.

With the general questions of easements and navigable waters still clouding the land selection process, the state BLM office has taken the position that it must proceed as best it can with the information and policy it now has.

Robert Arndorfer, BLM's Chief of Technical Services, said doubts raised by the easement and water issue have not slowed the land conveyances down.

According to Sue Wolf of the Branch of Lands and Minerals Operations, the adjudicators are still waiting for the Solicitor's Office of the Department of Interior to issue a departmental easement policy. In the meantime, BLM continues to use its own easement criteria, which differs from that adopted by the Land Use Planning Commission. The policies of BLM and the Commission have come under fire from Native corporations.

State Director of the BLM, Curtis McVee said he did not think the easement criteria now being used by BLM would differ greatly from the departmental policy. He said Interim Conveyances already issued would have to be reconsidered in light of the new policy but that no easements would be added. Some

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might be dropped he said.

Although the issue of which streams, rivers and lakes in the state are navigable must be settled in federal court, BLM is considering land applications in light of its own navigable waters policy. This policy has frequently been at variance with the views of Natives and the State of Alaska.

McVee said the positions of the three parties have come closer on the navigable waters issue.

Several corporations have received Interim Conveyances on portions of their selection areas, including the corporations for Eklutna, Dillingham, and Kotzebue, the corporation for Natives residing in Kenai, and the NANA Regional Corporation. The village of Klukwan, electing to take the lands that once comprised their reservation list in lieu of a land and money settlement, have received patent to their full entitlement.

Wolf said if there were no objections to the easement

recommendations in the next month, Eklutna and Nenana would receive title to portions of their selection they had identified as priority. She said Unalaska might expect an Interim Conveyance on portions of its selection in 60 days.

Within four months, Wolf said the villages of Ouzinkie, Port Lions, Afognak, Port Graham, Seldovia, Copper Center and Tazlina might expect Interim Conveyances on portions of their selections if there are no objections to the easement recommendations.

A total of 21 village selections have been surveyed or will be surveyed this summer. Twelve are being handled by BLM personnel, the rest under contract agreements.

Arndorfer said the surveys did not necessarily indicate that the village was close to receiving title to its land. The surveys are based on the village applications and any supplemental information that is available.