

Interior bill to bolster fisheries projects

The fiscal year 1977 Interior appropriations bill was approved by a joint Senate-House conference committee Wednesday. Additions for these projects had been put in the bill in the Senate by U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens, a conferee on the bill.

Alaska would get \$200,000 for special fishery research projects, \$1.35 million for emergency medical services to Native health corporations, and \$737,000 for the Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission.

A late budget amendment of \$2.8 million for an environmental impact statement and studies related to development of Pet. 4 was also included in the bill.

The conference also agreed to add-ons put in by Stevens of \$8 million for the Bethel Hospital, \$335,000 for runway reconstruction at the Gustavus Airport, and \$805,000 for the first phase of construction of a new salmon hatchery near Metlatkila.

House conferees insisted upon deleting language Stevens had added to the bill on the Senate floor to allow the Forest Service to use funding in the bill to continue timber harvesting in national forests in Alaska according to traditional practices, pending passage of permanent legislation on forest management.

"This amendment would have allowed continued clearcutting, necessary for a viable Alaskan timber industry, despite the recent moratorium on this practice, until we could pass a bill to permit this and other traditional forestry management methods," Stevens said. "The House was adamant, however, that this is up to the legislative committees to decide and that it was not to be attached to an appropriations bill."

Other Alaskan projects approved by the conference committee which were in the budget include \$2.6 million for a consolidated Bureau of Land Management District Office Building in Fairbanks, \$350,000 for Fish and Wildlife research projects in the state, and \$4.435 million for mineral resource appraisals to be done by the U.S. Geological Survey.

In addition, \$440,000 was added nationwide for research on anadromous fish, of which some would go to the Forest Service in Juneau. Funding of \$18.5 million nationwide programs was appropriated for Indian self-determination contract for medical programs, and \$30 million is in the bill for the Youth Conservation Corps.

Language requested by Stevens for improved earthquake prediction was accepted by the conference also.

Alaska will also receive substantial appropriations from the bill for other Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service, USGS, BIA, IHS, and Forest Service activities in the state.

Stevens said this is the final version of the bill. The conference report now must be approved by the Senate and the House before the bill is sent to the White House.