

# Sci. Conference Discusses Land Use Planning

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"The map of Alaska as it exists now is a frightening jigsaw puzzle."

This comment was made at a symposium on land use planning at the 23rd Alaska Science Conference, Aug. 15-17, as participants discussed the role of the state's new Land Use Planning Commission.

Representing the new commission was Max Brewer, also head of the state's Environmental and Conservation Department.

Harry Carter, the commission's sole Native member, was invited to speak but was called to Washington, D.C. to present the commission's first recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior.

Other symposium members were Arlon Tussing, U.S. Senate Interior Commission; Tom Davis, Division of Planning and Research for the governor's office; and Art Davidson, Resource Planning for the state's department of economic opportunity.

The discussion ranged over the past history of land use planning in Alaska to projections and possibilities for the future.

"In the cycle of events in world history," said Brewer, "what we are seeing is un-

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# Land Use Planning...

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precedented. At no other time has attention been given to all spheres of influence as they relate to land use planning."

Alaska is the first state to have a planning commission for the total land masses within its borders. It is expected that other states will have similar commissions in the very near future.

Speaking on behalf of Carter, Brewer reminded those present that the commission came into being as a result of the Native Claims Settlement, and that settlement of that claim was and is the primary objective of the act, not the classification of lands in Alaska.

"The Commission is dealing principally with land disposal," said Tom Davis, "what agency or group shall become the proprietor of what lands. It has no police power and no authority over the private use of land, no management authority over public lands."

Since its formation, this criticism has been leveled at the Commission, that it has no "teeth" and can only act as a recommending body.

Davis outlined the past history of land use in Alaska. The status of lands in 1968, he said, was that of the least settled and most undeveloped in the United States.

"Four-fifths of the entire land in the state was unreserved, unclassified public domain, under the management of the Bureau of Land Management."

"There was no statutory framework for land use. Private, state, federal, or mining interests could withdraw lands on a first come, first serve basis. The state selections were subject to private homesteading and mining claims."

It boiled down, said Davis to a question of "who was really there first? What lands were owned by the Natives? No matter which lands were granted to the Natives, a free-for-all would ensue."

The withdrawals made by the Secretary of the Interior must be examined toward incorporation into one or more of the several systems, state, federal, Native, or private. He compared Alaska at the present time to Africa in the 19th century, when various imperial and industrial powers struggled to establish claims to that rich continent.

Davis predicted that the biggest area of conflict "may be over use for mining, whether lands will be open for mining use."

The 1872 Mining laws which still by and large prevail give virtually no control over the initiative of the miner.

William Roscoe, director of the state Division of Lands, said that the state's mining law has in it the potential for management, not fully exercised

in the past.

"Why do we really want mining?" asked one participant. "Look at Eastern Kentucky, Pennsylvania, West Virginia. Do we really want to create that kind of society? Do we want Alaska to become another Appalachia?"

Davis recommended that the "whole system be analyzed, the total state. To superimpose over the old system," he said, "could lock in to dead ideas. We must be open to innovative ideas, we must have a more responsible attitude toward the state's resources and growing population."

In the past Alaska was described as having crisis-planning.

"We had a crisis, we solved it. There was no anticipatory planning."

The new Land Use Planning Commission has the opportunity to consider the state as a whole, each affecting the other.

It is the process now of developing strategies, policies, objectives, and goals for the state.

"The strategy," said Davis "should be dynamic, open to change, but not be constantly changing objectives."

Brewer reinforced this concept of flexibility. "There is no use," he said "in maintaining mistakes in perpetuity."

Brewer asked that people begin to look at the land first "as the land, and only secondly as ownership, to look at the best use of the land, whether it is federal, state, or other land."

It would be possible for Native corporations to effect trade-offs with the state where this would be advantageous to both, in order to create larger blocs of land in the same area.

Art Davis stressed the need to develop lines of communication between the various interest groups.

"If you can communicate," he said, "you can get the decision-making on a higher level. The Land Use Planning Commission will be making decisions with long-range effects for years to come. I hate to see these decisions made with the polarization that now exists."

"Government," he added, "has a responsibility to disseminate information, so that people can make informed decisions. Not only in rural Alaska, but also in urban Alaska, people do not really know what the areas out there are like."

One the Land Use Planning Commission makes its recommendations, said one participant, "it becomes a political decision."

Another observer said he was reminded of two analogies: the albatross and Pandora's box.

"The land policies of the state are the albatross," he said, "and mining is Pandora's box."