

VILLAGES PLAN CHANGES

Nulato Move Planned; Government Criticized For Lack of Action

By JASON LYTLE

NULATO (Special)—Delegates from seven lower Yukon River villages met here with government officials this week.

In a two-day conference in Nulato's community hall, they laid the groundwork for what is hoped to be future close cooperation and communication between government agencies involved in developing Alaska's rural areas, and the rural people themselves.

A young, new Native leader in Alaska took government agencies to task for their lack of action in helping the poverty-stricken lower Yukon.

"There's just a lack of anything being done for these people, to help them help themselves," said John Sackett, 21-year-old University of Alaska student recently elected President of the Tanana Chief's Conference.

Sackett, from Huslia, was Chairman of the two-day conference and attended the meeting as a representative of the Fairbanks Native Association. The Chief's Conference had no funds available for transportation.

He termed the lower Yukon "a disheartening and saddening situation to development. There's just a lack of anything being done in this area by government agencies who are supposed to be helping these people. Here are people who want to help themselves, who want to move forward but who know nothing of the resources available to them. They know nothing of any procedures, any markets, products, whether a tourist industry would be feasible and how it could be developed."

"These things could have been available in something as simple as a report. But we cannot find any substantial, detailed studies of the lower Yukon area's economic development potential. It should have been done by the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the State. Thousands of dollars are appropriated every year to finance economic studies, but

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in one of the most economically depressed and poverty-stricken parts of the state, we find that nothing has been done."

Sackett, in Nulato, singled out the Bureau of Indian Affairs as one of several agencies who, "could have done better."

"Nulato has no economy. People live by fishing and going down to the canneries in the summer, and a little trapping in the winter. There's nothing else. People ask, 'Why do we have to help these people. Why can't they help themselves?'" Well, I'd like to see them help themselves. But they can't. They've got to have a boost to help them on the road."

The meeting, held last Monday and Tuesday, was called



- JOHN SACKETT -

by Nulato's Mayor, Andy Demoski.

Demoski had wanted to find ways to help the village move to a new site where annual spring flooding would not threaten the community.

Representatives from Koyukuk, Kaltag, Huslia, Galena, and Tanana came to meet with Nulato people and the officials to discuss Yukon economic development and to establish a boundary line between land-protest claims in the area.

A line was established separating a land claim filed by Huslia residents, on the Koyukuk River, and claims filed by villagers on the Yukon.

Another agreement, separating claims made by Tanana and villages on the upper and lower Yukon areas may be forthcoming, also.

Nulato's pending move comes because the present location, on low, marshy land, makes it vulnerable to spring high water and floods caused by ice jams on the Yukon River.

In 1962 devastating floods almost completely destroyed the village. Villagers could remember whole houses floating off down the river.

Health and sanitation problems—again possibly resulting from the present bad location—also make the move more desirable.

At present there are no wells for drinking water in Nulato. Water comes from the Yukon, in the summer, or from snow, during the winter. Residents there suspect that an epidemic of sickness, during which two local youngsters died, might have been caused by the community's water.

But moving the village to the new location, drilling wells and providing a decent sanitation system for the community would be expensive.

A new airfield is needed, replacing the present rough landing strip that is built on a slope. Commercial airlines are hesitant to use the present field at times. Also needed would be a road from the river three miles back to the new village site.

Although funds are available which could help the villagers, people there didn't know how to cope with governmental red tape in applying for the funds.

After the conference, officials and villagers alike were satisfied that they were on the right track in solving many of Nulato's, and the lower Yukon area's, problems.

"We're optimistic now toward the future. Things are going to start happening down here," one official said.

Flore Lekanof, Co-ordinator for the Office of Economic Opportunity in Fairbanks, distributed applications for OEO funds and explained to local people how help could be obtained through the federal government's poverty program, and what the villagers themselves must do to earn it.

"We can't make any promises that they'll get the money they apply for," Lekanof said, "There's only so much money that has to go around. But they can apply for it. At least it's a ray of hope for them."

Lekanof pointed out that whether OEO funds are obtained to help in the move, the new 12-month rural Project Headstart program expected to be funded soon will provide a vital boost to Nulato's economy.

Headstart, which will prepare pre-school youngsters for the first grade, will provide a \$25,000 income to the village for the first term.

Represented at the meeting were five government agencies, the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Housing Authority, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and the University of Alaska's department of economics.