

Reader unhappy with decision

Dear Governor Sheffield:

When all is said and done, what recourse is available to the residents of Tuluksak?

I am referring to your administration's recent decision to allow Northland Gold Dredging a permit to divert and re-bed the Tuluksak River and Granite Creek, both Kuskokwim River tributaries in western Alaska, as reported in the Saturday, May 12 edition of the "Anchorage Daily News," and elsewhere.

In a sometimes-heated phone conversation that day with Mr. John Shively, your chief-of-staff, he informed me that there were perhaps two recourses available to the Tuluksak villagers: 1) A court challenge 2) or going to the legislature for further protection.

According to him, the issue is not mining, but the effects of mining. While I am not one to argue that no mining should take place in the state of Alaska, I would argue now that your administration's views on this issue are way off-base.

By "your administration" I am referring to your staff, the commissioners in question (who, according to Mr. Shively's best guess, have not even visited Tuluksak in reference to this issue), and ultimately, yourself.

Mr Shively spoke of "significant environmental damage" and of the fact that Northland Gold "can do what they say they're going to do" as long as they don't create the former. Hasn't this already happened, though? Apparently, the following facts, as reported in the "News," do not add-up to the state's definition:

A) The Tuluksak River is used for drinking water, a fact few of us who have not had water-carried sicknesses, nor drank contaminated water, can appreciate. Northland Gold's dredging activities muddied the water, and proposed safeguards were not carried-out.

B) The Tuluksak River, and the down-river Kusko for hundreds of other villagers, is used as a direct means of livelihood; even more significant, for subsistence,

an endeavor few of us who are holed-up all day in offices and boxes can master, let alone hope to emulate if our survival depended on it.

C) The effects of mining, or making use of a non-renewable resource, pose a significant threat and have already done damage to the fisheries, a renewable resource.

To say that the environmental damage that will be done to the Tuluksak River area and the people who depend on it is "controllable" is arguing the ridiculous. It is like arguing that tuberculosis is controllable. It is, and you can even choose between a modern-day prevention or cure. But I know a man who had t. b.: Although it was eventually "controlled," he was permanently crippled by it.

Your own experts at the Department of Fish and Game, acting as a monitoring and enforcement agency, and just doing their jobs, were over-ruled in denying the Northland permit by office experts at the Office of Management and Budget.

That is like having the head of window washers take-over the personnel manager's job, and vice-versa. There is no logic.

Mr. Shively spoke of a five-year mining plan. If this travesty is allowed to continue, because no one did the right thing, is reclamation of Northland's operations extensively and minutely addressed?

Judging from their track record of the last couple of seasons, they will need it. He also spoke of the state's exercising its option to monitor the mining operation in the future. Why was this not done in the past? If this is the way the State of Alaska administers its duties, what is it doing trying to regain management of federally-managed marine mammals?

One legal and moral argument (if morals have any role in government) that could be made in regards to Northland Gold

is whether or not it has been acting on good faith.

By breaking critical promises made to villagers and by not acknowledging its operations as a source of pollution (muddied water, and all that this reflects), Northland has demonstrated that it is not acting in good faith. This business had to get the state involved in policing its questionable activities in order to continue them.

The very fact that the state found itself negotiating with Northland Gold (and by the way, who paid the consultants' bills?) indicates that significant environmental damage is a concern, albeit a late one.

The concern was not translated into action that was appropriate to the situation. The state's attitude seems to be: Who cares about the past and the people of Tuluksak? And for that matter, who cares about the loss of 2,650 feet from the Tuluksak River and Granite Creek? Just the fish that spawned there?

Northland Gold hopes to appease its detractors and perhaps itself by offering to clean-up after themselves in the past few years?

I realize that the state administration is a proponent of expanded mining opportunities. I did not realize that the State of Alaska will allow a proven polluter, Northland Gold, to walk all over peoples' rights to the basic necessities of life, and then re-affirm the perpetrator's "right" to do it by granting them their permit.

Now is the time, Governor Sheffield, to reconsider and assume the role of a public citizen, rather than appearing to act as a private citizen, in a public position of power, looking-out for the interests of another private citizen, the owner of Northland Gold Dredging.

The courts and legislature are poor substitutes for remedying what should never have taken place. Is time on your side?

Sincerely,
Martha Upicksoun

Hess named acting editor

Bill Hess, reporter and photographer, has been named acting editor of the Tundra Times, replacing Linda Lord-Jenkins, who left her post to establish her own business.

Hess has served with the

Tundra Times since 1981 and is a familiar face to many of the Times' readers, having traveled extensively in rural Alaska covering many Native events.

The announcement of Hess' appointment as editor was made

by Sylvia Carlsson, President, on May 31.

"The Times is very fortunate to have someone of Bill's capability as a journalist and a photographer to fill the post," Carlsson said.