

Canadian Native Leader Wah-Shee Claims Victory

Native land claims and oil development are as inextricably linked in Canada as in Alaska.

MP Wally Firth, first native leader elected to the Parliament, is finding his office swamped by correspondence from constituents on land claims and oil development.

Firth announced that a recent survey showed people of the Northwest Territories to be undecided between a railway for shipment of oil from the Arctic

or a pipeline.

However, they agreed that aboriginal land claims must be settled before oil development can proceed.

Meanwhile James Wah-Shee, president of the Indian Brotherhood of the N.W.T. announced what he feels is a major victory for Canadian Indians in their fight for 400,000 square miles

of western Arctic land.

The Canadian government is claiming that the land is crown land and that no aboriginal rights exist. However, the Indian Brotherhood filed a caveat and obtained a land freeze preventing development.

In the court fight beginning May 15, government lawyers at-

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Wah-Shee . . .

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tempted to have the case thrown out of Northwest Territories Supreme Court, but Justice William Morrow ruled that he would retain legal control of the case.

Morrow also continued the land freeze instituted in April through July.

"I have heard argument based on references to aboriginal rights, crown title, Hudson's Bay land, the manner of the handling of patents and land grants, transfers involving the two governments — none of which is before me in concrete form as evidence," he added.

In the latest developments of the case, the news is that caveat hearings may sit in Mac Kenzie settlements in order to allow Justice Morrow to hear testimony from elderly Indian people who were present at treaty signings.

The hearings will not resume until July 9, and petroleum interests are protesting that the delay and the land freeze are obstructing oil activities and applications for pipeline construction.