

Unsettled Land Claims Trouble Alaskans

Alaska's Attorney General Warren C. Colver brought to the attention of those attending the two-day meeting of the Public Land Law Review Commission this week in Washington the many unique problems arising out of antiquated land laws.

Colver, representing Governor Egan, participated in the first public meeting of the Commission and its advisory committee as they began what has been described as the "almost incredibly complicated job of trying to sort out and recommend revisions in the 5,000 laws covering a third of the nation's land area."

In his prepared statement, Mr. Colver pointed out that Alaskans are troubled by unsettled native land claims, unmanaged land withdrawals, and inadequate resource development laws affecting both mining and oil and gas.

He stated that land withdrawn from alienation in Alaska under the public land laws now totals about 65 million acres, including national forests, parks, monuments, military reservations, wildlife refuges, petroleum reserves and others.

"There is no adequate system for review of these withdrawals by the Bureau of Land Management to determine that the lands still serve the purposes for which they were withdrawn and no effective way of forcing their restoration," he declared.

He said that the Petroleum Reserve No. 4 "is a ludicrous example of unmanaged land withdrawal." In pointing out that the Navy ceased its investigations in the reserve 13 years ago, Mr. Colver stated, "The reserve has no conceivable military value and will not have until commercial oil deposits are found and put into production, a job that private oil companies are willing to do."

Colver also suggested that a uniform mineral leasing law which provides essentially the same terms for the leasing of oil and gas in Colorado and on the shores of the Arctic Ocean may not be realistic and may not be in the public interest.