

People voice views in Juneau

By LAURY ROBERTS

Endorsement of a legislative package providing \$15 million for programs related to alcoholism ... opposition to the Susitna hydroelectric project ... and support for raising the drinking age from 19 to 21.

Those positions were articulated last week by about 150 rural residents who came to Juneau for the annual Citizens Participation Conference (CPC). The gathering was sponsored by the Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurALCAP) for the seventh

consecutive year, although it was initiated prior to that by the State Department of Community and Regional Affairs.

"Our purpose here is to impress our activities on the le-

gisature," says Phil Smith, executive director of RurALCAP. "Maybe the issues could be handled by a lobbyist, but this conference brings the home dis-

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tract to the legislature." It's also a teaching process which empowers citizens to deal with system."

Energy Critical

Participants divided into several groups and brainstormed rural Alaska's political positions for five days. The main quartet of workshops centered on alcoholism, energy, child development, and local government. Smaller groups tackled issues of subsistence, telecommunications, criminal justice, and taxation.

Energy was easily at the forefront of rural concerns this year, compared to last year's focus on subsistence. "Energy in many ways is the most critical this year," says Gordon Jackson, who chairs RuALCAP's board of directors. "I think that is because the issues of subsistence have been tied down and prioritized, while the energy question is still be complex."

The CPC energy workshop considered more than 60 pieces of pending legislation. "Their diligent work and recommendations ... are testimony to the growing spirit of rural people to attain self-sufficiency," stated the cover sheet on the group's long list of positions.

The panel opposed Senate bills promoting the \$2 million Sustina hydroelectric project which would be built in south-central Alaska. It also gave a "do not pass" to a House of Representatives measure which would establish an emergency fuel allocation program.

Listed as high priorities were geophysical exploration on Unalakleet and Unalakleet, an energy

conservation program, power production cost assistance, developing alternative energy systems, establishing a state energy center, creating a bulk fuel program, and putting money into the power project revolving loan fund.

Alcohol Control

Alcoholism received renewed interest this year, thanks to a package of bills being pushed by chair of the House Finance committee, Russ Meekins, (D-Anchorage). The \$15 million program would concentrate not only on treating alcoholics, but on preventing the abuse of alcohol in the first place.

The workshop recommended increasing the drinking age to 21, local option on liquor sales, allowing unincorporated villages to prohibit the sale of alcohol, heavier penalties for bootlegging, and insurance coverage for treatment of alcoholism and drug abuse.

The group opposed decriminalizing public drunkenness, the sale of beer and wine in grocery stores, and the admission of breathalyzer test results as evidence.

Participants concerned with child development requested increased funding for the Head Start nutritional program for pre-school children. However no recommendation was made on a measure to alter the state's foundation formula for school funding. One portion of that bill would provide state support for pre-school and post-secondary education as well as grades kindergarten through high school.

The group stated its major concern is "that this bill would dump dollars and responsibilities for pre-school education on school districts and rural education attendance areas without planning, preparation, or any assurance of technical assistance."

Subsistence

On the issue of subsistence, the conference supported a measure allowing late filing of persons seeking a limited entry permit. The group also endorsed continued state support to regional aquaculture associations, as well as increased financial assistance for local fish and game advisory committees.

"The subsistence bill of 1978 has begun to work," notes Smith in reference to why subsistence was not the burning issue this year it was in 1979. "The December meeting of the boards of fisheries and game saw several



KLUKWAN TLINGIT TONY STRONG TALKS TO ELDERLY COUPLE.

(LAURY ROBERTS Photos)

measures passed related to subsistence and D-2 is on the back burner."

The dispute between RuALCAP and its former Southeast branch, SEACAP, surfaced again during the week. SEACAP is seeking separate recognition from the federal government as a community action program. That status would enable the agency, which was defunded by RuALCAP in January, to apply for federal dollars. SEACAP recently received state funds for a weatherization program in the region.

However, Smith says it's unlikely the agency will be granted

community action status because of government restrictions on the number of such entities serving a particular area and limits on available federal dollars. And, he criticized the lack of sophistication in SEACAP's approach to serving as an "advocate for poor folks."

Participants in the \$60,000 conference represented Cook Inlet Native Association, Bristol Bay Native Association, Alaska Federation of Natives, Mauneluk, Nunam Kitlutsiti, Tanana Chiefs, Copper River Native Association, Kawerak, Kodiak Native Association, and Koyukon Development Corporation.