

TANACROSS PROTESTING

Charges State Attempting Sale of Ancestral Lands At New York World's Fair

By TOM SNAPP
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Indians of the Tanacross area say the state is trying to auction off their ancestral lands at the New York World's Fair.

And they indicate they will vigorously protest.

They say the state is trying to peddle their land at George Lake, 125 miles from Fairbanks and 60 miles from Tok, as "wilderness estates" to wealthy patrons of the fair.

The only access to the lakeside "estates," located off the Alaska Highway, would be by air.

In an emergency meeting Thursday night, Tanacross Chief Walter Isaac and leaders of the area urged assistance from a Bureau of Indian Affairs realty officer, O. L. Williamson, in blocking the state's contemplated action.

No Hearing, No Reply

The Tanacross people say in 1950 they filed a blanket ancestral land claim with the Bureau of Indian Affairs which included the lake. They say they petitioned for a hearing on the claim but to date have not been granted a hearing, that in fact to date they have not been granted the courtesy of a simple reply.

The state has selected and has recently been given tentative approval of the land around the lake.

New York Promotion

Roscoe Bell, head of the state division of lands, verified to Tundra Times his division was making plans for promoting the sale of the lands at the fair in New York.

Bell said the resignation of a state land officer, Richard Mueller, about ten days ago, was only "indirectly connected" with the George Lake controversy. Reportedly, Mueller had been on the side of the Indians.

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SCENIC GEORGE LAKE—Tracts have been surveyed and laid out around this beautiful interior Alaska lake and the State Land Division proposes to put them up for sale as wilderness estates at the New York World's Fair. The Natives of the area are presently formulating a protest, claiming the land around Lake George belongs to them by ancestral inheritance.

Protest State Land Sale at World's Fair

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Land Officer Resigns

"Dick's resignation was based on a general agreement so far as we are concerned that his services were no longer required by us. This, of course, is a personnel management matter and I am not free to go into it in detail," Bell said.

BIA Realty Officer Williamson told Tundra Times the description of the land claimed by the Tanacross people was ambiguously and inadequately described in their petition of 1950 but that their assertion area marked on an accompanying map clearly showed George Lake was claimed.

The map was drawn up by the people themselves; the description was drawn up by a BIA employee.

Error Repeated

In a protest of state selection filed in 1962 the previously drafted description of the claim was copied verbatim.

"It appears that the original claim was erroneously described and the error was repeated in the protest against state selection," Williamson said.

Williamson is now redrafting the

protest for the Tanacross people for their refileing with the BLM.

State Lands Chief Bell said he was "surprised" that there was a question of ownership of the George Lake area.

No Cloudy Title

"We checked with the BIA and PLM in Fairbanks and were told there was no cloud on the title of the land," he said.

Murrey Campbell, head of the Fairbanks BIA office, and Realty Officer Williamson, said no one from the state had checked with them.

Upon inquiry, Bell said the check was made by Joe Lawlor, of the Fairbanks State Land office.

Lawlor said he checked with a Mr. Koslosky, Jens Forshaug or Kenneth Cohen. He couldn't remember which one.

Koslosky has since been transferred to the lower states. Cohen has been retired.

Prior to the arrival of Williamson here, records of native land claims were not located in the local BIA office but in the Juneau headquarters.

Anxious and Dedicated

"Certainly there are administrative errors and adjustments are needed in cases of prior claims against title of land. We are anxious and dedicated to making adjustments in case anyone would be deprived of land because of error," Bell said.

"We will await word from the BLM. If the BLM informs us there is a cloud on the title of the land, then we will suspend all action on the proposed sale."

The new protest sets out the area claimed—from Healy Lake down to Little Grestle and north bank of the Tanana, all the way to the Tetlin reservation, back to Mt. Fairplay almost to Chicken. All natives in the Healy - Dot Lake - Tanacross area will be asked to sign the petition, according to Isaac.

Unfiled Claims

A large number of native villages in Alaska, besides Tanacross, have over the years filed blanket claims with the BIA. These claims, however, have not been filed with the BLM, the clearing house for land records for the public as well as state and federal agencies.