

Chugach Natives receive \$9 million

Keith Gordaoff walked out of a Washington D.C. office last week with a check for \$9 million in his hand and the signature of Interior Secretary James Watt on a document transferring 272,000 acres of land to Chugach Natives Inc. in his pocket.

Gordaoff, acting chairman of the Chugach Natives Inc., Regional Native Corporation, had just accepted part of an agreement between CNI and the federal government for the transfer of land to CNI under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

While the ceremony was

brief, it was called historic by U.S. Rep. Don Young who attended it and it represented 12 years of a struggle by CNI to get the 378,000 acres of land promised it under terms of ANCSA.

Chugach was entitled to receive lands which were inhabited traditionally by Chugach people. Much of that land is in the Prince William Sound area, however, and that land is a popular recreational area for the state and is a favorite site for environmentalists.

Those environmental groups frequently spoke against transfer of land in the Sound to

CNI on the grounds that selections of such land would lead to mineral or timber development of the land and would detract from its wilderness status.

At one point Chugach was offered the proper amount of acreage for selections but rejected that offer on the grounds that it constituted nothing more than "glaciers and mountaintops."

A Chugach Lands Study Commission was formed in 1980 with representatives from Chugach, the state and fed-

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Settlement ends 12 years of battles for CNI, feds, state

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eral governments to study the matter but, after more than a year of deliberations and a final report totalling three hefty volumes, it was able to make no recommendation.

That study group reported

to President Ronald Reagan in December of 1981 and a final agreement was reached several months later.

That agreement called for Chugach to receive \$12 million cash and to receive 378,000 acres of land rich in

timber, coal, and other minerals including a recently discovered deposit of manganese.

Chugach also agreed to give up 91,000 acres of selections in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Chugach is negotiating with

Korean companies to develop some of the coal resources on CNI land and probably will follow suit with the manganese deposit outcropping which was recently discovered on Chenega Island.

Gordaoff accepted the settle-

ment of cash and land at the ceremony in place of Edgar Blatchford, CNI chairman, who has taken a leave of absence to pursue a master's degree in business.

Blatchford already has a law degree.