

# USFS Fair and Just?

One of the main and most troublesome issues that has arisen in the fight of the Chugach Natives Inc. to obtain land promised CNI by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act is a study commissioned last summer by the federal government.

That study, commissioned and paid for by the U.S. Forest Service, took on great importance both for the people in favor of CNI's land selections and those opposing those selections.

The study was conducted by the University of Alaska Institute for Social and Economic Research and attempted to place a value on the land selections which CNI and the federal government had made.

But, as with most studies, this piece of work met with much criticism from the expected source — CNI. Those consultants criticized the method in which the study was conducted and the amount of value placed on timber lands selected by CNI.

Under the ISER study, a value was placed on the timber lands which was assessed at an amount that the lands would hold if timber were harvested within five years. CNI contends this is an unreasonably high amount because no one in his right mind would harvest hundreds of thousands of acres within five years. Prudent forestry dictates that the timber be cut in small amounts with 80 years between cuts.

Thus is the dispute. This writer is not equipped to assess the differing economic views of value-placing.

But a discussion which took place between CNI and the U.S. Forest Service representative last week shed some light on the Forest Service's intentions.

CNI asked that the Forest Service distribute CNI's opinion of the ISER study with every copy of the study that is distributed. The Forest Service representative said no. Nor would the Forest Service make a record of anyone who asked for the copy unless that request was in writing. Nor would the Forest Service attach a disclaimer to the report stating that it was not a part of the final Chugach Land Study Group report. Nor would it attach a statement that the report had been disputed by other experts.

In essence, the Forest Service has paid for a study with public money and yet is refusing to let the public know that there are other views about that publicly funded report.

We recognize that individuals within federal government may have strong beliefs about the forest which they were empowered to manage.

We also recognize that there are many persons working in the Forest Service who feel that if they don't protect the land, no one else will.

But they should remember that the Congress of the United States has set aside federal land from which CNI can make selections. And they should remember that they are working for Congress and CNI as well as others. And that Congressional action mandated that the Natives of Alaska receive the land, some of the land which was taken from them.

The Forest Service should also remember that it should be fair. And it should realize that refusing to keep a list of names to whom the study is given is not fair.

And that refusal is not just. And that is what the government should be more than anything — just.