

Money matters

The gap between projected state income and the state budget is expected to be about \$500 million this year, and a state commission is trying to figure out what to do about it.

The Long Range Financial Planning Commission is considering recommending tax increases as one way to deal with the budget

gap. Other possibilities include using earnings from the state's Permanent Fund, or capping the amount of Permanent Fund dividends paid to residents annually. According to press reports, commission members agree that:

- another 10-15 percent should be cut from state pro-

grams over the next five years;

- taxes on alcohol and cigarettes should be sharply increased to raise

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up to \$250 million per year;

- Permanent Fund earnings should be used to help finance state government, and dividends should be reduced or capped;

- motor fuel taxes should be increased to pay for road maintenance;

- an endowment system or other device should be created to help reduce the impact of widely fluctuating oil prices, which tend to complicate the budget process;

- re-institute income taxes only as budget reserves near depletion.

The commission's final report is due in October, with additional public meetings scheduled for September.

New land rush

For the first time since 1991, the state of Alaska is offering land to the public. the Dept. of Natural Resources will offer 384 subdivi-

sion parcels and 34 agricultural parcels by sealed-bid auction, and 55 homestead parcels by lottery. Parcels are being offered near Fairbanks, Manley Hot Springs, Central, Healy, Nenana, Lake Chandalar, Delta Junction, Tok, Wasilla, Talkeetna, Skwentna, Glenallen, Lake Louise, Valdez, Dillingham, Kodiak, Pelican, Excursion Inlet, Whale Pass, Thorne Bay and Petersburg.

For more information, call 762-2261.

Still cleaning

The Corps of Engineers is continuing the cleanup of former Dept. of Defense sites near Nome. Environmental assessments are now in

progress for 10 sites, which are characterized by 55-gallon drum dumps and contaminated soils. For more information, call 753-2637.

Fire on-line

Fighting fires in Alaska just became computerized. The Alaska Fire Service has introduced a new computer program—called Fires—that tracks blazes and puts the information "on-line," where it can be accessed by computers plugged into the system. A computer-user who punches a fire's identification number on the keyboard of his/her own computer will see a screen display describing the fire's history along with current information on location, size, status, cost-to-date, retardant used, and incident commander. The database also includes degree of response called for by fire management plans, affected landowners, and technical factors such as topography, slope, elevation, fuel model and burning index.