

Public Hearings Throughout Alaska

Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission Announces

By MARGIE BAUMAN

ANCHORAGE — Public hearings unencumbered by pre-written government proposals will be held throughout Alaska in May and June on 80 million acres of unresolved public lands in the state.

Federal co-chairman Jack Horton of the Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission for Alaska announced the hearings February 7, noting as significant a departure in the hearings from normal hearing procedures for government.

"In viewing the complexity and magnitude of the 80 million acres of land, almost a quarter of Alaska, we found it so extreme that we thought in fairness to everyone concerned, particularly

the public, that we should ask for their specific resource information and their advice on management systems that might be proposed in any D-2 area prior to any decision-making by the Department of Interior," Horton said.

D-2 lands are those withdrawn for possible inclusion as additions to or new units of the national parks, forest, wildlife refuge and wild and scenic river systems.

"Normally, it's the process of government that an agency with the concurrence of policy officials in Washington come to the public with a specific proposal," Horton said.

"In this instance we've asked the department to step back, allow the commission through

its agents to conduct hearings without any specific proposal being presented," he said.

Instead the commission will go out with a prospectus of the resource value in areas in various regions which are designated as D-2 areas.

The commission will outline possible alternatives for management systems and jurisdictional units that could be imposed on these areas.

"We'll be very fairly and thoroughly trying to outline the consequences, the implications that management by any particular agency would have for those lands and for the state of Alaska," Horton said.

The results and transcripts of the hearings will be available to the commission, the secretary of the Interior and Congress to influence the final decision on the lands. A full schedule on the specific location and dates of the hearings will be made at a future date.

State co-chairman of the LUPC Joe Josephson said the commission had entered a new period of its work.

"We've had between September and January a time of shaking down, briefing, orientation, information gathering and staffing, and now I think we're ready to embark on what is a very exciting process; a process in which we will be coming to grips with longstanding, substantive problems under the Native claims settlement act.

"We can say we are approaching these issues with a tremendous sense of balance, with as much depth as our staff can bring to bear on these problems, and with great openness, in the way we receive information and the way we carry on our business," Josephson said.

"All of our sessions are public sessions."

As for the forthcoming hearings, "I don't know of any government agency which has ever provided such a forum for the people of Alaska," he said.