



INTERIOR SECRETARY ROGERS C. B. MORTON, left, was at Kotzebue August 22, for an informal talk with NANA Regional Corp. officials, including (left to right) John W. Schaeffer, executive director; Tommy Sheldon

Sr., treasurer, and Willie Goodwin Jr., lands director. Topics of conversation ranged from Kotzebue village deficiency lands to the proposed East-West Highway, which NANA opposes.

— PHOTO BY MARGIE BAUMAN

Morton Chats With NANA

By MARGIE BAUMAN
KOTZEBUE Interior Secretary Rogers C. B. Morton flew north of the Arctic Circle August 22 for a brief, informal chat with NANA Regional Corp. officials, but it turned out to be much more than that.

Upset over the uncertain status of some 698,600 acres of Kotzebue Village deficiency lands, the leadership of the NANA Regional Corp. confronted Morton, over coffee at the Drift Inn, just off the shores of Kotzebue Sound.

Portions of the deficiency lands, being transferred for deficiency selection from D-2 status, have a D-2 override on them. Neither Morton, nor Alaska Bureau of Land Management director Curt McVee, who arrived the next day, were able to define what activities were presently allowed to occur on those lands under the D-2

override. (Under the D-2 override, those lands not selected will return to D-2 status).

So NANA executive director John W. Schaeffer put the questions to Morton, who in turn asked that Schaeffer direct the questions to Curt Berkland, director of the BLM in Washington D. C.

Morton's one hour stopover came amidst a visit to several areas of the state, in a week long trip designed to bring the Interior Secretary together with the Native leadership trying to

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implement the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Morton was also reviewing some of the proposed 80 million acres of federal withdrawal lands in Alaska. He is scheduled to report to Congress December 18 his recommendations for inclusion of lands in federal parks, forests, wildlife refuges and and wild and scenic rivers.

The Secretary said he would like to try and limit D-2 overrides as much as possible, while staying within the spirit of the land claims act.

(Subsequently, McVee paid a

brief visit to Kotzebue with State Senator Willie Hensley, D-Kotzebue, president of the Alaska Federation of Natives, and Area Director Morris Thompson of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. McVee said he would take the matter up with Berklund.)

With Schaeffer for the meeting with Morton were Robert Newlin, president of NANA Regional Corp., Tommy Sheldon Sr., secretary; lands director Willie Goodwin Jr. and deputy director James Gregg.

The conversation ran to a number of subjects, from problems with the Federal Park Service to seismic work; at times hitting some humor notes.

When Goodwin noted that the region had to give up certain lands to the Park Service in a disputed area. "Yeah, they're mean," joked Morton. "I have to fight with them all the time myself."

But Morton also promoted the idea of federal parklands in Northwest Alaska. "You should be interested in a park up here. It will bring in a lot of business," Morton said. "It will bring in people to spend their money but you don't have to build schools and houses for them," he said.

Schaeffer made it clear that NANA was completely opposed at this point to the proposed East-West Highway, which would connect Kotzebue to Fairbanks, via Nome.

"What we don't want is the people," he explained.

"Well," retorted Morton, "then why don't you tell the airlines to get the hell out?"

"No. The airlines brings them in, but they take them out," Schaeffer said, smiling slightly. On a more serious note, Schaeffer noted a number of areas where hunting and fishing has been ruined by an influx of people from another area. "It wouldn't take another 500 people to upset the balance in Northwest Alaska," he said.

Residents of Northwest Alaska would have several criteria for approving additional transportation were warranted, the effect it would have on the environment and the benefits to the residents, he said. After all, Schaeffer noted, it takes 30,000 acres per family to live off the land; an important factor in a number of Northwest families where subsistence is the rule rather than the exception.

With the price of beef going sky-high, there is a lot of hunting going on in this season in Northwest Alaska, Schaeffer noted. Imported beef (from outside Kotzebue area) is purchased mostly by non-Natives. Morton nodded his head as Schaeffer talked, looked up and commented that he had a few beef cows himself. "Problem is," said the Interior Secretary, "I have to pay somebody to watch them (so they're not stolen)."

Morton also challenged NANA's concern with subsistence, suggesting that the regional corporation would not be so interested in subsurface exploration if subsistence were the prime consideration. "You wouldn't be doing that much seismic work if you were just interested in subsistence, let's be honest with each other," he said abruptly.

Schaeffer leaned across the table and looked Morton in the eye. "We have to be prepared for future generations, who may have different needs," he said.

"But right now, if we had to make a choice between subsistence lands and an oil well, we'd choose the subsistence lands."