

Minto Claim May Become Precedent

Governor William A. Egan together with a number of state officials and Senators E. L. (Bob) Bartlett and Ernest Gruening are working with the village of Minto on the settling of their claim to land by historic inheritance.

And according to Governor Egan the Minto land claim may set a precedent for the settling of similar claims throughout the state.

Chief Peter John of Minto together with Virgil Titus, village secretary, met with Egan, Bartlett, state officials and William Byler, the executive director of the Association on American Indian Affairs last week in Juneau.

Egan said the meeting pointed to the tremendous problem which was posed to the state selection program by the claims. In a number of areas, the program has been slowed to a halt because of them, he said.

In his own mind, the Governor said he favored all villages with such claims obtaining the lands upon which their village was located and reasonable land for expansion.

But he said he believed the federal government should compensate villages for lands claimed by aboriginal right above and beyond this.

"Chief Peter John made a very good and effective presentation on behalf of his people and as a test case there is probably none better," he said.

At present state officials, including Roscoe E. Bell, director of the Division of Lands, and Commissioner of Natural Resources Phil Holds-

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worth are making a study of the Minto situation, Egan said.

In May the results of the study are slated to be sent to Senator Bartlett in Washington. Bartlett, Egan said, was contemplating drafting a bill which would allow Minto to bring its case to the U.S. Court of Claims.

While his people claimed much more area by aboriginal right, Chief John said his people would be willing to settle their claim for a 300,000 acre tract which he said they used at present for a livelihood.

"Mr. Byler estimated off the top of his head that all told in Alaska claims might involve 16 million acres."

160 acres of land in a native allotment under the law.

The meeting was attended by Senators Bartlett and Gruening, Attorney General Warren Colver, Holdsworth, Bell, Fairbanks Lands Chief Joe Lawlor, Burke Riley and Richard Bradley, both of the Department of Interior, Robert Bennett, deputy director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Rep. Barry Jackson of Fairbanks, Byler, John, and Titus.