

Anaktuvuk Being Strangled By Chronic Need for Fuel

The people of Anaktuvuk Pass are investigating a plan to move their village to Umiat to end their critical fuel shortage. The Arctic Slope Native Association, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other Federal and State agencies are helping the villagers to find out if the move is feasible and, if so, what help

they can give.

The village lies above timberline in the Brooks Range and the residents have to haul willows for fuel. This work, in turn, cuts down on the amount of time that they can spend in hunting

for their fuel supply.

Earlier this year, a suggestion was made that the villagers haul coal on winter sled trains to heat their homes. A meeting of the villagers and BIA officials

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had been scheduled for this week to discuss this and other village problems.

The village council wrote through ASNA to the BIA and State Rep. Willie Hensley announcing that the people had decided to move to Umiat where there would be adequate fuel.

At the meeting in the village, the residents discussed their reasons for wanting to move or to stay in the village. The overall vote was 21 for the move, 7 against it, and 5 undecided. Only a few of the 21 indicated that they would want to stay if the coal could be hauled in.

In general, those who lived off the land favored the move, while the residents who received salaries from outside agencies preferred to stay. There were exceptions on both sides, however.

The BIA officials said that aid could be obtained from several sources, provided that the villagers took the time to properly plan the move. They said that the BIA would take steps to aid the village in its immediate problems.

The villagers and the officials agreed upon a 30-day investigation period, during which the villagers would decide whether they really want to move, and ASNA and the officials investigate the problems involved.

BIA officials pointed out the four requirements for moving a village:

First, the availability of the desired land for the new site. The land at Umiat is under the control of the FAA, but is apparently abandoned, an official said.

Second, the feasibility of developing a village at the new location. This would involve an engineer's survey of transportation, elevations,

soil conditions, drainage, and water at the new site.

Third, educational facilities for the new site. The State Department of Education has announced that the Anaktuvuk school is not a permanent structure, and it might possibly be flown to the new site.

The Natives are also checking into the possibility of using an existing building at Umiat as a temporary schoolhouse. One of the opponents of the move commented that, if the plan goes through, all villagers will move, so there is no problem of creating a new school.

Fourth, there is the problem of community facilities. These include water and sewage, handled by the public health service, and financial aid for housing-available from several sources.

ASNA President Sam Taalak said that Hensley was checking into the possibility of using funds of Bartlett's rural housing bill for the move.

At present, the villagers must make a 35 or 40 mile round trip every other day for willows to heat their houses. This keeps them from making hunting trips longer than about one day, limiting their ability to obtain food.

This year, due to changes in the caribou migrations, the villagers found themselves short of meat. Although some caribou are now in the area, they are in the opposite direction from the willows and the villagers are unable to reach them.

The BIA has announced that it will fly in 15 tons of coal as soon as possible to free the hunters so that they can get these animals.

The site at Umiat has a good source of coal a few miles away, and it also has oil and gas available from the Naval Reserve. Sam Taalak has already sent a telegram from ASNA to Gov. Hickel asking for an endorsement on Federal legislation to make natural gas available at Umiat, as at Barrow.

One other advantage given for the Umiat site by some former residents is that a good supply of fish is available in the area. The BIA is considering a plan for the village to obtain a small freezer and sell the fish commercially. There are also numerous caribou in the area.

Another meeting will be held in a month to present the results of the investigations to the villagers. If they then decide to move, the government agencies will assist them where possible.