

Sierra Club blasted for Shee Atika troubles

The Sierra Club's "interference" in decisions allowing logging on Admiralty Island has been sharply criticized by the Alaska Congressional delegation and brought a commitment by federal agencies to expedite the necessary permits for the logging development.

Hearings called by Sen. Frank Murkowski to look into problems surrounding development of land on Admiralty Island by Shee Atika Native Corp. ended Thursday with a commitment by federal agencies to expedite the necessary permits for the development. The hearings, before the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, were held to create a formal record of the difficulties faced by Shee Atika Corp. over the land it claimed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

"Congress conveyed the land to Shee Atika and has an obligation to aid in Shee Atika's survival as a Native corporation," said Murkowski. "I have urged the people of Angoon and Shee Atika Corp. to resolve their differences. I also plan to review the written record of these hearings and may, if necessary, examine possible legislative solutions to the problem. It's important to emphasize that this kind of expensive and time-consuming litigation can have only an unhappy and divisive effect upon those most intimately involved with it — the Natives of Southeast Alaska."

Opposition to the land selection, which was intended for log harvest uses, was spearheaded by the Sierra Club, which fought the land development on the basis that Admiralty Island is classified as a National Monument, and the City of Angoon, which stated its subsistence lifestyle is threatened by the Shee Atika proposal. Angoon, with a population of some 500, is located on Admiralty Island, some 35 miles from the site of a proposed Shee Atika log hauling facility.

During the hearing, witnesses pointed out several times that portions of Admiralty Island, which is 100 miles and consists of one million acres,

had been logged in the past.

"Forest Service Chief Max Peterson called public attention to the fact that logging operations occurred on Admiralty Island for periods extending from 1850 to 1971. Some of these operations also occurred within 20 miles from the City of Angoon," Murkowski said.

Although Shee Atika Corp., which has stated it is facing imminent bankruptcy, made the Admiralty Island land selection more than three years ago under the Alaska Native Land Claim Act, it has been prevented from developing the land by a series of legal battles.

Also testifying were Sen. Ted Stevens and Rep. Don Young.

"This is a classic case of outsiders coming into an area, dividing its residents, and then using these divisions for their own gain," Young said. "The Sierra Club, a so-called public interest group, is clearly not acting in the best interests of the public here. They are continuing to defy the will of the Congress, and are using this issue to generate millions of tax-free dollars for their own coffers. The Sierra Club is growing rich at the expense of a small Native corporation which simply wants to improve the lives of its people by building a safe, environmentally sound business on its own land."

"The Sierra Club has refused to accept the decision of Congress to allow Shee Atika to develop lands on North Admiralty Island," Stevens said. "I find it appalling that a national organization would take it upon itself to deny approximately 1,900 Alaska

Natives the benefits granted to them by Congress in a settlement for their aboriginal land claims. It is extremely unfair for this organization to use its vast resources to harass and injure a group of Native Americans."

Witnesses at the two-day hearing included representatives of the Forest Service, Environmental Protection Agen-

cy, Sierra Club, Angoon, Shee Atika Corp., and other Native corporations, including Kootznوو, Inc., and Sealaska, Inc.,

Testifying for Sealaska, a Native corporation which has loaned more than \$4 million to Shee Atika, Inc., was its vice-president, Robert Loescher. Loescher said Sealaska has

been attempting to resolve the Shee Atika conflict and has proposed several alternatives. These range, he said, from allowing Shee Atika development of the land, to trading the Admiralty Island land for land elsewhere, to selling its interests on the island. These alternatives are still just proposals, he said, and more negotiations are necessary.