

Road frenzy grips State, villages fear impacts

by Jeff Richardson
Tundra Times staff

Some state lawmakers want Congress to defer to states in granting rights-of-way over federal lands, and have introduced House Joint Resolution 60 to convey their sentiments. This is just one of several recent government efforts to push the state's highway system into rural areas—despite serious budget problems and the stiff objections of many villages.

In other developments:

- Members of the Dalton Highway Advisory and Planning Board met last week in Fairbanks in their ongoing efforts to develop a master plan for providing traveler services along the newly-opened Dalton Highway without jeopardizing nearby Athabascan and

Inupiat villages;

- Residents of Stevens Village are angry about a recreational access road being built on federal lands by a state agency. Although the road has been in planning stages for several years, neither Bureau of Land Management nor the Alaska Dept. of Transportation and Public Facilities have produced proof that they consulted with tribal or other civic organizations in Stevens Village.

HJR 60

Conservative lawmakers charge the Dept. of Interior with trying to override state authority to decide what constitutes a valid right-of-way under Revised Statute 2477. That federal law was repealed in 1976, but Congress said that right-of-ways used before the law's revocation could be asserted and approved. Last year, the Dept. of Interior wrote and obtained public comment on procedures

for making right-of-way claims, and criteria for determining what claims are valid. However, Congress has blocked their implementation and HJR 60 is intended to reinforce this move.

The Alaska Federation of Natives generally supported the draft Interior regulations, while the Knowles Administration has continued the oppositional stance of the former Gov. Walter Hickel.

Assertion of RS 2477 rights-of-way could create serious land management problems for Alaska Natives by putting subsistence resources at risk and encouraging trespass on Native corporation, tribal and allotment lands.

Dalton deliberations move slowly

The group charged by Gov. Tony Knowles with creating a master plan to lease

• Road frenzy grips State, villages fear impacts

1

state lands and provide traveler services within the Dalton Highway corridor made some progress in their efforts during a two-day meeting in Fairbanks last week. The corridor extends from the Yukon River Bridge to Deadhorse at the Prudhoe Bay oilfields.

Work groups were formed to develop tentative recommendations in two areas:

- more clearly defining the several areas in the corridor designated by the Legislature for leasing and development; and
- Strategies for protecting public safety and subsistence and other natural resources

in the corridor from increased traffic. This group will also identify immediate steps needed to ensure safe travel and adequate law enforcement in the corridor.

A large delegation of North Slope Borough officials, as well as other residents of affected residents, attended the meeting to underscore their concerns.

The Borough is particularly concerned that despite a promise by the governor that no development would proceed until adequate protections were in place, no provision has been made in the governor's proposed budget for additional public safety officers. Natural Resources Commissioner

John Shively, who co-chairs the commission along with Will Mayo, president of Tanana Chiefs Conference, said he would convey these concerns to the governor, and suggested there might have been an oversight regarding inclusion of the funds.

Nome Creek Road controversial

The state is already building a recreational access road in the White Mountain National Recreation Area near the confluence of the

Yukon River and Beaver Creek under Bureau of Land Management plans finalized in the late 1980s.

Local tribal officials have been hammering the governor's office demanding to know why they weren't consulted about the project. They are pressing the Knowles Administration to reconsider state involvement in the project.