

CIRI Protests Glacial Land Awards

ANCHORAGE — The future of the Cook Inlet Region, Inc. will depend upon whether the U.S. government will allow land other than mountain tops and glaciers to be deeded over to that Native corporation.

This declaration came from Andy Johnson, president of CIRI, who spoke before the joint Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission meeting here April 30. Johnson pleaded with the commission to understand that

land provided under terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act would help everyone after the Native corporation develops it.

"We've known since day-one that we would have problems selecting land for the Cook Inlet corporation," Johnson said. "Land around our villages has been taken by individuals and 30 townships that could have been selected by us were awarded to the state in an out-of-court settlement."

Johnson made numerous examples of the problems associated with being the most urban of the Alaska Native regional corporations established under the claims settlement act. However, his primary concern was that without land development potential, the corporation would not have any hope of economic viability.

CIRI villages made some 1.3 million acres worth of selections

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CIRI's Land

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by the Dec. 18, 1974 deadline in spite of the fact that much of the land was not believed to be of "like and similar character" as the claims act says it should be.

Now the region must make its selection by Dec. 18 of this year and none of the land provided to select from is below 1,500 feet.

The corporation recently lost an appeal of the decision made by the Secretary of Interior some time back and is now looking to legislation to insure selectable lands.

Johnson will present his case before the U.S. House and Senate May 7. He says Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, has agreed to assist CIRI in its plea as long as there is not opposition to it from the state or the Greater Anchorage Area Borough or the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

"Only about 11 per cent of our land is of like and similar character," Johnson added. "That's about 20 townships in our village selections that are below

1,500 feet."

Johnson used the example of the village of Salamatof to illustrate problems of CIRI. Salamatof had enrolled 126 residents but it didn't have a physical location because a road had been built to it and the people spread out along it to live.

Although the village has been denied certification by the Alaska Native Claims Appeals board, Johnson says it will also be appealed, as will the Secretary's choice of land for CIRI selection.

"I think, by and large, that most people in Alaska don't understand the Native claims act," Johnson added. "They don't realize that right here in Anchorage there used to be four Native fishing camps . . . and one day they came back and there was a city here."

Johnson said his corporation resented the "people (who) give us land of different character because they think the other is too valuable for us."