



# Elders feel pushed around

By BILL HESS

Tundra Times

Hunters invade their traditional grounds, they see their resources wasted, and different regulations governing federal, state, private and Native lands leave them confused.

"A lot of these elderlies, they feel like they're being pushed around!" Charlie Titus emphasized during the recent Minto Denakkanaaga Elders Conference, sponsored by Doyon, Ltd. and Tanana Chiefs Conference.

"They don't have no freedom like they had before! I know I feel it! A lot of the elderlies feel it! The elderlies didn't leave us nothing. They didn't sign no will! Because they felt they left us subsistence, and that was free!"

Moses Cruikshank remembered a time when he could journey a small distance from his home and find plenty of moose. Things have changed. "People come in from all over. They got airplanes and every damn thing. They shoot just to see the moose drop, and to get the horns. I'd like to see us put a stop to that!"

The elders were mostly friendly people; warm even to strangers, and ready to share their moose, salmon, beaver and other traditional foods. Yet their growing anger showed.

"I feel like fighting," one

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Lucy Frank and Susie Jimmie share a laugh during a square dance held in conjunction with the Minto elders conference, just like a couple of school girls.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS



# Daily encroachment on game worries elders

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tiny woman said to gubernatorial candidate Steve Cowper outside the Minto school, site for the meeting. Her voice was gentle, causing onlookers to at first wonder if she were pulling off a friendly joke.

"I feel like fighting!" she spoke again. "You guys always make promises, but nothing ever gets done! Doyon always makes promises, but nothing ever gets done!"

"We need your direction in how we should be addressing subsistence," Spud Williams, president of TCC told the elders. "We need your direction in what programs we should be offering you. We're like a village council sitting here, and we're asking the elders what we should do."

Morris Thompson, vice-president of Doyon, assured the elders that their corporation wanted their input. "You are our bridge to the past, and our road to the future." Younger leaders, Thompson said, "often make snap decisions . . . we

need your wisdom, experience, foresight and strength!"

Doyon contributed \$40,000 to the conference, and several village corporations within the region donated smaller amounts.

More than 80 delegates from 44 villages attended the four-day meeting.

Chief among the elders' concerns were the daily encroachments they see upon the country where they have long taken fish and game.

Adolph Hamilton told of an airplane ride he shared with a guide and his hunter during the late sixties. They spotted a moose from the plane, landed, and the hunter immediately shot the animal.

Wounded, the moose fled into the woods. They were able to locate it again, but the guide determined it was too far from the plane to pack out, and was not worth pursuing. "You've wounded the animal, you have to kill it!" Hamilton said he told the two. They told him to quiet down; he was only a pass-

enger.

After that, Hamilton said, they took off again, soon spotted another moose, which was killed by the hunter immediately upon landing. Hamilton said he reported the incident, but nothing was ever done about it.

Other elders spoke of finding large quantities of moose meat left behind by hunters only interested in trophy heads, and of locating as many as 150 ducks killed by sportsmen more interested in a good time than eating.

Meanwhile, new regulations impede their own subsistence activities. International treaties with Canada and the Soviet Union prevent them from hunting ducks in the spring. Agreements have been sought between the three countries which would allow aboriginal subsistence hunters in each to take ducks in the spring.

Bob Hinman, deputy director of the Alaska fish and game, blamed outside interests for thwarting such an agree-

ment, but Williams placed the blame on the State of Alaska.

"The biggest opposition is this state," said Williams.

"Because of the wording aboriginal. The state does not want that . . . The state would agree if it was everybody."

Subsistence was not the only worry of elders. Many spoke of health care problems; complaining that new government cutbacks in travel funding are causing people to suffer unnecessarily.

A common charge was that medical personnel often brush aside Native patients whom they do not believe to have serious health problems.

Tommy Titus, of Nenana, told of a case where a man broke his foot in the morning and was rushed into Fairbanks, where doctors did not see him until late afternoon. By then, the foot had swollen so badly, he had to be flown to Anchorage for treatment.

A father told of sending his son with some money into Fairbanks from Tanana,

for treatment and x-rays. He had to wait several days before he could be x-rayed, the delegate complained, and his money ran out first, forcing him to return home.

Paul Frith, of the Alaska Department of Social Services, told the delegates that U.S. health workers would never knowingly turn away anyone in need of care. People will always make mistakes, which unfortunately have serious impacts in the health profession, he said.

He agreed that some of the delays described by the delegates seemed unreasonable, and suggested that anytime they have complaints, they take them immediately to TCC.

TCC is responsible for administering health-care-delivery programs throughout the region, and Frith praised them as having the most efficient health delivery program in rural Alaska.

No one from the U.S. Indian Health Service, which is responsible for most health care, spoke to the conference.

Unlike most large conventions, there was no alcohol at the Minto conference, nor any evidence that anyone had been drinking on the sly. Yet alcohol was on their minds.

"It's pretty hard, that alcohol," explained Al Star of Tanana. "in the old days when we were not American citizens, you couldn't even bring liquor in. Today, we got rights. We're American citizens. But today, all bad things happen (because of alcohol). It's throughout all Alaska, not only among Indians!"

One delegate told of the troubles in his village, and how his son had been beaten up by neighbors high on alcohol. Some of the villages already have taken an advantage of an Alaska ordinance which allows second class cities to ban liquor from their communities. Violators can receive fines up to \$50,000 and prison sentences up to 10 years for bringing liquor in.

Mike Walleri, Natural Resources director of TCC, told delegates that villages which were not second-class cities would also choose to outlaw liquor, by either working through the state board of elections, or by acting under the authority of their Indian Reorganization Act village councils.

Elders also learned that President Ronald Reagan wants to end the Indian housing program, and that plans call for all funds to be eliminated after 1983. The Housing Improvement Program, operated by TCC will continue, but with reduced funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Although the elders were frustrated about the events happening in their land, they also expressed their joy at being able to get together. Minto elders, Doyon, and TCC



Chief Andrew Isaacs smiles with pleasure as Minto youth demonstrate the skills they have learned in singing and dancing to traditional Athabascan music. Isaacs said the conference was a good thing to have, but that he wished it had been started earlier, back in the 60's.

PHOTO BY BILL HESS

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# Elders lament time-limit, no younger people

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were thanked many times for staging the conference.

A potlatch was held on Thursday night, with more moose, caribou, duck, beaver and fish served than could be eaten in a single sitting. Participants left with bags filled for later meals.

The potlatch also gave the elders an opportunity to break away from the formal setting of the day meetings, where speakers were limited to three minutes each, and where many elders found the proceedings — all in English — difficult to understand.

Here, they said what they wanted, for as long as they

wanted.

The elders conference faced its share of problems. The three-minute time limit was frustrating to many, as was sticking to a business-like agenda. One elder took the microphone early Tuesday morning with an old photograph of his father in hand. "Who can tell me what a fish trap is made of?" he asked.

Before he could get his answer, he was informed that the agenda called for discussions on subsistence and fish and game management, and he would have to wait until later to address his cultural topic. He went to the podium reportedly but the story behind

the picture was never told.

Traditional Chief Andrew Isaacs was cut off in mid-sentence by Conference Chairman Al Wright after he had passed his time limit. At the potlatch, Isaacs told those gathered that this was the first time in his life such a thing had ever happened to him. Such an action, he said, was "cheap."

Neal Charlie, a member of the conference planning committee, agreed that in the Indian way, cutting Isaacs off was a wrong thing to do, and noted that Wright apologized for it. Isaacs accepted the apology, according to Charlie.

"We have to live with to-

day," Charlie lamented. "Before the conference, the committee agreed that everyone would be limited to three minutes. If Governor Jay Hammond came, or Ronald Reagan, they would still be limited to three minutes! Just so we could get through our agenda!"

"I wanted to thank Chief Isaacs, for letting us know our mistakes."

Other elders lamented that the young people of the villages were not more involved in the conference, as it is they who must gain the elders' knowledge if the Athabaskan traditions are to be passed on.

Most delegates expressed good feelings that even though

problems existed, it was a start, and future elders' conferences would improve as the elders learned from their mistakes.

Madeline Solomon of Galena stressed that the elders need to get together, find out what is happening, and pass the information on to their villages.

"That's why Alaska became a state, because we didn't understand what was going on. A lot of people thought it would mean there would be a lot of money around, and everything would be good. That's why we voted for it. I think with ANCSA, a lot of people didn't understand."