

Elders vow to keep their Native lands

What Bertha Moses, has, she intends to keep. "I keep hearing 1991!" she coaxed her fellow seniors at the Minto Elders Conference. "Hang on to your allotments! It's all we have . . . I'm not going to sell my allotments, or my stock. I never think I'll sell it . . . I'll pass it on to my grandchildren, so they can pass it on to their grandchildren . . ." and on and on.

In reality, Native allotments are trust lands and can not be sold, without special federal action, or taxed. Stocks are a different matter.

Native Regional and Village corporations are companies just like Wien Airlines or General Motors with no special relationship to the government. Under current law, Native shareholders will be able to sell those shares to anyone—black, white, yellow or red

after 1991.

Selling stocks will be the same as selling Native land, as the corporations which issue the stocks own the land. The land also can be taxed after 1991. Natives have a lot to lose.

Spud Williams, president of Tanana Chiefs Conference, told delegates that many complicated ideas are being considered which, if implemented, may save Native lands and stocks for Natives. One such plan would take corporate lands in Alaska and transfer their title to the village councils, and would make them trust lands, just like reservations in the Lower 48 and Venetie.

Williams noted that the federal government is getting nervous about the possibility, and has stopped all further applications of villages seeking

to form governing councils under the Indian Re-organization Act. Williams believes the tribal actions will stand up in court, and that this may be one method used to keep Native lands in Native control.

There are problems to be worked out. "How about the stockholder who lives in Texas?" Williams asked, stating that he could feel this deprived him of his rights.

A number of dissidents from within the region also attended the conference. While they said little from the microphones, they did mill through

the throng of elders to pro-said little from the microphones, they did mill through the throng of elders to promote other ideas.

Bill Walsh of Tanana agreed that forming IRA village councils with control over Native land might be one way to save those lands. But he argued that the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was not voted in by a truly democratic procedure.

"Those old people never voted for it!" he contended. "Why stop at 40 million acres? We're going for the whole thing!"



Neil James of Bird Creek thinks that being old can be a good thing.