

# Getting allotment a frustrating task

Paul George first filed for the 160 acres of good timber-filled land under the Native Allotment Act back in 1959. He thought it was his.

He didn't anticipate living much on it, but was proud to have it to pass on to his niece.

"Six months later, I got another form and had to re-file," George remembered the beginning of the frustration.

A year afterward, he was asked to re-file once more, then again two years later.

This spring, George contacted his niece, and found out that the BLM had cut the property down to five acres.

"I filed a long time ago. I think I'm entitled to get the deed . . . I never got no deed, no papers, nothing!" George was not alone. Several other elders spoke of claims which had been cut down, and many more complained that they had not yet received a deed on their land. The Native Allotment program ended in 1971, so all those without deeds have spent a minimum of 12 frustrating years waiting.

In the meantime, they have seen squatters, often described as "hippies" encroach upon their holdings, and have had to deal with snowmachiners, float plane operators and other tres-

passers without deeds to back them up.

Spud Williams told delegates that the bureaucracy has created an extremely slow "mess" in finalizing Native allotments.

Countless letters are written back and forth after the applicant files his papers with the Bureau of Indian Affairs which then files them with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

Crews are sent out to check the land, survey crews follow, maybe years or decades later, and there are more letters.

"And then if you're not  
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Lt. Governor Terry Miller fields a question from Al Star. Miller joined Steve Cowper, Bill Sheffield and Edward J. Vincent in campaigning for the governor's office at the meeting.

# Allotment fight might take years

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dead, someday you'll get the papers," Williams told his frustrated listeners. "... we figure by the year 2100, they might finish, and then everyone will have their property."

In most cases, filed claims are still good, although Williams noted that the BLM interpreted occupancy and use language very strictly in many cases and cut holdings down as they did with George. Several lawsuits resulted, and the ruling finally came down from the U.S. Supreme Court against the BLM.

Since that time, the BLM has had the responsibility to notify people who had holdings reduced. After receiving the letter, the allotment holder has 30 to 60 days to file an appeal.

TCC has requested that the BLM send them copies of all such notifications; but the request has yet to be honored. In the meantime, the appeal period may have already ended for many Native elders who do not understand American law, and who still believe themselves to be owners of the land.

Unlike corporate lands, Native Allotments are held in trust by the federal government, and cannot be taxed or sold to non-Natives, even after 1991.



Fred Star of Tanana, one of the elders who have seen their traditional food supply dwindle. As Neil Charlie put it, "If I don't have my Native foods, I'll die! We all feel that way. We're tired of wieners! We want our ducks!"