

CHIEF ISAAC STILL BATTLING

'If You Don't Sign It, You Won't Be Able To Hunt at Forty Mile'

By LAEL MORGAN

DOT LAKE — Chief Andrew Isaac, traditional leader of the Crow nation, had cause to wonder this week if his 30 year fight for the native land claims settlement had been worth the trouble. A well-intentioned friend reported a paper was circulating in Tok and he'd been told, "If you don't sign it, you won't be able to hunt at Forty Mile."

Isaac located the petition and signed it reasoning the Fish and Game Department was simply changing regulations again. Then he had second thoughts. The paper read:

"We the undersigned oppose creation of the 6.6 million acre Forty Mile National Forest. We feel this area could best be managed if it remained under the Bureau of Land Management."

The Bureau of Land Management has been regarded in decades past as the Indian's enemy. When Tanacross Village natives filed a claim for their reservation in 1950 the BLM "lost" the application and didn't locate it until Nov. 16, 1961.

The Tanacross BLM office sits squarely on the main Indian trail to Tetlin and Mentasta and BLM stakes appear in many other areas that Indians believe

are theirs by tradition.

It stuck in Isaac's mind that Forty Mile had been claimed under the federal settlement by the Tanana Chiefs but the Tok petition made no mention of it.

"The proposed Forty Mile National Forest encompasses 6.6 million acres. The Secretary of Interior will decide if the 40 million acre area becomes a National Forest on Sept. 18," the paper explained.

"A former, less restrictive BLM proposal for Forty Mile planning unit was solidly opposed at a public hearing and by petition in Dec. 1970. There have been no public hearings by the U. S. Forest Service and little information available concerning the proposed national forest.

"The 40 million acre national forest would overlap state selected land north of Eagle, the Charley and Forty Mile reserve could become wilderness or scenic river without a national forest.

"Multiple land use management can be practiced without a national forest. The U. S. Forest Service has a history of being more restrictive than the Bureau of Land Management. There are eight proposed national forests and three existing forests in Alaska."

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A FIGHTER FOR HIS PEOPLE — Chief Andrew Isaac, traditional leader for the Crow Band, has been fighting for land for his people for 30 years. His latest fight is centered around Forty Mile area.

— LAEL MORGAN Photograph

Chief Andrew Isaac...

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Despite the fact no mention was made of native claims to the area, Chief Isaac's memory was accurate.

"We did select the Forty Mile area, all of it," reports John Sackett, president of the Tanana Chiefs. "We have first priority and that's the way it's going to be. We'd better get it."

Sackett said the land had been chosen as in lieu land for its mineral potential and that it would remain open for hunting to the Indians.

Gerald Timmons, District Manager of the Forty Mile area for BLM, wasn't sure the native claim covered the whole area. The maps show a confusing overlap of state and federal selections as well as the native claims.

However Timmons made it clear the petition was not circulated at the prompting of BLM.

"We just don't do things like that. We can't go out promoting our own interests."

He would make no official statement of the Forestry claim other than the observation that it would "further fragment the land." He did note his office had recently been moved closer to Native villages so it would be easier to do business with them.

Mrs. Nancy (Bill) Arpino of Tok turned out to be the sponsor of the petition.

She started it, she said, because they had no idea what the Federal Forestry people had in mind for the land and the people of Tok didn't want the area to become a big preserve.

To date she has seven pe-

titions signed with 24 names each. She will send them to the Secretary of Interior and the Land Use Planning Commission.

She didn't know about the status of native land claims, she added.

"The people around here like it the way it is now."