

Bethel Eskimos say no to tourism

By LAEL MORGAN

A resounding "NO!" to tourism has come from Bethel area Eskimos; leaving would be promoters with little to promote. The veto came in answer to queries from the town's adhoc committee on tourism which is made up of Bethel's "business elite" (a delicate label bestowed by local newspaper "Tundra Drums") which means membership is largely Caucasian.

The committee had been considering possible packaged tours and was in the process of arranging a meeting between the State Department of Tourism and Wien Alaska Airlines when protests rained in.

Robert Okitkun, a resident of Kotlik, took exception to adhoc meetings and asked why Native representatives were passed over in deciding a central issue such as tourism.

Others, like Paul Gregory, vice president of the Bethel Native Corp., were quick to point out that the Alaska Village Council Presidents (AVCP) had issued a firm resolution against tourism in 1973.

"The presidents rejected the

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No to tourism . . .

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proposal and have not reconsidered their previous stand," Gregory assured the adhocers. Nor were they likely to do so.

Tour ideas solicited from Bethel businessmen have included guided hunting and fishing trips, boat trips to see birds and visit Native fish camps on the Kuskokwim and scheduled ferry trips down the local river.

Since this is prime subsistence hunting and fishing area for the region's Yupik Eskimos, there been considerable protest.

Strongest comes from Anthony Vaska, AVCP member, who has issued a position paper on the subject (see editorial).

And should Native protests fail, local residents are working on a highly unattractive advertising package to discourage the would-be tourists.

"Picture yourself riding our local honey bucket truck...Enjoying a supper of Spam and seal oil with a local

welfare mother and her 11 children in a crowded, weather beaten (and broken) prefab house at Bethel Heights...

"Taking treatment for hepatitis at our local Public Health Service Hospital or boating along city streets during the annual spring flood..."

"Not that Bethel is all that bad," explains a local booster. "We love it but it does have a few problems and one more—like Tourism—we just don't need at the moment. This season we're strongly recommending folks visit Nome!"