

Agreement could speed process on allotments

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Tundra Times

A draft agreement on archaeology that might resolve one hindrance to conveyance of allotments is being studied by several government agencies and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in Washington, D.C.

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Survey fund lack causes conveyance slowdown

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However, a Bureau of Land Management spokesman cautions that, even if the proposal is approved, another legal requirement precludes immediate transfer of allotment lands to individual claimants.

The draft agreement — between the BLM, Bureau of Indian Affairs, State Historic Preservation Office and the advisory council — would rescind an Interior Board of Land Appeals requirement that the BLM determine the archaeological value of some 8,000 allotments still awaiting conveyance to Alaska Natives.

Neil Crozier, Anchorage area archaeologist for the BIA, said the proposal would require such determinations only where "significant" cultural resources are known to exist.

That would remove a major impediment to the conveyance process, he said, because the BLM has neither the manpower nor the money to determine the archaeological values of all pending Native allotments.

Until now, the BIA has not been involved in determining the status of allotment lands. That agency's entry into the process "should speed up things," Crozier said, "because we've already done extensive work identifying historical and cultural sites in Alaska."

However, BLM's Alaska public affairs chief said each allotment must be surveyed and its exact location plat- ted before a conveyance certificate can be provided to the BIA which issues allotment land patents.

According to George Gurr, those surveys cost about \$8,000, meaning the allotment survey bill would be \$64 million.

"Our yearly budget for the entire Alaska survey program is only \$12 million to \$15 million," he said. "And, because of our weather, we can only do field work four or five months a year."

Gurr said allotment applicants could speed up the process by paying for commercial surveys under guidelines provided by the BLM.