

Tundra Times



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Other Voices—

Native Land Ownership

During the forthcoming years many misunderstandings are going to occur between native and non-native over the question of ownership of land, and the relationships that are going to exist in the future.

The recent incident at Galena where in essence the local residents took the law into their own hands due to the inaction of the state government and their regulations on fish and game and also the lack of action by the Secretary of Interior to protect the subsistence rights of the Alaska native, does serve as a very good indication of possible clashes that may continue to occur.

With the passage of the land claims act there is now a new relationship between the native and the non-native in the ownership of land, and this new relationship must, through the process of education, be made known to the general public.

The native population received 40 million acres of land in the state of Alaska and most of this land is around and surrounding the present villages. This land is in fee simple title, giving the owners, the natives, full and equal ownership to this land comparable to the rights that present land owners in such cities as Fairbanks and Anchorage enjoy today. This situation is not conjecture or wishful thinking — it is fact, and as soon as this is understood by all of our Alaskan citizens that this is a new groundwork, we can all together develop the entire state.

Another point that we are trying to make known to the public is that there is a distinct need for the native people living in the villages to continue to live off the land in order to exist. There is no cash economy available, allowing them to shop for goods and services comparable to the way of life that urban-oriented residents are familiar with. These people must live off the land in order to live at all, and even as they strive to do this life is on a bare subsistence level. If this situation is understood by the general public then hopefully they will understand how the native in the village feels when they see a large number of people coming into their village and a situation developing whereby the very base of their existence is jeopardize and endangered.

Definitely over a long time there will be changes to allow the rural people an opportunity to develop other alternative methods of making a living, one obvious vehicle being the regional and village corporations and their proper management and and development of services geared to a responsible transitional movement.

We are not opposed to the progress of the state in all fields: however, this progress must be regulated so as to insure a maximum of our participation in view of our goals for our people. We want to be an integrated part of the development program of future operations. As major land owners we have that opportunity to have regulated participation, and on a schedule where we can receive the maximum benefits off our land and still protect the present life styles until they are replaced by an alternative source.

— JOHN C. SACKETT
President, Tanana Chiefs Conference