

Man and His Future

By BERNARD POIRIER

If a man looks into the fire and dreams of the future for himself and his family, he will not be able to picture the tremendous changes that will be forced upon his family and his people in Alaska.

This man, with dreams of the future, lives in a village next to one of many well-fished waters in Alaska. In the last three years he has seen many changes. His people have organized a regional corporation and even a village corporation to manage the complicated life of land owners.

Now that the man and his family has started to learn of all the important decisions that the regional corporation must make

during the next year, the village itself is making a land decision which will decide the land limitations of his children — and his children's children.

The last year has been dominated by one problem after another, all needing important decisions and the man is a bit tired. The snows have started. Maybe he will have the time to think as soon as the elections are over. There is a lot to think about because the new projects planned in Alaska will affect the man and his village more than the Land Claims Settlement, more than the Trans Alaska Pipeline.

And when the ice breaks next May the most important deci-

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Tremendous Changes and Future

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sions affecting the Man's future will be debated many miles from his village.

Next spring, outsiders will start asking the village corporation for use of land in the village to build offices, or a storage shed, or a communications station for telephone and television. Any new buildings to support new programs in the bush will change the life of villagers; and the new pipeline corridors for natural gas will affect the villages of many men, more than the Trans Alaska Pipeline for oil.

The Federal Government is establishing special new groups of men to evaluate and compare all the different routes that a natural gas pipeline may take, and the comparison of the advantages of disadvantages of each route will affect each village in many ways.

Even if the new pipeline route is two hundred miles away from the village, it could affect his fishing and his hunting permanently, it could preserve his village for a hundred years, or it could isolate his village for a hundred years — and now that he owns his land, he can no longer move his village as easily as in the old days.

The man worries about sickness in the village this winter. If his neighbor or his wife gets seriously sick, will he be able to call a doctor, will he be able to get an airplane to come and help?

The man knows that his village will be getting telephone service, maybe through the new satellite or maybe through a connection with a nearby village. Will his village also get television so he can hear the news from Juneau or from Washington every day? The man wants to know what they say there because they are deciding issues that will affect his village and his family until long after he is dead.

As the snow gets deeper this winter and the river ice cracks like a rifle in the darkness, he and his neighbors will need informa-

tion about what these outsiders are saying about his village, about what his village wants — at least about what they in Washington, Anchorage or Juneau say his village wants.

There are several new Federal laws and regulations which help to protect the interests of a man and his village, and it is important to know how to get this help.

The National Environmental Policy Act, called NEPA, provides some of the best protection to a village and permits the village to be heard in any matter involving governmental action near the village. Even the most routine matter, such as an airport beacon, a radio antenna, a storage shed for tools to build a school, cannot be decided upon in Washington without the village having a choice as to whether it is wanted, and if it is wanted, where it should go, what size it should be, and other decisions.

The Federal Council on Environmental Quality directed all agencies on May 2, 1973 to take special care in any federal action in a "rural Setting" and that the good points and bad points of a plan should be explained to the local people.

In many cases, the same type of federal action in other areas does not have to be explained, but in the case of a rural village, where the impact "may be significant as compared to an urban area" the explanations are necessary.

The Environmental Protection Agency has gone even further in providing protection, especially from complicated explanations that no one understands. The agency stated, on January 17, 1973, that these explanations must be clear enough for the average individual to understand, and should not be so complicated that it would take "extensive scientific or technical expertise" to understand.

In other words, before an action is taken, the village should

get, simple, concise, and meaningful information describing the proposed action, and alternatives or choices, and the advantages and disadvantages of each for the village.

This is very important to remember since there will be many proposals during the next year for large programs in rural Alaska that will affect many villages. Some of these actions are relatively minor, but when considered as a total package, they could have an important impact on rural Alaska, and in such cases the law requires that the people be informed directly and clearly before the decision is made, not after.

The Council on Environmental Quality calls this the "cumulative impact" of a series of "minor actions," and says the explanation must be presented in a "form easily understood" at all times.

All federal agencies are expected to comply with the Council's guidelines.

If a report presented to the village is not clear, and does not explain the different choices open to the village, the village can request that another report be prepared and that no action be taken until the village has received the new report.

There will be times when an action may be proposed outside the village lands, but the village, being one of the closest neighbors, still must be kept informed even if the regional corporation is separately informed.

If any village has any questions, we will try to help answer them if they are forwarded to us through the Tundra Times.