

Public comment favorable to Seldovia exchange

by Steve Kakaruk

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Last Friday marked the end of the public comment period to the proposed land exchanges between the Seldovia Native Association and the State of Alaska's Department of Natural Resources. The exchange would secure for the state in excess of 24,000 acres of prime land if the proposals pass the Legislature in May of this year.

SNA then would receive 19,000 acres of state land, a difference of 5,000 acres based on the fair market value of the land parcels. The State of Alaska wants to trade for Native lands in the Kachemak Bay State Park and Seldovia and would receive lands in parcels scattered across the Cook Inlet area.

Fred Elvsaas, SNA President said, "the recent snag on the 'Granite Site' which has been requested to be included, has the possibility of preventing passage of the legislation in Juneau. If the state were to file amendments to the bill, this would give us a better chance when testifying to the Legislature... on the other hand, we want the state to take some action and lease the land out so we can pick up on it."

Granite Point is adjacent to the lands the state has offered to trade for in the Kachemak Bay State Park.

Seldovia put together their proposals and went through the public hearings with their wish list and concluded to go ahead with the proposed transfers. Elvsaas said, "we don't want to make a move on this until all things are put on the table and (we) don't have to wait for the state to change their position."

Dennis Daiger, of the Department

of Natural Resources, in reviewing the reports, said, "in excess of 90 percent were happy with the proposed transfers." Daiger candidly admitted that he was surprised with the recent snag and that "it would derail the exchange."

Daiger added that the state has had a long standing commitment to make the land exchanges in order to terminate its agreement, and so that restoration of the park can begin and Seldovia can receive lands that will generate revenue.

Gary Gustafson, Chief of Land Management said, "there is a number of pit falls in the Seldovia land exchange." He added that he would take a steady stand to the Granite Point position to not include it in the exchange. Gustafson said, "as of September 1985 Seldovia signed an agreement that Granite Point not be included in the land agreement."

Elvsaas said, "Granite Point was not in the previous proposal and there are specific parcels adjacent offered to us and we would like to make it as a whole unit."

Elvsaas added that, "it is kind of ironic they can delete and we can't add to the proposals." Elvsaas explained that Seldovia and the state had previously come to agreement on proposed exchanges, only to have the state renege on the proposals at the last minute.

Elvsaas added, "realism has to have something of value that's worthwhile to us and to simply trade lands just to trade for sake of trading is not going to cut it."

On January 23, Seldovia and the State of Alaska will meet in Juneau for committee hearings to discuss the proposed amendments and issuance of land exchanges.