

AFN wants federal interim management plan

By NANCY HARVEY

The Alaska Federation of Natives has asked the Secretary of Interior to create an interim land management plan for federal lands even before Congress decides the ultimate fate of those lands a year or more from now.

In a letter to Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus, AFN President Byron Mallott says public lands in Alaska have historically not been managed, with few exceptions, and that any management which does exist can be characterized as ad hoc and short range.

"Lack of management has resulted in conflicts among users of the public lands; conflicts, which in our judgment, will increase greatly in coming months and years unless prompt action is taken," said Mallott.

AFN feels that since the Department of Interior can begin the process of active management now, it should do so,

recognizing it will ultimately require Congressional approval.

Secretarial authority to create a natural resource management plan is found in the Conference Committee Report of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, which states:

"The Secretary is authorized, where appropriate, under his existing authority, to withdraw public lands and to classify or reclassify such lands and to open them to entry, location and leasing in a manner which will protect the public interest..."

With finalized National Interest (d)(2) Land legislation over a year away, the development of a natural resource management plan could help ensure immediate protection of subsistence resources.

To date, federal protection of subsistence rights for Alaska Natives has been minimal due to the ambiguity of legislation dealing with subsistence.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act conference committee report continues:

"The conference committee expects both the secretary and the State (of Alaska) to take any action necessary to protect subsistence needs of the Natives."

AFN says the essential element of a natural resource management plan should include: a declaration that protection of natural resources necessary to subsistence land use by Alaska residents is the principal management priority. AFN also seeks a declaration that to the extent compatible with a subsistence priority, the principals of multiple use management will apply and the Secretary allow significant involvement and implementation of natural resource management in the geographic areas of subsistence use.

Mallott intends to inform

Governor Hammond of AFN's request to the Department of Interior and will ask the State to work in close cooperation with the Secretary in the development of the plan.

AFN suggests a policy advisory committee be formed comprised of federal land management policy makers, appropriate state officials, representatives of environmental and industry groups, subsistence users and Native interests. The committee would report directly to the Secretary or his designee and would recommend policy and program direction to the

Department and other agencies involved in the development of the interim management program.

It is expected AFN representatives will meet with the Interior Department while in Washington for d-2 markup to discuss the plan further.

According to Mallott: "Certainly any management program begun now will be interim in nature, but it will allow the government to meet present public land management needs which are now being exacerbated by the lack of responsible management."