

Commentary

Full story about Lake Clark claim by corporation

by Agnes Brown

The *Anchorage Daily News* recently published a front page article with the headline: "Native group lay claim to Lake Clark coastline". This story failed to report the true history of the issue and left readers with two very mistaken impressions. One is that the "claims" mentioned are the work of Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI) and

the other is the claims are very recent.

The facts are these:

These lands are not claimed recently, they were selected in 1974 by five Alaska Native Village Corporations and NOT BY CIRI, six years before Lake Clark National Park was created. The selections were chosen from land specifically set aside in this area by the federal government so the Village Corporations could claim

lands they are entitled to under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA).

Furthermore, these selections were made according to the direction and guidance of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM); however, after the selections were completed the BLM refused to convey the lands. BLM's actions were judged as inequitable

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and unjust by representatives of Alaska as well as by members of Congress. Therefore, legislation was enacted by Congress to assure the Corporations their land claims will be honored.

However, nearly 20 years after this legislation, all of the land in question has not been conveyed to the Corporations. This is true even though the Department of the Interior has formally acknowledged the 29,900 acres at issue in this dispute will eventually be conveyed to them. Indeed, in 1982, the Alaska Regional Office of the National Park Service published a land use study and plan of Native Village and Regional Corporation lands on the west side of Cook Inlet that recognized these lands would be conveyed to Native Corporations. Various alternatives discussed in this study included development of the land for tourism pur-

poses, the sale or lease of the land to private land holders or an exchange of the land with the federal government for other lands or monetary compensation.

With the growing importance of Lake Clark National Park to the National Park system, the Department on the Interior has recently reversed its position and reneged on its promise to convey these lands to the Corporations. Despite the fact the land at issue is among the highest priority selections of the Corporations the Department asserts they should be forced to accept lower priority land selections.

For more than two years, the Corporations, with the help of CIRI, has requested the federal government honor its prior agreements and convey the land selected by the villages in 1974. The federal government has

refused to do so and recently characterized its decision as "final." As they have been compelled to do in the past in order to vindicate their rights under ANCSA, CIRI and the Village Corporations have asked Congress to remedy this problem. The fact the Corporations must once again resort to costly and time consuming legislative remedies to vindicate their claims is unfortunate and unfair.

No one disputes the scenic and re-

source value of the 29,900 acres at Lake Clark. Indeed, the Village Corporations selected this land and identified it as their highest priority precisely because of those values. Nor does anyone dispute the land would be an important addition to the Lake Clark National Park. Because the land had value, however, does not make it just or appropriate to violate ANCSA and the agreements with the Native Corporations who have made legiti-

mate claims.

Editors Note: B. Agnes Brown is the Chairperson of the Cook Inlet United Deficiency Land Management Association, an association formed in 1974 for the purpose of coordinating land selection and management among the Village Corporations with land selections on the west side of Cook Inlet. From 1975 until 1986, Agnes Brown served as president of the Tyonek Native Corporation and is currently the Board of Directors Chairperson.