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Borbridge Chides State on Plan to Select Forest Lands

In an apparent move to select 400,000 acres of forest lands before the native land claims settlement in Congress, the state, spearheaded by Commissioner of Natural Resources Thomas E.

Kelly, is laying plans to select the acreage in Southeastern Alaska.

Distressed by this move, John Borbridge, president of the Tlingit and Haida Central Council,

wrote Gov. Keith H. Miller a letter of caution regarding the selection plan.

Thomas Kelly had told the Juneau Chamber of Commerce that the state was forging ahead

to select 400,000 acres of national forest lands coming to it through an authorization of the Statehood Act.

"All our energies will be spent to culminate our selection, and

when I say culminate, I mean the whole 400,000 acres," Kelly told the chamber.

"While I am more distressed than alarmed by the recent state-

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Borbridge Chides State

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ments attributed to Tom Kelly," wrote Borbridge, "that the state intends to forge ahead with the selection of land in the National Forests, I feel compelled on behalf of the Natives of Southeast Alaska to inform you why I think such action at this time would be contrary to the interests of both the State and the Natives."

Borbridge said that first of all, the natives have been repeatedly assured by the officers of the executive and legislative branches of the federal government, whose approvals would be required before such selections could be invested with even color of efficacy, that such approvals will not be granted while Congress is considering legislation to settle the natives' claims.

"This is why I say that I am not much alarmed by Commissioner Kelly's pronouncements," stated Borbridge.

"Were the Commissioner," he continued, "merely setting the State on a vain course of action I would not be even greatly dismayed; but it is not only a vain course, it is harmful and mischievous one which can be productive of nothing but spoilation of the spirit of cooperation among the Natives and non-Native citizens of the State so recently and painstakingly developed by men of good will in both groups."

Borbridge reminded the governor that each of the settlement bills now receiving the attention of Congress, including the one

sponsored by the administration, makes provision for the granting of lands in the vicinity of their villages to the natives.

"Because most of the villages of the Tlingit and Haida Indians of Southeast Alaska are now surrounded by the Tongass National Forest, effectuation of the village grants in their case will necessarily entail the conveyance to them of lands presently in this forest," said Borbridge.

Borbridge said that the governor would readily understand why Commissioner Kelly's announcement that the state intends to forge ahead with selections of forest lands has been a source of considerable consternation among the Tlingit and Haida people.

"Until their rights to receive land in the vicinity of the cities and villages where they live are defined by legislation, they regard it as a breach of faith for the State to attempt to select lands in the forest areas," Borbridge pointed out.

"I urgently recommend," he concluded, "that you make clear that it is the aim of the State as well as the policy of the Federal Government to preserve the status quo until Congress has had an opportunity to settle and define the rights of the Natives."

"When this has been done, their rights and the forest land selection rights of the State can be coordinated and exercised in the cooperative spirit so essential to the future of Alaska."