

Chugach Natives Face Barriers— State Land Selections Complicate Claims Selections

By MARGIE BAUMAN
(Courtesy of Anchorage Daily News)

In the mountainous, coastal region of South Central Alaska, Indians and Eskimos represented by Chugach Natives Inc. face major barriers thrown up by the state and federal government in making promised land claims selections.

Theirs is the rugged land stretching from the west shore of the Copper River across Prince William Sound to the top of the Kenai Peninsula south of Anchorage. It is lush with good fishing, rain forests and snow-capped mountains thick with glacial ice in season.

The state of Alaska, however, has blanket selected all of the

lower Kenai Peninsula and much of the rest of this scenic land lies within Chugach National Forest.

Much of the nearly one million acres due to the 1,500 Eskimos and Indians in this region may have to come from outside the region unless the U.S. Department of Agriculture releases part of the national forest to the Natives.

Land selection, indeed, is one of the foremost problems facing Chugach Natives, said Cecil Barnes, president and general manager for the region, who has set up a field office at 819 C Street in Anchorage.

Part of the initial \$500,000 federal payment to the Chugach region will go to pay off obligations from the past fiscal year, but much more will go toward regional organization, land selection and development cooperation with existing federal and private agencies, Barnes said.

On behalf of Native residents

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of Cordova, Valdez and Seward, and the villages of English Bay, Port Graham and Tatilek, Barnes will have the major task of minding the store until the fishing season is over.

Most members of the board of the regional corporation are commercial fishermen and the short fishing season is their major, perhaps only, source of income. Fishing, indeed, is the major occupation of the region's Natives, with construction placing a poor second.

Outside help is brought in to do the construction work on highways and other state and private projects in the area. About 30 per cent of the Natives depend on subsistence living, but Barnes estimates the average income for a family of four at about \$10,000.

What is needed, he says, is better housing, better jobs and better transportation.

Still, "we want the Secretary of the Interior to recognize material sites for new highway development as a property right of Native people," he said. Until the Natives have made their land selections, there should be no highway building, even though the Interior Department has the legal right to withdraw land as

right-of-way for highways, he said.

Cataloging the activities of federal agencies in areas of land use planning is another problem for Barnes to keep a hard eye on, he notes. The state-Federal Land Use Planning Commission, with Alaska Federation of Natives executive director Harry Carter as its only Native member, will undoubtedly have a strong effect on future use of much of Alaska.

Working with Barnes on some of the immediate problems is the region's attorney, Clark Gruening of Anchorage, and officers Walter Meganack of Port Graham, George Allen of Tatilek and Ethim Moonin of Port Graham.

Eventually, Barnes said, the region may undertake a housing program, but aside from participation in the federal Turnkey 3 project, there are no present plans to build improved housing.

Much of the struggle of land selection and other area problems of organization will have to wait, however, until the fish nets are hauled in this summer.