

What others say...

• *Old Harbor explains land exchanges in ANWR*

(Continued from Page Two)

Environmental Impact Statement on the exchanges.

It has taken until now to agree on even a draft contract that the public could meaningfully comment on. A public participation process has been initiated. To our knowledge, of all the many land exchanges in Alaska that have been approved by the Executive Branch, these would be the first to undergo full NEPA review.

This will give the public more opportunity to influence the secretary and Congress on our exchanges than for any of the scores of land exchanges authorized in recent times.

We recognize that there has been an element of privacy in the process to date. Realistically, no one can negotiate a contract with the press at his elbow.

The most important thing, it seems to us, is that what has gone on to date is preliminary, and no binding decisions have been made or will be made

without the approval of the secretary and Congress.

We feel that when fair-minded people examine the draft agreements, the valuation methodologies and the care we have exercised to protect the public interest in these exchanges, they will realize that the exchanges could represent one of the great public land acquisition success stories.

We hope that these benefits are not obscured by procedural squabbles or personalities. Even under the most optimistic schedule for congressional action, before the first acre of ANWR land is explored, the current administration will be long gone.

What is important is the merits of these each exchanges to the national interest. These are the issues that are telling: substance, not form.

Frankly, we are offended at your clear suggestion that our corporation is being used by oil companies and that we need congressional protection from ourselves. That simply is not true.

Come to see how we make a living in the Gulf of Alaska. You will find some very practical and hard-working people.

We welcome debate over the merits of our exchange, but we respectfully request that you recognize that we know what we are doing. The paternalism of the 1880s is misplaced in the 1980s.

As we understand the American legal system, people are supposed to have their day in court before they are convicted. We seek a commitment from you, your committee, and the others who have jurisdiction over these exchanges, that we will be given an opportunity to let the NEPA process proceed, and to appear before you to make our case before you make any final judgment on the merits of these exchanges.

Our future is dependent largely on these exchanges. To have our future snatched from us without the opportunity to defend it is not the American

way. In 1971, Congress made a pact with us to move forward together toward Native self-sufficiency. We are working within the system to achieve that dream. Government help on converting our refuge inholdings, priceless to the public, into assets that can truly help our people is a part of the ANCSA commitment. We hope you will support this.

We hope to work together with you on this matter for as long as it takes to resolve it in a manner that serves the national interest, including the interests of our corporation and the Alaska Natives who are our shareholders.

We would like to meet with you at your earliest convenience to begin this process.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely yours,
Old Harbor Native Corp.
Sven Haakanson
President