

# Editorial

## ARCTIC RESEARCH COMMISSION MEETING

*"The most common trait of all primitive peoples is a reverence for the life-giving earth...the land was alive to his loving touch, and he, its son, was brother to all creatures...All of his religious rites and land attitudes savored the inseparable world of nature and God, the master of Life."*

—Stewart Udall, *"The Quiet Crisis"*

Representatives from the oil industry, the scientific community, academia, environmental/health groups and Native groups spoke at Friday's public meeting of the Arctic Research Commission at the Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum. Meetings were also held in Barrow and Fairbanks earlier in the week.

The Commission was created by the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984. Its primary duty is to develop and recommend an integrated national Arctic research policy. Although the Commission stressed the importance of public input in its efforts, time constraints were allowed to restrict that input to only those with prepared statements who signed up to address the Commission in advance.

Most of the testimony was concerned with specific areas of research and policy development. Many of the areas which were being advocated for study have been neglected until now, particularly those which deal with the behavioral sciences and the impact of development on indigenous Native populations in the Arctic region.

These areas, and many others put forth during the meeting are worthwhile pursuits both by virtue of their practical application and their addition to our knowledge about this crucial region.

But as is often the case with these meetings, what goes unsaid is often more important than what is. The case in point, as Judith Brady of the Commonwealth North organization expressed it, is that, "this Commission has the job of designing the Arctic for the 21st century." Brady continued by questioning the efficacy of attempting to do so without first having a moral and philosophical understanding of the region.

In order to accomplish that goal, it is first necessary to ask some fundamental questions about ourselves and our relationship with the land. The people of Barrow spoke to this point. Their words were echoed by Charles Edwardsen, a Barrow resident, at the Anchorage meeting: "We (Inupiat people) refuse to be somebody else's victim...We are older than Jonah, have been in the Arctic since time immemorial." Edwardsen went on to express patience and caution on the part of those who would develop the Arctic in haste.

And Vernita Zilys, Director of Subsistence Resources for RurAL CAP, said that the Commission is "morally obligated to the protection of Alaska Natives."

This is not to say that the oil companies and academicians have nothing important to say; but their views are only a product of their perspective of what the land means to them. The Commission should strive to keep in mind that only the people who live there have a long and abiding relationship with the land; it is only they who can tell us what the Arctic is.

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