

# Electric rates soar

Emergency assistance for the skyrocketing cost of electricity was the primary concern of the SEACAP Board of Directors who met in Juneau last week.

Southeastern Alaska Community Action Program (SEACAP) is the federally supported anti-poverty corporation serving 19 communities in the region.

"During the past twelve months, electricity costs have risen about 100 per cent in those communities served by Tlingit and Haida Regional Electrification Authority," said James Axel Wilson, Executive Director of SEACAP. Their diesel-fueled generators serving populations of several hundred now exceed Juneau's hydro-power rates by almost 500 per cent.

"Something's got to give," said Frank Price of Kasaan. The City Council has not decided on a course of action yet, but some people feel we should just shut the generator down."

Miles Murphy, Mayor of Hoonah, claimed that the local governments and small businesses are also suffering from high rates. "Its like a chain reaction, electricity goes up and everything else is affected," said Mr. Murphy. "Two businesses have closed in Hoonah because of the high cost. And the people it hurts most are the elderly and low-income people." Mr. Murphy went on to say that several communities are faced with supporting a sewage treatment facility — if they can't pay their own electric bills, how are they going to pay for other local utilities.

Al Macasaet, Mayor of Klawock is considering working with the local sawmill to develop a waste wood electric generating system, but like other Tlingit and Haida Regional Electrification Authority serviced communities, there is a catch.

Communities have entered contracts with the Regional Electrical Authority to continue to buy service — attempting to opt out and take over the utility themselves could lead to breach of contract proceedings.

Robert Martin Jr., Manager of Tlingit and Haida Regional Electrification Authority spoke to the SEACAP Board about the electrical rates. "One-third of our operational budget pays for diesel fuel. Given the present oil situation, we anticipate further fuel increases, which will unfortunately mean another rate increase," he said.

He went on to say that the Electrical Authority is investigating generating systems based on renewal resources but it may be several years before any could be 'on line'.

"So what do we do now for the people being threatened with shut-off?" asked Richard Whitaker of Ketchikan. Dr. Walter Soboleff, ANB Grand Camp President and Representative of Tenakee Springs proposed an urgent plea in the form of a resolution seeking emergency assistance through the Governor's Office. It was passed un-

animously. The Board went on to direct that SEACAP continue weatherization efforts and look into additional methods to help people save money on fuel and electricity.

Through federal grants, SEACAP has assisted 105 low-income families in seven Southeastern communities to insulate and 'weatherize' their homes. Another 10 homes of elderly Yakutat residents are scheduled for the service this spring.

The Board also considered the issue of SEACAP becoming an independent agency. For the past ten years SEACAP has operated as a regional delegate agency under a parent corporation located in Anchorage Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP). Perennially underfunded, to the point of seeking supplemental personnel grants to adequately staff the Juneau office, SEACAP is now considering applying for Community Action Agency status to deal directly with Federal Officials in Seattle. In addition to saving middle-man costs, SEACAP would then be eligible to apply for other program support and development.

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lop projects which would have greater flexibility in addressing local and regional issues.

The Board decided to wait for word from their President Myrna Torgramsen of Wrangell who will be attending two upcoming meetings — a special Task Force meeting in Seattle and RuRAL CAP's Board meeting set for early June in Bethel, before taking any action.

Other motions and resolutions adopted at the SEACAP meeting related to seeking Federal support for meeting fire protection needs in Southeast, designating alternative energy development as a regional priority, continued support for JOM (Johnson O'Malley) funding at current levels, petitioning Department of Transportation for increased ferry service to Prince of Wales Island and protection of tidelands marine life and vegetation within city boundaries for traditional subsistence users.

Board members or their alternates who participated were: Jim Allan — Pelican, Robert Davis — Kake, Dr. Ronald Hatch — Craig, Johanna Hotch — Klukwan, Bonnie Howard — Sitka, Tillie Kushnick — Saxman, Gertrude Lyons — Petersburg, Al Macasaet — Klawock, Miles Murphy — Hoonah, Frank Price — Kasaan, Ray Sensmeier — Yakutat, Dr. Walter Soboleff — Tenakee Springs, Mildred Sparks — Haines, Myrna Torgramsen — Wrangell,, Amos Wallace — Juneau, and Richard Whittaker — Ketchikan.