

# Villages attempt to control change

## Management of Change

### Seminar a success

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You may not be able to stop change from coming to your village, but when and if it does come, you can have a lot to say about how that change will happen.

This was the view presented by wide range of speakers at a seminar of village people who came to Anchorage last week to find

out how oil development on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), of Alaska may affect them.

The seminar, entitled the "Management of Change" was sponsored by the Alaska Native Foundation and the Kellogg Project. It brought together representatives from about 40 Alaskan coastal villages to hear

how they could use their land, money and their wits to control change in their areas.

Although conference speakers included state and federal officials oil company representatives and legislators, the three day gathering was largely devoted to presentations by repre-

(Continued on Page 16)

# Villages want to control development ...

(Continued from Page 1)

representatives from Yakutat, Kodiak and English Bay. These three communities, already confronted with the need to make hard decisions about progress, have each made a different response to the promise, or threat, of offshore oil development.

The purpose of the conference was to give tools to the villagers, on the assumption that oil development is coming whether anybody really wants it or not. However, Roger Lang, who helped moderate the discussions, reminded them that as landowners, they could choose to try and prevent development from taking place. As land owners, he said, they had a "right to say no. Don't leave here thinking you have to do what's been shown."

Just what are the tools for controlling change? Villagers were told they could use taxation, zoning ordinances, building codes, land swaps, political pressure and direct negotiations to determine how and where the oil companies could set up shop in their area.

## The Yakutat Experience

Byron Mallott, chairman of the board of Yak-Tat Kwaan, Inc., village corporation for Yakutat, described how oil companies arrived in the village overnight, buying some of the best waterfront property in town before residents knew what was happening. He said the first step the corporation took was to find out exactly what the people wanted, to what degree they welcomed development, and how strongly they felt about preserving their rural and cultural values. It was important he said, that the corporation not take the villagers' thoughts for granted.

Having received the views of the Yakutat people, the "Yakutat team" consisting of the board of directors, and a lawyer and a land consultant, turned to the job of negotiating with the oil companies. The purpose of the negotiations was to keep control of the land, keep the village from being overrun by uncontrolled growth and construction and make sure the village got a share of the oil wealth.

Professional advice and two years of negotiating have cost Yakutat a lot of money. But

attorney David Wolf said they had achieved many of their goals because their board of directors worked hard, met often, did not claim to know all the answers, spent time trying to understand their situation and at no time let their consultants tell them what to do.

"This board had staying power," Wolf said.

## Negotiating Methods

The Yakutat team, in several semi-private sessions with other villagers, described some of the negotiating methods they had used, culminating in five separate land use and lease agreements with oil companies. Several key points were:

- Make sure you are negotiating over a proposal that you have put forward. Villages could have a slight edge by forcing industry to respond to terms asked by the villagers.

- Be prepared to select, after careful consideration, more than one lawyer or consultant. All have different kinds of knowledge and can help you in different ways.

- Be prepared, at all times, to break off talks when you feel you are beginning to give up more than you are getting or otherwise not achieving the goals you have set for yourself.

Mallott concluded that preservation of the Yakutat lifestyle was their number one priority and they have achieved some success. Nonetheless, "I still think we have a tiger by the tail. It's a calculated risk we're taking there's no doubt about it."

## English Bay Approach

Another village with another answer is English Bay. Several days before the seminar opened, the little Aleut village near Homer joined with environmentalists and fishermen to ask that a February 23 offshore oil lease sale in Cook Inlet be called off.

Village spokesman Arnold Melsheimer told the seminar, "Our lifestyle is such that we would prefer to have nothing to do with offshore development." He suggested that others someday would thank the handful of Aleuts for saying no to oil.

Melsheimer was skeptical of state officials who spoke in

"glowing terms" of helping villages plan for development. "I would suggest that they are paid politicians saying that. That's how they make their bread and butter. Their job is to sell the program they were employed to sell."

Melsheimer said the job of English Bay was to protect its lifestyle from being "snowed under."

The lawsuit filed by English Bay and others claims that shore activity near the village stimulated by offshore drilling will destroy the rural and cultural values of the village. Villagers also fear the destruction of crucial salmon and other marine resources.

"You have to take your stand somewhere along the line. We're fighting for our way of life and to us that's more important than anything else," Melsheimer concluded.

## The Koniag Method

Residents of Kodiak Island attended the OCS seminar in force. A lease sale is scheduled off the island late this year and Koniag, Inc., the Native regional corporation for the area, has taken the lead in preparing for expected oil development.

Adopting a "good neighbor" policy, Koniag has offered some of its extensive land and financial resources to the city and borough of Kodiak to develop a joint plan to deal with oil.

As attorney Martin Farrell pointed out, the philosophy of the Kodiak effort has been to keep the oil companies at "arm's length" while Natives and local government "harmonize" their relationship.

Unlike others who have spoken of protecting Native cultural values that some people feel are already dead, Koniag president Jack Wick said his people had defined their problem a little more simply, "We decided to preserve our life as we have it now."

Wick warned that oil companies could buy an entire village and will go around you any way they can. He said Kodiak's goal is to "contain the oil development to a specific area, thereby reducing the impact on the villages already existing."

Presentations by state and federal officials and oil company representatives at the seminar were confined to a couple of hours altogether.

Natural Resources Commissioner Guy Martin told the villagers that Outer Continental Shelf development is "at the top of our agenda." He admitted the State of Alaska cannot offer the same amount of assistance to every village, but "The state has had a tremendous role with regard to the OCS program."

## Villagers Viewpoints

Villagers at the seminar seemed to appreciate the wealth of new information, but none had any illusions about the struggle ahead of them.

A man from Togiak said, "The people in rural Alaska are crying out: how are we going to live when this goes through?" He urged a moratorium on offshore leasing until the villages can plan for change.

Another, from Chefornak, tied OCS development to other social and economic change in Alaska. He and others, urged unity among Alaska Natives to defend their interests. "If people are united regardless of what anybody says, we can protect the village way of life," he said.

Another man from Bristol Bay complained that villages

are forced to react to events because they lack information, rather than being able to take their own initiative. He suggested, "Our only defense at the present time is to say no."

## New Claims

Several speakers recalled the days of the grueling land claims struggle. One prominent voice, that of North Slope Borough Mayor Eben Hopson, proposed a dramatic extension of the land claims issue:

"There is a natural connection between the OCS program and our land claims movement, and I think that our experience on the Arctic Slope illustrates this connection for all to see and understand. The OCS program raises the question of what I

term 'aboriginal offshore jurisdiction', and our claiming and securing this jurisdiction will be an important new phase of what has become an international Native land claims movement."

As the three day seminar drew to a close, villagers reminded one another of the tremendous political and economic cloud that lies with the villages, not just the regions, of Alaska. This power derived from the land and money of the land claims settlement, seemed greatly enhanced in the eyes of some by the information from the seminar.

As Roger Lang told them, "There's a lot of weight to be thrown by you."