

# Land can provide the means for a tax base

by Eileen P. MacLean  
for the Tundra Times

Last year I sponsored and introduced House Bill 588, relating to general grant land selections.

Although the bill was introduced late in the session, it passed through the House Community and Regional Affairs Committee and also was heard in the House Resources Committee.

## Inupiat Paitot People's Heritage **OPINION**

The purpose of HB 588 was to restore equity in the municipal land selection process and return the emphasis in land selections to the original intent of "maximum local self-government."

In understanding the need for HB 588 it helps to briefly review the history of municipal land selections in the state.

The Alaska Constitution intended municipalities to be self-governing and gave them broad powers to encourage independence and maximum local self-government.

To further this goal, the state also offers incentives to encourage municipal incorporation. Since 1962, one of these incentives has been the receipt of general grant land.

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Land provides a means of creating a tax base, of generating revenues through land sales and leases and a land base for community and other public purposes.

The Mandatory Borough Act, enacted in 1963, created opportunities for municipalities to acquire state land for their local use. The intent was again to "provide for maximum local self-government." The Mandatory

Borough Act also caused the creation of several boroughs in the more populated areas of the state.

The act provided that "an organized borough may select 10 percent of the vacant, unappropriated and unreserved state land located within its boundaries within five years after the date of availability of state lands in the borough."

Over the years, several changes to the law have been made. Two which have had a major impact are:

- The population cap instituted in 1978, which limits general grant land entitlements to no more than 20 acres per resident.

- Restrictions made on vacant, unappropriated and unreserved classifications of the land available for selection.

Furthermore, the Department of Natural Resources has implemented several in-house policies which have not had the benefit of legislative review.

All of this has resulted in greater restrictions on land selections and has gradually given more authority to the DNR in approving land selections. Now, all the decisions regarding land entitlements are made by DNR.

HB 588 would remove restrictions on land classification, remove the population cap, create an appeal process in the land selection process and give the Department of Community and Regional Affairs an opportunity to recommend approval or disapproval of land selections.

I intend to introduce the municipal lands bill again in the 17th Alaska Legislature. It will have a different number, and it may be introduced as a committee bill.

Your comments and support will be appreciated. If you would like information on this or any other legislation, please contact my office in Barrow, 852-7111, or my office in Anchorage, 561-7611.



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