

BLM Sees New Role After Claims Settlement

The pending native claims legislation, regardless of its final provisions places the Bureau of Land Management in a new role in managing Alaska's public lands. The bureau's first priority in Alaska will be to transfer lands selected or claimed to individual natives or groups as rapidly as possible.

Much work has already been done by BLM to try to get a head start but much more remains.

BLM has signed an agreement with BIA which outlines some of the joint and separate responsibilities of the 2 agencies.

Under this agreement, BLM will provide information for a BIA directed public information program. The bureau will also have representatives on traveling teams formed to describe the provisions of the final legislation to native villages and other concerned groups.

BLM hopes to assist BIA in creating training courses for na-

tives. The trainees could then be hired by BLM to help with the work that must be done before patents can be given.

BLM will also give information, where it exists, from its records on land status and the resources around the villages so natives can make informed decisions on what lands to select.

In its long history of issuing patents to private persons, the federal government has had to establish certain procedures. These are designed to insure that the patentee has good title which will not be attacked in future years.

Before lands are patented to the native villages, a basic determination which must be made is whether there are any valid claims which must be honored first. Some of these claims are already shown on the official public land records. Others may involve settlers who have not recorded their claims, or there may be mining claims which are

not recorded with BLM.

Such lands are not available for selection by the villages. To find all of these and tell the villages which lands can be selected, BLM must examine the land on the ground.

To look at up to 25 townships withdrawn around about 200 villages is a big job and will take time and people. This phase will probably take several years to complete, after the various selections are made.

Once the land to be transferred to individuals is definitely identified it must be surveyed by BLM. This will involve both the survey of the boundary of the large village selections and the smaller individual claims.

It will also be necessary to survey the villages themselves to identify the lots which the village deeded to individuals. Plans will then be prepared from the field reports, and upon approval by Washington, the land office can prepare the patents.

Depending on available manpower, it may take 10-15 years or more to survey most of the selections. This time, coupled with the necessary "examine time," indicates that the last patent may not be issued for 20 years or more after the legislation is passed. In view of these problems, BLM and BIA will jointly determine priorities and identify areas that, for one reason or another, should be examined and surveyed ahead of others.

BLM has also been involved in gathering as much information as possible. The bureau has created a file for each village. The file contains land office status plats, maps showing the appropriate location of the withdrawals according to the terms of existing legislation, and computations on the acreage in each township and the number of acres not available for selection because of existing rights. Such data gathering is continuing.