

BIA Director Says Aggressive Technique Taking Roll

JUNEAU—Experts say it can not be done, but Morris Thompson says the enrollment of Alaska natives will “definitely” be completed by the end of the two-year deadline set down by

the Alaska Native Claims Act of 1971.

According to Thompson, Area Director for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Alaskans will use a new technique—an aggressive

enrollment—to meet the deadline.

The Department of Interior has assured BIA officials, he says, that funds and necessary personnel will be made available

for the work.

According to him, the operation will require “\$400,000 between here and the end of June.”

His office has opened a post office box—Pouch 7-1971, An-

chorage, 99501—to receive any inquiries concerning enrollment and “people are negotiating for office space” now.

Job descriptions for positions
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have been circulated to all native organizations in the state, Thompson says, and his office hopes to open the Anchorage office this week with at least a skeleton staff.

The aggressive enrollment plan calls for contracting with the regional organizations to hire people in the villages and train them to assist village families in filling out the "short and simple" one-page enrollment form.

The plan was developed, he says, by him and other BIA employees at a meeting in Washington, D.C. and was based on the wishes expressed by Alaska natives. Once the procedures are published, Alaska natives will have 30 days to ask for changes.

Thompson says he is shooting for a March 15 target to start the actual enrollment so that village employees can be hired and trained and put to work before the summer months begin.

"If we move into summer," Thompson says, "enrollment will be more difficult."

The biggest problem Thompson anticipates is enrolling Alaska natives who live in the lower 48. There, he says, officials will have to rely on slower and

more traditional methods of finding the beneficiaries of the claims settlement.

Persons living in the lower 48, he says, must take action to be enrolled. But BIA is doing two things to aid them:

—"We're asking each and every village to give us names of those living outside," Morris says

—and "we're visiting cities" such as San Francisco, San Jose, Portland, Seattle and San Diego to seek out Alaska natives living there, in addition to sending out press releases to all Indian organizations in the lower 48 to ask them to send any inquiries from Alaska natives to the Anchorage address.

Forms completed by Alaska natives, Morris says, will be computerized in the Anchorage office, where a staff of 20 people (secretaries, coders) will be on board to handle the enrollment forms.

And, Thompson says, the revised system of reporting has an evaluation system built into it which will help employees "see where we are every two weeks" in meeting the deadline.

"I'm pretty excited about the whole thing," Thompson says, "it's a challenge."