

Federal, state spokesmen discuss rights-of-way for road construction

The one-sentence federal law giving state governments rights-of-way over unreserved public lands for the construction of highways was the topic of a multi-agency meeting recently sponsored by the Bureau of Land Management.

The 1866 law, meant to provide access for settlers and others, has been a controversial issue in Alaska in recent years as the state and the BLM work to interpret it.

Wayne Boden, BLM's deputy state director for land and renewable resources, said the meeting was intended to be a review of the Alaska Federal Agency Policy on the issues drafted by BLM last year.

"Our main purpose was to discuss the process by which the State of Alaska will assert jurisdiction over certain rights-of-way across federal public lands," he said.

State Sen. Jack Coghill of Nenana put together a task force last year to identify surface transportation routes which could be claimed under the law. Coghill said he was pleased that the federal and state agencies are beginning to work together on these issues.

Others involved in the discussion included agency representatives from the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Forest Service and the Alaska Federation of Natives.