

State resource agency needs permanent chief

For the third time since Gov. Walter Hickel took office, the Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources has a new commissioner.

The governor's office last week announced the resignation of Glenn Olds, who will go to Washington, D.C. to resume teaching, writing and consulting in the private sector. Olds was preceded by former oil executive Harold Heinze and will be followed by Harry Noah, another consultant who helps corporations obtain the environmental permits needed for development projects.

Setting aside the possible reasons for these changes, Alaskans can ill afford the kind of administrative drift that inevitably results from this kind of mid-term shuffle. As steward of millions of acres of land and its priceless wealth of fish, wildlife, water, timber and minerals, the department is responsible for many critical decisions regarding development and protection of resources.

Have watched for years as environmental degradation and depletion have caused the eyes of the world to turn north. Cherishing the state's pristine condition even as we pursue our livelihoods in forest, mountain, tundra and sea, we deserve someone special to head the agency overseeing resource policy—regardless of which political party is in power.

It takes a gifted and inspired manager to reconcile the sometimes conflicting aspirations we have for state-owned lands. We feel a good commissioner is one who will:

- ensure professionalism, objectivity and application of the best scientific information available in resource policy analysis and field decisions;

- consult closely with citizens, communities and adjacent landholders, including Native corporations and tribal organizations;

- fight for an adequate budget to achieve the standards of resource stewardship called for by our statutes and expectations;

- bring decorum and common sense to our relations with federal resource managers;

- respect and invite diversity of opinion regarding the use of our resources, including those who would err on the side of protecting rather exploiting the land that endows us all so richly; and

- take the long view and foster a truly sustainable resource future.

We wish the new commissioner well as he attempts in what remains of Hickel's term to regroup and re-inspire his cadre of professional planners and managers.

A little stability at DNR would be a good thing for rural villages and Native corporations whose lands are heavily impacted by activities on state lands. From land use classification to cooperative wildland firefighting, state and native land managers are frequent partners, even when opinions differ. These relations can flourish for the good of all once the new commissioner comes on board—and stays on board.