

# Gravel's TT Report

By Mike Gravel  
U.S. Senator, Alaska

It's official now: The Kenai Native Association, Inc., owns what used to be the Wildwood Air Force Station. This transfer of federal property to local use is a prime example of cooperatively using the Native Claims Settlement Act for the benefit of all Alaskans.

## Air Force Leaves

The question of the future of the station was raised a couple of years ago, when the Air Force abandoned its Wildwood base.

A delegation of Kenai residents traveled all the way to Washington, D.C., to see what could be done. There were representatives of the city and borough governments and of the Native Association.

When the group met with me, I suggested that we use the recently passed Claims Act to get the base transferred to the Native Association. Such a move, we all felt, would benefit the entire region, providing both jobs and income to help the economy of the Kenai Peninsula.

## Agreement Reached

We had some hurried meetings with the Interior Department, the Pentagon and other agencies and reached an agreement that the Native Association could select the base as part of its lands, once the roll of the Natives had been completed.

Then we had the problem of what to do until final transfer could take place. We went back to the Pentagon and persuaded the Air Force to maintain the facility for the Natives, letting them use it until implementation of the Claims Act would permit transfer of the base outright to the association. The Natives then began setting up a school at the Wildwood Station.

## Generators and Jobs

Then, in November, 1972, we convinced the military to leave its three electric generators at Wildwood, where they were needed for a University of Alaska soil experiment in high-nutrition food growing.

Originally, the Air Force fought the plan. But when I asked them to explain their plans for the generators, they admitted that they had none. Finally they agreed to do a good turn for Alaska: The generators remained, and the food growth experiment began.

## Final Transfer

On March 28, 1974, the Air Force Station officially became a part of the Kenai Native Association, proudly announced, "You're on Native land now!"

On April 6, I had the pleasure of visiting the newly-acquired facilities. I was, to say the least, very impressed.

## Native School

The Native Association is using much of the facility as a school, with students coming from all over Alaska. George Miller and Alex Shadura, the

director of the Controlled Environment Agriculture program, have great expectations for both the school and the soil experiment.

## Jobs and Food

The potential is enormous: Kenai residents were hurt economically by the closing of the Air Force Station. But the experimental soil program could result in jobs for almost 200 people from the peninsula.

Equally important, the controlled environment growing experiments could revolutionize food production and consumption in Alaska.

In the greenhouse building, I toured the vegetable and fruit growing project. The reconstruction work, incidentally, was done entirely by Kenai Natives who were trained in the various fields required at that time. The special lighting set-up is really something — the experimental lights are remarkable similar to natural sunlight in their effects.

If the project proves successful — and the odds are that it will — the benefits for Alaska will be immense. Even the most remote villages in the state could have fresh vegetables and fruits year-around, and at a lowered cost.

## Native Claims Act A Boon to All

This is positive proof of how we all benefit from the Settlement Act. With the selection of the abandoned base under the Settlement Act provisions, people are getting jobs, children are gaining an education, Natives are receiving compensation for the land in Alaska.

And with the new scientific project about to go full-steam ahead, the Settlement Act is contributing toward the betterment of our lives — and those of future Alaskans — in a very different way.