

12 Regionals Place Allotments As One of Top Priorities

The twelve native regional corporations have placed native allotments as one of the top priorities when a committee of native representatives meets with top Washington officials later this month.

"This is a matter of a lifetime for these people," said an attorney for one of the regional corporations. "They may or may not have a place to live."

Jimmy Huntington of the Tanana Chiefs Board of Directors said "The number one priority of all people living in the village, in the bush, living on the land, is the native allotment. The people want their allotment."

Huntington referred to the confusing letter sent out by the BLM to approximately 8000 native people who had filed applications for an allotment. "People came to me and said, 'Am I going to get my allotment? I think they want to take it away from me.' They (BLM) sent this letter out to 8000 individuals to confuse

them worse than they ever been confused before."

"I would like to see a letter,"

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ALLOTMENTS

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said Huntington, "saying: Completely ignore the letter we sent out before."

It does not appear that BLM will send out such a letter, but Curtis McVee, State Director for the Bureau of Land Management in Alaska promised, "We will be concentrating our field personnel on allotments."

McVee said his department would make every effort to contact each person who received a letter "to be sure they understand what they will be signing away."

But he also said he could not guarantee that it would be possible to talk to, field examine, and screen each and every allotment in the time remaining. (The letter sent by BLM named December 18, 1973, as the deadline for switching a native allotment to a primary-place-of-residence, which was the option presented in the letter.)

Last year his office field examined only 400 cases, so the possibility of processing 8000 in slightly more than half a year looks very slim.

Hank Eaton of the Koniag region blamed the Department for the present allotment crisis, calling it a "monster they created themselves."

"From 1906 to recently," he added, "less than 100 allotments were granted. If the Department had done its job, there wouldn't be this problem now."

"I spent 7 years fighting for a 5 acre homestead," said Eaton, "and never once did the department inform me I had the right of a native allotment."

The regions also addressed themselves to the shortage of land which will be available under the Special Purpose Grant and asked the Department to answer how that problem would be met.

"The department has to come to some consideration about what it's going to do," advised Washington Attorney Weinberg.

The legal counsel for the Division of Public Lands, Paul Kirton, also agreed that 2 million acres "just wasn't enough to cover all of the needs lumped under this heading (The Special Purpose Grant).

Robert Nick, speaking for the native people, said, "The 8000 applications were made in good faith that these applications would be granted us. This land settlement was for us."

A suggestion was made that since BLM had doubts about whether it had adequate manpower to contact each and every applicant affected by the allotment-residence option, contracts be let to the regional corporations to undertake the time-consuming job.

There was no official response from the Department on this suggestion.

An attorney for the regional corporations called for a preliminary screening of all allotments to determine which fell into the possibility of being chosen as a primary place of residence.

"If you came to the conclusion that an applicant did not qualify for an allotment, he could then file for a primary place of residence. I would hate to have it on my conscience that some of these people would end up without a home. We're talking about the livelihood of individuals, not how many thousands of acres are going to a corporation."