

Allotment group fights injustice

by Grenelda M. Edmiston

Alaska Native Foundation

Even getting approval to your Native allotment doesn't seem to mean much these days. And if some get their way, getting title to your land won't mean a thing either.

An Interior Alaska Native's allotment was approved, surveyed and a certificate of allotment was issued. That in itself is in the low percentage of actions that take place in the Alaska Native Allotment Program of the Bureau of Land Management.

We all have thought the last an allottee would ever get from BLM was that final document showing the world that you have title to your land. We were wrong. Last month, five years after the deed was recorded in the state recording office, BLM sent an Alaska Native a followup letter.

Did you guess right? BLM nullified the certificate of allotment.

Native allottees wait years and years for that certificate so they can do what any other private landowner does when he or she gets title to land. They sigh with relief that the ordeal is finally over and go on with their plans for the future.

They have something to show for their efforts, something that enriches their lives and that of their families. Now, it looks as if Alaska Native allotment owners can't even relax when they get that piece of paper proving the land is theirs.

Another case in limbo involves the State of Alaska and the bald eagle preserve in Southeast.

The Native allotment applicants met with the state and others involved in forming the preserve. The discussions seemed to be productive, and Native leaders and allotment applicants understood that if the BLM found the allotment applicants were entitled to allotments, the state would reconvey the land.

With this condition in mind, the Native allotment applicants agreed to support the formation of the preserve.

The case of Esther Hotch is one of those mentioned. Hotch went through the process, and BLM determined she was entitled to her allotment. The BLM did its part. Staff members requested title reconveyance from the State of Alaska. The state has come back to the BLM and said, "Sue us. We will not reconvey that parcel of land."

Despite the fact that Alaska Natives from there have maintained an environment that any outdoor lover would be proud of showing off, the state now refuses to reconvey. This flies in the face of the fact that their ancestors have used the land in Southeast Alaska for centuries with a respect for the other inhabitants of the earth and BLM found they were entitled to the allotment.

These people thought an agreement had been made, and now that just isn't the case, according to the state.

Getting approval to your Native allotment doesn't seem to mean much these days, and if some get their way, getting title to your land won't mean a thing, either.

Native allotment applicants statewide are coming together to ensure that they are treated in a fair and just manner. We will continue to press government officials to halt these injustices.



Grenelda M. Edmiston is part of the Statewide Native Allotment Association.