

BLM says state, ANCSA land conveyance could take 40 years

by A.J. McClanahan
Tundra Times publisher

Agency estimates land transfers could cost taxpayers \$1 billion

Complete conveyance of land to Alaska Native corporations could take at least 40 years and cost up to \$1 billion by the year 2026, according to recent estimates by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

"We're getting down to tough areas and complex ownership," said

Michael Penfold, Alaska BLM director. "To have things finally cleaned up, we're talking in the 40-year magnitude."

He said his estimate also includes conveying land to the state and processing individual Native land claims.

By June 30, the BLM had conveyed

nearly 34.5 million acres to Alaska Native village and regional corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, in which Natives were granted about 44 million acres of land.

Both villages and regional corporations have received a total of about 80 percent of their entitlement. The bulk

of village land is granted to 172 village corporations under section 12(a) of ANCSA, and entitlements range from 69,120 acres for villages with 25 to 99 enrollees to 161,280 acres for villages with at least 600 enrollees.

Complicating future conveyance of land to Natives is the fact that conveyance has not been completed for state land. Also, about 8,800 Native allotments are still pending. Under a 1906 federal act revoked by ANCSA, Alaska Natives — as individuals — had until 1971 to apply for up to 160 acres of land they traditionally had used.

Among other complications is ongoing litigation over the definition of navigability, a key issue in areas that

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include lakes and streams.

Penfold said because of the cost involved, it would be difficult to shorten the 40-year estimate.

"It's terribly expensive," Penfold said of the conveyance program, noting that the current cost is about \$28 million a year.

To date, the BLM has spent nearly \$180 million in Alaska conveying land to the state, Native corporations and in processing Native allotments, according to BLM figures.

Penfold said he hopes that despite budget cutbacks at the federal level that the BLM can continue land conveyance at its current "aggressive" rate.

"It's not realistic to ask for more. My concern is to keep moving aggressively," he said.

The following acreages, provided by Robert Arndorfer, deputy state director for Conveyance Management, have been conveyed by the BLM to each region and villages within the

region (including cities and historical site conveyances):

●Ahtna, eight villages —
1,528,585.93 acres.

●Aleut, 13 villages —
1,143,760.319 acres.

●Arctic Slope, eight villages —
4,758,561.86 acres.

●Bering Straits, 17 villages —
1,613,637.903 acres.

●Bristol Bay, 29 villages —
2,814,676.73 acres.

●Calista, 56 villages —
5,039,327.947.

●Chugach, five villages —
583,936.932 acres.

●Cook Inlet, seven villages —
1,203,783.781 acres.

●Doyon, 34 villages —
9,150,549.561 acres.

●Koniag, 12 villages —
730,308.74 acres.

●NANA, 11 villages —
1,444,323.40 acres.

●Sealaska, 10 villages —
457,401.401 acres.

In addition, 184,663 acres have been approved for Native allotments, and 3,977,910.87 acres have been conveyed to Elim, Chilkat Indian Village, St. Lawrence Reserve, Tetlin and Venetie for former reserves.