

A MESSAGE FROM GOVERNOR HAMMOND

A Flexible Proposal For Alaska's Future

My Fellow Alaskans —

I want to talk to you about an issue which literally touches every one of us . . . our land. While we may define it differently, all Alaskans desire to ensure the highest quality of life for ourselves and for our children. Perhaps more than anything else, how we use our land will determine whether those qualities be sustained or squandered. Perhaps here more than anywhere else there is an awareness that the people and the land are Alaska.

Section D(2) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act directed the secretary of Interior to place 80 million acres in National Parks, National Forests, Wildlife Refuges, and Wild and Scenic Rivers. Other plans have been proposed by special interest groups and congressmen which would place all D(2) lands under exclusive control by Federal agencies. I believe this is neither desirable nor necessary.

Our proposal, unlike the others, emphasizes what can be done upon the land rather than what can't.

We want to avoid placing needless restrictions upon the land if it can be used without harm to the land itself or to the life it nurtures.

We want flexibility to revise management decisions to meet changing circumstances without that flaccidity which bends to every special interest pressure of the moment or changes radically with each new administration.

We want maximum cooperation between State, Federal and private landowners.

We want a continuing voice in policy-making for Federal lands within Alaska.

A New Approach To Alaskan Lands

Our tentative plan incorporates four basic proposals: First, we propose that 37 million acres be placed in the Federal Park, Refuge and Forest systems. In recognition of the fact that Congress will almost certainly place at least this amount of acreage in such systems, we have pointed out those which we consider most appropriate.

Alaska Resource Lands

Our second proposal calls for an entire new system called "Alaska Resource Lands." These 62 million acres of Federal lands with high national interest would be under joint State-Federal management. When we speak of classifying 62 million acres as Alaska Resource Lands, bear in mind that this is not a proposal to place this acreage into a restricted Federal management system but rather to remove it from such systems and place instead the State into the management process from which it otherwise would be excluded. These lands would not be locked up. Rather, they'd be locked open to permit us input.

Cooperative Management Of Alaska's Lands

Our third proposal is for a new concept of Cooperative Management Areas called "Comans." Lands within the Comans could belong to either government but would be managed under joint control. Private landowners could elect to join the Comans if they wish or stay excluded from them. In Alaska, with its crazy quilt pattern of Federal, State and private lands interspersed with each other, only cooperative management can preclude chaos.

The reason for the Comans is that in many instances the manner in which lands surrounding national interest lands are managed may have substantial impact upon those national interests. What good does it do, for example, if the state imposes maximum protection for salmon at the upper end of a river if the Feds build a high-reach dam on their lands down below? It would seem that in such instances both the State and the Feds would be well advised to enter into a cooperative management system whereby the fish would receive comparable protection whether migrating through State or Federal land zones. Fish and wildlife unfortunately cannot read maps nor confine themselves to arbitrary boundaries.

The Alaska Land Commission

Our fourth proposal is to establish an Alaska Land Commission. This commission would be a policy-making body located in Alaska and exercising broad cooperative authority over Alaska resource lands and designated Federal and State lands within the Comans.

On the commission would be three State members and three Federal members with co-chairmen. The State co-chairman and the governor could veto commission decisions on State lands; the Federal co-chairman and the Secretary of Interior could veto decisions on federal lands. In this way, the essential interests of both parties would be protected when differences arise. Further, in order to assure that local interests and needs are fully accounted for, the commission would establish area advisory boards comprised of local residents.

How The Plan Works

To simplify an explanation of this plan, imagine the boundaries of a National Park on a map of Alaska. Draw a circle around this park. Next, around this first circle draw another one. Within this second circle would be the Alaska Resource Lands. These are national interest lands belonging to the Federal government. Congress, with Alaskan input, could designate the prime values of these lands: Whether they be scenic, recreational, fish and wildlife, scientific, minerals, or wilderness. However, other compatible uses such as livestock grazing, hunting and fishing, or mining would be allowed as long as they did not do violence to the prime use. The proposed Alaska Land Commission would determine the compatibility of secondary uses. Emphasis would be on what could be permitted, not prohibited. The major advantage, of course, is that Alaskans would have a voice on the Land Commission in the use of these 62 million Federal acres. Other proposals would deny us such a voice.

On the opposite page we have illustrated what a Comans area might look like. Except for the National Parks, Forests & Refuge withdrawals, the Alaska Land Commission would have classification authority over all Federal and State lands included in the Comans. Their charge would be to enhance all uses at the expense of no single use.

It would require action by the State Legislature to place State lands within the Comans. We believe that in return for acquiring equal participation through the Land Commission in management decisions over millions of acres of Federal lands, it is not unreasonable in turn to include some State lands in the Comans.

No Private Lands Are Affected

It must be emphasized that no privately owned lands, be they owned by individuals or Native corporations, would be made part of the Comans under the authority of the Alaska Land Commission. Private owners, of course, would be invited to participate voluntarily in cooperative planning with the State and Federal land managers just as is already occurring where private owners see the value of cooperation and its benefits for them.

Why would anybody choose to cooperate if they don't have to? Simply because by joining, they could gain the usage of adjacent lands which otherwise might be denied. Moreover, there is little doubt that the desire of some for excessive Federal restrictions on Federal lands could best be offset by adoption of cooperative constraints on adjacent lands. For example, in exchange for being able to hunt on what otherwise might become a Federal park, Alaskans might be willing to provide for additional habitat protection upon adjacent State and private lands. On the other hand, the more lands locked into a park, the less inducement there is for State or private owners to enter into cooperative management.

Too often when people speak of the manner in which land should be managed, they get hung up on labels. Terms like multiple use versus single use mean different things to different people. Strip off the labels, however, and I have found an astonishing accord among otherwise antagonistic groups of people.

A Balanced View Of Alaska's Land Resources

I find persons of seemingly disparate interests, be they "environmentalists" or "developers", can substantially agree insofar as many specific parcels of land are concerned as to what should be considered the prime use upon those lands. Certainly, occasionally they will differ. But surely there is sufficient land to accommodate the needs and interests of all, be they wilderness aspirants, miners, developers, or subsistence users. To the wilderness aspirant, once pristine wild lands which fall to the bulldozer are just as surely "locked up" from his point of view as are lands designated wilderness areas "locked up" from the developer's point of view. It's hard to believe we don't have room for both. It's harder yet to think we're not intelligent enough to tell which lands are best suited for which purposes.

What it all comes down to is that Alaskans finally would have a proper voice in the management of federal lands within Alaska. Of equal importance is that the greater our willingness to participate in cooperative management through the Commission and the Comans, the less threat there will be that Congress would place unnecessarily large amounts of Alaskan lands under far more restrictive regulation.

This, in essence, is the approach I propose for your consideration. Our final proposal will ultimately require approval by the Alaska Legislature and the Congress. Thus, we want your help in framing it. Members of my administration will soon be meeting with as many interested Alaskans as possible. We are also distributing maps of this tentative plan via this insert and including a questionnaire for public response.

These concepts were presented to Senator Henry Jackson's Interior Committee a short while ago. Since Congress will cast the final vote on the D(2) land issue, it is of vital importance we enlist support for these concepts from that quarter as soon as possible. Understand, however, that our Washington testimony was simply to explain the concept of cooperative management and did not speak to specific boundaries or acreages. These will not be set until you have been heard.

I invite all Alaskans to make their voices heard loud and clear in the management of Alaska's land. The next step is up to you.

J. S. Hammond

