

Scott Thompson and Alaska Power Systems: Private sector assumes new rural energy role

by *Tundra Times* staff

With 25 full time employees, Alaska Power Systems won't have any trouble providing power plant inspection and other technical assistance under its new state contract.

That's according to company president Scott Thompson, by many accounts a fervent believer in energy services being provided by the private sector.

We've been working in the Bush for 12 years. The state had been competing with us before," Thompson said. "It was duplication of service."

Thompson predicted there would be no change in the service delivery structure. "In fact, there may be an improvement in service," he said, suggesting that restrictions under which state agencies must operate sometimes create bottlenecks. He said his firm, one of three recently awarded circuit rider technical assistance contracts by the Division of Energy, which now manages the programs of the former Alaska Energy Authority, would be able to respond to community needs more quickly.

For example, he said, if a power plant goes down on a weekend, there are no state employees avail-

able to respond to an emergency call. He plans to rely on a toll-free number and 24-hour answering service to provide immediate response in such situations. Former energy division staffers say provisions were made for weekend emergency response.

Alaska Power Systems, based in Anchorage, has developed sophisticated power plant monitoring systems as well as metering systems designed to simplify electric billings in rural communities. Thompson said he has sold a number of systems to happy remote site customers from Akutan and ARCO Alaska Inc. to Alaska Com-

mmercial Co.

Whether it's providing services under the new circuit rider contract or simply marketing his firm's products, Thompson said the goal is the same: to minimize redundancy in power systems, maximize their efficiency and lower prices.

"I think it's going to be like a public-private partnership. This (contract) was not a reduction of service, this was more or less a transfer or shift. I think it's going to be a benefit to the communities because it eliminates the bottleneck of one agency," said Thompson.