

BLM submits summer land surveying schedule

Numerous Bureau of Land Management land surveying parties are now on location throughout Alaska, using electronic and ground-based surveying equipment.

"More than 80 per cent of Alaska has never been surveyed," Irving Zirpel, chief of BLM's cadastral survey division said.

"Under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Alaska natives are entitled to 44 million acres. Under the Statehood Act and other laws, the State of Alaska can claim 104 million acres, and all of this must be surveyed before it can pass from federal ownership."

Zirpel noted that more than 56 million acres of state land selections and four million acres of Alaska native lands had been surveyed. "This summer, much of our surveying work includes surveying the exterior boundaries of lands selected by Alaska Native villages or the State of Alaska," he said. "For this, we use electronic surveying equipment mounted in helicopters. It's a lot faster and cheaper than trying to survey these vast areas on the ground."

Zirpel said BLM surveyors would survey boundaries of 15 villages this summer including Hoonah; Aniak, Russian Mission-Kuskokwim, Napiamute, Kalskag and Lower Kalskag, about 80 miles northeast of Bethel; Deering and Buckland, about 60 miles; Northway, about 150 miles southeast of Fairbanks; Pilot Point and Ugashik, about 100 miles southwest of Dillingham; and possibly False Pass and Belkofsky, both at the western tip of the Alaska Peninsula.

"In addition to the surveying done by BLM, we are also contracting survey work to private contractors," Zirpel said.

Exterior boundaries of village land selections of Kasaan, Hydaberg and Saxman, all near Ketchikan, will be completed by a survey contractor for completion of village exterior boundary surveys by Oct. 1 for Evansville, 180 miles northwest of Fairbanks; Galena, 280 miles west of Fairbanks; Kivalina, 80 miles northwest of Kotzebue; and Craig and Klawock near Ketchikan.

Zirpel said that about 15,000 separate small surveys were needed for claims under the Native Allotment Act, which allowed individual Alaska natives to claim up to 160 acres each after proving occupancy and use

of the land.

"Because the size of these Native Allotment parcels averages about 40 acres, we use mainly ground survey crews for this work," Zirpel said. He said this summer native allotments would be surveyed near Kobuk, 180 miles east of Kotzebue; Unalakleet, 140 miles east of Nome; and Healy Lake, Dot Lake, and Northway, about 150 miles southeast of Fairbanks.

"We'll be out in many native villages this summer, and we'd like to ask the help of people there," Zirpel commented. "There's no substitute for having local people help us with arrangements for fuel, riverboats, lodging, and the hundreds of little things that can

make or break a survey. We'd appreciate any local help we can get."

According to Zirpel BLM surveyors would also survey State of Alaska land selections at Birches, some 230 miles northeast of Fairbanks; and also at Granite Mountain, near Granite Mountain Air Force Base. Some small tracts (such as homesites, homesteads and headquarters sites) also are scheduled for survey this summer, as is a portion of the

Chugach National Forest boundary on the northern Kenai Peninsula.

Zirpel said BLM would not have "horizontal control" crews throughout the state. These crews do not do any actual surveying of lands, he said. Instead, they use electronic equipment that observes orbiting satellites and then determines the exact geographic position of a designated point on the earth. Surveyors will use these points as references in future surveys.

Zirpel said that "people should remember that a survey isn't completed as soon as the surveyors leave." He said the BLM has to make plats from their notes, and these plats must be approved in Washington, D.C., before they are accepted as official records.

"So even after the surveyors leave, it will be a year or two before their survey is official," he said. "And there's enough survey work to do in Alaska to last us quite a while."



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