

BLM Input to the d(2) Lands Debate

By George Schmidt, Retired BLM Mining Engineer

Section 17 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) established the Joint Federal - State Land Use Planning Commission, whose task was outlined in subsection (a)(7). In brief, the Commission was to plan uses of the public lands, including withdrawals and easements. This Commission was also to gather information for the benefit of the Native corporations so that they could make good choices in their selections, and to make recommendations concerning Alaska's future.

Prior to the commission established under ANCSA, Congress had authorized the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska, best known as the Fitzgerald Committee, after its chairman. The Committee engaged the talents of about a dozen professionals of the many specialties necessary to come up with the finished product. There were, of course, a number of support personnel, e.g., draftsman and typists, making the total number impressive. Shortly after passage of the Act, the Committee had set up offices in a new building on Fourth Avenue in Anchorage, Alaska. The Committee worked hard, did excellent work, and was cooperative with all Federal and State offices. They did not encourage visits, they were a busy group, but recognized that they had information not elsewhere easily available. I believe their final reports were deposited in the Alaska Resources Library, now Alaska Resources Library and Information Services (ARLIS).

ANILCA, in Title XII established the Alaska Land Use Council, still somewhat alive today.

Subsection 17(2)(A) of ANCSA provided that the Secretary of Interior might withdraw "not to exceed 80 million acres of unreserved public lands for addition to or creation as units of the National Park, Forest, Wild Life Refuge, and Wild and Scenic Rivers Systems." However, in 1980 when Congress enacted the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), in defiance of section 17(2)(A) of ANCSA, over 100 million acres were withdrawn for National Conservation System Units (NCSU). ANILCA Section 101(d) states, that the Act provides sufficient protection for the good things in life, and the need for further NCSU's is obviated. This is the "No More" promise that is conveniently forgotten by many.

A great deal of study went into the proposed withdrawals after the Fitzgerald Committee was disbanded. The Secretary directed each of the "conservation" agencies to set up study teams. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) offered its assistance but was told it wasn't necessary. The Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Fish and Wildlife Service had study teams of different sizes, in Alaska. None of the teams was as helpful and cooperative as the Fitzgerald Committee. The National Park Service team operated in an air approaching war time secrecy! There were eight to a dozen people in a large room.

They were instructed to cover their work (maps, notes, typing) whenever strangers entered the room. One time some of us from BLM had to pass through the room. It was almost insulting the way everyone covered up, but the humor of childishness got the best of us. The wife of one of the BLM personnel worked there and told us about the rules. She did not give out any information, nor did anyone try to pry "secrets" from her. Those agencies, and in the Washington offices of the Geological Survey and the Bureau of Mines, had teams working on defining the areas of their interests. The two mineral agencies, of course, did not manage lands. In fact, they did not manage anything. Both were, and the Survey still is, research oriented. Which brings us up to the summer of 1977.

Although the BLM had offered to field a team of professionals, the Secretary had refused the offer. That had been in the early 1970's. But in 1977, on short notice, BLM-Alaska was asked to send a team of three to the Washington D.C. office for two weeks to do what the other agencies had been doing for the past few years. We knew we were good, but there are limits! Nevertheless, three of us, Jules Tileston, our branch chief, representing recreation and other land uses, Sal DeLeonardis, representing forest and wildlife resources (he has degrees in both studies) and me, the minerals representative, arrived in Washington, and were told to put what we knew of our specialties on E-size maps of Alaska. There was no time for library research, and certainly none for field checking.

John Mulligan of the Alaska office of the US Bureau of Mines was temporarily in Washington. I called him, and he graciously loaned me an E-size map of Alaska on which he had outlined what he felt were the best and poorest areas of possible mineral deposition, with two subcategories in between. The map agreed very well with my estimates (or vice-versa). It formed the basis for written estimates of the location of potential mineral lands.

We took our stuff back to Anchorage at the end of two weeks, tried to make the lines neater and a bit more accurate. Accumulated and incoming day-to-day work interfered a bit, but about two weeks later we were recalled for another two weeks. This time one of the professionals was replaced by Curtis McVee, the BLM State Director, on demand by the Secretary of the Interior! Again, we struggled with what we knew, working together, with overlapping knowledge and experience. I never had more knowledgeable or cooperative co-workers.

The afternoon of our last day, we were invited (read "ordered") to take our maps and writings to Assistant Secretary Guy Martin's office. Martin had been Alaska Commissioner of Natural Resources in the early 70's, so we felt comfortable with him. We spread out our maps, and explained what we had done. Martin asked a few questions, nothing awkward or difficult. As we were leaving, he said that we had to leave any copies of maps and descriptive material behind. Some of mine were already rolled in a tube, in my hotel room, ready to leave the next

morning. Being a naive fellow, I mailed it back, along with some copies I'd kept from the first trip. I'm sorry! This last act took place in August 1977. When ANILCA was eventually enacted, December 2, 1980, *all* of the high-potential mineral land was withdrawn in conservation units in spite of President Carter's statement that "...95% of potentially productive oil and mineral areas will be available for exploration or

drilling." The Secretary of the Interior, Cecil Andrus, said that he had carefully avoided all the high-potential mineral lands. Not so!

A few months later each person who had anything to do with the overall project, and there must have been several hundred, received a certificate of commendation for excellent work. Mine is in the Anchorage landfill.