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Edward Hopson and Eben Hopson testify about the d-2 land proposals

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

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Song by the Yukon Stars

Jeff Kennedy said this program deals with testimony by Native leaders about d-2 lands in Alaska. In section 17 d-2 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act the Secretary of the Interior is directed to withdraw up to 80 million acres of land in Alaska. The land is to be set aside for national parks, forests, wildlife refuges and wild and scenic rivers. The subcommittee headed by John Seiberling, Representative from Ohio, has been traveling through Alaska to hear testimony from Alaskans. On August 20th the committee came to Fairbanks.

Edward Hopson, President of Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC), said with him are Jacob Adams and Oliver Leavitt. He said they fully support lands of national significance in Alaska. The proposed Gates of the Arctic National Park is the most important to the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) and the Nunamiut village corporation. Since 1973 ASRC has consistently supported a national park in the central Brooks Range. The area is important to the Anaktuvuk people who live in the heart of the proposed park. ASRC has three specific concerns: subsistence protection, a utility and transportation corridor, and land ASRC has identified for selection, but has also been included in the recommendation for the national park. He talked about Native subsistence rights and their protection. He discussed the need for adequate transportation corridors. He said for countless years the Native people established dominion over 56 million acres of the Arctic Slope. The approach of western civilization brought whalers and missionaries. It wasn't until 1923 that their land was impacted by outsiders. President Harding set aside 23 million acres for the Naval Petroleum Reserve no. 4. This led to extensive exploration activities during and after WWII. In 1958 Alaska joined the Union and a few years later the state made land selections of about 6 million acres which contained the Prudhoe Bay oil reserves. He said if Congress permits the terms of the Settlement Act to prevail in spirit and in law and does not include the Killik River area in the proposed park the lands which ASRC has identified for selection in the Killik River area could be conveyed to them. The Killik River area has the best chance of providing a substantial economic return to ASRC and other Native people. He said the subcommittee must make the initial choice to establish the national park in the Killik River area or to allow lands ASRC has identified for selection to be conveyed to them. He thanked the chairman.

Fred Lewis and Ella Thompson perform a song

Eben Hopson said now they can get down to implementation of 17 d-2. He said they have no problem with quantities of land to be classified. They are concerned about regional planning.

They want to see the federal government manage d-2 and other federal lands on a regional basis within the contexts of a national Arctic environmental policy. They feel that none of the legislation expresses the kind of sustaining Arctic policy that should flow through all legislation. The North Slope Borough is a home rule regional government covering an area of 10 million acres. They are a distinct region in Alaska and a sub-region of the Arctic areas they share with the Northwest Territories and Greenland. They feel that the position they take with d-2 land negotiations is important in the circumpolar land claims movement. Through improper land classification the federal government would effectively cancel much of the equity of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. They feel that through sound regional planning this can be avoided. The only thing they seek is the protection of traditional uses of their land. The Arctic Slope has a stable community population consisting mostly of Inupiaq. Their villages have been provided land for community expansion. He said their borough is a strong home rule government. All that they are is expressed in their ability to subsist on their land. Anything that tampers with their subsistence ability threatens their ability to continue living in the Arctic. Development is bringing money into their community, but money is not of much value in terms of Arctic survival. Subsistence is the only economics in the Arctic that they can trust for the security of their families and their community. Arctic resource development can be managed to avoid conflict with subsistence value of their land. More care is going to have to be given to subsistence resource management. Home rule means the right to manage their land and resources. Tax money spent for this kind of management should be seen as a good investment in the Arctic. It is important that this investment be made in careful cooperation between the federal government, and the Inupiaq community with the Canadian government. He said checker boarding the North Slope with classification which ignore these basic factors will threaten to destroy it and will not demonstrate the care that needs to be taken. Taxation in their borough has allowed them to bring modern housing and adequate schools to their villages. Living standards are becoming comfortable. They want to know the value of their resources so that they can plan their safe removal without disturbing the economic value of their land which is subsistence. He talked about the resources on their land and the reasons they may not be mined. He said land jurisdictional boundaries on their maps of the North Slope Borough are meaningless in terms of subsistence use. Existing and proposed wildlife refuges provide no sanctuary for the caribou nor do they contribute to their management. They feel their wildlife need the same care outside the refuge as inside. He hoped that d-2 legislation already passed will provide for an international coastal zone management program. He hopes that the international cooperation would extend into the ice offshore to provide environmental security of the Beaufort Sea. They regard the d-2 position to be made over the next year to be important indicators of the care that they can expect in the exploration and development of offshore oil. He discussed the importance of regional management and international wildlife management. He said the classification of section 17 d-2 lands within the North Slope Borough requires the breadth and depth of an Arctic policy that looks toward the future of the entire North American Arctic. It should be a policy that assesses problems and seeks solutions based on an Arctic regional basis.

Day is done by Peter, Paul and Mary

Eben Hopson clarifies his proposal in a question and answer session. He said it minimizes the number of agencies that must take part in the whole North Slope. He said if he has to deal with a half a dozen federal agencies in an effort to make proper management practices he is in all kinds

of trouble. The objective on their part is to minimize the number of agencies that must take part in the management of the whole North Slope. He doesn't think they should make the choice of who manages. The long-term answer would be to build language into the bill so that local input into management practices takes place. They would like to take part in suggesting how game is managed in their own area.