

## **Alaska: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow**

### **ANILCA**

Conservation and environmental protection and regulation are important issues in Alaska. Before World War II, conservation of Alaska lands did not affect Alaska's economic development very much - only 54 million acres of Alaska's total of 375 million acres were withdrawn in parks, forests and other special federal units. But after World War II Alaska land issues became more and more visible, as Alaskans campaigned for statehood, and as Alaska Natives campaigned for protection of lands they had lived on for centuries.

At the same time, Americans across the nation became more aware of and interested in environmental issues. Their awareness culminated in the Wilderness Act of 1964. Congress provided that some land in the U.S. be set aside as wilderness preserves. In 1969 the National Environmental Protection Act created the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA). In 1970 the first Earth Day was held, and millions of Americans all over the country proclaimed their commitment to protecting the environment.

Alaska became very important to Americans as an environmental issue. For Americans, Alaska was no longer "the last frontier;" it became America's "last wilderness," to be preserved and passed on to future generations as an unspoiled place. This change of national consciousness occurred just as the Alaskan debate over land selection and Native claims reached conclusion in ANCSA. In that legislation, Congress committed to set aside new federal conservation units in Alaska, in ANILCA.

The challenge for Alaska's future - and for the nation - is to balance existing resources, including wilderness, with the economic needs of the people. Continued development puts increasing pressure on existing supplies of oil and gas, arable land, mineral deposits, usable water and all the resources needed to sustain life. In Alaska, the need for economic development exists along side the need for environmental protection of undeveloped and wilderness lands. Alaska's citizens will be called upon to determine a balance between these necessities.

One specific challenge from ANILCA concerns the provision that calls for a rural preference because it conflicts with a provision of the Alaska constitution that guarantees equal access to the state's natural resources. In this case federal sovereignty supersedes state sovereignty. In 1998 and 1999 the federal government took over management of fish and game resources on federal land in Alaska (in other states, most fish and game management on federal land is left to the state). It also took control of the management of resources that migrate between state and federal land. Many Alaskans resent this intrusion of federal

sovereignty. In the future, Alaskans will have to decide whether they want to tolerate federal management, or take steps to bring the state into compliance with the ANILCA rural preference provision, or come up with some other solution.

How will knowledge of the Alaska lands act help Alaskans address the challenges it presents for Native subsistence and the impact of federal ownership in the state?