

DOCUMENT RESUME

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Land Title Should Be Conveyed to Alaska Natives Faster.  
CED-78-130; B-108439. June 21, 1978. 41 pp. + 3 appendices (16 pp.).

Report to Sen. Henry M. Jackson, Chairman, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources; Rep. John Seiberling, Chairman, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs: General Oversight and Alaska Lands Subcommittee; Rep. Teno Roncalio, Chairman, House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs: Indian Affairs and Public Lands Subcommittee; by Robert F. Keller, Acting Comptroller General.

Issue Area: Land Use Planning and Control: Land Planning Programs (2305).

Contact: Community and Economic Development Div.

Budget Function: Community and Regional Development: Area and Regional Development (452).

Organization Concerned: Department of the Interior.

Congressional Relevance: House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs: General Oversight and Alaska Lands Subcommittee; House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs: Indian Affairs and Public Lands Subcommittee; Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Rep. John Seiberling; Rep. Teno Roncalio; Sen. Henry M. Jackson.

Authority: Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1601). Alaska Statehood Act. Mental Health Act. Federal Power Act. 43 U.S.C. 945. 43 U.S.C. 975d.

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act provided for conveyance of title to 44 million acres of land, both surface and subsurface rights, and almost a billion dollar monetary settlement to about 77,000 Alaska Natives. The 44 million acres will be conveyed to regional and village corporations established under the act from within a 90-million-acre area selected by the corporation throughout Alaska.

Findings/Conclusions: Six years after Congress enacted the Claims Settlement Act of December 1971, the corporations had received title to only about 20% of their land entitlement. The Department of the Interior estimated that it would take another 6 to 13 years before title of the land could be completely conveyed to Alaska Natives. Alaska Native corporations need title to the lands in order to develop natural resources to generate income so that the self-sufficiency of the corporations can be maintained. Delays in conveying land title have impeded community development in some Alaska villages; delayed the use of land selected by the State; and delayed reconveying of title to local residents, businesses, nonprofit corporations, and governments. The Department of the Interior had not adopted policies needed to resolve issues delaying the transfer of lands or approved actions proposed for improving processing of Native claims until March 1978. Two issues need to be

addressed--finding ways to minimize future litigation and establishing a monitoring program to determine whether Native corporations are complying with the settlement act.

**Recommendations:** The Secretary of the Interior should propose legislation to include easement criteria developed by the Department. The Secretary should also: revise easement agreements used to transfer lands pending the outcome of court litigation; insure that Native corporations' rights to unused agency lands are defined and protected by Federal property disposal procedures; review all Federal land transfers in Alaska by December 18, 1971, and identify land disposals to which Native corporations have a right under the act; and analyze the issues of how litigation can be minimized and how regional corporations can be monitored. To help Native corporations realize benefits of the tax exempt provision of the act before taxes are assessed on their land, the Congress should amend the act so that the tax exempt period will not begin until land title has been transferred. (RRS)