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Hailing it a "landmark study II Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today made public the report of a three-man task force which last year studied the problems of the 43,000 Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts of Alaska.

The study group, which was headed by William W. Keeler, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Indian Nation, and chairman of the executive committee of the Phillips Petroleum Company, traveled more than 5,000 miles throughout Alaska, visiting many of the native villages and holding conferences with native leaders.

“The report faces up to some problems and the Congress have kept in the closet now be dealt with in a positive way that, in the past, both the Executive It is my hope that these problems will now be dealt with in a positive way.

"The report of the three-man task force on Alaska Native Affairs is a landmark study, and I have read it with keen interest. It is the first comprehensive study in depth of the complicated problems of the Alaska native peoples. It puts their hopes and opportunities in sharp focus and also defines clearly the responsibilities both State and Federal governments must discharge if these citizens are to achieve their full potential.

"This is a highly constructive report. Mr. Keeler, Secretary of State for Alaska Hugh Wade, and James E. Officer, Associate Commissioner of Indian Affairs, deserve high praise for this specialized study, II Secretary Udall said.

Among the items covered in the report are native land problems, the Bureau of Indian Affairs loan program which has made it possible for the Indians of southeast Alaska to operate village salmon canneries, the Eskimo reindeer herding program, and hunting and fishing matters which are of vital concern to the native population.

In the report, the authors discuss the controversy over enforcement of the migratory bird treaty of 1916. This compact between the United States and Great Britain forbids the hunting of certain types of migratory fowl in Alaska between March 10 and September 1. Since the late spring is a season when fresh meat is in short supply, the natives feel that the treaty discriminates against them in favor of the sportsmen of the West Coast States. During the fall and winter, when the Alaska season is open, there are few birds in the northern parts of the State, the cold weather having driven them south. Furthermore, some of the remaining birds, which the natives contend are not migratory in the sense implied by the treaty, are still on the restricted list.

In this connection, the Task Force recommends a thorough study by the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service to determine which birds are migratory and which are not. It also suggests that if relief cannot be provided for the native subsistence hunters in this fashion, negotiations be undertaken to have the treaty amended.

The Task Force report devotes a lengthy chapter to land problems, pointing out that in the Alaska Organic Act of 1884, the Congress promised that the natives would not be disturbed in the use of land then occupied or claimed by them, but reserved unto itself a determination as to how title to these lands might be conveyed. As a result of the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958, which authorized the State to select more than 100 million acres from the public domain, the question of native rights under the 1884 Act has now become a main issue. Some of the lands claimed by the Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts have already been selected by the State, and the Department of the Interior has been faced with the problem of deciding whether to comply with the State's request and transfer title to it, or to wait until Congress acts to define native rights more precisely.

The Task Force suggests a number of steps for resolving this controversy. These include granting individual natives the title to home sites and hunting and fishing sites; withdrawing small acreages in the vicinity of the native villages for their future growth and development; establishing native hunting and fishing privileges in larger areas; and setting up a special tribunal in which to consider native claims for lands taken from them by others in the period since 1884.

It also recommends that Congress prescribe a definite period of time in which to adjudicate native claims so that the State land selection program will not be indefinitely postponed.

In a chapter on health problems, the Task Force lauds the Division of Indian Health of the U. S. Public Health Service for its effective program of reducing the death rate and bringing hospital and other medical services to the residents of the villages.

Other Task Force suggestions include transferring to the State administrative authority for the education of native children and the operation of a general assistance welfare program for the native population; encouraging the native villages to incorporate under the municipal laws of Alaska; Federal supplementary assistance for an existing State program of public works; increased vocational training and placement for natives; and the use of “peace corps type" workers in the native villages.

The Task Force report was submitted to the Secretary in December 1962, and some of its suggestions have already been carried out. For example, Secretary Udall on December 27, 1962, announced that the Tsimpshian Indians of the community of Metlakatla would be permitted to continue using fish traps to support their salmon cannery during the 1963 season. Responding to another recommendation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs added an advisor on native housing to its Juneau staff, and placed economic development officers at field locations to help improve the economic situation in the native villages.

The Task Force was in the field during the month of June 1962, and Mr. Officer returned to Alaska for additional information in October. The report, which contains 110 pages, is available on request from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.