Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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For Immediate Release: May 22, 1978
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Twenty Alaska Natives from villages in the Kuskokwim Delta area came to Washington, D.C., in mid-May to tell United States Congressmen how pending legislation, H.R. 39, involving millions of acres of Alaska land could affect their lives.

The Eskimo group raised funds for the trip through tribal activities in 56 villages. For most of the group it was a first visit to the Nation’s Capital.

The group planned to visit the offices of 200 Members of Congress in their week's stay in Washington. They divided themselves into five working groups for these visits. Representatives of the group said that they felt it was important to try to help Congressmen from the other states to understand their subsistence culture and way of life and how the designation of D-2 lands in the bill touched on their village life.

While in Washington the group also visited with Interior's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Forrest Gerard to inform him about their efforts, to thank him for his support and to request the Department to develop a policy on subsistence. "It involves every part of our life," one of the group told Gerard. "It's an issue that won't die with Title 7," of H, R. 39.

The bill, passed in the House May 19 by a vote of 277-31, would set aside almost 100 million acres of federally-owned lands to be added to the United States systems of National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Forests.

Stemming from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, it has been described as the largest land conservation proposal in United States history.