Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Media Contact: Knuffke (202) 343-6115
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The Interior Department's Bureau of Indian Affairs has drafted proposed rules for its revised program to remove from the roll of Alaska Natives the names of those ineligible under terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The proposed rules will be published this week in the Federal Register.

The Settlement Act directed the Secretary of the Interior to prepare within two years of passage of the act an official roll to be used to determine distribution of land and funds. The huge task was not completed by the deadline because administrative appeals were still pending. The roll was certified subject to change due to future legal determinations.

By 1974, it became clear that the roll might contain names of people ineligible for enrollment under the act. The Bureau of Indian Affairs began a program to eliminate ineligible individuals.

The Alaska Native Corporations approved the idea of such a program, but objected to the way in which it was implemented, a BIA spokesman said. Natives claimed the procedures were so complex that most people could not understand them. Native leaders also feared default judgements might be entered against natives who failed to answer complaints. They also charged the eligibility of many natives was challenged without adequate investigation.

In response to the criticism, Interior Secretary Cecil D. Andrus called for a full review of the program. Andrus determined that failure to finalize the roll was interfering with the process of conveying land to Native Corporations. In order to finalize the roll promptly, he has directed that the disenrollment program be limited to those names now being contested because of:

--Death before or birth after December 18, 1971, the date the act was passed.

--Enrollment as of April 1, 1970, to the Metlakatla Indian Community

--No native ancestry and lack of U.S. citizenship either by birth or naturalization.

The proposed rules will not alter the current deadline for contesting enrollments and will not allow the filing of any new or additional challenges.

Written comments on the proposed regulations must be received within 30 days after publication in the Federal Register. Comments may be addressed to Assistant Secretary, Indian Affairs, 1951 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20245.