Media Contact: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs
For Immediate Release: January 7, 1983
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Interior Secretary James Watt, Agricultural Secretary John R. Block and representatives of Chugach Natives, Inc. today signed an agreement that provides for the final major settlement with regional corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). The State of Alaska, also a party to the agreement, will sign shortly. “

This action is a milestone in our commitment to resolve Native claims,” Watt said. “It ends more .than a decade of uncertainty for the Chugach people and it concludes more than two years of intense study and negotiation by the Departments of Agriculture and Interior, the Chugach Natives and the State of Alaska. This settlement is equitable for the Natives, for other Alaskans who are concerned about access, and for the public at large. This is another example of our Good Neighbor policy at work.”

Secretary Block noted that the Department of Agriculture was deeply involved in the negotiations because most of the valuable and productive lands in the agreement are within the Chugach National Forest.

“Valuable timber and mineral resources from the Chugach National Forest will be exchanged to the Chugach Natives under the action,” Block said. “We are looking forward to implementing the agreement with the Chugach Natives.”

The agreement specifically identifies about 272,000 acres in the National Forest (about 172,000 acres), National Wildlife Refuge (about 1,900 acres) and other public areas (about 98,000 acres) that are to be exchanged to Chugach Natives, Inc. The corporation's remaining entitlement of about 106,000 acres will be identified by December of this year from lands that were selected by the Chugach Natives prior to December 1976 under the ANCSA.

The corporation, which represents Natives living along the Gulf of Alaska east of Anchorage, already has received $3 million as part of the settlement and will get an additional $9 million upon final execution of the agreement.

The agreement improves land management patterns in the Prince William Sound region by consolidating ownership in important areas and reducing Chugach Natives, Inc., inholdings in the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Under the agreement, more than 80 easements have been obtained from the corporation to provide for public use and access. This includes public access to certain marine shoreline areas and streams for recreational purposes. The area is highly regarded for its recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, kayaking and hiking. Also, more than 90,000 acres of selections will be relinquished by the Chugach Natives from within the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Because of difficulties in settling the claims of the Chugach Natives, the 1980 Alaska Lands Act provided for a special study which was the framework for today's agreement.

“Although this is the last major settlement with the 12 Native regional corporations entitled to land

under the 1971 law, there is still much work to be done," Watt said. "This work will continue to be given a high priority.”