

Historical Timeline

Selected Dates from Time Immemorial to 2001

8000 BC to late 1700s

The land provided for the Alaska Native people in every aspect. The people lived in harmony with the land, and had respect for the wildlife and all the food, fuel, clothing, tools, and shelter the land had to offer. The social and cultural values were based on the resources of the land, which provided them a means of subsistence. The people had a general recognition of lands used and occupied by other tribes or groups. Territorial wars between tribes occurred when land and its resources became an object of dispute. Permanent villages did not exist until the establishment of schools and churches beginning in the late 1800s and continuing through the 1950s.

1741

Discovery of Vitus Bering, a Danish sailor, on the shores of what is now Alaska
There were less than 1,000 Russians that settled in Alaska, establishing trading posts and trading glass beads and other “riches” for furs. They killed Aleuts and Koniags if they resisted becoming their slaves, until the 1820s. The Russian-American Company made no attempt to introduce a system of land ownership, but it did recognize use of the lands by the Native in “perfect freedom, without any foreign interference or restrictions.”

1789

United States Constitution states, “The Congress shall have power ... to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.”

1850s

The U.S. government established its policy to set aside reservations for Indian tribes. Assimilation efforts or “civilizing” the Indians by destruction of their cultures and social systems was carried out by the military, schools, and churches. Indians were required to build wooden houses, wear white man’s clothing, and cut their hair.

1867

Russia sold Alaska to the United States of America. The Treaty of Cession concerning the cession of Russian possessions in North America, March 30, 1867, United States – Russia, 15 Stat. 539, T.S. No. 301, stated, “. . . The uncivilized tribes will be subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes in that country.”

All lands and waters became public domain under the control of the federal government.

1878

Beginning of salmon industry; first canneries established

1880

First important gold discovery in Alaska (Juneau).

1884

Organic Act of 1884, Ch. 53, 23 Stat. 24

The Organic Act makes Alaska a District with an appointed governor and other officers. Protection for lands used and occupied by Natives is promised.

“ . . . The Indians or other persons in said district (Alaska) shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands in their use or occupation or now claimed by them but the terms under which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future legislation by Congress.”

The Act provided specific protection to claims of miners and lands used by missionaries.

1885

Dr. Sheldon Jackson, General Agent for Education in Alaska, met with several representatives of churches to divide the territory so as to further the educational missionary work effort.

1887

The United States government established its policy of making the allotment of land to individual Indians and breaking up tribal landholdings. The General Allotment Act was also known as the Dawes Act and was developed using the Homestead Act as a template. The purpose was to give every Indian a tract of land; this “would allow him to experience the pride of possession felt by white settlers, and hasten the process of civilization.” After tracts were allocated, the remaining tribal lands were declared surplus and put up for sale by the government, reducing the Indian land inholding from about 156 million acres to about 78 million acres by 1900.

1890

Suit filed by Tlingit Chief Johnson against whites who built a dock in Juneau on his property.

1891

Congress established the Metlakatla reservation for a group of Tsimshians who had migrated to Alaska from Canada.

Congress opened land for town, trade, and manufacturing sites, and authorized the President to set aside timbered areas as public reserves. Millions of acres were then set aside to establish the Tongass and Chugach National Forests, and Mt. McKinley National Park.

1900s, in general

The federal government set aside large blocks of land for various purposes, including parks, wildlife refuges, forests, military withdrawals, and the National Petroleum Reserve.

1905

Congress passed the Nelson Act, which provided a means for providing public schools for white children. It also stated that Alaska Native children shall have the same rights to attend any Indian boarding school as the Indian children in the United States.

1906

Native Allotment Act allowed Alaska Natives to obtain land under restricted title. The motive of the government was to protect the indigenous population from encroachment by the fringe element of western civilization (compared to assimilation in the General Allotment Act of 1887 in the lower 48 states).

1912

The Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) was founded by one Tsimshian and nine Tlingits. The goals were to win citizenship, education for Indian people, and abandonment of aboriginal customs which were seen by white as “uncivilized.”

Alaska becomes a territory with a two-house legislature; the capital is located in Juneau.

Mount Katmai explodes, forming the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes

1914

Congress authorizes construction of Alaska Railroad

1915

Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS) was organized “to complete the organization of the ANB.”

First Native Rights conference held in Fairbanks. The Athabascans made it clear that they did not want reservations created and requested Alaska’s Congressional delegate, James Wickersham, do something so that the Alaskan Indians could be left alone, “to be able to live here all the time.” Wickersham told the chiefs that “as soon as they have established homes and live like white men, and assume the habits of civilization, they can have a vote.”

Territorial Legislature adopted an act similar to the Dawes Act, to allow Natives to become citizens. A few Natives did.

1923

Completion of Alaska Railroad

1924

Congress passed the Citizenship Act of 1924 allowing Natives to become citizens with the right to vote.

Tlingit William Paul was the first Native elected to the Alaska Territorial Legislature.

1926

Native Townsite Act allowed Alaska Natives to obtain restricted deeds to village lots (repealed in 1976 by the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA)).

1929

First formal claims of aboriginal title by Tlingit and Haidas.

1934

Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) to decentralize the enormous discretion and powers exercised by the Department of the Interior and the Office of Indian Affairs and to move that power to tribal governments.

1935

Legislation allowed Natives to sue the federal government for land taken by the United States. Tlingit and Haida Indians filed the first Native land claim lawsuit against the federal government.

1936

Congress extended the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 to Alaska; the Department of the Interior was authorized to establish reservations for the Natives in Alaska.

1941-1946

Reservations established for indigenous people of the communities of Venetie, Arctic Village, Elim, Unalakleet, Akutan, Diomedes, Hydaburg, Karluk, and Wales.

1941

Ernest Gruening established Alaska Territorial Guard (aka Alaska Scouts or Eskimo Scouts) (disbanded in 1947)

1942

Japanese bomb Dutch Harbor and occupy Attu and Kiska islands. Forty-two Aleuts are taken prisoner, interned in Japan until 1945. After the war, the 27 survivors are not allowed to return to their island.

US Government moves 882 Aleut people from their villages to temporary camps in southeast. When finally allowed to return, they find extensive vandalism to their homes and houses of worship.

1944

Alberta Schenck is arrested for sitting in the white-only section of the Dream Theater in Nome.

1945

Elizabeth Peratrovich (Tlingit) eloquently testifies in favor of an anti-discrimination law, which is passed. Almost 40 years later the governor designates February 16 as Elizabeth Peratrovich/Alaska Civil Rights day in her honor.

1950

An additional 80 villages submitted petitions to the Secretary of Interior requesting reservations. Officially, no action was taken.

1952

Military begins construction of the Distant Early Warning System (DEW line) across the Arctic. Other cold war construction projects thru the 50s and 60s were the White Alice, Nike Missile sites, and the Ballistic missile Early Warning stations.

1958

Congress approves the Alaska Statehood Act, 72 Stat. 339; state's right to Alaska Native land is disclaimed; State chose 103 million acres.

1959

The U.S. Court of Claims upheld claims of aboriginal title by the Tlingits and Haidas who, the Court rules, were entitled to compensation for lands the United States wrongly took or failed to protect.

1960

In Barrow, John Nusungingya was arrested for shooting ducks outside of a hunting season; 138 other men shot ducks and presented themselves to federal game wardens for arrest.

Federal Government transfers authority to manage fish and wildlife in Alaska to the new State government.

1961

Inupiat protested the proposed Project Chariot at Cape Thompson; the U.S. Atomic Energy commission planned to set off a nuclear device to create a harbor.

Village of Minto protested the State's intent to establish a recreation area in the Minto Lakes region where the Athabascans hunted, fished, and trapped.

Inupiat Paitot established. This organization of northern Native people coalesced around the resistance of Barrow residents to hunting restrictions imposed by an international migratory bird treaty. Inupiat Paitot was not the first regional Native organization, but it was the first organized to defy national or international attempts to restrict traditional land and resource use.

1962

Tundra Times is established with Inupiat Eskimo Howard Rock as editor.

1963

Proposed Rampart Dam is protested by Stevens Village and other Yukon River villages.

Alaska Task Force (ATF) calls upon U.S. Congress to define Native land rights.

The ATF was a committee made up of deputy assistant secretaries, assistant secretary of agriculture, and chaired by departmental counsel, responsible for coordinating the interior department's effort in implementing ANCSA (from NPS website).

The ATF was a three-man group appointed by Interior Secretary Stewart Udall (from Alaska Native Land Claims). ATF report to Congress called for individual land grants, village withdrawals, and communal, traditional food-gathering activity areas. Opposition from Natives prevented these recommendations from being implemented. No provision for cash payment for lands lost and no minerals rights were guaranteed for titled land to be received. Another opposition reason was that only small tracts were proposed. Small areas would not be sufficient to maintain traditional lifestyles.

1964

Major earthquake (9.2 on Richter scale) devastates southcentral Alaska, destroying several Native villages (Chenegga, Akhiok, Kaguyak), forcing residents to relocate.

1965

Atomic Energy Commission conducts a nuclear test on Amchitka. Other blasts would be in 1965 and 1971.

1969

Alaska Village Council Presidents organizes in western Alaska. Regional organization for 56 villages.

1966

Statewide conference of Alaska Natives leads to organization of Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN)

Interior Secretary Stewart Udall imposes a “land freeze” to protect Native use and occupancy.

1967

First bills introduced in Congress to settle Native land claims

Native protests and claims to land reach 380 million acres (more than the total acreage of Alaska, which is 365.5 million acres).

1968

Alaska Land Claims Task Force, established by Governor Hickel, recommends 40 million-acre land settlement.

Government study effort (Alaska Native and the Land) asserts Native land claims to be valid and provides an outline for settlement legislation.

1969

North Slope oil lease auction produces \$900 million for the State of Alaska.

1970

A land claims bill is passed by the Senate, but Natives are disappointed in its land provisions.

1971

Signed into law by President Nixon on December 18 (Public Law 92-203), the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) extinguished aboriginal hunting and fishing rights in exchange for 40 million acres and nearly \$1 billion in compensation to Alaska Natives through their status as shareholders in the newly established corporations.

1972

U.S. Congress enacted the Marine Mammal Protection Act, with a provision authorizing Alaska Natives to continue the traditional taking and use of marine mammals, and a section addressing co-management by the Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Native individuals.

1973

U.S. Congress passes the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Reauthorization Act. Salmon fisheries limited-entry program becomes law.

1975

Indian Self-Determination Act is passed, extending contracting opportunities to tribal councils and organizations to provide health, education, and welfare services to Alaska Natives.

The “Molly Hootch” (Tobeluk v. Lind) case is settled with the commitment by the State to provide local schools for Alaska Native communities.

1977

Trans-Alaska Pipeline completed from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez.

1978

Indian Child Welfare Act is passed by the U.S. Congress.

Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission created to ensure continued hunting of bowhead whales for subsistence.

State subsistence law creates a priority for subsistence use over all other uses of fish and wildlife, but does not define subsistence users. Alaska Supreme Court determines the law unconstitutional in 1985.

1980

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) passed by the U.S. Congress with Title VIII, the subsistence title, providing for subsistence uses for rural Alaskans.

1982

The Alaska Board of Fisheries and Game adopts regulations creating a rural subsistence priority. The State program is in compliance with ANILCA.

1986

The State Legislature passes a new bill regulating subsistence hunting/fishing. Berger Commission holds hearings around the state to assess the effects of ANCSA.

1988

ANCSA amendments extend the prohibition of selling stock in regional or village corporations

1989

The Exxon Valdez grounds on Bligh Reef, spilling 11 million gallons of North Slope crude into Prince William Sound.

The Alaska Supreme Court overturns Alaska's rural preference law for subsistence.

1990

Federal authorities take over subsistence management of hunting, trapping, and fishing on federal public lands and non-navigable waters in Alaska.

1991

Red Dog Mine starts operation (zinc and lead) with royalties paid to regional corp (NANA).

1992

Federal authorities adopt final subsistence management regulations for federal public lands.

1993

Federal Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) are established.

1994

President Clinton issues an Executive Memorandum – Government to Government Relations with Native American Tribal Governments.

Indian Entities Recognized and Eligible to Receive Services from U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) published pursuant to Section 104 of the Act of November 2, 1994 (Listing of Federally Recognized Tribes).

1995

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals rules that the Federal Subsistence Board should expand its management of subsistence fisheries to include all navigable waters in which the United States holds a reserved interest, such as waters on or next to wildlife refuges, national parks, and national forests. Congressional rulings prevent this from taking effect until October 1, 1999.

1996

Venetie/Arctic Village court case regarding taxation – reversed in 1998.

1997

U.S. Senate ratifies protocols amending the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (treaty with Canada and Mexico) to regulate subsistence harvest of migratory birds.

1998

In May, an estimated 4,000 marched in Anchorage to show solidarity as a gesture and to bring focused attention to Native Rights' issues.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the approximately 1.8 million acres owned by the Native Village of Venetie does not qualify as "Indian Country" with regard to taxation.

1999

In Anchorage, the Alaska Native Heritage Center, a 26-acre cultural park, opened its doors. Financially supported by the for-profit regional corporations, it offers a glimpse into the diverse Alaska Native cultures and provides a learning experience for visitors.

2000

Federal subsistence management expands to include fisheries on all federal public lands and waters.

2001

Special Assistant to the Secretary of Interior in Alaska signed an Alaska-specific policy on government-to-government relations in Alaska.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA)

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon on December 18, 1971, 87 years after the first U.S. Constitutional promise to resolve the land claims of Alaska Natives, and following more than five years of intensive lobbying by Alaska Natives in Washington, D.C. and Juneau, Alaska. Unprecedented in its magnitude and complexity, the U.S. Congressional settlement of long-disputed land rights of Alaska's Indian, Eskimos, and Aleuts extinguished their claims of Aboriginal Title for which they receive fee simple title to 44 million acres and compensation of \$962.5 million through their status as shareholders of the newly formed regional corporations.

In a departure from the past, in which Indian land settlement assets were received by tribal governments, ANCSA provided for the formation of 13 regional, 4 urban, and more than 200 ANCSA village for-profit corporations to be charged with the administration of vast acreage, untold resources, and nearly one billion dollars.

While ANCSA, as amended, establishes a business-for-profit format, its tribal roots shaped such provisions as:

- the selection by ANCSA village corporations of much of their lands from those located in traditional subsistence areas
- the requirement that the Alaska Native applicant be born on or before December 18, 1971, and able to prove one-quarter Alaska Native ancestry for original eligibility for stock ownership in the regional corporations
- the extension of original stock ownership to Alaska Natives residing outside of Alaska
- the extension of protection for undeveloped ANCSA corporation lands
- the protection of continued Alaska Native ownership of the ANCSA corporations by ensuring ANCSA stock was not alienable for 20 years after 12/18/71 (1991 amendments further addressed this provision)
- the inclusion of Section 7(i) requiring that regional corporations share 70 percent of their resource revenues with other corporations
- provision for additional benefits for Alaska Native elders

Source: Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 – A 2004 Perspective by John Borbridge, Jr.

ANCSA summary:

- established state-chartered regional and village corporations
- provided for \$962,500 in cash payments to shareholders of ANCSA corporations
- provided for 44 million acres to shareholders of ANCSA corporations
- revoked reservations in Alaska, except Metlakatla
- revoked the Native Allotment Act of 1906
- required up to 80 million acres of federal lands in Alaska be studied for inclusion in National Parks, Refuges, and National Forests.

Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)

This Act designates certain public lands in Alaska as units of the National Park System, National Wildlife Refuge System, National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, National Wilderness Preservation System, and the National Forest System. The act also provides for comprehensive land management for all Alaska federal lands.

In 1980, after years of congressional debate, President Jimmy Carter signed ANILCA into law. Often called the most significant land conservation measure in the history of our nation, the statute protected over 100 million acres of federal lands in Alaska, doubling the size of the country's national park and refuge system and tripling the amount of land designated as wilderness. ANILCA expanded the national park system in Alaska by over 43 million acres, creating 10 new national parks and increasing the acreage of three existing units. With the enactment of ANILCA, the U.S. Congress attempted to confront the longstanding, unresolved issues of Alaska Native land claims, the subsistence lifestyle, energy development, economic growth, and transportation planning by enacting solutions that were meant to be compatible with each other.

From the time it was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1977 until it was enacted in 1980, the ANILCA legislation was considered in over a dozen versions. The final act is a painstakingly crafted compromise that reflects the struggle for balance between development and conservation of public lands in Alaska. Over twenty years later, battles are being waged in Congress and the courts over the interpretation of key provisions in ANILCA.

To better understand ANILCA's complexity, it is useful to know what necessitated the law. When Alaska became a state in 1959, virtually all of its land mass was federally-owned. Under the Statehood Act, Alaska was granted the right to select 104 million acres of land, which it could manage as a revenue base. During the first eight years of statehood, Alaska identified 26 million acres for selection. As the state staked out more and more land, it was inevitable that lands the Alaska Natives had a traditional interest in were identified for selection by the state. The Alaska Native community argued that without a treaty or an act of Congress extinguishing Aboriginal Title, the state should not continue to make selections. The Secretary of the Interior agreed and declared a freeze on any additional state land selections.

The Alaska Native community would have been hard-pressed to obtain a lands claim settlement in the Congress if it hadn't been for the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in 1968. Because of the land freeze, the state couldn't proceed with development. Suddenly, the oil industry, the Nixon Administration, and the State of Alaska were advocating on behalf of the Alaska Natives. Enacted in 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) created thirteen Alaska Native-owned regional corporations, granted 962 million dollars in seed money, and authorized twelve regional corporations to select 44 million acres of federal lands in Alaska.

The environmental community was also involved in the ANCSA debate. That effort is reflected in Section 17 (d)(2) of the Act, which directs the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw 80 million acres of significant federal lands from development. These lands, referred to as "d-2" lands, were to be available for potential congressional designation as national parks, wildlife refuges,

wild and scenic rivers, or national forests. The “d-2” provision set a deadline for Congress to respond; if it did not act to designate these lands earmarked for special protections by 1978, the withdrawal would expire and the lands would be reopened to development.

Six years after ANCSA was enacted, Congress began to address the “d-2” lands issue, resulting in the introduction of the first version of ANILCA. In addition to the overarching controversy between development and environmental interests, ANILCA gave rise to debates about reconciling Alaska Native and rural lifestyles with the changing demographics and technologies in Alaska. The issue of access was central to this debate. Questions arose regarding an acceptable means of access and became a situational discussion. Compromises were made and many tough questions were left to be answered later.

As numerous versions of ANILCA were considered, the ANCSA deadline for addressing “d-2” lands was approaching. The Carter Administration responded in 1978 by withdrawing over 100 million acres of federal lands from development: 40 million acres withdrawn under the authority of the Secretary of Interior, and 56 million acres were designated as National Monuments. The 40 million acre withdrawal was to be rescinded with the passage of a lands bill. In November 1980, Congress passed a final version of ANILCA that President Carter signed into law on December 2, 1980.

More than twenty years since the passage of the Act, many challenges face the federal agencies responsible for its administration. Increases and shifts in population, new technologies, new interpretations of access, commercial tourism on public lands, and increased awareness of the population are contributing factors in the controversy.

Title VIII of ANILCA addresses subsistence.

The term “subsistence” refers to the hunting, fishing and gathering activities which traditionally constituted the economic base of life for Alaska Native people. At the time ANILCA was passed, approximately 50 percent of rural residents were Alaska Native. Title VII of ANILCA affords a harvesting preference to rural Alaska residents. Subsistence patterns follow a seasonal cycle of harvestable resources. Availability of fish, land animals, marine animals, and plant resources strongly influenced Alaska Native cultural groups. Throughout the years, the technologies of Alaska Native subsistence have changed as people adjusted to the use of modern instruments of harvest, transportation, and storage. Through modern subsistence practices, old patterns of behavior and values continue to be passed along to the next generation. Since the passage of ANILCA in 1980, rural residents have witnessed major changes in population, development, and competition for fish and game. The subsistence harvest amounts to less than five percent of the entire fish and game harvest in Alaska. Harvesting preference is given to rural residents.