

*“The discovery of oil on the North Slope pushed Congress to enact the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 which took nearly all the land from indigenous control and allowed the industry and state to gain access to the resources. It set up a tool to divide and exploit the Indigenous Peoples, their traditional lands, and resources.”*

—Evon Peter, Director of Native Movement



## OIL AND THE ALASKA NATIVE CLAIMS SETTLEMENT ACT

**W**hen Alaska became the 49th State in 1959, there were approximately 85,000 Alaska Natives throughout Alaska. In the 1960's, oil was discovered on the North Slope of Alaska. Congress immediately was faced with another “Indian problem,” namely, how were they going to put an 800-mile Trans-Alaska Pipeline through all those Native villages when the rights of title in Alaska were unclear.

In 1971, the federal government, with \$562 million dollars from big oil companies, decided to take things into their own hands. President Nixon convinced Wally Hickel to retire as Governor of Alaska in order to be immediately appointed as the new Secretary of the Interior, making him instrumental in brokering the Alaska Native Claims

Settlement Act (ANCSA, 1971). All aboriginal land claims were extinguished by this act of Congress, which was passed without a vote of Alaska's original inhabitants or the American public. A new system was set up in which native lands became owned under a for-profit corporate structure in which Alaska Natives were shareholders.

Natives in Alaska do not own their ancestral land, they own shares in an ANCSA corporation that holds land title. In 1971, 100 shares were given to every Alaska Native that could prove they had a quarter-blood of Alaska Native heritage and lived in a local traditional village. No additional ANCSA shares were to be issued to their children. These ANCSA shares cannot be sold or traded, only transferred to a relative through inheritance. ANCSA corporations are not mandated to have anything in their charters regarding culture, subsistence or ancestral land preservation. They are simply required to turn a profit. If they are not profitable, the United States federal government can take possession of the ANCSA land and dismantle the corporation. Some native corporations have gone bankrupt or merged with other ANCSA corporations. Others, faced with the day-to-day challenge of creating financial revenues in order to provide dividends to their Native shareholders, have entered into arrangements with large oil, mining and timber corporations or exploited those resources themselves.

Many Alaska Natives are concerned that our people are becoming too dependent on the money culture and western ways.

Resisting Environmental Destruction On Indigenous Lands rejects the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act as an illegitimate infringement on our right to sovereignty and self-determination. ANCSA has allowed the “takings” of our aboriginal lands to be exploited by natural resource extraction corporations with no commitment to building and maintaining sustainable and healthy communities.

Resisting Environmental Destruction On Indigenous Lands is honored to share, reach out and network with Alaska Natives, other Indigenous tribes and organizations, and support groups who want to defend our inherent rights to our lands, waters, and cultural way of life from unsustainable energy policies advanced by corporations whose goal is to disenfranchise, separate and eradicate Alaska’s Native peoples. ■

*“ANCSA has successfully removed tribal people from control over their ancestral lands and destiny. Because our lands are run by corporate Indians and not our traditional leaders, we have lost our way and our wisdom. As long as ‘profit at all cost’ is the motto of these corporate entities, Alaska Natives are left to defend themselves—including their distinct culture- from corporate raiders, government and greed. ANCSA has splintered Native people over money, at a time when we need to come together to save what remains of our wild lands and subsistence way of life.”*

—Dune Lankard, Eyak Preservation Council, Eyak tribal member

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