



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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Acting upon the recommendation of a special task force which visited Alaskan native villages this past summer, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today announced that the Tsimpshian Indians of the island community of Metlakatla will be permitted to continue using their fish traps during the 1963 fishing season.

Since 1915, by Secretarial regulation, the Metlakatlans have been allowed to fish with traps. Early in 1962, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that an Alaskan law prohibiting traps does not apply to the Annette Island Reservation within which Metlakatla is situated.

In making his announcement, Secretary Udall pointed out that the members of the task force felt it was desirable to hold off changing the 1915 regulations to bring them into harmony with State law until suitable alternatives to the use of traps have been developed, so that Metlakatla can maintain the level of fish production upon which its salmon cannery depends. The cannery is the principal industry in the community, providing employment for Indians during the summer and income with which to finance public works programs which supply jobs for local residents during the remainder of the year.

Secretary Udall remarked that members of his staff will investigate alternatives to trap production of fish, and that he will make a further announcement when their comments are received.

Metlakatla was established in 1887 by an Anglican missionary, Father William Duncan, who led a group of his Indian followers from "Old Metlakatla" in British Columbia to the Annette Islands just south of Ketchikan, Alaska. In 1891, Congress set the area aside for the Tsimpshians. Since that time, the Indians have developed a progressive community, whose economy is built around the fishing industry and the salmon cannery. In addition to their traps, the Metlakatlans have a fleet of fishing boats.

The task force on Alaska native affairs included William W. Keeler of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Phillips Petroleum Company; Hugh J. Wade, Secretary of State of Alaska; and James E. Officer, Associate Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Keeler, who headed a similar task force making a broader study of Indian problems early in 1961, was also chairman of the Alaska group.

The complete report of the Alaska task force is in the final stages of preparation and will likely be submitted to Secretary Udall and Governor Egan early in 1963.

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