

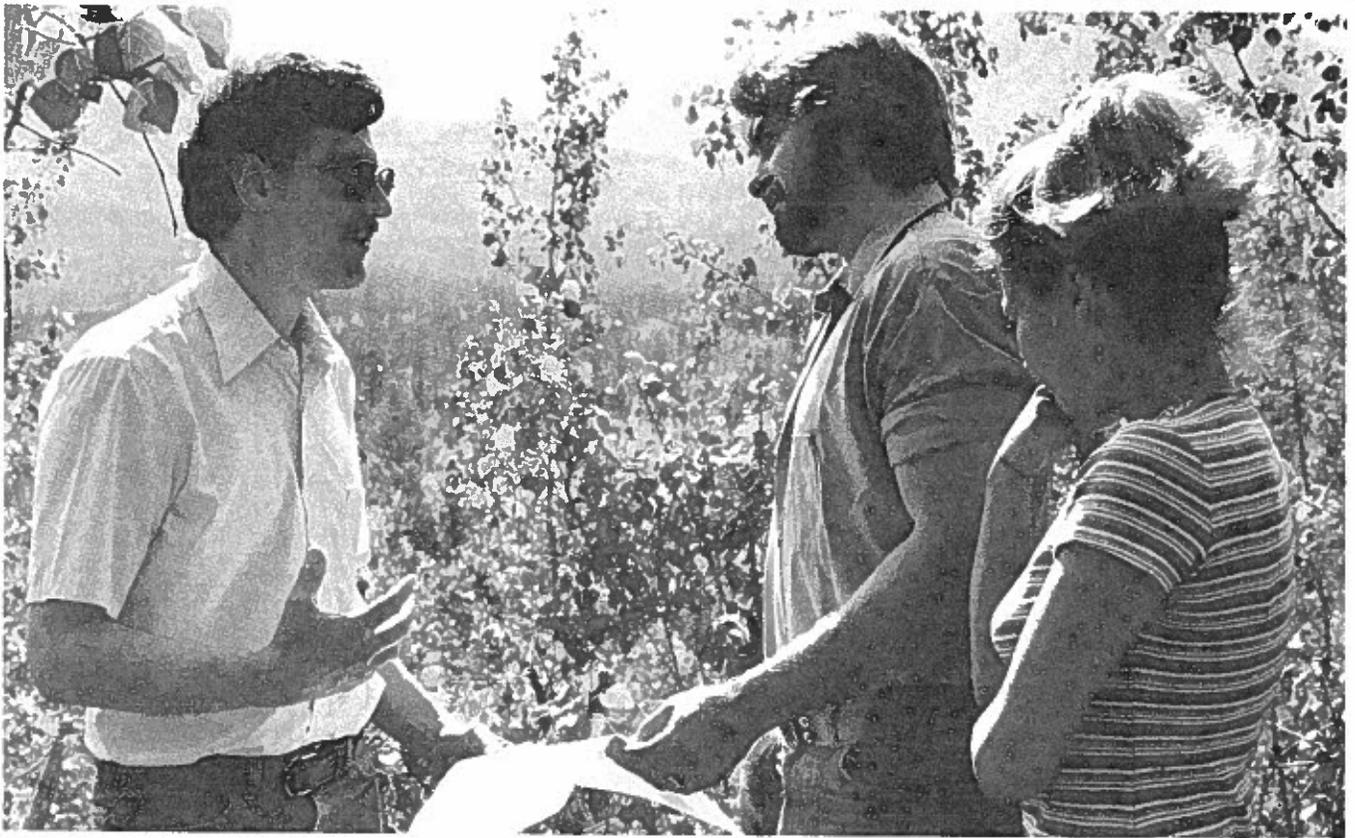
# ALASKA PEOPLE

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## Slana Pioneers Challenge The Alaskan Wilderness



*Glennallen Realty Specialist Steve Durkee discusses access problems with Mike and Judy Brandt who have staked land in the northern Slana parcel.*

Glennallen Area Manager Kurt Kotter and Realty Specialist Steve Durkee met with residents of the Slana land settlement program on June 22 to answer questions and to discuss problems. Approximately 50 settlers attended the meeting held at the future Slana grocery store located on a trade and manufacturing site near Nabesna Road. One of the main concerns expressed by many of the residents was how to gain legal access to the land.

The Slana settlement lands are split into a northern parcel and a southern parcel. The southwest corner of the southern parcel borders Nabesna

Road. Land with road access was the first to be staked, and those who staked away from the road have to cross other people's land to get to their parcel.

The northern parcel is located three and a half miles from the Glenn Highway. Residents of the northern parcel must cross Native land to gain access. BLMers Kotter and Durkee could not provide an easy answer to the access problem. South parcel residents were encouraged to negotiate with their neighbors to obtain rights-of-way. What will be done about northern parcel residents is still uncertain.

The people who have staked land at

Slana are as diverse as the places they came from. Mike and Judy Brandt have always wanted to come to Alaska. Last winter their cabin in the High Sierras in California burned down with all their possessions inside. When they heard about \$2.50/acre land in Alaska, they decided to give it a try. In May they packed their converted delivery truck and drove to Alaska to stake their land. Since they couldn't find land to suit their needs in the southern parcel, they staked land in the northern parcel, only to find out that they had staked on Native land outside the boundaries of Slana. They restaked inside the

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boundary, but their only access is wading through three and a half miles of swampy Native land. They hope to build a cabin by fall, live partially off the land, start a mail order business selling jellies, and trap. Right now they are living in their truck until they can get supplies onto the land.

Another Slana resident, Mary Frances DeHart, staked five acres for an art gallery. Her husband Don homesteaded at Slana years ago when many areas in Alaska were open to homesteading. Their ranch, which is located behind the Slana post office, was used as the DeHart's guiding headquarters. Both DeHarts were big game hunting guides in the Wrangel-St. Elias Range before the area became a National Park. After her husband died in 1977, Mrs. DeHart devoted full time to running the ranch and to creating bronze sculptures which are on display at galleries in Phoenix, Ariz., and Jackson Hole, Wyo.

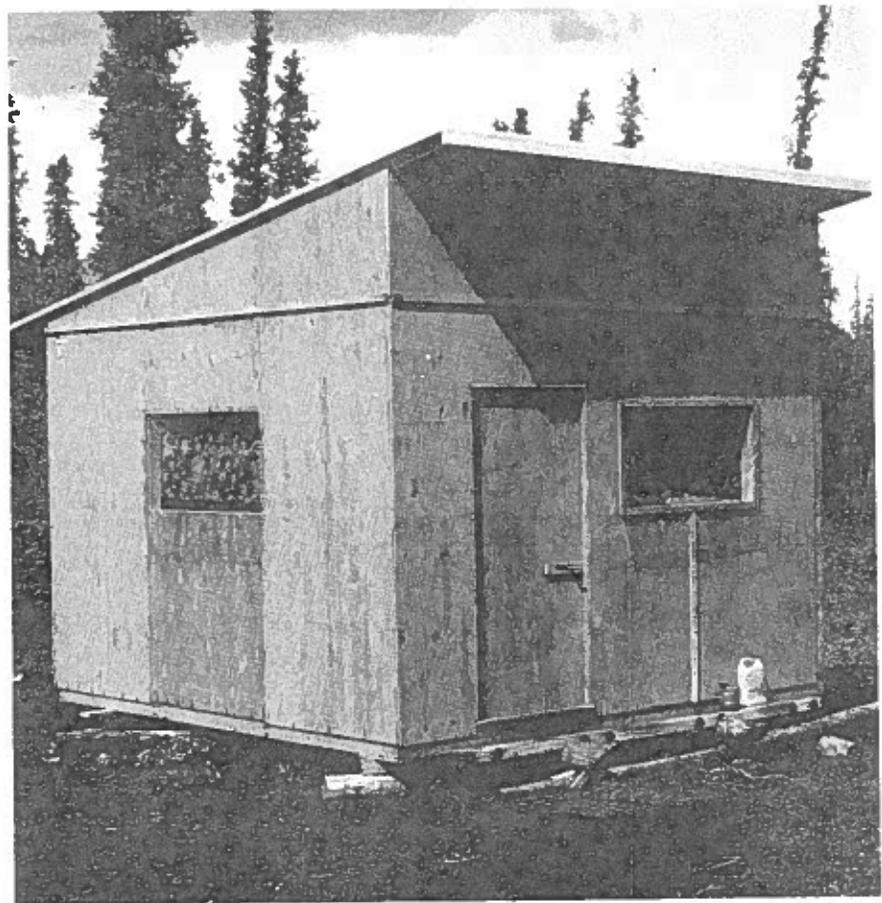
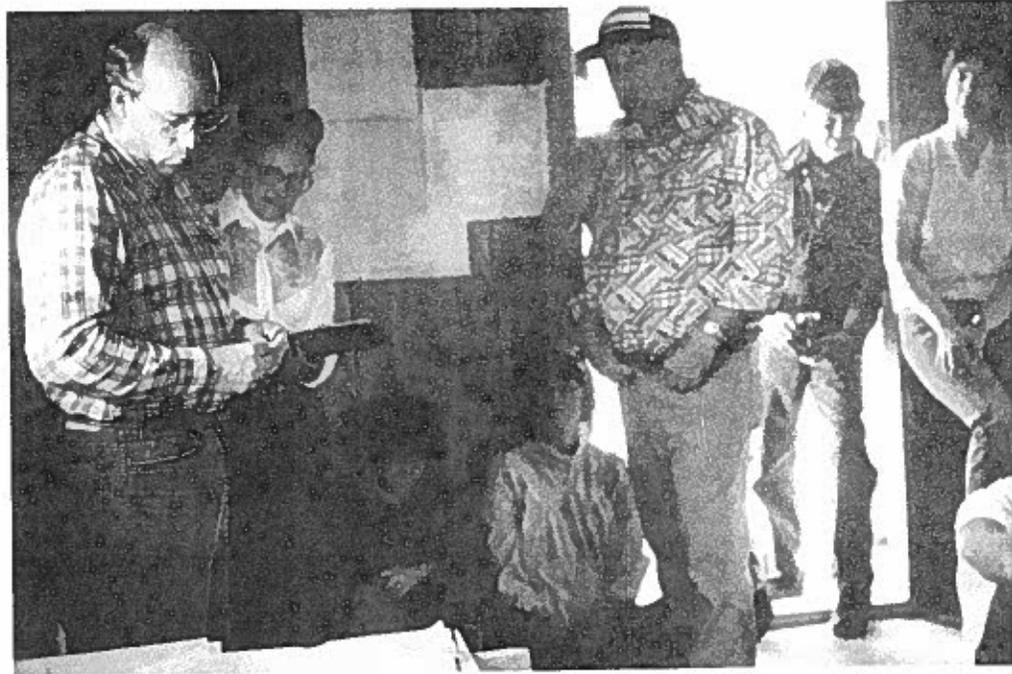
Peter and Barbara Johnson have six years of Idaho wilderness living experience behind them. The Johnsons looked for two weeks before deciding on the site they wanted. Johnson said, "Access and water are the most important things to look for. This is ideal for my wife and me. We feel less remote here than we did in central Idaho where we had to snowshoe 18 miles to get out during the winter months."

Betty Freed and her brother own the future Slana grocery store. She staked her land last fall and headed to California for the winter. Last March she brought up all of her supplies and began building the store. Freed says, "We hope to stock everything a homesteader might need, from groceries to hardware to gloves. We also hope to attract some tourists traveling to Wrangel-St. Elias National Park.

Each settler's idea of what Slana will provide them is different from the next. Some came to find solitude, others came because it gave them the chance to get the start they couldn't get anywhere else, and several stated they enjoyed the challenge of starting a community from scratch in the Alaska wilderness.

Conditions are far from easy. Dust, clouds of mosquitos, and hot weather are characteristic of the short Alaskan summer; minus zero temperatures are typical during the long winter months. There is no electricity, telephones, or plumbing and very little potable water nearby.

Whatever their reasons for being there, a pioneering spirit exists; and the residents have a determination to "make it on the land".



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*(left) Glennallen Area Manager Kurt Kotter discusses problems with Slana residents.*

*(right) Slana residents gather at the future Slana store for a public meeting with BLMers Kurt Kotter and Steve Durkee.*

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*(clockwise from left) Home sweet home .. Homes on Slana lands come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes.*

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