

The Homestead Debate

Saipan's Survey

Cost Tops \$100G

News Saipan Bureau

SAIPAN--The cost of completing surveys for 175 contested homesteads on Saipan "will exceed \$100,000," a Trust Territory land management official said yesterday.

Kozo Yamada, chief of the Lands and Surveys Division, gave this figure to The Daily News in a prepared statement following Wednesday's disclosure that his office plans to let a contract for the survey "within two months."

The disclosure was contained in papers filed in answer to a lawsuit demanding that the High Commissioner immediately issue deeds for the homesteads.

"Issuance of quit claim deeds without survey as suggested by a recent lawsuit," said Yamada, "would not be in the best interests of homesteaders, adjacent property owners or of the Trust Territory Government."

It would "only serve to clear the land titles, cause boundary disputes, and intensify the problem rather than constituting a responsible solution," he added. "It is extremely doubtful that a majority of the homesteaders would subscribe to such a proposal themselves."

The class action suit was brought by four homesteaders on behalf of all other homesteaders who have complied with the regulations but who have not received deeds after a two-year period.

The original figure of 202 affected homesteads that was revealed on Wednesday has since been changed by the TT to 175. Of these, 43 require only plotting and mapping, while the remaining 132 need surveying as well.

"Issuance of homestead deeds to those who had completed the legal requirements has proceeded at a very slow pace

"Extensive investigation revealed that some of these homesteads encroach on other properties, that entry permits

were issued without proper surveys and that although shown generally the location of their property, many homesteaders have not contained themselves within what they were shown.

"Lack of funds and skilled personnel, coupled with rugged terrain and overgrowth of tangantangan have been major problems. Available district survey personnel have been required for capital improvement project surveys and matters of greater general public need."

Yamada added that, "For some months we have been in the process of completing overlay maps necessary to visualize the scope of the problem."

"Following the survey, each tract will be designated a 'registration area' by the Marianas Land Commission, the adjudicated and deeds issued."

"This has been made possible by an amendment to the Land Commission Act passed by the 75th Session of the Congress of Micronesia this year and signed into law by the High Commissioner."

"This method will eliminate boundary and title problems and secure the homesteader's interest," said Yamada.

The headquarters Lands and Surveys Division primarily gives technical advice to the district land management offices, which are under the supervision of the various District Administrators. The survey crews also come under the districts.

The 175 homesteads involved in the suit represent only a small proportion of the agricultural and village homesteads on Saipan that still require surveying. At present there are

735 applications pending for village homesteads, 636 applications pending for agricultural homesteads, with an estimated 104 agricultural tracts being occupied without official entry permits.

Other major land areas on Saipan that have been designated for homestead also must be surveyed. No new agricultural homestead permits are currently being issued.

On Tinian there are 24 agricultural and 16 village homestead applications pending. Rota has 135 agricultural and 49 village applications pending.

The Marianas Political Status Commission has estimated that \$3 million is needed to complete a land cadastral program for the Marianas, which would include homestead surveys as well as private land registration.