

Sept. 22, 1982
Hon. Advertiser

9/22/82

Group says homestead action up to state

By Robert Hollis

Advertiser Staff Writer

A task force examining the Hawaiian homestead program decided yesterday that it lacks the authority to force the state to make changes in the law that many critics say are needed to ensure that hundreds of native Hawaiians are granted land before they die.

Nevertheless, several individuals in the 11-member group said they expect that their proposals to speed up the awarding of homestead grants, which they hope to have ready within six months, ultimately will be accepted by the state and the U.S. Interior Department.

The task force — the first of its kind in the 61-year history of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act — set as its primary goal the acceleration of land distribution to the estimated 7,000 Hawaiians

and part-Hawaiians who qualify for homesteads.

In the first six decades of its existence, first as a territorial and later as a state agency, the Hawaiian Homes Commission handed out only 20 percent of the 200,000 acres set aside by Congress to eligible recipients, according to a federal audit made public on Monday.

The Interior Department audit found that former territorial and state governors illegally set aside more than 13,000 acres for various public uses not allowed by federal law.

In addition, investigators found the current state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands bookkeeping was so sloppy that an audit has not been done since 1972. DHHL records of the Hawaiian Home lands throughout the state were found to be confusing and inaccurate.

In its second day of meetings yesterday, the task force decided that an attempt has to be made to accurately inventory the Hawaiian Home lands. The group also plans to look at ways that land taken in the past can be returned to DHHL or if other state property can be swapped for it.

Stephen Shipley, one of three task force members appointed by Interior Secretary James Watt, promised on Monday to "turn the department upside down" in a search for long-missing maps that are thought to show the exact boundaries of the land Congress wanted to set aside.

The task force traveled to the Big Island today for a tour of some of the Hawaiian Home lands there. It has tentatively scheduled its next set of meetings in Honolulu for the week of Nov. 29.