

Good Morning, my name is Jerry Isaac. I am Athabascan from Tanacross and I am currently the President of Tanana Chiefs Conference, a tribal consortium representing 37 federally recognized tribes of Interior Alaska.

Earlier you heard testimony that during the passage of ANCSA the State of Alaska and the Secretary of Interior **promised** to protect Alaska Native hunting and fishing. Today it is necessary to hold this hearing because that promise has gone unfulfilled.

You also heard during the passage of ANILCA, the State of Alaska urged Congress to provide for a **rural** priority rather than a **Native** priority. Today it is necessary to hold this hearing because the compromise of ANILCA has **failed** and there is currently not a rural priority on state lands and waters to the detriment of the rural Native people- those most dependent on subsistence resources.

Finally you heard that it is well within your Congressional authority to act to protect Alaska Native hunting and fishing, by passing into law preemptive legislation providing for a Native subsistence priority on all lands and waters in Alaska and allowing for Alaska Native co-management of hunting and fishing resources.

In the current system, a subsistence priority is only triggered when the resource is so low in numbers, that there is not enough for commercial and sport take. If the resources were better managed there would be fewer instances in which a subsistence priority is necessary. Under the current checkerboard management, in which Alaska Native tribes have little to no influence, sustainable yield for Alaska's hunting and fishing resources will continue to be unattainable for many species. I have been directed by the tribes I represent to ask you to allow the Alaska Native tribes to fix the failed management system. Fixing the management issues will include ending the checkerboard system and allowing Alaska Native co-management.

You have the opportunity under two proposed demonstration projects to provide a small scale solution to the problem established by ANCSA's broken promise and ANILCA's failure. **First** I will speak about the Demonstration Project for Establishment of Inter-tribal Fish Commission and Tribal-State-Federal Fisher Co-Management for the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers and **Second** I will speak about the co-management proposal for AHTNA's lands. Both demonstration projects should be passed into legislation this year.

Demonstration Project for Establishment of Inter-tribal Fish Commission and Tribal-State-Federal Fisher Co-Management for the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers

A good example of the broken checkerboard system is the Chinook management of the Yukon River. The State of Alaska is the primary in-river manager and so the State Board of Fish implements most regulations applying to Yukon River Chinook. Tens of thousands of acres of

federal lands and waters are also within the Yukon River drainage and so the Federal Subsistence Board and the Office of Subsistence management which receives advice from two separate advisory councils also implement salmon regulations. Two separate regulation systems manage the same fish swimming up the Yukon-it does not make sense. The most disturbing fact-there is no official role for tribal governments in the salmon management on the Yukon, but tribal members are by far the most dependent and knowledgeable of the resource. It is no wonder the Yukon River Chinook runs have been on the decline for over a decade.

We propose a demonstration project to authorize inter-tribal fish commissions for both the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers and establish a state/federal/tribal co-management structure that would focus on rebuilding the Chinook stocks and would ensure fishery management consistent with the tribe's customary and traditional fishing way of life. Co-management will unify management throughout each river, thereby discarding ineffective, controversial and artificial jurisdictional boundaries that have nothing to do with the best salmon management practices.

The demonstration project would unify the current dysfunctional split of the federal Office of Subsistence Management regional advisory council (RAC) system for the Yukon and Kuskokwim, providing for one RAC for each river. The project would give preference to the Fish Commissions when awarding ANILCA section 809 agreements and include funding for research pursuant to ANILCA section 812. In addition the project allows for the commissioners to influence the impacts of both the Yukon River Salmon treaty with Canada and the Magnuson-Stevens Act by mandating commissioners participate in both the implementing bodies.

We have draft legislation prepared to implement the Fish Commissions. These Commissions are supported by Tanana Chiefs Conference and the Association of Village Council President, representing a total of 93 federally recognized tribes.

Ahtna's Demonstration Project

Next it is my honor to speak to you about our next proposal concerning co-management of Ahtna's lands. While I do not officially represent the Ahtna, Ahtna lands are located not far from my home of Tanacross and I am clan cousins with many tribal members from the Ahtna region. Because Tanacross is on the road system, I understand the struggle experienced by the Ahtna Athabascans when outside hunters take away from the subsistence and cultural needs of the Native people. Ahtna's traditional hunting area is surrounded by Alaska's major population centers, Anchorage, Fairbanks, and the Mat-Su and the roads that connect these centers.

The Ahtna villages selected village corporation lands based on their value for subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering, but decades later the Ahtna people struggle to provide for their families hunting and fishing needs because their traditional lands are poorly managed by the State of Alaska. The federal rural subsistence priority does not help the Ahtna because there

are little federal lands in their traditional lands. The lack of authority to manage hunting and fishing on our own ANCSA lands is one of the greatest existing injustices for Alaska Natives.

This demonstration project would remedy this injustice, greatly advance effective wildlife management, and help resolve the growing divide over subsistence management in Alaska. It would authorize Ahtna tribes to manage wildlife on lands Ahtna was conveyed through ANCSA.

The proposed Ahtna demonstration project would only include Ahtna lands and it would not apply to other regions. The legislation would also authorize Ahtna, the State and the Department of the Interior to develop a co-management agreement for the coordination of wildlife management on ALL lands traditionally used by the Ahtna.

I have been asked by the tribes I represent to tell you it is your duty to **address** the broken promise of ANCSA and the failure of ANILCA and your sacred trust responsibly to the Alaska Native people AND wait no longer and pass legislation establishing an Alaska Native priority on all Alaskan lands and waters and Alaska Native co-management authority.

The demonstration projects I have testified to today are projects that can be passed into legislation **this year**.

Protection of Alaska Native hunting and fishing will continue to be the Alaska Native people's number one priority until we see implementation on the ground of legislation establishing an Alaska Native priority and Alaska Native co-management.