

# National Subsistence Technical - Planning Meeting For the Protection of Traditional & Tribal Life-ways



**Alaska Native Science Commission**

429 L Street  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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# National Subsistence Technical/Planning Meeting For the Protection of Traditional & Tribal Life-ways

Anchorage, Alaska

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## **FINAL REPORT**

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The natural environment has always been an essential component of Indigenous subsistence life-ways and cultural identity. These lifeways are intimately linked to seasonal and long-term cycles. In addition, the quality, quantity and accessibility of these resources are significant factors in the existence of subsistence lifeways. Depletion and evidence of significant contamination of subsistence foods and materials have had a devastating effect on the health and cultural identity of Indigenous people. Past and present environmental protection activities on behalf of federal and state agencies fail to recognize the threats to the health and culture of Indigenous lifeways.

In March 2002, a National Tribal Subsistence Summit Concept Paper was issued by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics. The approach was intended to be a Tribally-driven summit meeting of “Tribal scientists, Tribal Elders, environmental directors, risk assessors, agency representatives and technical advisors.”

The stated objectives of the subsistence summit were:

- “Develop a working definition of subsistence from an indigenous perspective.”
- “Identify a comprehensive set of assessment tools and communication mechanisms that Tribes can utilize in their own assessments that address subsistence-related exposures to toxic chemicals and pesticides.”
- “Identify scientific research and data gaps that presently exist.”

The Alaska Native Science Commission submitted a proposal in response to the Request For Proposal for the Tribal Subsistence Project and was awarded the grant in June 2002.

Shortly after award of the grant, a meeting was held in Sparks, Nevada where the concept of a subsistence summit was further developed. The Subsistence Summit was to be an “opportunity for tribes to be involved in the development and eventual outcome of the Summit.” The National Tribal Environmental Council would “work with the Alaska Native Science Commission, as well as other subsistence workgroups, for the Summit agenda development.” One of the recommendations identified at this stage of the planning, was to “coordinate and bridge Tribal subsistence workgroups.”

“We knew we wanted to look at what it would take to maintain or keep a healthy environment and we wanted to see how that might work. That’s how these talks all came about.” *Kesner Flores, Cortina Indian Rancheria.*

Planning for the Subsistence Summit continued with recommendations as follows:

- Tribes need to have more input

- Need to standardize and define terms
- Broaden who is participating in the project

“Since I have moved to EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency], I have seen an agency that is working hard to open the door to listen respectfully. They are putting the money, resources and time into this effort. Probably doing more than most agencies in that most agencies don’t want to deal with Tribes. I constantly get calls from EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] colleagues asking, ‘What can we do?’, ‘How can we help?’, ‘How should we approach this?’ They are going to embrace us and listen. It is my hope that across the agencies we get the support we need to share what we have to share, in a respectful, non-violating way.” *Carol Jorgensen, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Headquarters.*

- Clarify the goal



Carol Jorgensen clarifying one of her points during a break-out session. From left, Lydia Olympic (Igiugig, AK), Carol Jorgensen (Washington DC), Barbara Cunningham (Washington DC), Alice Petrivelli (Anchorage, AK), Vicki Vanek (Anchorage, AK)

- Safeguard tribal lifeways/subsistence

In December 2003, the subsistence planning group met in San Francisco to discuss the scope of work; the contractor's role, the name of the project, date/location, representation, and the communications issue. This meeting identified the agenda for the upcoming technical

## Anchorage Meeting & Identifying Issues/Concerns

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planning meeting and named it “A Subsistence Technical/Planning Meeting for the Protection of Traditional/Tribal Lifeways.”

### **ANCHORAGE MEETING**

On April 13, 2003, fifty representatives of tribes from across the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Alaska Native Science Commission met for “A Subsistence Technical/Planning Meeting for the Protection of Traditional and Tribal Lifeways” in Anchorage, Alaska. As discussed and agreed in San Francisco, the meeting had three purposes:

1. Identify issues and concerns regarding contaminants in Traditional Foods
2. Discuss issues, resources, and gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways
3. Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop the process and structure to protect traditional ways of life

#### ***1. Identify issues and concerns regarding contaminants in Traditional Foods***

Although the mandate from the San Francisco meeting specifically stated “contaminants in traditional foods” the intent, as well as the discussion held in Anchorage, included “contaminants in traditional foods and in natural resources utilized for medicinal or spiritual use.” Prior to the gathering in Anchorage, Tribes responded to the letter of invitation with a form identifying concerns and issues. Roland Shanks summarized the identified concerns as follows:

“Many tribal people expressed concerns about the safety and wholesomeness of the food people eat. Tribes are concerned about the level of PCBs in fish in the Bering Sea and in the rivers of the Northeast. They are concerned about the effect of pollution from oil and gas development, mining activity, pulp mills, Superfund sites and municipal sewage discharge. Many also expressed concerns about the air deposition of pollutants. They all ask the same questions – “Is the food safe to eat? What is a safe level of contamination to eat?”

“They expressed concern about the wide scale use of herbicides and pesticides. Not only what are the affects where they are used, but also what are the affects downhill, downstream, and downwind? How do they affect surface and groundwater? What is the effect when they are blown onto berries, other plants and medicinal plants important for the health of the people? There were concerns expressed that EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] did not adequately regulate chemicals to protect human life and the

## Identifying Issues/Concerns

environment.

“The risk assessments that are used to develop ‘safe levels’ for contamination were repeatedly questioned. What is a safe level? Is there such a thing as a safe level? Do these assessments adequately address the lives of American Indians and Alaska Natives, and the way they interact with the environment? Do they deal with multiple exposures to the same chemical? Do they take into consideration the amount of subsistence and traditional food people eat?”



Fred Corey (Presque Isle, ME) and Patricia Cochran (Anchorage, AK) Co-Chair the planning meeting

“However, perhaps even more important than the effects on individual resources, is the effect on the cultures and traditional lifeways of the people who rely on those resources. There was concern over the long-term exposure to these contaminants because it is obvious that people are continuing to use the resources in spite of the contamination--whether it is because there is nothing else to replace those resources or because it is central to their culture and traditions. The alternative is to eat processed foods with all the attendant problems and to stop carrying out ceremonies and cultural activities, both of which lead to the death of a people and their traditional lifeways. People expressed concerns about how contaminants have negatively impacted their ability to follow their lifeways--whether it was because their traditional foods with all the associated traditions was not available or whether it was that it was hard to find uncontaminated materials to make the objects they need to carry out their traditional activities.

“Another major area of concern expressed was their inability to control the contaminants, their resources, the impacts on their food and traditional lifeways and ultimately the future of their Tribe and its traditions. Why do people who live someplace else have more say over what happens to their food and traditions than they do? Why hasn't their tribe been

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways

given jurisdiction to control the activities that negatively impact their ability to protect and preserve their traditional lifeways?”

### 2. *Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways*

During the meeting, participants identified the following issues and concerns, often through the telling of stories. We share some of those stories below:

#### 2.1 Concerns rose regarding Sites and Specific Contaminants

- Contaminated grounds and leaching from old military sites

“In 1987, I went to Pt. Hope. The people there lost everything up there due to toxins seeping into the earth from tanks rotting. Now they are having problems in St. Lawrence Island, too. I just came from the toxin conference in Fairbanks. Maybe it’s too late to clean up, I don’t know. All we have to do today is teach our younger people that are going to be Elders too, and teach them - tell stories to each other. Gather your Elders and let them tell you about life. Respect. Because you notice everyone notices; greed always gives problems. You have to learn to understand yourself first and then share. That’s what our Elders used to tell us, all of us, Alice knows that, Dorothy knows that; everyone knows that, but do something about it.” *Rita Blumenstein, Elder, Alaska.*



- Air Force fuel dumps contaminating plants; hazardous waste from plane crashes
- ‘50s and ‘60s radar bases’ contaminants on Blackfeet Reservation
- Storage tanks – leakage (above and underground)

“The Department of Defense had a great affinity for setting up house on tribal lands after we were given our traditional lands . . . There were some radar bases set up on the Blackfeet Reservation. I was told, by Elders that these complexes were installed in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and were abandoned suddenly, almost overnight. They were there on a Friday and on a Monday they were all gone. They said you walked into the houses and it was like someone had just had supper there and got up and walked away. The Tribe felt very uncomfortable with that. You couldn’t help but wonder why people left so suddenly that they left food on the table. It leads the Tribe to believe that there



## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

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is something wrong with this area. . . The U.S. Department of Defense is back at these sites and trying to clean them up. At least we're on that right now.

"We have an underground storage tank coordinator out there now. They had diesel heating fuel and we've found contamination where the tanks have leaked." *Gerald Wagner, Blackfeet Tribe.*

- Superfund sites: In tribal sense, human risk and ecological risk are one in the same
  - Incorporate Traditional values in superfund ranking system
  - Remediation level
- Power dams and hydro-power created major industries

"My community has had environmental contamination problems since at least the 1970s. The St. Lawrence Seaway opened in the late '50s followed by the Sanders Moses Power Dam which brought cheap hydroelectric power and three to four industries settled in the area. Since then we have had several sources of environmental contamination. Three sites have superfund issues. My community mobilized in the mid-'70s to start remediation of the problem." *Doris Cook, Elder, Akwesasne.*



- Maine rivers were polluted by paper mills, logging, damming of rivers, dioxins and heavy metals; although the rivers are cleaner today, people still don't eat fish.

"Our main focus is the Penobscot River that flows around our islands. I have seen the pollution of the river. I lived through the peak of the pollution created by the paper mills; driving of logs and damming of the river. It wasn't until the 1960s Clean Water Act and after, that I witnessed the cleaning up of the river. However, you look at the water today and it is cleaner. But there are still poisons in the river. We don't eat the fish and exercise our aboriginal rights to take fish from the river because of the dioxins and heavy metals and all the rest that comes from the pollution of the river." *Butch Phillips, Elder, Penobscot Indian Nation.*



- Laguna land contamination—uranium deposits, water contamination to sheep

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

“At Lagunas we have the uranium mines that I was brought up with contaminating our lands. We used to farm, but the lakes where we got water were contaminated by uranium tailings. Where I grew up, in the summertime where we watered the sheep was contaminated. I know about contamination and being brought up traditionally.” *Eileen Lopez, Tohono O’odham Nation.*

- Boundary connection to Mexico – people, vehicles and misuse of land and problems dealing with traffic

“Today we are trying to deal with impacts to the land because of the policies along the Mexican border. As the customs and border patrol clamp down on the major avenues of traffic along the border, it is forcing more and more people across our land. We have two million acres. Sixty-five miles of our southern boundary is shared with Mexico. We have a problem with the people and substances coming across that land. You have more and more vehicles whether it’s the smugglers or government agents tearing up that land.” *Angelo Joaquin, Elder, Tohono O’odham Nation.*



- Open dumps
- Mining contaminants issues
- abandoned mines; residual pathways into traditional foods
- U.S. Department of Defense bombing ranges

“We have also procured funds from the U.S. Department of Defense; they have a bombing range where I work now. We have those issues. I have worked with underground storage tanks – I’ve pulled some out; I’ve worked with above ground storage tanks where the problem was potentially contaminating a drinking well of a community. We tested and it was contaminated 30 feet down. So we are working with the operators of that gas station.” *Louis Hena, Santo Domingo Pueblo.*

- Cruise ships during seal pup time dumping waste

“One of the issues now is cruise ships that dump contaminants into the water just 3 miles off shore . . . The cruise ships dump 150,000 gallons of wastewater; 7,000 gallons oily bilge, etc. One hundred sixty-eight ships come to my area. In the middle of May the seals are pupping. We utilize seals. We are one of the highest harvesters of seal in the State [of Alaska].” *Ray Sensmeier, Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission.*

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

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- Drilling rigs in Cook Inlet – drilling muds

- Abalone shells breaking – pulp mill contamination

“One of the complaints during the mill operation was that when you would clean abalone, the shell would break. It isn’t supposed to, so we were concerned.” *Jack Lorrigan, Sitka Tribe of Alaska.*

- World War II lead communication cable decaying in Southeast between islands

“There were two radars in the Pacific and one was on Harbor Mountain above Sitka. To communicate with the outposts they laid miles and miles and miles of lead cable in the water and its still there. We found our answer. Some of these islands had observation points. It was a secure line that couldn’t be tapped. They didn’t want to transmit with radio because it could be intercepted. It’s everywhere in the environment.

“We’re still assessing what can be done with the lead. They may yet take it out. It lies on the bottom but is sometimes suspended. Anemones and seaweed are growing on it. The anemones are absorbing it--it gets worked back into the environment. One of the professors at Sheldon Jackson College said that although fishermen lose lead leads, that lead is inert and should react and degrade. The lead from the cable is in an active surf zone. The electrolysis on the lead is turning it into a white powder--unfortunately you want to pick it out now while it has form and before it dissolves and shows up as a reading.” *Jack Lorrigan, Sitka Tribe of Alaska.*

- World War II dumping sites of hazardous waste materials in the water

- Exxon Valdez Oil Spill impacted lives

“In 1989 there was the Exxon Valdez oil spill--11 million gallons of crude oil dumped on our waters. I remember thinking it was so devastating. I was about to have my first daughter. I remember thinking they would clean it up and it would not get to the beaches. The oil spill happened on the 24<sup>th</sup> my daughter was born on the 29<sup>th</sup>; as I flew home a week later all I could see was sheen of oil on the Cook Inlet. I was devastated. I remember getting back to my village and all the chaos; people scrambling to protect the beaches. It was devastating. These are some of the issues that made me decide to be proactive. I decided to get out there and do what I can to protect the privilege of harvesting and gathering and living the traditional lifestyle.” *Violet Yeaton, Port Graham Village Council.*

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

- Radioactivity in Aleutians from Amchitka

### 2.2 Concerns raised regarding Animals, Fish, Plants

- Seal and seal oil contaminated
- Contaminated plants: from refineries, coal and paper mills in area
- Food sources of moose



Traditional introduction: Everyone introduced themselves by sharing their traditional name and following traditional introduction customs.

“We started in 1999 testing for cadmium in moose livers. We’ll do that study again in 2004. Continuing with that, we have started looking at sediment cores of the lakes on the reservations. We are also trying to figure out why the moose are doing such a good job of accumulating cadmium in their livers.”

*Trevor White, Passamaquoddy Indian Township Reservation.*

- Species loss of diversity, quality and quantity
- Drought problems – fish disappearing

“Cattle grazing has been occurring in the valley for 100 years. All riparian vegetation had been completely wiped out except for a few very old willow trees. A 12-foot deep arroyo had formed in the central part of the valley which was growing in size every year. Water flow in the channel was restricted to a few weeks following the rainy season and dried up for the rest of the year . . . .

"In 1992, the Campo Band applied for funding under the Clean Water Act, §106 program and began to incorporate the project into the Clean Water Act program. By the end of 1992, there were four structures in place along a one-half mile stretch of the Diabold drainage. When the winter rains hit in 1992-1993 the structures all filled with silt to the top. The following spring,

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

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thousands of willow saplings began to emerge from the silt. Campo Environmental Protection Agency supplemented the natural resurgence with hundreds of cottonwood cuttings. All types of riparian plants began to emerge: watercress, nettles, tules, cattails, wire grass, and so on.

“By 1995, some of the willows were topping 15 feet in height. Bobcats, red winged blackbirds, ducks, raptors, and deer were common sights at the area. An open water habitat has been created in a portion of the project area that is fed by the groundwater seepage. This habitat has, in turn, attracted herons, egrets and other water fowl. Some tribal members dropped bass and catfish into the pond and it has become a favorite spot for kids to fish.” *Tonya Largo, Campo Indian Reservation.*

“You may want to take back to your program that in 1993 we were told that no tribes in Oklahoma would ever have a clean water program. We went to the Campo Band and they provided training for us. We worked hard at getting that type of thing to get it into the region. The Campos helped us with training and now we are doing that for other tribes.” *Nancy John, Cherokee Nation.*

- Endocrine disruptors going into the environment

“This table shows the types of risks from the most commonly used herbicides in forestry in California—[glyphosate, triclopyr, hexazinone, 2, 4-D, and atrazine]. Note that we don’t know whether or not these chemicals are endocrine disruptors. When the Environmental Protection Agency registered these chemicals for forestry use they didn’t know about endocrine disruption. A study released last year found that tiny amounts—as small as 1 part per billion—of atrazine exposure can cause frogs to change their sex gender. None of that work has been done for these chemicals. No one is prioritizing these chemicals for that type of study, so it may be decades before we know what the effects of these are in that regard.” *Vivian Parker, California Indian Basketweavers Association.*

- Potato roots have holes
- Sourdock leaves turning yellow
- Cadmium in moose liver

“We depended on salmon; most of the fish are now threatened or virtually extinct. We come by this work, fighting for our rights and survival based on

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

the impacts we see on our rivers. Our concern for the fish and game we eat: we can't eat certain foods--moose liver contaminated with cadmium. This work is near and dear to my heart. I'm 5,000 miles away from my home. From coast to coast, from sunrise to sunset the concerns are very similar." *Jerry Pardilla, Alaska Inter-Tribal Council.*

[Can you tell where the cadmium is coming from?] "From facilities--a lot of the cadmium is coming from the Midwest from waste energy plants. The look at sediment core was to see if we could identify the source of the cadmium, but we don't know yet if we can do that. There is a lot of possible sources for cadmium. There is even cadmium in car tires." *Trevor White, Passamaquoddy Indian Township.*

- Contamination of basket-weaver materials



Lori McKinnon (left) and Tonya Largo examine a basket weaving loom while touring the Alutiiq long house at the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

"I am from the Yurok Tribe of Northern California. Our reservation is 56,000 acres of forest. For 11 percent of the reservation, one of the biggest issues is pesticide use to control vegetation in the forests. I'm a basket weaver and have always fished with my father and brother. We are concerned about pesticides used on our resources." *Lori McKinnon, Yurok Tribe.*

"There are numerous ways Basketweavers and their families may be exposed to herbicides in plant materials that have been sprayed. Weavers may be exposed during gathering, processing or weaving. Baskets may be used for cooking, for acorns, for baby rattles and baby baskets, and for ceremonial use." *Vivian Parker, California Indian Basketweavers Association.*

- Mercury in fish

"In Down east Maine we have serious contamination. The mercury in the fish is some of the highest in the US [United States]. This is the result of air contamination coming in from the mid-west for the industry and energy producing generating plants. It is important to continue to monitor and collect

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

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empirical data on what's happening. The Tribes in Maine cannot handle this problem by themselves. It originates someplace else. We have to work with those regions across the United States to attack this problem.” *Stephen Crawford, Passamaquoddy Tribe of Maine.*

- Threatens populations of loon, otter, and mink (and man!)

### 2.3 Concerns raised regarding Commercial Products

- Chemicals in everyday products like soaps

“We need to remember the chemicals we are using in laundry soap -- pesticides are in there. I have worked in programs about pesticides. The word is that machine did it. My daughter says, ‘I worked all day doing the laundry!’ My husband says, ‘Where's your washboard?’ The sun would take away your germs hanging the laundry out to dry.” *Eileen Lopez, Tohono O’odham Nation.*

- Lead shot problems – geese – hunting area destroyed

### 2.4 Concerns raised regarding Long Distance Sources

- Trans-boundary contaminants
- Arctic - a sink for contaminants

### 2.5 Concerns raised regarding the Indoor Environment

- Carbon monoxide present in homes

“I have worked with indoor air quality. Carbon monoxide is bad in our homes. Through our program, we have saved lives and families. We have had some open dumps and built transfer stations. We worked with mining issues; we have a micro mine station in Taos County in New Mexico.” *Louis Hena, Santo Domingo Pueblo.*

### 2.6 Concerns raised regarding the Natural Environment

- Sediment in lakes
- Contaminants on and around islands – Northeast Cape
- Fire suppression; plants not getting water needed; subsequent fires devastating

“We are also working to halt the use of pesticides in forestry. While fire suppression has led to unnatural fire hazards from fuel build-up in our western

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

forests, we are concerned that we are seeing proposals now to use herbicides to kill vegetation supposedly in order to prevent fire. This can actually lead to *increased* fire hazard, because the openings in the forest and the dry conditions on the ground caused by herbicide use increases the conditions for devastating fires to occur.” *Vivian Parker, California Indian Basketweavers Association.*

- Contamination of drinking water
- Contaminated groundwater, air and soil

### 2.7 Concerns raised regarding Regulation

- What does acceptable level of contaminants mean? Is there such a thing as an “acceptable” level
- Pharmaceutical traces – no monitoring
- Conflict avoidance agreement – oil company and whalers

“Some things that might apply to this workshop is the way we look at how contaminants enter into the ecosystem. Some of us, like myself, believe that development is going to happen. There’s not a lot we can do to try to stop it, but there are things



Trevor White crawls out of the entrance of a Kaasgii (Inupiat Dwelling) while touring the Alaska Native Heritage Center.

we can do. On the North Slope, the North Slope Borough and oil companies have developed a conflict avoidance agreement for exploration in the Arctic Ocean to avoid whaling conflict and habitat conflict as ships and drilling moves. When oil companies come in and say, “we want to develop this area” they have to understand it's a critical habitat. They impact the tax base for the North Slope Borough, so what we do to try to counteract that is to say, “if you ever impact our ecosystem off the shore here you will pay.” It's an understanding with the developers.” *Rex Snyder, Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission.*

- Critical habitat; good neighbor policy

### 2.8 Concerns raised regarding Human Health

- Contaminants being passed on to nursing children



## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

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“Most important to elders was the concern about perpetuation of our culture. We need to remember all the things we used to teach in our houses, in our young women's and young men's houses. We don't have the same kind of training that I was fortunate enough to receive. We are not offering that anymore and that's a fault of my generation. We have to do that. We have to give that kind of training to our young women to tell them what you should and shouldn't eat when you are a nursing mother and the way to prepare food to help overcome some of the contaminant issues we're concerned about. For me that was a lesson and something we're trying to learn to do better now--to pass on this information and see it is given to our young people so they have it as well.” *Patricia Cochran, Alaska Native Science Commission.*

### 2.9 Concerns raised regarding Spiritual and Traditional Practices

- Need to respect plants and earth “take only what you need; use all of what you take; and respect what you take”.
- Important to bring Native tradition message and not just science

“I'm not a scientist--I am an Indian person who has seen destruction of our homelands. I take it seriously to work with scientists towards cleaning up the environment. I bring the traditional message when we're talking about Indian lands and Indian country. You must remember that you are dealing with Indian feeling for that land that is much different than for non-Indian lands. You can't be on a certain piece of land for thousands of years without having a deep connection to that land. My message to you is that while you're making management policies for our lands you must incorporate the culture and traditions within the management plan.” *Butch Phillips, Penobscot Indian Nation.*

- Important to use traditional knowledge and Elders' knowledge
- We need patience in teaching our children and grandchildren
- Health of the people depends on the health of the culture and spirituality
- We are only as healthy as our Mother Earth

“Before any decisions were made you had to figure out the consequences of your actions on people seven generations from now. We are only as strong as our Mother Earth. Our culture is only as strong as our ceremonies. We only have one air, one water, one Mother Earth and we need to make this known. I

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

think in closing I'll close with a statement from another spiritual leader, Oran Lyons. When he talked with the United Nations he said to the non-Natives present, "Even though you and I are in different boats, we share the same river of life and downstream of this river of life our children will share the cost of our arrogance, our misunderstanding." *Ray Sensmeier, Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission.*

- Teaching kids is difficult, but need to maintain oral tradition

"For me, as a young person and hunter my Elders and parents made it fun. It's a responsibility, but you have to do it in a way that means something. I grew up around a table with the stories of my Elders. There was no TV in Huslia. The way we think now, to go back to that oral tradition is important to maintain what you're calling subsistence. It's more than that out there. I can't say it's just food, when it's the wolf skin I'm dancing with in my hand signing my Native song my Grandmother taught me, and it's part of taking care of the land. It's part of the responsibility we have as Native people. I have to get those young warriors to think the way I was brought up." *Orville Huntington, Huslia, Alaska.*



- We are our ancestors

"I feel that I am my ancestors. In our culture, in Yupik and Aleut culture we are told that all of our ancestors and their spirits walk with us; celebrate life with us; and dance with us. I feel like that at times. You know, it's like déjà vu. As a child I used to sit and listen on the edge of the lake and my favorite sound in the spring was the robin. I would sit there and eat snacks in the dark and wonder why no one wanted to sit with me and wonder at this land and the robin starting to sing in the morning. I always feel close to my relations." *Lydia Olympic, Native Village of Igiugig.*

- Who are our real heroes?

"My dad would tell me stories at night while mom was working. He used to get tired of reading me the same books; so he started telling me hunting stories from when he was younger. It was then I realized there was a big difference between who he was and who I was.

## Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways (continued)

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“He was talking about his heroes in these stories: Uncle Louis and Uncle Ted and how they were hunters and providers of meat. They risked their lives to bring home the food that sustained us as people. When he first used the word hero, I remember thinking ‘Spiderman’ or ‘Batman’ or ‘Captain Cook’. But then I realized my definition of hero was wrong. When I went to school we learned about Captain Cook. Later, when I was a tour guide for the Alaska Railroad as I talked to tourists about Cook Inlet and Turnagain Arm and how Captain Cook and his people thought they had discovered the Northwest Passage, it came to me that “we” weren’t “discovered” by Captain Cook. We always knew we were here.” *Shawna Larsen, Alaska Community Action of Toxics.*

- Religion changed who we are
- Sanctity of traditional ceremonies being compromised by contaminated elements

“One of our own tribal Elders was wondering if the sweetgrass is in a contaminated area. If it is contaminated, he wanted to know, how do you purify yourself with something that's dirty? It doesn't work.” *Fred Corey, Aroostook Band of Micmacs.*

- The Circle of Life includes all plants, animals, fish, birds, insects, humans. The only aspect of the circle that is not essential to life is the human aspect

“I mentioned the sacred circle of life. If you can imagine a circle, in that circle are the people, plants, animals, birds, fish, and insects. The Native belief is that if you damage anything within that sacred circle of life, eventually you damage yourself. If you take any one of those items, animals, out of the sacred circle of life--everything would die. If you take out the insects, eventually everything will die. If you take out the plants, eventually everything will die. If you take out the fish, eventually everything will die. What would happen if you take the humans out of the sacred circle of life? What would happen then? Nothing. We are the least important in that sacred circle of life. The ancient beliefs are that we were the last to come along. The animals, plants, fish, birds and insects didn't depend on us. Our lives depend on a harmonious relationship with everything within the sacred circle of life. That's the basis of Native spirituality. It's not a worship of animals. It is a relationship, a strong feeling with the natural world.” *Butch Phillips, Penobscot Indian Nation.*

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life

### ***3. Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life***

After two days of working together, developing a trust relationship, telling stories, and discussing issues and concerns, participants broke into two groups to create outlines of proposed ways to approach, Group 1) capacity building, tribal coordination and organization, and Group 2) communication, education and outreach. Below are the results of these two groups' work.

#### **3.1 Capacity Building/Tribal Coordination/Organization Workgroup Summary**

##### **3.1.1 Capacity Building (for tribes)**

- Training
- Information clearinghouse
- Laboratory
- Form coalition with other tribal organizations and environmental organizations both national and international
- Legislative amendment §106
- Quality Assurance Program Plan - ([www.nativeknowledge.org](http://www.nativeknowledge.org) - Resource Guide)

“One of the other things that might be helpful is our native knowledge website. It’s a step-by-step walk through on how to do a Quality Assurance Program Plan. Putting together a quality assurance project plan is hard for communities so we have a step-by-step process on our website.” *Patricia Cochran, Alaska Native Science Commission.*

- Identify future resources
- Budget
  - Research
  - Natural resource database
- Legislative analysis
- Using national organizations as vehicles to motivate interest (i.e. Federal Register)

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

- Build stronger government-to-government relations
  - More substantial consultation and processes to protect tribal interests

### 3.1.2 Agency

- Intra-agency communication using Environment Protection Agency's American Indian Environment Office as lead
- Resources from various agencies
- Educating agency regarding national tribal workgroup, projects that are addressing "lifeways"
- Immersion/educating deputy regional advisors, deputy assistant directors, and headquarters decision makers that deal with tribes to travel to Indian country to see "lifeways"
- Letters of appreciation for workgroup participation and support



Kesner Flores of the Cortina Band of Wintun Indians (right) facilitates Group 1's discussion. Here he poses a question to the group to reach consensus on the list of priorities that they have identified.

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

### 3.1.3 Other

- Structure to provide substance for task force goals

### 3.1.4 Organization

- Task Team (Bumblebee)
  - Communication
  - Meetings and participation
  - Provide continuity for goals and objectives
  - Keep tribal leadership informed
  - Tribal member participation
- Letter of appreciation for workgroup
- National meeting for sharing with agency workgroups

## 3.2 Communication Education/Outreach Workgroup Summary

### 3.2.1 Communication

- Raise awareness
  - Tribal Communication
    - ? Use existing regional groups (e.g. United South and Eastern Tribes)
    - ? Native American Fish and Wildlife Society regional meetings



Vickie Hykes-Steere, (Anchorage, AK) scribes for Group 2

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

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- ? Newsletters/Radio
- Communication between tribes and state and federal agencies
  - Issue-specific email lists
  - Establish an Office of Management and Budget Native liaison
  - Tribes and United Nations
  - Permanent Forum, Working Group on Indigenous Populations
- Establish communications network
  - “That will be important--need to keep individuals involved [and] up-to-date. That piece could be quite costly and quite cumbersome to the last group or whoever deals with the issue. This is where Office of Pollution Prevention and Toxics or the office might help us find revenues to deal with that piece. It will be key to this national issue to bring all the tribes together.” Kesner Flores, Cortina Indian Rancheria.
  - Alaska Native Health Board and other Indian health boards
  - National health groups
  - Indian Health Service
  - American Indian Physicians Association
  - Nationals
    - ? Water, contaminants, food, and high cancer rates
    - ? Needs paper
  - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Governor Christine Todd Whitman
  - National Congress of American Indians
  - Policy makers
  - Precautionary principle
- Publicize issues
  - “There is a real need for the Native American community to make presentations about what hunting and fishing is to our people. We need to describe the real connection between the land and the people. It’s just one of

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

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the steps necessary to educate them about what we face. Persistent Organic Pollutants are impacting our people. We need to use all vehicles.” *Art Ivanoff, Native Village of Unalakleet.*

- Use the media
  - Develop public service announcements for radio and television
  - Link problems to issues that non-governmental organizations and we care about
  - Produce video of health resources and health of people
  - Produce video on subsistence with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
  - Develop program to bring Native people into the media and connect with existing resources like Alaska Native Media Institute
  - Use public education channels within schools
  - Develop public relations with organizations, for instance National Congress of American Indians to carry the message

### 3.2.2 Education

- Educate all worlds
  - How to reach and educate rural communities and tribes
    - Scholastic magazine
    - Develop local curricula for schools: respect, sharing, values and relationship to environment and world
- Use and value western and traditional cultural ways.
  - Office of Management and Budget Cost benefit analysis - look at educating the right people: e.g. policy makers, legislators etc.
- Establish that traditional knowledge equals and exceeds scientific knowledge
- Solicit and leverage resources for example, funds, staff
  - Solicit casinos and other Native organizations and corporations
    - “We also talked about tapping into those resources such as casinos and Native corporations. We need to make them see this is part of their responsibility as



## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

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well. We need to seek out not just outside help, but also the commitment and responsibility within our communities.” *Patricia Cochran, Alaska Native Science Commission.*

- U.S. Department of Justice - social issues
- Protect, restore and enhance Tribal Lifeways
  - Protect tribes from exploitation by pharmaceutical companies
  - Protect information from the Freedom of Information Act
  - Show the connection of subsistence as a way of life

### **3.2.3 Outreach**

- Identify levels of outreach, for example tribes, universities, agencies
- Develop information action plan
- Use existing resources to disseminate information
  - Newsletters
  - Nature Conservancy
  - Toxic Action Committee
  - Audubon Society
  - Coalition for Tribal Sovereignty - Maine
  - Peace and Justice
  - Environmental Defense
  - United States non-governmental organizations
  - Rural development leadership network
  - Native American Rights Fund
  - Universities
  - Indian Law Alliance
  - Arctic Council
  - Native non-governmental organizations

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

- International Indian Treaty Council
- International Indian Law Alliance
- Inuit Circumpolar Conference
- Indigenous Council on Biocolonialism
- International Council for Exploration of the Seas
- Establish Native liaisons in government
  - Identify all Native people in all agencies
  - Identify people we need to influence including staffers and key policy makers
  - And President's Tribal person
  - Bring them to villages



“Learning the Yupik Caribou Dance” at the Alaska Native Heritage Center

## Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop process and structure to protect traditional ways of life (continued)

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- To use culturally appropriate methods and protocols
- Educate tribal members and non-Natives about what is happening in the environment and environmental impacts
- Outreach coordination with everyone in village/on Indian reservations
- Take advantage of the opening of the National Museum of American Indians to bring environmental issues to forefront

### 3.3 Alternative Terminology Suggestions for “Subsistence”

- “Customary and Traditional Use/Lifeways”

“In the old days it was a negative thing to have to go out and harvest because it meant you couldn't afford to go to the store. But they were doing something more honorable than subsisting. They were living. To me subsistence is living. What else were they doing, every day was living; picking berries is living, ‘Customary and Traditional Lifeways’ trying to hammer out one word is tough in English.” *Jack Lorrigan, Sitka Tribe of Alaska.*
- “Traditional Lifeways”
- “Reverence and caring for the land, acknowledgement of the complex interrelations of the web of life”
- “Sustenance for body, mind and spirit”

“What we do in Maine to describe Native gathering we use the word “sustenance.” “Native lifestyles: sustenance for body, mind and spirit.” You can take sustenance for those three things. Some people might take a seal and eat it to sustain their body--others say this is brain food. There are others--the Elders may take it for their spirit--and there are others that look at the food stuff and its sustenance for all three of those things. That’s the way I look at my food. The sweet grass we don’t eat, but that’s sustenance for mind and spirit. The flagroot is for physical healing and the spirit.”
- “Native lifeways”
- “Living”
- “Protecting cultural resources”
- Create a “New Word” or Symbol

## Action Recommendations

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“If we are going to fix problems and find resources, we have to take it back to our agencies and convince them. We have to actually address things from the bureaucracy. We have to learn to weave the Native way into the bureaucracy. What I was hearing Trevor [White] say is we want to do something, but we have to learn how to translate it.” *Caren Rothstein-Robinson, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Headquarters.*

### 4. Action Recommendations

- Use the term “Customary and Traditional Use” instead of subsistence
- Remember the seventh generation in assessment of environmental impacts

“Not too many cultures give credence to ancestors. Everything that we do is because the ancestors made preparations for us. They planned for the future. As a tribal leader the sacred oath is to remember the ancestors and enhance the life of the living and prepare for the seventh generation into the future. That’s a difficult thing to do. A lot of tribal councils have great difficulty dealing with that. Planning for the seventh generation from where you are. We have to always be reminded we are the seventh generation sitting here. Someone planned for us seven generations ago. Our ancestors; everything we know about spirituality and culture, was passed on to us by our ancestors. Celebrating the ancestors is our oral tradition. Some archaeologists and scientists don’t put a lot of importance on oral traditions. They teach us, love, providing for people, and a way of thinking of Native people from the past and hopefully for today.” *Butch Phillips, Penobscot Indian Nation.*

- Seed banks – seeds are a tangible connection to our ancestors

“Over the years we have collected over 2000 members of the community from the southwest tribes. We have 600 varieties of corn alone from northwestern Mexico and north. We keep those seeds and give them back to the Native people. Seeds are a tangible connection to our ancestors. By putting them out in the ground we honor our ancestors.” *Angelo Joaquin, Elder, Tohono O’odham.*

- Litigation regarding Clean Water Act
- Tribal commitment to their community and also to educate agencies

“The community banded together to create the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment to address contamination. We have as a result, superfund

## Action Recommendations (continued)

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designation to three of the sites. The Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment is a community-based group that has been successful in working with EPA [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency] and New York State Department of Environment to develop remediation plans.

“A unique aspect of the Akwesasne environmental program is our approach to dealing with it. We recognize there are very strong cultural aspects to it. One of the nicest outcomes of our work with DOE [U.S. Department of Energy] is documentation of our environmental philosophies. They are contained in this book that I will pass around and leave as a gift to ANSC [Alaska Native Science Commission]. It’s entitled, *Words That Come Before All Else*. It is based on our Thanksgiving address that reminds us as human beings of our responsibilities and the interconnectedness of all life. We talk about the waters and fish and greet them. We have a responsibility not to overburden the water system so the fish won’t die so they can continue to purify and clean the water. Our environmental philosophy is documented here. It helps to understand how and why the environment is important to us, because we depend on it and it depends on us.” *Doris Cook, Elder, Akwesasne.*

“We’re talking about the health and vitality of our culture. You can read all these technical reports. It mentions the wellness of the people and the traditions of the culture of the people. Do you know what the spirituality is based in? If you don’t know that, how can you measure the wellness? My sister here mentioned education as a basic part. All agencies that serve Indian people should have education about Indian people. The spirituality of our people is not just dances and songs and gathering that’s based over thousands of years. How does this issue affect the spirituality? How does the poison on that fish or animal or the medicines affect the spirituality. Everything is connected. We must hang onto that theory. Everything is connected between the environment and the people.” *Butch Phillips, Penobscot Indian Nation.*

- Indian General Assistance Program grants are critical
- Lands for example, Los Alamos, need to be on a priority list for superfund sites

“Robert Alvarez wrote an article that I brought for everyone working with those types of facilities. When he talks about Los Alamos he says the labs have to be on a national priority listing. They should be superfund sites and

## Action Recommendations (continued)



Participants examine the jaw bone of Bowhead Whale at the Alaska Native Heritage Center

they are in our backyard.” *Louis Hena, Santo Domingo Pueblo.*

- Incorporating Traditional Knowledge into hazard ranking
- Precautionary principle: err on the side of caution
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency could be used more like “638” funds
- Remember the smaller tribes and include their voices
- Rewriting history of California Indians and what Traditional Knowledge used today
- Toxic cleanup of air quality at power plants

## Action Recommendations (continued)

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- Using environmental enforcement officers
- Hard to fight federal policy
- Harbor seal project; bio-sampling project

“The bio-sampling program has become an integral part of the research being done on harbor seals. We are an equal partner at the table with the National Marine Fisheries Service, not only in figuring out what is important, but also where to go and what questions need answered. We are not just collecting samples for one project--like contaminants. It is an important question, but our vision was to create a system of hunters who are trained and expert in order to collect samples from their catch for whatever project and questions need answers. We hold a workshop for hunters who come and are trained in data collection; the standardized ways in which animals are measured. We use the standard procedures and measures so anyone around the world can compare their information to yours when you do it in a systemized way. If you can't communicate it you lose value.” *Vicki Vanek, Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission.*

- Quality Assurance Project Plans – not standard among agencies
- Propose bill to Congress “Native American Traditional and Wild Food Security Act”

“Some of the agencies want some type of policy to guide them to blend measurements and ways of understanding how contamination gets into traditional foods. We are also hearing that we need to carve away some of these things to get to the final piece. One thing that might help would be if we take a proposal to Congress to pass an act to help guide the agencies to do their work. Something like the Native American Traditional and Wild Food Security Act. We could maybe work with our congressmen and propose a bill with that kind of title.” *Rex Snyder, Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission.*

- A database to track plants and the contaminants that they may absorb

“I am always getting questions about the safety of different plant materials. It is a tough question for them to answer. There are good resources out there that describe plants and what they may take up--the information is not consolidated anywhere. One project we might propose to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that would improve the capacity of tribes would be an on-line database

## Recommendations, Upcoming Meetings, Participants

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where you could search by a name and location of a given plant--or particular topic like cadmium. The neat thing about an on-line database is that it wouldn't raise any confidentiality concerns. I wouldn't need to tell anyone which plants are important to the Micmac Tribe. I could just look for the specific plants I need to know about." *Fred Corey, Aroostook Band of Micmacs.*

### ***5. Recommendations for Future Workshops***

- Give background information to be read by participants prior to start of meeting,
- Look at mission statement that started
- Have flip chart papers to write down concerns
- Have place where concerns not in line with topic issues can go
- Send on concerns to appropriate national work groups of that area
- Have someone responsible to do follow through
- Keep individuals who were involved posted with up-to-date information and changes to process
- Have a report written from each meeting
- Brief presenters on where the issue has been
- Need a protocol for communication with Tribes
- Need a task force / contacts for follow-up
- Inter-agency workgroup (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs etc.)

### ***6. Upcoming Meeting***

- National Tribal Summit - 2004

### ***7. Participants***

**In alphabetical order:** Percy Ballot, Yolanda Benally, Fred Corey, Stephen Crawford, Calvert Curley, Kesner Flores, Sterling Gologergen, Weslie Goodwin, Louis Hena, Bernadette Hudnell, Orville Huntington, Vickie Hykes-Steere, Art Ivanoff, Liana Jack, Nancy John, Tonya Largo, Shawna Larson, Jack Lorrigan, Eileen Lopez, Lindsey Manning, Lori McKinnon, Lydia Olympic, Jerry Pardia, Vivian Parker, Monica Riedel, Angela Ross, Ray Sensmeier, Rex Snyder, Vicki Vanek, Gerald Wagner, Trevor White, Violet Yeaton



## Recommendations, Upcoming Meetings, Participants (cont.)

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### **Elders**

Rita Blumenstein, Doris M. Cook, Angelo Joaquin, Jr., Alice Petrivelli, Butch Phillips

### **U.S. Environmental Protection Agency**

Barbara Cunningham, Carol J. Jorgensen, Sherell A. Sterling, Caren Rothstein-Robinson, Marylouise Uhlig

### **Alaska Native Science Commission Staff:**

Patricia Cochran, Nancy Edtl, Kim Leming, Gregory Nothstine, Aaron Peters, Christina Wilson, Roland Shanks, Marg Kruse (Rapporteur)



Group photo: After a long day's work, we're still smiling!