

# Village Council Presidents: "Subsistence is not a static culture, but an evolving culture."

*Editor's Note: This space normally reserved for the Native Land Claims Textbook serial, this week is turned over to Mr. Carl Jack, President of the Association of Village Council Presidents. The following remarks were presented by Mr. Jack during recent hearings in Washington D.C. on proposed legislation to reserve National Interest Lands (D-2) in Alaska. The Tundra Times believes Mr. Jack's testimony to accurately reflect a concern of many rural Alaska village people about their need to continue the taking of game on lands which may become classified as national interest lands in D-2 legislation. The Tundra Times is grateful to Yupiktak Bista for permission to reprint Mr. Jack's statement and Mr. Bob Belous and the National Park Service for permission to reproduce photographs taken by Mr. Belous and other NPS personnel which illustrate continued use of land for food gathering and other traditional purposes.*

## STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SUBCOMMITTEE ON GENERAL OVERSIGHT AND NATIONAL INTEREST LANDS

By CARL JACK  
President Association of Village Council Presidents

I would like to thank the Subcommittee for allowing me this time to testify on the subject of National Interest Lands. We are very concerned with the changes that have occurred in our region of Southwestern Alaska where the 57 member villages of AVCP are located since the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. For four years, we have worked with our villages on the issue of who should manage the federal lands that surround our villages, and how these lands shall be managed.

Our villages are unique by American standards for they like other rural Alaskan Native villages, represent the last vestiges of the "hunter race" among America's Native peoples. Although the Claims Act set up distinct land ownership patterns, our villages travel far past their village selections to harvest the protein that is required for our people. There are approximately 11,000 Native Alaskans living in our villages surrounding the region's urban center Bethel. In 1974 our villages harvest 14.2 million pounds of food off of the lands in our region. This amount of food represented their entire protein content. Prices and transportation prevent the transportation of imported protein into our region: the people depend on our limited resources to feed their families.

### CULTURE INTERWOVEN WITH LIFESTYLE

Our culture is interwoven within our lifestyle. The Native peoples of our region are hunters and fisherman: they depend on the land for their sustenance, which we call "subsistence", and in turn, they protect the land. There is no mineral development activity in our region except for local use. When you visit our lands in August, you will see mile after mile of seemingly endless and barren landscape. We leave nothing when we re-settle villages, for we as a culture live in harmony with the land.

Because of boundaries, and the interest in dedicating new refuges in our southwestern coastal lowlands, our people have shown great concern for the future of federal land management. We need to guarantee our culture. The two mechanism that we implore this Subcommittee to face in depth are the question of access and wildlife management for subsistence purposes, and the conflict for federal and/or state of Alaskan inter-regional development projects like OCS or coal-slurry pipelines that would also require access across the federal national lands in question.

The wildlife in our region does not follow boundaries created on maps, nor do hunters. To interfere with their movements in pursuit of their subsistence lifestyle would cripple our culture; eliminate us as meaningful participants in all decision making on these federal lands so germane to our unique culture would place restrictions against our intimate knowledge of the land being useful in future manage decision making, to allow national energy needs to determine on the basis of cost and national benefits the location and erection of pipelines and surface transportation would dissolve the habitat so vital to our culture.



Although some of their equipment comes from the Kotzebue store, the scene of two Eskimo hunters dragging an oograk (bearded seal) back to their spring camp at Cape Krusenstern is as old as the cape itself. Across the cape's 114 ancient beach ridges lie a series of archeological sites from every major phase of Eskimo culture — a site by which all others in the Arctic are measured! Along today's outermost beachline, traditional harvest of marine mammals continues as it has over long ages. The National Park Service's proposal for a Cape Krusenstern National Monument would protect this unique archeological site, and allow for the continued subsistence and gathering activities of longstanding importance to local users.

### AVCP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Association of Village Council Presidents has these specific recommendations for Subcommittee's.

(1) That hearings must be held in rural Alaskan villages beyond the regional urban centers like Bethel, Nome, Dillingham, or Kotzebue. In our region, a hearing should be held on the Yukon River between the two sections of the proposed Yukon Delta Wildlife Refuge; a second hearing should be held at either Chevak or Chefornak, both these villages are within the existing Clarence Rodes National Wildlife Refuge and subject to "instant wilderness" status in the H.R. 39, and the hearing in these villages would represent the nineteen other AVCP villages affected by existing refuges proposed for "instant wilderness" and a third hearing in either Quinhagak or Togiak to allow the seven villages within the ecological sphere of the proposed Togiak National Wildlife Refuge to participate fully in deliberation.



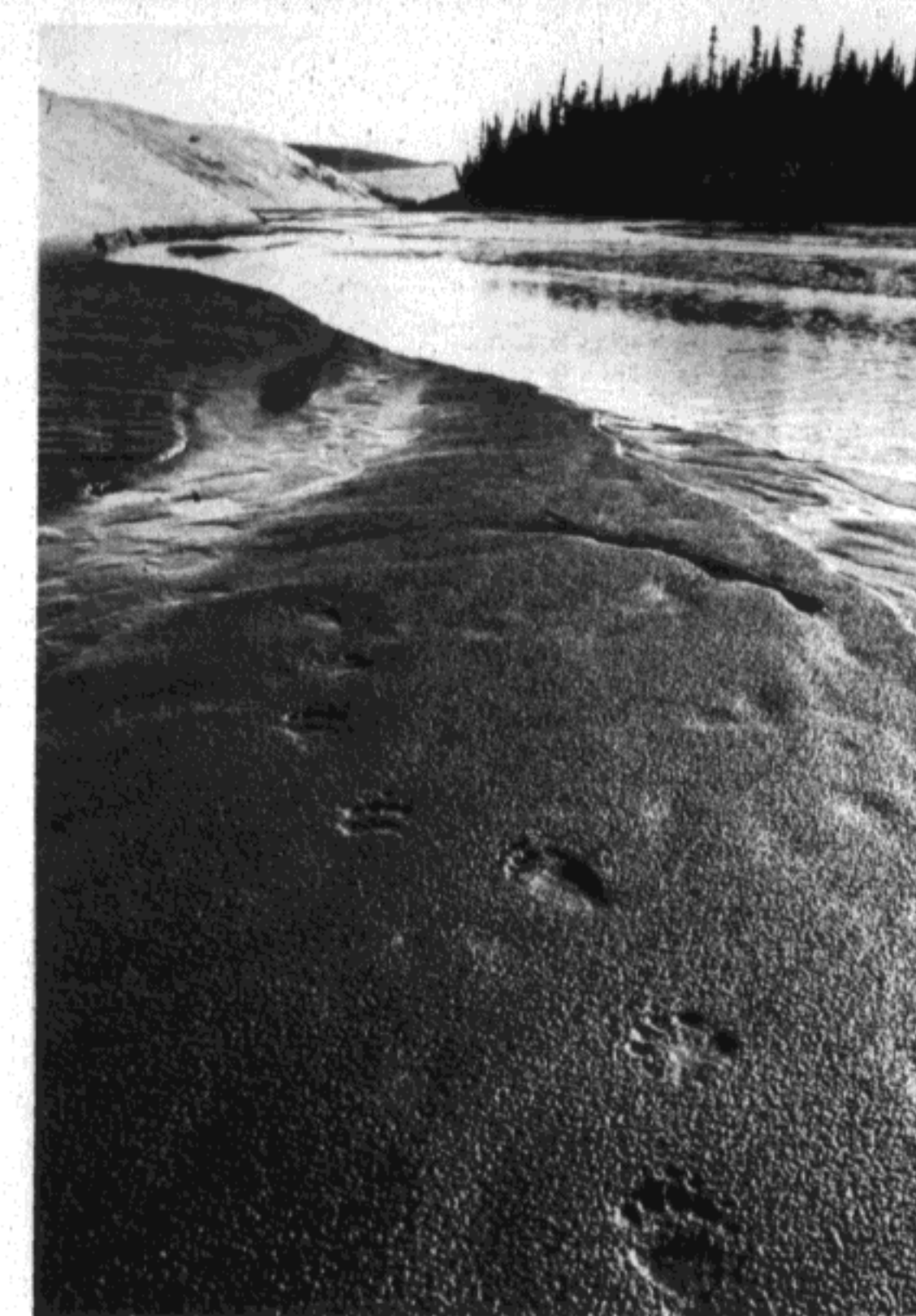
Kavet Creek, along the Kobuk River, separates an arctic spruce forest from the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes. The edge of the Kobuk Dunes has been a traditional area for the gathering of berries (especially tinnik) by Eskimo people from along the Kobuk River.

### SUB REGIONAL MEETINGS

By holding sub-regional hearings the Subcommittee and its staff would be able to learn first hand the tenor of life within our villages, and the meaning of the federal lands surrounding our villages. To our region, this is the most important message that our "nukalpaig" or food suppliers of our families can impart to the Subcommittee in its deliberations with national interest land deliberations.



Caribou have been harvested along the Kobuk River for more than 10,000 years by Eskimo and pre-Eskimo people. The long story of human survival in the Arctic is told at the archeological site at Onion Portage, downriver from the village of Ambler. Today, despite their low numbers, caribou continue to migrate across the Kobuk Valley and supply Native people with meat for their table and skins for traditional clothing.



Not the tracks of an Arabian camel, but those of an arctic grizzly bear meander along Kavet Creek in the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes in the Kobuk Valley. Spawling for 25 square miles, the Kobuk Dunes form a small part of the National Park Service's proposal for a Kobuk Valley National Monument. The area contains some of the most important archeological sites in the American Arctic, as well as important and unspoiled landscapes that have sustained and inspired Kobuk Eskimo people for thousands of years.

(2) That the Subcommittee understand that the creation of "instant wilderness" within existing refuges would seriously affect nineteen of our villages immediately and 26 villages secondarily by limiting access to non-mechanized means of transportation. We are asking for a responsible partnership in managing these lands, so that they may continue to live.

Subsistence is not a static culture, but an evolving culture. I do things differently today than my father and his father, and this dynamic change in our harvest patterns, particularly the winter use of snowmachine, must be understood by the Subcommittee. We are not talking about hundreds or thousands of snow travelers crossing federal lands, but of solitary hunters seeking their food supplies in rural Alaskan federal lands. We too want to preserve the existing ecosystem, as our management of these lands clearly demonstrates, but to forbid our winter means of travel and support of our families under current wilderness statutes is unreasonable.

### REFUGE SIZE

(3) In reference to the size of refuge within our region, we will reserve the final determination to specify the size of National interest lands for the hearing to be held in Alaska per our recommendation no. 1 above. The people have covered every inch. In association with the professional land and wildlife managers of the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service, a unique and important addition to national land management could be achieved by fusing the knowledge of both parties in a legislated cooperative management agreement.

### SUBSISTENCE RESOURCE COUNCIL

Through the creation of a Subsistence Resource Council, the village people of our region would be allowed to participate in the management of the land. Decision



Clara Lee, from the village of Ambler, fashions a traditional birch bark basket. The rich and unspoiled Kobuk Valley has long supplied the natural resources of tree bark, caribou, fish, and plantlife used in the past — and still used today — as part of their subsistence lifestyle. Almost 2 million acres of the Kobuk Valley's important landscape, habitat, and caribou migration routes are currently proposed by the National Park Service as Kobuk Valley National Monument, between the villages of Ambler and Kiana.

making would be conducted on the local level, with the Secretary being ultimately responsible for conduct of the federal managing agency and the Subsistence Resource Council. The Council would work on developing a meaningful wildlife management and research program, review, evaluate, and assist in the management of development project, energy programs, and transportation plans that could alter existing environment.

We recommend the establishment through congressional legislation of a effective scheme of local decision making that many of the failures of past federal management decisions affecting wildlife and mineral development that took place in Washington, D.C. far distant from the source of information would be alleviated, and that for the first time, a fusion of first hand knowledge with the land would work daily with the professionals in federal services to create an ideal wildlife refuge management system.

### LAND CONVEYANCE URGED

(4) In reference to fine determination and adjudication of National Interest lands in Alaska, we herewith strongly recommend that the issue of conveyance of land be settled first i.e. to give the village and regional corporations title to lands selected under Section 12 (a) (b) under P.L. 92-203 The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act.

During my presentation, I have only discussed the broad outlines of our proposals. There are many specifics we would like to discuss with you individually or with your staff so that you will better understand the concerns of our people when you visited our region in August of this year.

Our final remark is there will be no compromise in promoting our subsistence way of life and the final adjudication of NIL until the patent to the lands selected per pt. no. 4 have been settled.

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