

Southeast Alaska Natives form subsistence panel

JUNEAU — Native leaders from Southeast Alaska have formed the Southeast Native Subsistence Commission, according to Richard Stitt, president of the Grand Camp Alaska Native Brotherhood.

"The commission's purpose is to protect and assert the right of Alaska Natives to continue traditional uses of plant, animal and fisheries resources," he said. "Native people feel strongly that the subsistence rights of Alaska Native people are in serious jeopardy, and they continue to deteriorate by actions of the state and federal agencies and the Alaska courts."

The commission is endorsed by Ed Thomas, president of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska; Sue Sargent, grand president of the Grand Camp Alaska Native Sisterhood; and Bryon I. Mallott, chief executive officer of Sealaska Corp.

The formation of the commission will occur under the tribal government structure of the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. Appointments of the initial members will be from elected Native leaders from each community throughout the region.

"In light of recent decisions by the Alaska Supreme Court, we urge the agencies to maintain the status quo," Stitt said. "Existing agencies and personnel who work in this area should be kept in place."

He added that he hopes the state courts do not leave the subsistence issue in "complete disarray."

"Southeast Alaska is largely federal land managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service. Native subsistence activities take place on federal lands, Native lands and some state recreation sites throughout the region," he said.