

Gwich'in renew no compromise vow on ANWR

Vowing no compromise in their opposition to oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Gwich'in Indian elders and leaders, meeting in Arctic Village recently, expressed outrage at what they termed the continued efforts of the oil industry to destroy their culture for profit.

The position reaffirms the stand taken two years ago when the Gwich'in held the first full gathering of their people in more than 100 years.

At the second gathering in five days of meetings, the Gwich'in Athabaskan Indians of Northeastern Alaska and Northwestern Canada renewed their commitment to protecting the caribou calving and nursery grounds in ANWR from oil development.

Several speakers noted the growing opposition to ANWR development in Alaska and across the United States and urged the people not to be discouraged by negative press in Alaska.

They cited strong anti-development resolutions by Tanana Chiefs Conference in March and by Indigenous Survival International at a meeting in Anchorage this summer.

Over 350 Gwich'in people, including chiefs, elders and children, gathered in Arctic Village to celebrate their culture and address the problems that face their communities, especially preservation of their language, protection of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and alcohol abuse.

The Gwich'in are the northernmost Indian nation in North America. The people live in about 15 small villages and towns scattered across Northeastern Alaska and Northwestern Canada.

According to a Gwich'in press release:

"We are caribou people and are among the most traditional and threatened Indian cultures today.

"Our communities are extremely dependent on caribou to meet their nutritional needs. Besides food, caribou is used for winter mukluks, slippers, purses, Native dress, tools and many other things.

"Caribou play a central role in our beliefs and understanding about the world. It's in our songs, dances and stories we tell our children. It binds village to village and one generation to another."