

T & H develops educational program for mariculture

An educational program is being designed to inform Southeast Alaska's rural Native villages of issues related to mariculture development and provide information on business and job opportunities associated with sea farming, according to the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.

The project by the Central Council will provide villagers with the information necessary to make decisions about a developing industry which officials said offers great economic opportunity and has sparked strong debate in Southeast.

Mariculture — the farming of fin-fish, shellfish and sea vegetables — is rapidly growing segment of the seafood industry. Its potential in Alaska is thought to be significant.

Edward Thomas, Tlingit and Haida president, said the educational effort is in response to requests from tribal members throughout Southeast for more information related to mariculture.

He said materials will be developed to present the pros and cons of the primary policy issues raised during legislative debate over fish farming.

"We are responding to direct requests from villagers to provide factual information on mariculture policy concerns," he said.

Thomas said the council will hold workshops in some of the larger rural Southeast communities this fall to discuss business and job opportunities, as well as the potential impacts associated with mariculture.

"We are now developing an assortment of materials for use in the



workshops and for mailing to other communities our budget will not allow us to visit," he said.

The project is funded jointly by the Central Council, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Sealaska Corp.

Byron Mallott, chief executive officer of Sealaska, said the project should help communities make informed decisions about mariculture development.

"We're trying to provide an educational program enabling villagers to make personal decisions, as well as participate in shaping local and state policies governing an activity that may have a major impact on Southeast Alaska," he said.