

Agencies seek Native expertise on land

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It seems federal land agencies are finally beginning to understand how much Native people really know about the land those agencies are supposed to manage.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently held an orientation for five students who will spend the summer working at wildlife refuges throughout the state.

Employment of the students was made possible by a cooperative education agreement between USFWS and Kuskokwim Community College. The students are all enrolled in the two year land and resource management program at KCC. One goal of the FWS-KCC

agreement, according to Native Employment Coordinator Cynthia Wentworth is to get students interested in going to the University of Alaska in Fairbanks for their junior and senior year..

She explained that without the educational agreement, the students would have had less chance of being hired. The problem is not the USFWS, she said, but the Civil Service Commission which prepares and gives the tests that all people take if they are going to be employed by the federal government.

"It's really been a battle. This is the first time anything like this has been done in Alaska. All the tests for getting

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Getting Natives in ...

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into the civil service are all so slanted toward the white society that the tests themselves keep the Natives out of the Service. The co-op education program is the only way Fish & Wildlife has discovered that you can hire Natives without the tests," Wentworth said.

She added she had worked on the program for over a year and was confident that similar agreements were possible with other community colleges.

The students hired by Fish & Wildlife will serve as biological and archaeological aids to USFWS personnel. And they won't just be cleaning campgrounds and building trails.

"It's going to be mostly bird banding, they'll be involved in some wildlife surveys things like that," Wentworth explained.

Biological Aid, Allen Joseph (hooper Bay) will work in the Clarence Rhodes Wildlife Refuge banding birds. Biological Aides William Tinker (Hooper Bay) and Roger Wassillie (Nunapitchuk) will do alot of travelling working at the Clarence Rhodes, Izembek, Kodiak, Arctic and Kodiak refuges.

Archaeological Aid John Kernak (Bethel) will assist USFWS archaeological Curt Wilson.

Archaeological Aid Wilson Peter (Chevak) will work at an archaeological site near Chevak.

Although the cooperative education agreement should work well for students, providing them with an opportunity to continue with USFWS after college, this type of arrangement does not help Fish & Wildlife hire older Native people who are short on classroom schooling but long on land knowledge. The older people mayb be hired as laborers but are frequently intimidated or discouraged by the Civil Service test they must take to qualify as full-fledged biological aides or field assistants.

According to Wentworth, the manager of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Ave Thayer, has often hired residents of Kaktovik to count caribou and do other field work. She said he had found them more reliable than out-of-state college students. Not only did they know the land thoroughly, but they were self-reliant in the field; they know how to live on the land.

Thayer apparently prepared a job description for a position that would qualify Natives as field biologists. He listed all of the advantages that Native people had in such work. The job description for the proposed position read in part:

"Lifetime physical and cultural experience in the Arctic is very desirable. Incumbents with such backgrounds are unusually skilled arctic wildlife ob-

servers; they apply tested outdoor techniques to their work, communicate well with other life-time arctic residents, especially where the Eskimo and Indian language is required, and are a source of wildlife historical information.

"A high level of self-discipline, self-reliance, reliability and foresight is required: Frequently, incumbent will work with another biological aide in a remote camp along a wildlife migration route for an extended time period without

supervision. Incumbents must be capable of judging camp sites most suitable for wildlife surveillance and weather protection and make prompt valid judgements regarding moving camp and making other changes to improve wildlife work."

Wentworth said when Thayer ran the description by the Civil Service Commission, the CSC "wouldn't give them the time of day. I think there has to be a big political move to change Civil Service in favor of bilingual people."