

Tuluksak agrees to mediator

The Associated Press

The lower Kuskokwim River village of Tuluksak has agreed to bring in a mediator go forge a compromise with gold miners seeking to divert the Tuluksak River into a man-made channel.

The villagers had opposed the plan and urged state officials to deny permits necessary for Northland Gold Dredging's operations. Residents said the dredging had muddied the river for the past three summers, threatened salmon runs and made the water undrinkable.

"The Tuluksak is usually clearer than the Kuskokwim, but last year it was the opposite," said Anna Phillip, mayor of the Yupik village of 315 residents.

But villages agreed Tuesday to bring in a mediator after meeting with John Shively, Gov. Bill Sheffield's chief of staff, and Chuck Hawley, a Northland partner.

"No matter if we're against the permit, it seems like the state is willing to give it, so the best way is to go into mediation," Phillip said.

Phillip also said that villagers want assurances the mining will not affect salmon runs or water quality, and she said the hiring of villagers on the project may be a topic of discussion.

Last month, Northland settled a lawsuit filed by the Environmental Protection Agency by agreeing to meet strict water quality standards in its Tuluksak operation, Hawley said.

But Hawley said that even if permits are granted, it may be too late to work with the dredge this summer.