

Natives North of 60th Parallel

The Federation of Natives North of the 60th Parallel met in Whitehorse May 31 and June 1 to discuss Canadian land claims, future meetings of the international group, and cultural exchange programs.

President James Wah-Shee led the two day discussions. Wah-Shee also represents the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories, who have currently filed a caveat or blanket claim on some 400,000 square miles of Northwest Territory lands.

Also attending the meetings were Elijah Smith of the Yukon

Native Brotherhood; Joe Jacquot of YANSI (Yukon Association of Non-status Indians); Victor Allen from the Inuit organization; Sam Raddi from COPE (Committee for the Original Peoples' Entitlement); Carl Carpentier of the Metis (Non-status Indians of the Northwest Territories); and Al Ketzler, guest speaker representing the Alaska Federation of Natives.

Ketzler made a presentation to the group detailing the background, strategy, and outcome of the Alaska Native land claims.

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Ketzler commented later that the Canadian claims are somewhat more complex due to the confusion caused by the differences in legal status of the status and non-status Indians, a situation which resulted from Canadian government policies over the last century.

Status Indians were not allowed to vote, own property, or businesses. In order to achieve these privileges many Indians signed away their status as Indians in the government's eyes. Also, if an Indian woman married a white man, she automatically became a non-status Indian.

The Federation discussed seeking funds to finance future international meetings which would hopefully include Greenlanders, Laplanders, and the native people of northern Russia.

The next meeting is tentatively set for July, and Ketzler said there is a possibility it will be held in Alaska with the AFN as host.

"I think the Federation is a good step forward in fostering international relations among the native people," said Ketzler.

"There's a great need for informational and cultural exchanges that can be had in a council like this."