

NAFWS hosts workshop on co-management

by Michelle Davis, Regional Coordinator
Native American Fish & Wildlife Society

Representatives of Tribal governments, Native organizations and other non-profits participated in a workshop titled *Principles and Issues of Co-Management*, December 20th & 21st, 1995, sponsored by the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society. This informal workshop focused on the elements and challenges of implementing co-management agreements. It was facilitated by Larry Merculieff, Adusak for the

Indigenous Peoples Council for Marine Mammals.

Merculieff carried several themes to this workshop. The first was the connection between spirit, intent and action. Merculieff repeatedly brought the group back to the knowledge that when your spirit is in harmony, your actions will be productive and positive results will follow. He stressed that community involvement is essential to developing good co-management agreements which benefit the entire community and work to ensure the health of fish & wildlife species.

A vital part of this meeting was the discussion of co-management agreements. The Marine Mammal Protection Act has created new opportunities for co-management in Alaska. Its implementation is being speeded by work the National Marine Fisheries Service is doing to establish Potential Biological Removal levels for all marine mammal species. It is vital that a clear framework is established soon for co-management agreements that ensure government to government participation by Alaskan Tribes.

In the past in Alaska, conflict has sometimes arisen from differences in perception of co-management. Historically, co-management agreements began in controversy and have often progressed to mutual respect and support. Now, it is time for co-management agreements to change from adversarial relationships to full partnerships that empower tribes as the stewards of their lands.

Merculieff discussed a recently completed

project, an international review of co-management agreements. This review showed a range of recognition of tribal sovereignty, community accountability and equal participation by tribes in co-management agreements. The workshop participants made a strong recommendation that federal agencies follow strict guidelines to ensure that any future co-management agreements are equitable and beneficial to participating Alaskan tribes.

One step toward this may be an umbrella agreement at the Secretarial Level. A draft model agreement is being developed and reviewed. The consensus of the workshop participants was that it needs to be reviewed, discussed and approved by the members of the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council as the elected representatives of Alaskan Tribal Governments. For a copy of the draft model agreement, call Carl Hild, Biologist and Planner for Rural CAP. He may be reached at (907) 279-2511 or 800 478-7227.