

ALASKA NATIVE SCIENCE COMMISSION

Volume 1, Issue 1

Naalaktuaqtuni Ilitchiruni-lu - "Listening and Learning" Summer 2000

Welcome to the first edition of the Alaska Native Science Commission Newsletter - *Naalaktuaqtuni Ilitchiruni-lu (Listening and Learning)*. Our newsletter will be published twice annually. We invite your comments and information from your community.

The Alaska Native Science Commission

Partnerships in Science & Research

ORIGIN

The Arctic Contamination Conference held in Anchorage, Alaska in May of 1993, was the genesis of the Alaska Native Science Commission (ANSC). The Conference opened with a keynote address by Senator Frank Murkowski speaking on the topic, "The Environmental Legacy of the Cold War". After several days of hearing "war" stories, like Project Chariot and iodine experimenting on Natives, the Native community knew it was time to continue the battle on a new front. A position paper was prepared which stated the desire of the Native community to become actively involved in scientific research, to become aware and informed of science investigating Native lives and environment, and to assure that when science is performed in Alaska it is with the knowledge, cooperation and understanding of the Native community.

In October 1993, The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) Annual Convention passed a unanimous resolution to support the creation of an Alaska Native Science Commission.

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Traditional Knowledge & Contaminants Project

Alaska Native Wisdom & Knowledge Sought to Deal with Contaminants

The Alaska Native Science Commission (ANSC) and the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), University of Alaska, Anchorage recently received a three-year grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Radiation and Indoor Air for a project on traditional knowledge and contaminants, which documents Alaska Native understandings of environmental changes. The goal of this project is to build capacity among Alaskan communities in order to identify and address concerns about environmental changes and contamination.

Alaska Native leaders have repeatedly sought to bring to the public attention concerns that Alaska Native communities have about contamination in their subsistence foods. In direct response to these concerns, the ANSC and ISER have begun the process of listening to and documenting Alaska Native observations about contaminants and environmental change. The most important goal of

Our elders tell us that our earth is getting older and needs to be replaced by a new one.
J. Wongittilin, Sr.
Savoonga, St. Lawrence

this project is to increase community ownership and trust as a result of documenting and accessing traditional knowledge. In order to accomplish this goal, the *Traditional Knowledge and Contaminants* Project is using an in-depth, interactive process that includes meetings, education, training, outreach, documentation, and funding. The communities will determine this community-based project so that traditional knowledge about environmental changes may be collected within a social and cultural context based on information shared by recognized community experts. For all phases of this project, community experts are consulted to develop methods to preserve local control and promote local use of the information collected.

In contrast to typical scientific methods used for collecting traditional knowledge such as surveys and public hearing

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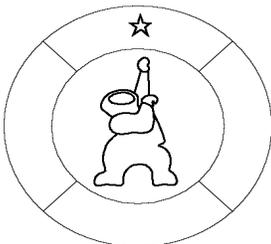
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

The ANSC solicited nominations from the Native community to serve on the Board of Commissioners to oversee the work of the Commission. The seven Alaska Native Commissioners and their seats are:

- Paul John, *Advisor*
- Elder*
- Dolly Garza, *Chair*
- Scientist*
- Richard Glenn, *Vice Chair*
- Arctic Research*
- Elaine Abraham, *Secretary*
- Teacher*
- Anne Walker, *Treasurer*
- Health*
- Oscar Kawagley
- Education*
- Michael Pederson
- Natural Resources*

Ex- officio members of the Commission include:

- ♦ Alaska State Science Advisor - ASTF Executive Director
- ♦ Arctic Research Commission Executive Director
- ♦ Arctic Research Consortium of the US President
- ♦ College Science Student Advisory Boards and special Task Forces are also used to assist the Commission.



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During 1994, a series of workshops were held with Native community leaders and elders and Arctic scientists and researchers to discuss the formation and structure of the ANSC. Funding was received from the National Science Foundation to assist in establishing the ANSC. These funds facilitate the development of the ANSC into an independent body that will provide the primary link between the scientific community and the Alaska Native community.

- ❖ Provide a mechanism for community feedback on results and other scientific activities.
- ❖ Promote science to Native youth.
- ❖ Encourage Native people to enter scientific disciplines.
- ❖ Ensure that Native people share in economic benefits derived from their intellectual property.



ANSC Commissioners (starting from second from left to right): Michael Pederson, Dolly Garza, Anne Walker, and Oscar Kawagley; (seated) Paul John and Elaine Abraham; (missing) Richard Glenn. They are joined in this photo by (far left) University of Alaska Chancellor Lee Gorsuch; and far right former Alaska Federation of Natives Vice-President Dorothy Larson, and former NSF Arctic Social Services Program Director Carole Seyfrit, and Patricia Cochran, ANSC Director.

MISSION

The mission of the ANSC is to endorse and support scientific research that enhances and perpetuates Alaska Native cultures, and ensures the protection of indigenous cultures and intellectual property. This mission statement was drafted as a result of the 1994 workshop series and adopted by the participating Native community leaders, elders, arctic scientists and researchers.

GOALS

The goals of the Alaska Native Science Commission are to:

- ❖ Facilitate the inclusion of local and traditional knowledge into research and science.
- ❖ Participate in and influence priorities for research.
- ❖ Seek participation of Alaska Natives at all levels of science.

OBJECTIVES

Targeted areas of concern identified by the Native community include:

1. Environmental health and the causes of disease that are specific to Alaska Natives, especially the types of cancers that are killing the young and non-substance abusers.
2. Elements and conditions that contribute to the survival of Native cultures and societies, and identification of major barriers to cultural survival.
3. Partnerships with agencies and re-searchers who have supported community involvement in research and work well with Native communities.
4. Active community involvement in science and research which:
 - ❖ Inform communities of their rights regarding research done on their environment or people.

- ❖ Establishes community research standards and protocols.
- ❖ Establishes standard research reviews to address issues of local concern and cultural values.
- ❖ Assures that scientists work with communities on the direction and design of research.
- ❖ Channels communication of research results in a practical manner back to the communities which are most impacted.
- ❖ Helps scientists work directly with students in the classroom and at the research site to foster interest and involvement.
- ❖ Promotes hire of local people to assist with research.
- ❖ Prepares locally held knowledge of community resources.
- ❖ Promotes student learning through elders.
- ❖ Encourages and supports students who are interested in science to become actively involved in the research of their people and homelands.
- ❖ Establishes local standards for the utilization of traditional knowledge with consideration of intellectual property rights.

A PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

The ANSC was created to bring together research and science in partnership with the Native community. The ANSC serves as a clearinghouse for proposed research, an information base for on-going and past research, and an archive for significant research involving the Native community. We provide information, referral and networking services for researchers seeking active partners in the Native community. We are the bridge to bring these communities together. It is time for us to work together - for better communities, for sensitivity to each others concerns, and in the long run - for better science. ☺

"IN OUR WAY OF LIFE, IN OUR GOVERNMENT, WITH EVERY DECISION WE MAKE, WE ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND THE SEVENTH GENERATION TO COME. IT'S OUR JOB TO SEE THAT THE PEOPLE COMING AHEAD, THE GENERATIONS STILL UNBORN HAVE A WORLD NO WORSE THAN OURS - AND HOPEFULLY BETTER. WHEN WE WALK UPON MOTHER EARTH, WE ALWAYS PLANT OUR FEET CAREFULLY, BECAUSE WE KNOW THE FACES OF OUR FUTURE GENERATIONS ARE LOOKING UP AT US FROM BENEATH THE GROUND. WE NEVER FORGET THEM."

OREN LYONS, ONONDAGA, 1990

testimony, during the first year of this 3-year project, locally meaningful practices and protocols were used to gather traditional knowledge about environmental concerns in the following regions of Alaska:

- 1) Northwest Arctic Regional Meeting: Nome
- 2) Southeast Regional Meeting: Sitka
- 3) Interior Regional Meeting: Fairbanks
- 4) Y-K Delta Regional Meeting: Bethel
- 5) Western Regional Meeting: Cordova
- 6) Southcentral Regional Meeting: Anchorage
- 7) Arctic Regional Meeting: Barrow

Meetings in each of the above regions were organized with key community and regional experts in order to document local people's concerns and questions regarding environmental change. Year 2 of the project will focus on a second series of regional meetings that will allow communities and scientists to consider appropriate applications of traditional and local knowledge of environmental changes with information from the science community. Synthesis meetings will enable scientists and communities to identify common and divergent understandings of environmental change, including the role of contaminants. During Year-3, a community grant program will be implemented to support Alaska Native grassroots efforts to address community concerns about contamination. The project will create a record of the entire process of regional and synthesis meetings as well as the grant program. A final statewide assessment meeting will focus on how to carry forth lessons learned from the *Traditional Knowledge and Contaminants* project in future initiatives.

The regional workshops enable local experts to express their observation of environmental changes, as well elaborate on which of these observations are of concern to them and their communities, and why. As keen observers of the natural world and carriers of long-term orally transmitted knowledge, community experts possess a wealth of knowledge about the environment that often goes untapped by natural science research methods. This project focuses on environmental changes as they relate to the following topics, although we are not limiting our inquiry to these areas:

- ❖ Health or population of animals, plants, and fish
- ❖ Health of people
- ❖ Sea ice, currents, and weather
- ❖ Sources of radionuclides and other contaminants

For each of these environmental changes, we are asking community experts to share with us their impression on the following topics:

- ❖ How people have come to be concerned
- ❖ How people explain these changes
- ❖ What people think should be done about the changes

The community experts invited to the workshops function first and foremost as interpreters of their own experience, and secondly, to summarize the experiences of other people they

know in their community, especially community elders and active hunters. Workshop participants come to the workshop prepared to share their knowledge and impressions about the following topics:

- Why the health or numbers of animals, plants or fish may be declining?
- Why people's health may be declining?
- Why sea ice, currents, and weather is changing?
- Why sources of contaminants may be increasing?

One of the direct outcomes of this project is a database, which systematically documents Alaska Native people's perceptions about the nature and source of contamination in each community (www.nativeknowledge.org). The observations shared during the regional workshops are entered into a database that is a useful tool for Alaskan communities as well as providing a foundation and cultural context for further discussions between the Alaska Native and science community.

The second outcome of this project will be a network of Native experts who have specialized environmental knowledge. This network will credit Native people's vast knowledge of their environment and will be used as a resource for other commu-

L - R: Roseanne Waghiiyi, Faye Ongtawasruk, Myrtle Johnson, and Ellen Richard discuss traditional women activities and concerns at the Northwest Regional Traditional Knowledge and Contaminants meeting in Nome, AK

Photo by
Amy Craver



nities and researchers who may be interested in collaborating with Native experts for further information on a particular resource or geographic area.

Another aspect of this project is to determine what Alaska Native communities think are the most appropriate courses of action. In order to do this we are bringing together understandings, questions and outstanding issues related to available traditional and scientific knowledge regarding contaminant issues. In April 2000 we will begin our Year 2 - round of regional meetings in order to discuss the implications of both traditional and scientific perspectives on contaminant issues. During these workshops, community representatives will discuss what they think are the most appropriate actions to address concerning contaminants and other environmental risks.

To allow Alaska Native communities to implement their

plans for action, this project will provide small grants to communities to support actions such as community education, training, sampling, laboratory testing and analysis. These tasks will include working with community schools, colleges, and elders. A final workshop at the end of Year 3 will be convened to bring together the grantees to discuss the outcomes of the action grants. During these workshops communities will evaluate the process they used and consider future initiatives.

Summary of Native Concerns: Northwest Arctic

There are increased numbers of fish with abnormalities. These increases appear to be associated with local sources of contaminants.

- ❖ Beavers and bears are moving into the region and there is increased willow growth.
- ❖ There was a large die off of seabirds (cormorants, puffins, murre) in the summer of 1996.

- ❖ There is more dirty ice seen and the extent and thickness of sea ice has decreased.
- ❖ There are more years of warmer, wetter weather.
- ❖ Lakes and normally wet areas are drying up.
- ❖ Residents are concerned about Russian sources of contaminants including nuclear power plants and dumping of wastes.
- ❖ People would like to be able to test for contaminants. They want training for collection and testing.
- ❖ People are concerned about higher rates of cancer in some villages than others. There appears to be a relationship between cancer rates and local military sites.

Summary of Native Concerns: Southeast Alaska

- ❖ There has been a decline in herring, herring spawning areas, and a shift to earlier spawning.
- ❖ Sea otters are moving into inside waters.
- ❖ There have been declines in local shellfish, halibut, smelt, hooligan, rockfish, and sockeye.
- ❖ There is a loss in the spiritual relationship that people have with the natural environment and a loss of respect for animals.
- ❖ People are changing in how they act and think; these changes bring pollution, cancers and other illnesses. There is a need for healing.
- ❖ There is a loss of old growth forest habitat, with a decrease in availability of medicinal herbs and plants for weaving.
- ❖ Sources of contamination range from fuel tanks, asbestos, lead-based paint, pulp mills, inadequate buffers of trees along streams with resultant siltation.
- ❖ Fishing pressure on herring and halibut is high.
- ❖ Warmer ocean temperatures appear to be bringing tuna, mackerel, barracuda, sunfish, giant turtles, and white sharks to the region.

Interior Alaska

- ❖ Peoples' diets are increasingly including store bought meats and vegetables, instant foods, pop, and improperly stored canned and frozen food.
- ❖ There are local signs of pollution: E-Coli, discolored river and village water.
- ❖ Whitefish and salmon show increased numbers of abnormalities. There have been local die-offs of whitefish.
- ❖ Moose meat tastes different and some have water bags in their lungs.
- ❖ Muskrats have spots on their liver and lungs and are not as fat. There has been a decline in muskrats around Fort Yukon.
- ❖ More people are dying from stomach cancer, ulcers, and other cancers. There has been a loss of traditional medicine people and an increased use of the clinic.
- ❖ There are increased numbers of beavers. Beaver recently have had spots on their liver.
- ❖ Caribou have runny bone marrow.
- ❖ The Tanana Chiefs Conference has measured high levels of PCB's and DDT's in King Salmon and high levels of mercury in fish.



Southeast
Region
Participants at
Traditional
Knowledge &
Contaminants
Meeting in
Sitka, AK
February 2000

- ❖ Marine buffer zones for subsistence are needed.
- ❖ Sea otters need to be controlled.
- ❖ Tourists need to be educated about the environment and local customs.
- ❖ We need a traditional knowledge study to identify resource population levels when the system was healthy and we need large area contaminant analysis.
- ❖ Sources of pollutants include dumps, honey buckets, military sites, mines, chemicals used in dust control, vehicle oil leaks, fire retardant, acid rain, and distant sources like sunken submarines.
- ❖ Winters have not had the usual severe cold snap with the result that lakes do not freeze to the bottom.
- ❖ Summers have been hotter and dryer with the result that lakes and wet areas are drying up.
- ❖ There is a need to return to use of traditional medicines

- and to use healthier practices in living.
- ❖ Youth need to be taught to be caretakers of the ecosystem.
- ❖ Gwitch'in people need to have a voice on the Arctic Council.

In Their Own Words: Native Concerns and Observations about Environmental Changes

Summaries from Arctic Y-K Delta, Western, and South Central Alaska will appear in the next issue of "Listening & Learning."

People on the island are very concerned about the animals we eat now. They think there might be something wrong because they are getting very skinny. A couple of years ago there was a lot of dead birds all over the beach.

I wonder why this is happening? The elders said that there never used to be cancer but now they are getting cancer. They think it may be from the Northeast Cape site.

HERMAN TOOLIE, SAVOONGA

ST LAWRENCE ISLAND

We have a high rate of increase in beaver. What's happening is that because the winters are warmer, the lakes don't freeze all the way down and more of the young beaver survive. That's what is causing them to proliferate. We are having warmer winters than usual on a consecutive basis. This allows for more favorable conditions for beaver—but most important of all—is that the lakes in Interior Alaska do not freeze all the way to the bottom—thus allowing a much higher percent of beaver to survive the winter.

PAUL ERHART, TANANA

There are a lot of things happening. The weather has gotten warmer. The taste of the plants has changed. The fur is coming off the seals like they are molting but it is not molting time. We're wondering if Chernobyl was responsible. They were wondering about Russian military dumping toxic wastes and it is coming over to our side. I'm glad to be here and to understand that we aren't the only ones to experience these changes. We are isolated with one-week mail service. It is really hard to get off and on our island.

ERIC IYAPANA, LITTLE DIOMEDE



Interior Region Participants at Traditional Knowledge & Contaminants Meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska March 1999

I'm from Koyuk, and I've lived there all my life. My Eskimo name means man from the sky. I spend most of my time hunting. I hunt caribou and I like to hunt moose. Sometimes there are more moose and sometimes there are no moose at all. I use to pick berries when I was young. I noticed that I used to pick salmonberries in August and now they pick them in July and by August all the berries are gone. I use to hunt birds in mid-September but now they leave Koyuk Flats earlier. It seems like the birds are in a hurry to go outside.

ALFRED ADAMS, KOYUK

What I'm saying is that I truly believe that we will never get action unless we do it ourselves. We have to put things together, with the help of some technical, responsible people. So the movement to gather all the information that we can is good and we should try to get a committee or statewide support to do what we're trying to do. I think that you have a pretty good group here.

ROBERT CHARLIE, MINTO

I've noticed that few people my age are still living. The seasons are getting very fast and are getting all mixed up. I was raised by my grandparents and I was out on the country with them during my school years. I helped my grandmother put things away. The last few years she was living she said that there was not enough time to put things away like there use to be. A few years ago I told my kids that we just have to work faster. When we are done with the willow leaves then comes the sourdocks. But these seasons are in too much of a hurry now. . Now before we're done something else is ready. It is odd because it is not natural for these things to be growing at the time they are. Also, I've noticed that there are few plants that grow where they use to grow. We used to pick these plants by the lakes and we used to combine them with salmonberries. I don't notice too much of these plants anymore."

HANNAH MILLER, NOME

My concern in Allakaket is water. We don't have running water at home. We have outdoor bathrooms. We have real problems with our water pollution, all over.

JOHNSON MOSES, ALLAKAKET

There are real environmental concerns about a proposal that would bring in freighters from China to get water here. It would bring in things that our environment is not ready for.

TERI ROFKAR, SITKA

I lived most of my life in Western Alaska. The animals and berries are changing. I've noticed that the silver salmon had sore like spots on their sides. They said a few years ago when the birds were dying that there was a yellow like substance like foam in the Bay. We've never seen anything like that before. When I talked to the elders at home before I came here they talked about the migration patterns of the walrus and caribou changing. Recently two families lost their reindeer to caribou because they came right down the beach near Koyuk. The caribou use to come 15-20 miles inland and now they are migrating towards our area. One family lost most of their herd this year. It seems that in my lifetime the migration of the walrus and beluga are really changing too. Take an example from the lemmings, when there are too many, they go to different areas to feed. That is they way it is with the walrus too. They are going to new places to feed. Last year thousands of them went to Norton Bay. When we opened their bellies, we found rocks in there. They migrated towards the land, maybe it was because they ran out of things to eat.

WILLIAM TAKAK, SHAKTOOLIK

This summer we had no sockeye. The sockeye they were catching up the river in June, they had tumors, they were deformed. Some had only one eye, some had bumps.

ELAINE ABRAHAM, YAKUTAT

There is Fish Lake, and I saw dead fish there. You know when you see dead fish in a river, you know something is wrong. Like I said, the people have been mining there since I can remember. What have they been putting into that lake? Makes you wonder.

JOHN STARR, TANANA

There is a real hesitancy about eating the clams now. When I was a kid, you know, we use to eat the muscles on the clam raw. As my mother and dad were cleaning it out, we ate all those little buttons. And you know, I won't let my kids eat that anymore. We use to eat it raw. But now you don't know anymore. We have a joke in my house because I have two Siamese cats and my kids say, "Gram, test it on your cat first." So, we have a generation that's scared of eating their Native foods.

ELAINE ABRAHAM, YAKUTAT

I noticed that a long time ago when I was growing up the plant and berries use to be sweet in July. Nowadays the greens and even the berries don't last long. I go camping and I notice different things. I enjoy camping but four days ago my son-in-law killed three birds. Two of the birds were okay but the third one had pinkish water inside. This is bad and I was scared there was something bad in there so I threw it away. I've been camping since 1949 and I notice differences between then and nowadays. I start wondering why old people get Alzheimer's. I never use to see Alzheimer's. I have a mother who passed away this spring. I don't understand what is going on with our food. Something is happening but I don't know what. This morning I was walking here, I could smell the city pollution. When I'm at camp I can only smell nice clean air.

ROSEANNA DAN-WAGHIYI, STEBBINS

They sprayed DDT in Galena area. They just sprayed everything around year after year. The military dump chemicals everywhere. Soaked the ground with PCPs. I told my little girl not to drink the water.

ORVILLE HUNTINGTON, HUSLIA

My concern is the pollution and garbage. Everywhere I go in the summer with a boat or by snow machine in the winter, I find trash left around. The cans don't weigh hardly anything, so I haul them home. But most people don't do that. People dump oil in their machine and dump the can in the river.

PAUL HERBERT, FORT YUKON

There is a very visibly over-population of sea otter in Southeast Alaska. Normally, the sea otter is an outer coast animal. That is where we would like to see them stay. Because of the large population, the sea otter are infiltrating into the inside waters. The threat of this trend is that sea otter feed on the same things that we consider subsistence foods.

HAROLD MARTIN, JUNEAU

You don't hear birds any more. All the time we used to hunt there use to be so much noise from the geese and cranes going north. The noise just isn't there now. Go back there is the fall and you don't hear it any more. The changes we're seeing—it's not very good the changes that we're hearing.

JOHN STARR, FORT YUKON

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MEETING

PLACE GIRDWOOD, ALASKA, USA
DATE SEPTEMBER 19 – 20, 2000

ANSC TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE - SYNTHESIS MEETING

PLACE GIRDWOOD, ALASKA, USA
DATE SEPTEMBER 19 – 21, 2000

AAAS, ARCTIC SCIENCE CONFERENCE

PLACE WHITEHORSE, YUKON TERRITORY, CANADA
DATE SEPTEMBER 21 – 24, 2000

ALASKA NATIVE HEALTH BOARD – ANNUAL TRIBAL CONFERENCE ON ENVIRONMENT MANAGEMENT

PLACE ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, USA
DATE OCTOBER 9 – 14, 2000

ARCTIC COUNCIL: SR. ARCTIC OFFICIAL MEETING

PLACE BARROW, ALASKA, USA
DATE OCTOBER 10 – 11, 2000

ALASKA FEDERATION OF NATIVES CONVENTION

PLACE ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, USA
DATE OCTOBER 16 – 21, 2000

AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION

PLACE BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, USA
DATE NOVEMBER 12 – 16, 2000

ALASKA INTER-TRIBAL COUNCIL ANNUAL CONVENTION

PLACE ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, USA
DATE NOVEMBER 28 – DECEMBER 1, 2000

ALASKA HEALTH SUMMIT

PLACE ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, USA
DATE DECEMBER 4 – 5, 2000

ALASKA FORUM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

PLACE ANCHORAGE, ALASKA, USA
DATE FEBRUARY 5 – 9, 2001

"Man did not weave the web of life - he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself."
Chief Seattle, 1854.

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land?
The idea is strange to us.
If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?
Every part of the Earth is sacred to my people.
Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clear and humming insect is holy in the memory and experience of my people.
The sap which courses through the trees carries the memory and experience of my people.
The sap which courses through the trees carries the memories of the red man.
The white man's dead forget the country of their birth when they go to walk among the stars.
Our dead never forget this beautiful Earth, for it is the mother of the red man.
We are part of the Earth and it is part of us.
The perfumed flowers are our sisters, the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers.
The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and the man, all belong to the same family.
So, when the Great Chief in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land, he asks much of us.
The Great White Chief sends word he will reserve us a place so that we can live comfortably to ourselves.
He will be our father and we will be his children.
So we will consider your offer to buy land.
But it will not be easy.
For this land is sacred to us.

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