

# The Arctic Sounder

Vol. 19, No. 30 • Serving the Northwest Arctic Borough and the North Slope Borough • July 14, 2005 • 75¢

**Celebration of landmark law is call to arms for both sides**

**By Alex DeMarban**  
Alaska Newspapers Inc.

Alaska Natives are being misrepresented in the battle over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a longtime tribal leader said. Mike Williams, vice-chair of

refuge to oil drilling.



Mike Williams makes a point during the ANILCA 25th Anniversary Convention that not all Alaska Natives are in favor of resource development on regional corporation lands.

Rob Stapleton/Alaska Newspapers Inc.



**BARROW**

Finkler travels to the hearthland.

Page 5



**KOTZEBUE**

Conservationists, Native join hands

Page 6

## Some Natives, conservationists join hands

But dozens of tribes in Alaska oppose drilling in the refuge, he said. The tribal council, which represents 189 federally recognized tribes in Alaska, has repeatedly taken a position against drilling. So has the National Congress of American Indians, he said. Yet the debate so often portrayed in the media and on the floors of Congress has centered on Alaska's Gwich'in tribe as if they were the lone dissenting voice.

"I read that Alaska Natives support opening ANWR," Williams said. "That's not true." The misinformation has swayed key members of Congress, Williams said. It is in part why a provision to open the refuge passed as part of the Senate and House budget bills this spring.

Final approval to open ANWR isn't guaranteed, Alaska Sens. Ted Stevens and Lisa Murkowski have said. The budget bills contain key differences that must be ironed out by a joint House-Senate committee this fall. The dispute is expected to rage on until then at least.

Strategies to keep ANWR closed to oil development were key topics last week, as hundreds of conservationists and several Alaska Native leaders gathered in downtown Anchorage to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

The landmark law, signed by President Jimmy Carter on Dec. 2, 1980, added 106 million acres to the nation's public lands inventory. It created or expanded 13 parks, nine refuges and two forests. It also created a rural subsistence priority to protect Alaska Natives who hunt and fish to survive.

The far-reaching act was bitterly opposed by many Alaskans who worried it would lock up resources and freeze the economy. But the law created a unique partnership between Natives and the conservation community that many on both sides hope to revive.

Heather Kendall-Miller, an Athabaskan lawyer for the Native American Rights Fund, called on environmentalists at the conference to help Natives protect the rural subsistence priority created in Title VIII of ANILCA.

The rural subsistence priority is under siege by a powerful minority of state lawmakers who have refused to bring the state constitution in line with federal law, she said. NARF is currently suing the state to protect the rural subsistence priority.

Miller said the threat to subsistence threatens the integrity of the entire law.

"We welcome you as our friends in the conservation community to think of Title VIII as part and parcel of the overall act," she said.

See ANILCA, Page 9

# ANILCA ...

From Page 6

Conservationists attending the conference, which included a speech from former President Carter, responded with similar entreaties.

Bill Meadows, president of The Wilderness Society based in Washington, D.C., said Alaska Native and rural support is critical to keeping ANWR and other parks and refuges closed to development.

"I believe it's critical that we link arms nationally and locally with the people who live in these communities," he said. "That's when we win elections and we win votes."

Alaska Natives from Arctic villages such as Fort Yukon, Nuiqsut and Gambell spoke passionately, even poetically, about the consequences of global warming. The shrinking ice pack is limiting the whaling season and allowing the ocean to erode communities once protected by an ice shield.

Nuiqsut Mayor Rosemary Ahtuanguak said nearby oil developments at Prudhoe Bay have altered the routes of migrating caribou and disturbed subsistence hunting.

"These changes change us — how we live, how we survive, who we are," she said.

Efforts to strengthen the relationship between the Native and environmental communities will continue at an Anchorage meeting Aug. 1 and 2. It's being organized in part by Vernita Herdman, the Native liaison for the Anchorage office of The Wilderness Society.

The partnership has waxed and waned as both sides have struggled against philosophical differences that pit recreational desires over subsistence needs, Herdman said.

But there also has been successful collaboration, she said. A unified voice, for example, helped Native elder Katie John win crucial legal victories over the state to uphold subsistence fishing rights on federal waters.

It's time both communities work together again, she said. With the state ramping up

development plans for mineral extraction and offshore oil development, and continuing to fight the rural subsistence priority, ANILCA's safeguards are in no way guaranteed.

"My main goal is to put tribal leaders and the conservation community under one roof, because when that happens, good things come out," she said.



Rob Stapleton/Arctic Sounder

*Rosemary Ahtuanguak, former Mayor of the City of Nuiqsut, spoke at an ANILCA plenary session called, "Protecting Arctic Landscapes: Strategies for Our Time."*