



ALASKA FEDERATION  
OF NATIVES

July 11, 2012

Dr. Rebecca Blank, Acting Secretary of Commerce  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Blank:

Re: Request for a Declaration of Disaster

On June 29, 2012, the Alaska Federation of Natives<sup>1</sup>, Legislative/Litigation Committee, met to discuss the crisis developing in western Alaska in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta as a result of the closure of the subsistence and commercial Chinook salmon fisheries. Salmon returns to western Alaska have been in decline for more than a decade, creating numerous hardships for the people and communities that depend so heavily on this fishery resource. Poor returns of Chinook salmon to the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers have resulted in repeated disaster declarations by the federal and state governments. This year is shaping up to be one of the worst Chinook returns to this region on record. As a result of poor returns of Chinook stocks in the Yukon and Kuskokwim River drainages this year, both the federal and state fisheries managers severely restricted the subsistence fisheries and closed the commercial fisheries.

Entire villages were unable to obtain the salmon they need to satisfy their basic food needs for the winter or to earn cash needed from the small commercial fishery to purchase other subsistence necessities. The severity and magnitude of the loss of Chinook salmon has caused wide-spread panic in the region. The food security of the people of this region is at risk. The situation is compounded by high energy prices and the rising costs of alternative sources of protein. Current resources in the region are not sufficient to deal with this emergency, and for that reason AFN is calling upon the Secretary of Commerce to issue a Declaration of Emergency Fishery Disaster for the Yukon and Kuskokwim 2012 Chinook salmon fisheries.

Pursuant to the enclosed AFN Legislative/Litigation Committee Resolution #12-07, we urge the Department to declare a disaster emergency so that the affected villages can access disaster relief to address their immediate subsistence needs. We also ask that you support increased funding

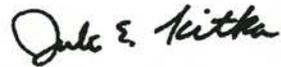
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<sup>1</sup> The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) is the largest Alaska Native organization in Alaska. Its membership includes 244 Native villages and tribes, 13 regional for-profit Native corporations (established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act), and 11 regional Native nonprofit tribal consortia that offer a broad range of human services to their member tribes. The mission of AFN is to enhance and promote the cultural, economic and political voice of Alaska Natives. The Legislative/Litigation Committee acts on behalf of the full Board of Directors between meetings.

for research on the life cycle of Chinook salmon in the ocean and the effect changes to the ocean environment are having on Chinook returns.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our urgent request.

Sincerely,



Julie Kitka, President

Cc: Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere  
Senator Mark Begich  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Congressman Don Young  
Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Honorable Daniel K. Inouye, Chairman, Committee on Appropriations