

TESTIMONY OF PATTY BROWN SCHWALENBERG  
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CHUGACH REGIONAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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My name is Patty Brown-Schwalenberg. I am the Executive Director of the Chugach Regional Resources Commission. I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify this morning. In addition, I would like to thank Senator Murkowski and her staff for their terrific support as we weave our way through the halls of Congress.

The Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC) is a non-profit Alaska Native organization established in 1984 by the seven Tribes of the Chugach Region of Alaska, including the Tatitlek Village IRA Council, Chenega IRA Council, Port Graham Village Council, Nanwalek IRA Council, Native Village of Eyak, Qutekcak Native Tribe, and the Valdez Native Tribe. CRRC was formed to collectively address issues of mutual concern regarding stewardship of the natural resources, subsistence, the environment, and to develop culturally appropriate economic projects that promote the sustainable development of the natural resources. Over the past 19 years, CRRC has supported the development and operation of many natural resource projects and programs that have assisted these communities in providing meaningful employment opportunities as well as valuable services and products to the people of the State of Alaska. Our work is funded primarily with base funding through the Bureau of Indian Affairs and supplemented with other federal and state grants.

As many of my colleagues have or will testify, natural resources are critical to the economic and cultural stability and vitality of Native communities. The people of the Chugach Region, as well as in other parts of Indian Country, rely heavily on the natural resources and environment to sustain their traditional lifestyle and have developed strong working relationships with state and federal management agencies to ensure that these resources are available for future generations. Thus, it is appropriate for Congress to examine Tribal fish and wildlife programs to determine what more should be done to support and enhance these programs that are a vital component to the overall management scheme.

CRRC's purpose is to assist the seven member Tribes of the Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet to 1) promote Tribal management of the natural resources, traditionally utilized by the Chugach Tribes, through the development of Tribal Natural Resource Management Programs, in ways consistent with their cultural traditions and values; 2) provide formal advocacy to assure that private, state, and federal land and resource management agencies will work cooperatively with the Tribes to manage natural resources in ways consistent with the cultural traditions and values of the Chugach Tribes; 3) develop and enhance natural resource management education and training opportunities for Chugach Tribal Governments to improve the management capabilities of the Tribes; and 4) promote sustainable and economically sound natural resource development that will improve the well being of the Chugach Tribes.

By carrying out its mission, CRRC has become an important community development tool supporting Tribal natural resource programs in the Chugach Region that are an integral part of the communities' social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of their daily lives. I would like to discuss a few examples of the successful and innovative programs in the Region that CRRC has worked with the Tribal Governments to develop and establish.

The most significant initiative CRRC is working on is the development of *Tribal Natural Resource Programs* in the region in an effort to be more meaningfully involved in the natural resource management projects and decisions that affect the Tribes' traditional subsistence lifestyle. Active participation by the Tribes in such current initiatives as the Exxon Valdez Trustee Council's Gulf Ecosystem Monitoring Program, the federal subsistence fisheries management projects occurring in traditional use areas, and the potential co-management of the Outer Continental Shelf fisheries is vital to the overall success of each of these programs. Along with the development of the natural resources programs is the development of Tribal natural resource management plans for each of the member Tribes, as well as accompanying traditional use area maps, developed through our Geographic Information System. We have also been working on developing a vocational technical level curriculum for natural resources management

based on the traditional philosophies and management strategies of Tribes. This training will enable the communities to be better prepared to participate in state and federal agency management efforts.

In 1990, CRRC provided the Port Graham Village Council with the funding, technical, and administrative expertise necessary to build a salmon hatchery program to rebuild the local pink salmon runs while providing economic opportunities for village residents. After the initial hatchery and cannery building was destroyed by fire in 1998, CRRC again assisted the village council and village corporation in securing the necessary funding to rebuild the hatchery and cannery complex. The new facility was completed in 2000, and the hatchery currently produces local stocks of pink and coho salmon and incubates sockeye salmon eggs for the nearby Native Village of Nanwalek. The hatchery is expecting about 300,000 adult pink salmon to return this year, which will be enough to fill it to capacity. Annual adult returns are expected to increase to about 3 million pink salmon beginning in 2004, and 100,000 to 200,000 sockeye salmon beginning in 2006.

CRRC also supports the Nanwalek Sockeye Enhancement Program. This program produces a Sockeye smolt stock to supplement wild production and help rebuild the depleted English Bay Sockeye run, which are a principal source of subsistence food and commercial fishing income for both the Nanwalek and Port Graham Villages. The Nanwalek IRA Council operates this program with administration and technical support coming from CRRC. It is the only program of its kind in the State of Alaska, in that it is a cooperative effort between two Native villages to return the sockeye salmon populations to a level where they can be safely harvested for both subsistence and commercial purposes. The heart of the project consists of collecting red salmon eggs in Nanwalek, flying them over to the hatchery in Port Graham where they are hatched, then returned to Nanwalek at smolt size, and reared in the English Bay Lake system where they are later released to migrate out to sea and return as adults. Rearing operations commenced in 1991 and have occurred annually since that time. We are proud to report that over two and a half million sockeye smolts have been released into the English Bay Lakes since the project's inception. This has produced over 220,000 adult sockeye salmon that have returned to the English Bay River and associated

fisheries since 1990 and has allowed the first commercial and subsistence harvest of sockeye salmon to occur in 11 years. It is a Tribal success story.

The Qutekcak Shellfish Hatchery in Seward is another major accomplishment for both Qutekcak Native Tribe and CRRC. The operation began in a small pilot hatchery with funding from CRRC and is now operating out of a new state-of-the-art facility, spawning, hatching, and rearing littleneck clams, Pacific oysters, cockles, and geoducks for sale to shellfish farms in Alaska and elsewhere. This is the only shellfish hatchery in the State of Alaska, and has the capacity to serve all shellfish farms in the State. We developed the program by relying on the traditional knowledge of tribal elders, which will now preserve the littleneck clams for future generations.

Related to this is the Tatitlek Mariculture Project, which has operated since 1992 with support from CRRC. This project utilizes seed provided by the Qutekcak Tribal Shellfish Hatchery, and produces some of the best oysters in the country. The operation markets 200-300 dozen oysters per week and is well on its way to becoming a profitable and thriving Tribal business and an important component to the local economy. This project employs 5 Tribal members, who in turn, are able to put food on the table for their families. In a small village of 102 people, this is a major economic impact.

This is just an overview of the natural resource programs in the Chugach Region. There are many other Tribes in the State of Alaska who operate natural resource programs that are taking a strong partnership role in the natural resource management decision-making process. Many of them provide not only employment opportunities, but sound scientific data to assist the state and federal management agencies in their management efforts for the benefit of all users.

All of these programs highlight the real economic, cultural and community development benefits that well-managed natural resources bring to Tribal communities. It is important as Congress examines the

federal programs involving natural resources that Congress considers the important and vital role that tribal programs fill and that you work to ensure that tribal programs are full partners at the table.

While Tribes view the wise and prudent stewardship of our natural resources as a critical priority, the fiscal support of the federal government to launch and maintain effective programs is vital to the continuing existence of these programs. Unfortunately, the President's budget requests for FY 2003 and FY 2004 have targeted our programs--not merely for cutbacks--but for elimination. We are grateful to our friends in Congress who worked to restore our funding last year and who are working to assist us again this year. However, the uncertainty created and the time, expense and travel involved to get the funding restored take their toll from year to year. We respectfully suggest that these programs be made part of the BIA's base funding and treated as the recurring programs we are.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer any questions the Committee regarding CRRC.