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Segments from the Tanana Chiefs Conference held in March 1977 in Fairbanks, Alaska

Moses Wassillie, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

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Morris Morgan, a planner with Tanana Chiefs Conference, advocates for change for Indians in Interior Alaska from a subsistence hunting and fishing culture to agriculture. He said Native lands acquired by Natives through the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act can be used for that purpose. Morgan said in assessing the needs of villagers there is a lack of jobs and there are a lot of laborers available. Native people control acres of farmland and this is a valuable resource. The village stores are not as well stocked as larger stores. This situation needs improving. Since Natives possess the agricultural lands and there are unemployed people this is one area that can be entered on a small scale operation. Villagers could produce all the vegetables that they would need. He is advocating for a cultural change. Farming is not a traditional activity here. There used to be enough wild game to support them and now there isn't. Some changes must occur. There will be funds available and the people must be willing to use them for economic salvation. He talked about 17,000 pounds of potatoes traded for caribou meat in 1963.

Moses Wassillie said Louisa Wescott talked about a study done in the 1930s. Wescott said the federal government sent a planning team in the 1930s to see if it would be feasible to develop agriculture in the area. In the 1930s there were lots of farmers down in the lower forty eight that were affected by the depression. Most of the people on the planning team were farmers. They did not want competition. It went down in the logs that Alaska was not feasible for agriculture. At the present there are problems with agriculture in the lower forty-eight because of climatic conditions. She said we will never be self-supporting, but the surplus of what can be grown up here can be used for trade or cash.

Mitch Dementieff talked about the commitments that the land claims college couldn't keep and that they are organizing again. Dementieff said they do not have any courses offered at this time. They are getting the administrative organization done at this time. He talked about accreditation. They are under review. He talked about the expense and man hours necessary to run a large institution. When they started the college in 1973-1973 the university was not doing anything for rural areas. Now the university has been trying recently to deliver services in rural Alaska.

Song by Mack Davis

Kathy Carleno of the Human Rights Commission reported on the kinds of cases that they are involved in. She said even though they only had nine complaints in the northern region to begin with now there are nine more complaints in just the first two quarters. The presence of representatives in Barrow have sponsored a filing of complaints. She said our state law covers discrimination, employment and also public accommodations, financial practices and government services. She said she will talk about a few things that they have been covering in their region which have implication for Native people. They

assisted a city council to fire its city police chief after he was found in violation. He was fired under a contract violation. They have also handled a problem with a rural utility cooperation. There was a problem with their health benefits for Natives. She encouraged everyone to bring these kinds of issues to them. They will get involved. She said one case involved a teacher aide. They didn't receive the same types of benefits as the teachers including housing. They found out that teacher aides had substantial responsibility in the classroom.

Al Kesler talked about some of the changes that were made when TCC took over some of the programs from the Bureau of Indian Affairs under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Kesler said it is not self-determination when the BIA is interpreting some of the regulations so narrowly that it is creating more bureaucracy on their side because they are saying they need more people to monitor the contracts. Kesler talked about the social services program requirements. He said they have been able to get away from a lot of the regulations.

Song by Rita Coolidge

Carol Drake talked about Native foster children and where many of them are placed. Drake said the majority of Native foster children are not going into Native foster homes. They are being placed in Fort Wainwright, Eielson and Fairbanks in non-Native homes. She said their goal is to license at least one foster home in each village. She talked about a case where the state stepped in and took three children from a single parent and placed them with their grandfather. They were told later that they couldn't prove a relation. She said they don't hear about cases like this because the state is responsible for the children.

Mitch Dementieff talked about a decentralization plan for the TCC. He said there is a shortage of accounting personnel. He said other businesses have the same problem. He talked about regional issues that TCC needs to exist for to keep going. They are looking at expanding in villages. He talked about setting up sub-regional boards and proposal writing and responsibility.