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Frank Ferguson, Phil Smith, Gordon Watson, Dave Case, Bob Hinman and Chief Andrew Isaac speak at the annual Alaska Federation of Natives conference in Anchorage, Alaska in October 1975

Moses Wassillie, moderator

Frank Ferguson, state senator from Kotzebue, talked about education responsibilities of the state and providing equal education for rural students. He said sending children hundreds and thousands of miles away from home for their education has been an ongoing program since territorial days. It is tragic to send adolescents away from home for nine or ten months a year for any reason. The child is deprived of parental guidance, community influence in their informal education, and the love and attention needed at that age. He said adequate educational facilities are essential for a good educational system and their children are their greatest resource. He said it is imperative that they be given an opportunity for an equal education.

Phil Smith, the executive director of RURAL CAP said Christopher Columbus was the first bureaucrat in America. He said bureaucrats can't make decisions about subsistence since they don't know, live, and feel subsistence. Lawyers and Congress wants to define it. One reaction to that is subsistence is a word being imposed on a lifestyle. It is a problem because people come up here and want to use the land. They have to define or attempt to define subsistence or arrogant enough to come up with the basic definition. Using the terms of basic human right they continue to feel that no one, the federal government, the state, lawyers or oil companies has a right to interfere with a lifestyle and to interfere with the development of a culture or a variety of cultures in rural Alaska. That development or cultural development does not take place on the terms of the people whose lifestyle is being affected by the decisions made by the United States government, the state of Alaska and others. They have come to the realization that the key to this is the decision making process and it is critical that the villages and other communities get involved in that decision making process and to sensitize bureaucrats that land use decisions affect people, cultures and human rights.

Song by Floyd Westerman

Gordon Watson from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service talked about preservation of habitat for migratory birds. He said it is important to establish that their areas of concern are essentially the migratory bird sources, the rare and endangered species and the polar bear and sea otter in the Marine Mammals Act. He said walrus responsibilities have been turned back to the state. He expects other marine mammals will be returned to the state. He said when they are looking at their responsibilities of the migratory bird treaty act it is important to understand that they are talking about an international resource. It spends part of its time in Alaska in the summer and other parts of the year going north and south. He said these habitats being jeopardized directly affects the welfare of everyone who utilizes these birds. Were it not the availability of winter habitats in California there would be fewer birds coming back to Alaska to satisfy the needs of people in Alaska. If we have destruction of Alaska habitats sports hunters in the lower forty-eight states will have less birds. He said every time a sports hunter buys a duck stamp that money goes directly into acquisition of land for additional refuges. Last year they

took ten people from the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta to California, Washington and Oregon so they could see where the Alaska birds were wintering. They were impressed with the great number of birds confined to these very small areas called refuges. They were beginning to develop a newer appreciation of the interrelationship between the sport hunter in California and what he did for the welfare of the birds back in Alaska and their use by the people. He thinks the responsibility of the Fish and Wildlife Service is the welfare of the habitats of the wildlife resources. He said if they are not concerned with the welfare of the habitat there are not going to be the wildlife resources produced. He said they have to be concerned about the welfare of the resources. If the populations of migratory birds are not maintained in a healthy stock their opportunities into the future to continue a lifestyle are rapidly diminished. He thought it is important to reassert some of the things that are changing that impact in how they have to look at the world. He said they have had advances in technology. The white man uses them and the Alaska Native uses them. The snow machine has replaced the dog team. The rifle has replaced the spear and bow and arrow. Gill nets have replaced traps. He said this means there is a greater capability for harvesting game and fish in a more efficient manner. They are able to range further and further in the quest for these resources. White men can now go into subsistence areas that twenty years ago was out of range. He talked about airplanes allowing people to go into areas that were not used many years ago. The Natives too are extending their hunting areas. Planes and boats have allowed them to go much further to find their subsistence resources. He said if this trend continues, even if subsistence zones are set up, the same conflicts that exist between Natives and non-Natives will eventually emerge between Native villages.

Song by Glenn Campbell

Dave Case, Bush Justice at AFN, talked about federal and state responsibilities in relation to subsistence rights. Dave Case said it is unthinkable that Congress or the Alaska Natives that negotiated the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act intended to wave those hunting and fishing rights in Alaska. He said lawyers call these subsistence rights of the Native people. He said although the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act claims to wave all aboriginal land claims including those related to hunting and fishing the conference report on the Native Claims Settlement Act is very clear that the state of Alaska and the Secretary of the Interior are expected to protect the subsistence rights of the Native people. The taking of fish and game by Native people is a vital part of the core of the entire culture of the Native people in Alaska. He talked about the land being the cultural bank for the Native people. It is important to develop the profit making capability of the Native people and to preserve the culture. He talked about 17 D2 of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act which requires the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw approximately 80 million acres for various national parks, wild and scenic rivers and other federal land programs. There are bills in Congress that will define how those federal lands will be managed and who will have the say over the control of the renewable resources on those lands. These D2 bills is now the chance to preserve the subsistence rights of the Alaska Native people.

Bob Henman from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game outlines the formulation of subsistence zones and talked about the preservation of a resource. He said in the case of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd priority was given not on the basis of ethnic origin nor to all residents of a given area but to villages and individuals in this area base on individual need. He said their responsibility in the Fish and Game is

to the resource. They are responsible for managing. Legislation sets up a specific procedure whereby residents of an area may petition the Board of Game for the establishment of subsistence hunting areas. Subsistence in this case being legally defined as being the use of game resources by a resident of the state for his personal use. He said the Board may establish the subsistence hunting zones in any unit or sub-unit or portion of a sub-unit upon the recommendation of the Department or the majority vote of the local advisory committees for that area or the written petition of not less than 100 interested residents of that management unit or the written petition of not less than 25 residents of an area which is requested as establishment as a subsistence area. He said his last comment is a gloomy one. He is concerned that with the current push for subsistence rights the potential for increasing polarization between various groups of Alaskan is there especially between Native and non-Native. At a time when it is important that all Alaskans be working together to solve problems it is important that everyone work together as an Alaskan people.

Song by Bad Company

Chief Andrew Isaac from Dot Lake talked about changes that he has seen and hope for the younger people. He said he was born and raised in Alaska. He was raised in the hard way. He was not raised by welfare. He said his parents, grandparents and people took care of him. He said there are a lot of people coming into Alaska. He talked about the Alaska pipeline. He talked about the young generation needing education to make a living. He made his living by trapping and hunting. He gave advice to the younger generation.