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KUAC Chinook Radio Series: Bowhead Whale Studies, Koyukon Language, and Eliza Jones

Part 1:
Chinook Patterns

In the Arctic Ocean and the Beaufort Sea, studies are being done to weigh the environmental impact of oil and gas production. Some 50 of these studies fall under the auspices Bureau of Land Management Outer Continental Shelf Office (OCS) and NOA, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. The studies are concerned with many aspects of Arctic biology, mainly those relating to endangered species, and the Bowhead whale in particular. Gary Hufford of the OCS office in Anchorage oversees the North Slope studies which will be used to assess the environmental impact of a proposed oil lease sale planned for December 1979. The lease site extends 60 miles west of Prudhoe Bay and about 30 miles east of Prudhoe and goes about 20 miles out to sea. The Bowhead studies will determine if there are Bowhead whales in that area and if so, how the oil and gas production might potentially affect them. The Secretary of the Interior must abide by the Endangered Species Act's requirement of not harassing or destroying habitat by removing or changing certain tracts that are on sale by either removing them from the sale or by putting certain restrictions or stipulations on that will guarantee that no harassment or destruction will take place. Hufford has contracted two different studies to ensure the Bowhead's safety. The first study with the Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission through Chairman Jacob Adams and another study with the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory acting as a project manager in which there are 8 distinct projects which include actual scientific studies on the Bowhead. The contract with the Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission started in the fall of the last year, with the purpose of meeting two phases. The first phase is to record all the information on their land use records that were put together as part of their native settlements act of 1971. That information lists many key spots along the coast that were identified as culturally or environmentally important. The Alaskan Eskimo Whaling Commission was to put this information into a useable format so they could figure out where they hunt the Bowheads and where they've observed Bowheads in the past. The second phase is to go out and interview whaling captains from the villages of Wainwright, Barrow, Nuiqsut, and Kaktovik to ask them about the unrecorded information such as what their fathers taught them about where to look for Bowheads, what they observed in their years of whaling, have they seen them mating, where do they migrate, and so on. The OCS program on the Arctic Slope hopes to use this information to utilize indigenous information about the Bowhead in a number of ways, one of which will be to include in the environmental impact study, and also used by the people in the Naval Arctic Research Study to decide where it might be best to set up their sampling programs rather than blindly choosing. The Naval information will be used to further prove the information given through the natives. The information coming from the natives is empirical data, the information gathered by the Naval Arctic Research Laboratory will be substantiating scientific evidence that can be used to either prove or disprove the information from the native data. This helps them support the native claims and better determine the potential impacts. The Naval Arctic Research Laboratory is also going into a lot more detail. One example is that they will be taking tissue samples from Bowheads' eyes to find out more about their ability to see. They will also be taking tissue samples from their flippers. This is usually given to the whaling captain who struck the whale as a sign of prestige. It's considered a delicacy. So scientists will be going around the

villages asking permission to x-ray and photograph those flippers to obtain the bone structure which gives a rough estimate of the age of the whale. This is important because scientists can get a better idea of the breakdown of the population that exists in the area. This plays into the impact study as affecting a high number of adults with reproduction capabilities is different from a large number of juveniles. The information is used in a number of steps leading up to the environmental impact statement which will be available for public review. Comments from the public review will be used in the final report. The final impact statement should be out around the first of August. This final impact report will help determine some of the sale decisions. The Naval Arctic Research Laboratory's information will be utilized in the EIS and also to satisfy the stipulation of the Endangered Species Act to determine jeopardy for the animal, which is a determination made by the National Marine Fishery Service of NOA. NOA will have the ability through consultations with the scientists, to require more or less or specific information; whatever it takes to make their final determination. This study could go on for several years, even after the sale is finished. The OCS Amendments Act gives the Secretary of the Interior more power. He can hold a sale and if evidence comes up later that one of the tracts sold is habitat critical to the whale he can buy it back. An alternative to that is to put stipulations on the land sale that make things safer for the environment and any endangered species, for instance only allowing work to be done in the area at certain times. So sometimes it is not always necessary to take the tract away and mitigation is a better option. These kinds of decisions are made at the higher levels of the Department of the Interior. Hufford also said that these decisions would take public opinion on the EIS into consideration. Public hearings on the matter will begin in June.

Part 2:
Chinook Profiles

Paula Schiller interviews Koyukon language specialist at the Alaskan Native Language Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, Eliza Jones. Jones helped compile a Koyukon noun dictionary and is in the process of writing a dictionary of Koyukon verbs. Jones says she first learned about reading and writing the language sometime around 1962. David Henry and his wife who were with Bible translators came to Koyukuk where she was living with her husband at the time. She started working with him as an informant, repeating words over and over so he could write it down. Jones gives some examples of some of the longer words she would help him with. She was interested that these words he'd write seemed to go all the way across the page of a tablet and she'd look and think she could never write that. When he asked her if she was interested in learning she said it looked too hard. David Henry eventually got money from the state operated school to develop books to be used in the bilingual program in the villages because there were no written class materials. People would have to be trained to read and write. He asked her again if she was interested and she attended a 6 week workshop where she and others learned to read and write the Koyukon Athabascan language, which is a different alphabet from English though there are some similarities. Some differences Jones demonstrated was the soundless "l" in the language that is written as an "l" with a downwards slash through it, as well as some glotalized and back consonants. After this workshop, Jones worked a year for the state operated school developing materials like schoolbooks and a noun dictionary. She started at the university in 1974 but had met Dr. Krauss prior to that when she was enrolled in the workshop.

She remembers being so impressed about what he knew about Athabascan grammar. When she started working she was excited to learn what she could discover about the grammar. He taught her grammar by forcing her to sit and write out a whole paradigm and then dissecting it. She laughs that her own students are not quite as excited as she is about it and remembers that sometimes she'd stand in front of the class, totally engaged in the grammar, and lose them for a bit. She thinks it is most difficult for students to learn to pronounce the different sounds. Schiller and Jones discuss whether or not Athabascan is spelled with a "c" or a "k" and its origins from the Cree Indians in Canada. There were surveyors with Cree guides in Canada and they came to a big lake and asked the name. The guide told them "Athabasca" which means "shallow, weedy lake" and there were some Indians living around the lake, so they became Athabascans. Jones says that most people do not ask if she speaks "Indian" but rather most commonly people make the mistake that everyone in Alaska is Eskimo. She recalls going to speak to a group about her work and told them she was a Koyukon Athabascan. They wanted to know what she did for her work and she had brought along some booklets and a girl flipped through them and said: "Oh! A book that's actually written in Eskimo!" Jones had taken it for granted that they knew that Koyukon Athabascan was an Indian language, but most people don't know the difference between Indian and Eskimo. Jones says this is why she believes it is very important to educate people on the differences, even in different indigenous groups.