

Central Yukon Resource Management Plan Public Scoping Summary Meeting Notes Venetie * November 7, 2013



Planning Team

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Questions and Comments during the Presentation:

NEPA/EIS Process

I know you're doing a public meeting, but a small group concept of a public meeting. But Fairbanks and Anchorage have large populations and that's where a lot of decisions could be made. In Venetie we are a big land owner and we care about the water. I don't think that BLM doesn't care about what's going on up here. It's like getting into development themselves. We [Venetie] have always been friends to the environment as people of this country. I don't know how far this meeting...this meeting is just for information right?

So you guys are just filling in the villages, so the next thing is getting to the Final Draft?

How does the Alaska National Lands Interest Conservation Act (ANILCA) fit into BLM lands? I know there are certain sections that talk about resources and a shortage of resources. And I've always asked that to the Yukon Flats [Wildlife] Refuge and I never get answers. *BLM explained that certain sections of ANILCA set-up "Conservation System Units" like National Parks and Wildlife Refuges. It also set-up some of the BLM lands as conservation units like the White Mountains and the Steese areas. But the lands in the Central Yukon Plan were not designated as conservation system units so those sections of ANILCA do not really apply. Other*

sections that do like the responsibility under section 810 for subsistence priority on all federal lands whether they are conservation units or not.

You're dealing with our water; you're dealing with our environment our core of our land, you're dealing with that. That stream comes to us and echoes to our land. We have to speak for the generation ahead, for the Native and people that's going to be living throughout our Yukon Flats. The land needs a lot of protection from contamination, or killing-off of fish. We eat a lot of fish, beaver, and caribou; those are very important.

We have 287,000 spawning fish that go into the Chandler River. The lands that you guys are dealing with that's been with us for a number of years for immortal time. There's very good trap lines, there's very good sheep country that you're dealing with. There's very good grayling and a lot of fish habitats and spawning areas in this country here that feeds the world. In about five years, the fish goes down to the basin of the Yukon and also to the basin of the ocean and that feeds the world. If anything happens to this country or to its environment, we keep on saying that it's going to kill off a lot of people down river. Or, if we dig up the wrong kind of rock and leave some kind of acids behind that will get into the water just like in Arizona, you know. And it's affected inside a human body system and gets into fish and animals. That's the way I believe and think about it.

We should have the first choice on our side before anything happens. I mean if they are going to have prospecting up there or if they are thinking about selling the land, these guys that are prospecting, trying to find a deposit, they should look at the clean way of the environment. The science way of doing things, not just someone looking to make money, leave, and never come back. They don't care about us, our grandchildren, the caribou children, the moose calves, the fish that spawn in those areas. Those are concerns that I have; I am looking ahead at my future. Hopefully the world will understand that the way of the Gwich'in people is a good way to go; a good way to go by protecting their way of life. Everybody should be doing that. The whole world, the natural world, should protect their way because the chain of everything is in demand here and that chain of food, the chain of animals, the migration of it ...the northern atmosphere. The northern lights, we love to look at the northern lights and wake up to the birds. If something happened to the environment, how can we help? We should look at that way of life. How can we help the native respectful way of doing things? Look at this river here that is feeding the world, how can we help? Not enough fish go up the Yukon River. We need to consider more environmentally friendly ways of doing things.

Government-to-Government Consultation

As we go through this process developing this plan, even developing your scoping plan, the BLM needs to understand that we need to be kept informed of what is going on. Anytime we want to have a Government-to-Government meeting, we should be able to request it.

How does this cooperating agency fit into the picture if we asked to be a cooperating agency? BLM described the formal Government-to-Government process that involves writing an agreement that spells out the level of participation, writing and reviewing of the plan by both parties. Only a tribe or government is qualified to participate in this way.

We would like to explore that [cooperating agency or government-to-government consultation] because of this one section of land here where the BLM lands touches our lands [Venetie block]. That area is a prime

hunting area for us. It's also tied into our rivers and our water and we want to protect our water. So, I think we'd like to explore that...talk to some people about it.

I also have concerns over that little strip of land (area west of Venetie and north of the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, referred to as the Venetie block) that BLM says they own, but back in my grandfather's days, they do want to maintain and protect that area for many years. Since some of the gold price came up, and now everybody wants to release lands or exchange lands, and we don't do that as a Native People because we own a big chunk of land ourselves too and any sub-surface title rights.

One attendee told a story his grandfather told him about how Venetie and its people never had good representation from the State of Alaska and that lands that were rightfully theirs were opened by the State of Alaska and had been given away.

Subsistence and Traditional Way of Life

Two million acres of land, of additional land the Native Village of Venetie, the tribal government owns that land. I was wondering why the BLM says they own that land? That little strip of land, you [BLM] need to go out and do some research on why you think BLM owns that land that my grandfather says we [Venetie] own. How did they get that piece of land that my grandfather went to hunt and fish on? We walked the land in the summer; there are a lot of sheep. How many years now, 50 or something I been up there since I was knee-high with my uncles. Maybe an old timer says "I know every wolf den in the Yukon Flats", maybe he does. We had some elders who walked hundreds and hundreds of miles throughout this whole Yukon Flats. And they governed themselves, that's why it's always in the green. There's [Wildlife] Refuge land here too and those refuges are supposed to be protecting us and not for exploration or change the law on these things, NO. This is the old law was a place that old timers that traveled on the land. My native grandfather, he walked the land all through the Yukon Flats. Today, we don't see big buildings around, we see log cabins. Because once you start building that way, you're going to start the process of having to order things to maintain that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. Instead, you can use that for the land, to protect it. Today's generation, they have to go out there and get their education too which is as being a parent and grandparents, we have to make sure these things are in order. That's the way I think and I know a lot of people are very close to the environment and friends, my friends living in the white world. You go down to DC and you start drumming your drum you're going to get picked up and thrown in jail for making noise with your drum. You come up here and it's a peaceful world. We know that five hundred miles that way, there is an isolated area and we know that the reason it's like that is because they protect the land there. The native people, they walk this country. It's good, it's good. So, if they own it, then maybe that's a different story. And then maybe they will be friends to the environment if they owned it and walked the land as a native people. If we own the land, we own the water rights. I think that disturbing the Yukon Flats is a pretty touchy deal here [in Venetie] and they [BLM] needs to consider that. And they need to realize that it's a whole different picture here when it comes down to dealing with the environment or thinking about making a dollar. I fish up here, I survive and I don't get into oil or gold either. But, today a new generation is born so we have to look at protecting ourselves.

Venetie is an Indian Reservation. I'm from Venetie Indian Reservation. Venetie is founded by traditional ways, water rights, and other sacred grounds that are part of our reservation [by] Indian country bylaws. Venetie Reservation is a native tribal government. Our ancestors put these bylaws together to make that

law when they put that reservation together. This reservation is a bylaw as a whole foundation around the reservation. Everything centers and constitutes in Indian country. Our ancestors went and put together that. We are not supposed to be part of a native management plan. It's protected Indian country by our reservation bylaw. We never gave consent to the State or Federal Government.

The BLM, they wanted a plan for the whole Yukon Flats once upon a time over priority areas. I know Doyon was really involved, Tanana Chiefs Council was involved, BLM was involved, but we were not included. And whatever we did back then, we had 100 percent turnout if there was any kind of fire situation on our land. But, we did not know there was a plan happening and we were not a part of that. Like Eddie was explaining, we are land owners...we are a big land owners here and when it comes down to decisions on black and white, we should be included. My grandfather had been here since 1934 and before that, 1900s with his father. The State and federal government never offered to come to the table and convey the final decision of what the priority areas were of the land. In the 1900s a lot of things happened inside the federal government, law changes, some of the changes that happened within the State. But we were not a part of that! We want our land, we want our water, we want our membership, we want those areas that we want to protect and hunt on those areas. That's what the BLM claimed [from us] in the early 1900s and it really disturbs me. My grandfather, he knew how the government worked, but he did not have the proper English for decision-making on black and white. Things that we were not involved with, today, the dollar went up, oil went up, gas went up so everybody is looking for alternatives. But we are still here and we are still thinking about the fish, the moose, and the caribou. It's scary that you folks are trying to develop. Now you're trying to make a decision over the membership of those people, the descendants that were here and are still here, making a decision over that. If they want to develop and make a profit, I think that they should come to us. Today, we need lawyers to protect the native side when it comes down to the federal and state making decisions. Whatever they did on September 7th, 1971, it was not in favor of us as a native people, as a tribe. What they did with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act that really hurt the natives within the state and it still does under Section 4, a provision of it, natural resources. They should give it back to the tribe; they should give it back to the people. Discrimination, September 2nd, 1971 there was discrimination over black and white on a piece of paper. Because no one really understood, there were people over there 300 miles away that live in Anchorage that made decisions about state revenue, state budgets. They are the ones that made that decision, not us. They need to protect the native people of the state. Tanana Chiefs [Conference] does not look at the big picture. Doyon does not look at the big picture. Venetie looks at the big picture all the time, what is in the best interest of the native people and the membership of the native people. Alaska Native Federation, they don't protect native people, they protect the dollar. Not the subsistence way of life. The creator gave us this land to live on; it's what it's here for, the respectful people. They talk about subsistence priority for rural areas if the resources are low to being available for the locals. I've always ask the Yukon Flats [Wildlife] Refuge who makes these determinations that the moose population is low enough so that outsiders can't come it? And I never get answers. We have over 1,500 enrollees on our land. *BLM (Shelly): BLM follows state fish and game regulations, but when there is a shortage (like you're describing) BLM lands can be made available for "in season management" or "special hunts". BLM has one around Allakaket and one around Hughes.*

Who determines if there is a shortage allowing for a special hunt? *BLM: The Federal Subsistence Board and they have the federal RACs (resource advisory councils) that advise them and they base their decision on the input they get from the local residents that are on the RAC.*