

## 2024 Special Convention & Full Board of Directors Meeting

Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) hosted the 2024 Special Convention & Full Board of Directors Meeting in Fairbanks November 13th to 15th. During this event, Tribal leaders, community members, and stakeholders gathered to address critical issues impacting the region and its people. The meeting, held at the Westmark Hotel, served as a platform for meaningful dialogue, decision-making, and planning for the future.

#### **Key Topics and Decisions**

The agenda included pressing topics such as Hunting and Fishing Rights, the Reclaiming Our People initiative, combating Drug Trafficking, and the Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) Arming Pilot Program.

#### Fishing and Hunting Rights:

The meeting opened with updates on Tribal Resource Stewardship, including an in-depth discussion of salmon conservation efforts. Leaders heard from experts including Eva Dawn Burk and members of the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission about the ecosystem-wide advocacy approach to salmon and bycatch challenges.

#### Reclaiming Our People:

This initiative, aimed at addressing behavioral health and wellness in the region, featured presentations by TCC Behavioral Health. Discussions focused on strategies for support-

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 4** 



### IN THIS ISSUE...

PAGE 3: Tobaan Etseh Book Launch

**PAGE 7:** Every Salmon Counts

**Potluck** 

PAGE 9: NCAI Convention

**PAGE 10:** Broadband Update

**PAGE 11:** Share Your Sobriety Story



## **Letter from the Chief**

Dear Tribes and Tribal Members.

As the year comes to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the challenges we face and the strength we continue to show as a community. I know that many of you may be concerned about the change in our country's administration and the political shifts taking place. There are fears that much of the progress we've made in recent years to protect our lands, animals, and way of life could be at risk.

I want you all to know that, no matter who sits in the White House, in Juneau, or in local positions, we will continue to stand firm in our fight for our tradi-

tions, values, and culture. We have faced challenges before, and we will face them again. During President Trump's previous administration, we experienced significant cuts to Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) funding, which required our staff to advocate to minimize the impact of the funding cuts. Now, with an unbalanced House and Senate, there are fewer safeguards against potential cuts to critical funding.

I urge our Tribes to keep this in mind when planning budgets and preparing for the years ahead. In recent years, we have seen an influx of funds through COVID relief and other sources, but we must remain vigilant and prepared for possible reductions. Strategic planning and prudent financial management will be essential as we navigate these uncertain times.

Last month, I had the privilege of attending the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Annual Convention where I hosted a panel to provide insight into Alaska's unique structure that emerged out of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. This model can seem complex to those outside of Alaska and we thought it was important to share how this structure works among tribes, tribal consortia, and Alaska Native corporations at both village and regional levels. I hope that the panel provided valuable insights into the Alaska model and will encourage lower 48 tribes to support rather than oppose funding opportunities for Alaska tribal members.

Last month, we also hosted our Special Full Board of Directors Meeting in Fairbanks. We had many productive discussions on topics critical to our Tribes, including Reclaiming our People, hunting, fishing, and the implementation of a pilot project that would arm Village Public Safety Officers (VPSOs) in three of our Interior communities. After a lengthy and thoughtful discussion, the Full Board made a motion to defer the final vote on this decision to our Annual Convention in March.

As we approach the holiday season, I want to extend my warmest wishes to all of you. May this time of year bring joy, connection, and peace to you and your loved ones. I also acknowledge that this season can be difficult for many in our community. Let us commit to checking in on one another, treating each other with kindness, and, most importantly, being gentle with ourselves. Together, we can ensure that no one feels alone during this time.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to you all!

Mahsi' Choo, Chief Bian Ridley



## **Celebrating Language & Culture: Launch** of The Story of Tobaan Etseh

During National Native American Heritage Month, on November 8, 2024, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) offi-

cially hosted the book launch of The Story of Tobaan Etseh, a new Denaakk'e language learning book, at the Morris Thompson Cultural & Visitors Center. This book launch marked a significant milestone in preserving and sharing Koyukon Athabascan traditions, language, and sto-

ries. A labor of love, it was brought to life through the collaboration of TCC, Elder Eliza Jones, and Illustrator Holly Wofford.

#### An Evening to Remember

The evening began with a heartfelt welcome and thank-you message from Chief Brian Ridley, setting the tone for the evening. The speech highlighted the importance of language preservation and the collaborative effort behind this project, emphasizing TCC's on-going commitment to cultural heritage. It acknowledged the tireless work of contributors, including Elder Eliza Jones, her daughter Susan Paskvan, and Illustrator Holly Wofford. Each was invited on stage and presented with a token of appreciation from TCC.

About 220 families and community members gathered to honor this special occasion, including Victoria Jimmie Parr who arrived at the venue two hours early to ensure she didn't miss the event. Adopted as a baby and raised in Texas, Victoria recently returned to Alaska to reconnect with her family and culture. She shared that she attended this event to connect with her heritage and begin learning her language.

The evening's highlight was the premiere of a video recording featuring Eliza Jones narrating the story, which immersed attendees in the Denaakk'e language and showcased the book's vibrant illustrations. Attendees received a free copy of The Story of Tobaan Etseh along with a swag bag filled with surprises. Exciting giveaways kept the energy high, and guests had the opportunity to meet the books creators-Eliza Jones.

Susan Paskvan, and Holly Wofford-ask questions, and get their copies signed.

#### A Tale of Tradition and Lessons

The Story of Tobaan Etseh takes readers into the Kk'edonts'ednee period—The Time of Long Ago-when animals, fish, and birds communicated like people. This cherished Koyukon Athabascan legend follows Grandma Porcupine's journey as she seeks a way to cross a river to find food. However, with no way to cross, she sits crying on the beach until a series of helpful animals offer their assistance, leading her to find an unexpected solution.

At the end of the night, 10-year-old Carson shared that he was proud of his auntie's artwork and that he loved the black bear most of all. His words reflected the deep connections sparked by the event, underscoring the enduring impact of cultural storytelling.

#### Building Bridges for the Future

The Story of Tobaan Etseh is not only a celebration of language and tradition but also a step forward in bridging generations and communities. TCC announced plans to distribute copies of the book to schools across the region, ensuring its lessons reach young learners. Additionally, the book is available by request, with an animated version accessible online for broader audiences.

TCC would like to extend heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed to this project, including the Communications. Family Services, and Education Departments, for making the book launch a success.

To request a copy of the book or view the animated version, please visit https://www.tananachiefs.org/tobaan-etseh/.













## **2024 Special Convention** & Full Board of Directors Meeting

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1** 













ing Tribal members in recovery and fostering intergenerational wellness. Breakout sessions allowed delegates to focus on region-specific needs in collaboration with members of TCC's Behavioral Health staff. These priorities were then shared with the larger delegation when the whole

group reconvened.

#### VPSO Arming Pilot *Program:*

A proposed pilot program to arm VPSOs in three communities was a focal point of discussion. Tribal leaders debated the program's implications for safety and community dynamics. A motion was passed to delay the vote until the TCC Annual Convention in March, ensuring that leaders have time to consult with their Councils and communities.

#### Combatting Drug Trafficking:

On the final day, a panel of law enforcement and Tribal representatives discussed strategies to address the drug crisis. Collaboration between agencies and communities was emphasized as key to creating safer environments.

#### Highlights of the Meeting

The gathering began with a moment of silence for the Missing and

Murdered Indigenous Peoples and a presentation of colors by the Alaska Native Veterans Association. Tribal leaders and guests shared heartfelt welcome addresses, reaffirming their commitment to the collective well-being of their communities.

> Interactive panels, Q&A sessions, and working lunches fostered collaboration and ensured all voices were heard. Attendees also previewed the Wellness Center Campaign Video, which will be used to raise funds for the wellness center.

#### A Look Ahead

The meeting concluded with clear next steps for addressing these critical issues. Leaders emphasized the importance of consultation, community involvement, and ongoing dialogue in shaping the policies and programs that will impact the region.

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who participated, both in person and online, to help shape the future of our region. Mark your calendars for the TCC Annual Convention March 10th-13th, 2025, where many of these topics will continue to be discussed and decided upon.

Together, we are building a stronger, healthier future for our communities!































# TCC Shuttle Service

TCC's complementary Patient Shuttle Service now has extended hours to meet the needs of patients traveling to Fairbanks for medical appointments.

#### **Weekday Schedule**

Monday - Friday • 7:30 AM - 6:00 PM

Call 907-347-0765 for appointments outside the route schedule

#### **Weekend Schedule**

Saturday - Sunday • 8:00 AM - 8:00 PM

Call 907-687-8338

#### **Airport Transportation**

Monday-Friday • 7:30 AM - 6:00 PM

Saturday • 6:30 AM - 8:00 PM | Sunday • 8:00 AM - 6:00 PM

SCAN TO VIEW MORE SHUTTLE INFO!





## **Healthy Family Time** During the Holidays

create memories with your children. It's also a chance to focus on spending healthy, quality time together. Here are some ideas to keep your family active, happy, and connected this holiday season.

#### Get Outside

Winter is the perfect season for outdoor fun. Take your children hunting for grouse, snowshoeing, or simply walking together. Fresh air and movement are good for everyone's health and can help burn off extra holiday energy.

#### Cook Together

Holiday cooking doesn't have to be stressful. Teach your kids your favorite traditional recipes or try something new. Cooking together is a great way to bond and teach children about healthy eating.

#### Tell Stories

Sharing your favorite stories from growing up bonds families together.

The holidays are a special time to Laughter, life lessons and good memories connect the past with the present and gives your children something to carry with them into the future.

#### **Limit Screen Time**

It's easy to get caught up in TVs, tablets, and phones during the holidays. Set aside time each day for technology-free activities. This helps everyone stay present and focused on family time.

#### Take Care of Mental Health

The holidays can be busy, but it's important to check in with your children's feelings. Spend time talking, listening, and showing love. Simple acts like hugs and kind words make a big difference in keeping your family healthy and happy.

By making time for these simple activities, your family can enjoy a season full of connection, laughter, and love. Healthy holiday habits can create memories that last a lifetime.

## **NO WAITLIST FOR SUBSTANCE USE ASSESSMENTS**

Same day substance use assessments are available Tuesday-Thursday.

To schedule or speak to a provider, please contact Desiree Dan, Intake Coordinator, at 1-800-478-6822 ext 3847.

Or come in at the Al Ketzler Sr Building Suite 118 in Fairbanks.

If you are in a rural community, please reach out to your local BHA or clinic.

Clients are enrolled in case management following the assessment to facilitate enrollment in additional services. If you or a loved one is "waiting" for service, please contact us.



## **Every Salmon Counts Celebration Potluck**

On Thursday, November 14th, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) partnered with Native Movement, Native Peoples Action, and the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission to host the Every Salmon Counts Celebration Potluck. This community gathering brought everyone together to celebrate the work that has been done so far in our fight to protect our fish and to energize the movement that is to come. A Bristol Bay sockeye salmon bake was provided and guests brought delicious side dishes and desserts. The potluck culminated in traditional drumming, dancing and singing.

Mahsi' Choo to everyone who contributed to making this night a success!



















## **TCC Pharmacist Isaac Bailey**

## Receives Preceptor of Excellence Award

Isaac Bailey, PharmD has been a valuable member of the Pharmacy team at Chief Andrew Isaac Health Center (CAIHC) since 2019. He started out as a pharmacist intern at TCC in 2019 while attending Washington State University's College of Pharmacy and became a full-fledged pharmacist in 2021. Isaac is Alaska Native with family roots in the Norton Sound area. He was raised in Fairbanks and is in the process of training to become a private pilot outside of work. Since starting at CAIHC Pharmacy, Isaac has helped on various projects and has been a preceptor (teacher) to many pharmacy students that complete their clinical rotations at CAIHC Pharmacy. Most recently, Isaac has been instrumental in setting up Pharmacy Services in the CAIHC Cancer Care and Infusion Center. In recognition of his dedication and skills in mentoring and training pharmacy students, he was recently awarded the Preceptor of Excellence Award by the Idaho State

macy students, he was recently awarded the Preceptor of Excellence Award by the Idaho State University / University of Alaska Anchorage College of Pharmacy Program. We are very proud to have excellent pharmacists like Isaac on the team at CAIHC!



## FRMP Project Update: Humpback Whitefish in the Upper Koyukuk River Region

By Brian McKenna, Project Lead

Tanana Chiefs Conference is collaborating with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on a project that combines traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and biological sampling to enhance our knowledge base and understanding of Humpback Whitefish in the Upper Koyukuk River region. This project is funded through OSM's FRMP. It is a two-year study, which began in 2023, and will be culminating in early 2025. Project objectives include the following:

- Identify critical Humpback whitefish habitats.
- Identify changes in Humpback whitefish populations, habitat usage, and traditional uses.
- Describe the demographic composition (age, sex, length, gonadosomatic index) of Humpback white-fish populations in the Alatna and South Fork Koyukuk rivers.

ADF&G's Subsistence Division is leading the TEK portion of this study, and has conducted interviews with knowledge holders in the nearby communities to address the first two objectives. Ethnographic data is currently being processed and analyzed, and community data reviews will occur in the spring of 2025.

TCC's Fisheries Program is leading the biological component of this study to address the third objective. The sample size goal for both rivers was 200 fish. Only 39 samples were collected in the South Fork Koyukuk River due to high water. The sample size goal was reached in the Alatna River (n = 203). Preliminary results for the Alatna River are provided below. Results for the South Fork Koyukuk River will be updated and provided in spring of 2025. If you have any guestions regarding this project, please reach out to TCC's Tribal Resources Stewardship Division.



Sampling Humpback Whitefish in the Alatna River, September 2023



TCC staff sampling Humpback Whitefish on the South Fork Koyukuk River in September 2023



TCC staff with Stephen Bergman in the Alatna River in September 2023



TCC staff seining in the South Fork Koyukuk River in September 2023

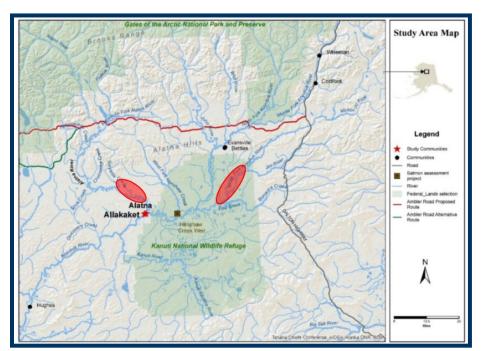


Figure 1.—Map of the study area. Spawning area sample collections are denoted by the red ovals.

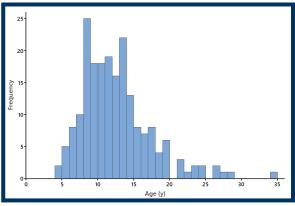


Figure 2.—Age distribution of humpback whitefish in the Alatna River

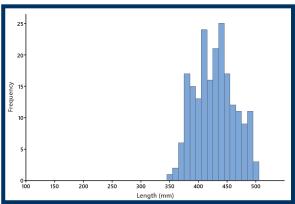


Figure 3.—Length distribution of humpback whitefish in the South Fork Koyukuk River



## **National Congress of American Indians** Annual Convention

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Annual Convention recently took place in Las Vegas, Nevada, bringing together Tribal lead-

ers and representatives from across the country. Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) actively participated in the event, with Chief Brian Ridley, members of the Executive Board, and representatives from the Emerging Leaders program—Mackenzie Englishoe (Gwichyaa Zhee), Robert Pilot (Nulato), and Natalie Newman (Rampart)—

in attendance.

A key highlight of the convention was the panel discussion titled "Alaska's Unique Model of Self-Determination," which spotlighted the innovative structure of governance shaped by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The panel, led by Chief Brian Ridley, featured Shauna Hegna of Koniag, Nathan McCowan of St. George Tanaq, Richard Peterson of Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes, and Melanie Bahnke of Kawerak. Together, they shared insights on how Alaska's Tribes, Village Councils, and corporations collaborate to address shared challenges and achieve collective goals. The session provided valuable lessons for Tribes outside of

Alaska, showcasing the power of cooperation and community-driven leadership.

In addition to participating in panels and discussions, TCC submitted two resolutions to the

NCAI delegates. Both resolutions were successfully passed:

•Resolution 036: Support and Enhance the Bureau of Indian Affairs Small Tribe Supplement Program - This resolution seeks to ensure continued support and enhancement of critical funding for small Tribes.

Resolution 037: Opposition to legislation that would allow construction of the 211-mile Ambler mining road through the Gates of the Arctic National Preserve - This resolution opposes projects that threaten the pristine environment and traditional lands of Alaska Native communities.

TCC's active involvement in the NCAI Annual Convention underscores its commitment to advocating for the interests of Interior Alaska Tribes and contributing to national discussions on Tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and governance. The conference was an excellent opportunity to build relationships, share knowledge, and strengthen partnerships with Tribes and organizations across the nation.









## **Broadband Update from the TCC Infrastructure Division:**

## **Investing in Lasting Connectivity**

by Matt Glover, Broadband Program Manager

TCC's broadband program is committed to expanding reliable, high-speed internet to villages across Alaska's interior. With critical federal support, we've secured substantial grants—including \$4.5 million from the NTIA Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) and \$65 million from the USDA ReConnect Program for projects throughout the TCC region. These funds will support broadband development in Northway, Nenana, Eagle, Dot Lake, Evansville, Alatna, Allakaket, Huslia, Fort Yukon, Venetie, Chalkyitsik, and Circle.

In addition to these projects, TCC has applied for a \$77 million grant to extend fiber along the Yukon River from Tanana to Holy Cross and is also preparing to apply for the state's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) program, which has earmarked over \$1 billion to expand broadband access across Alaska. These combined efforts represent a long-term investment in essential broadband infrastructure. However, a common question has arisen: Why invest in fiber when satellite options like Starlink are already available?



Work in Nenana.

#### Why Fiber? The Case for Long-Term Community Infrastructure

Satellite internet options like Starlink have improved connectivity in some areas, providing a helpful solution for households with immediate internet needs. TCC's commitment to fiber infrastructure goes beyond today's needs. Here's why fiber is at the core of TCC's broadband strategy and how it meets the unique demands of Alaska's rural communities:

# 1. Built to Serve Whole Communities

Fiber networks are designed to meet the needs of everyone in the community—individual households, schools, health clinics, and local businesses. Like other utilities, such as water and power, fiber is a reliable foundation that can serve the whole community, providing robust internet service that works consistently for a range of essential services. For many TCC communities, fiber means better access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities close to home.

# 2. Tribally Owned Infrastructure with Local Management

Fiber infrastructure in TCC's broadband projects will be a tribally owned asset, offering a lasting resource that belongs to the communities it serves. While day-to-day operations may involve commercial, for-profit operators in some areas to ensure the network runs effectively, the ownership of the fiber network remains with the community. This approach balances efficient service management with local ownership, providing the authority and control for TCC communities to adapt the network to their needs over time.

# 3. Ready for Tomorrow's Needs

Fiber is more than fast internet; it's a resource that can scale up to meet future demands. As education, health-care, and work continue to move online, fiber networks can handle increased data and support growth, ensuring that TCC communities have reliable connectivity for years to come. Building this infrastructure now means fewer limitations in the future, supporting residents who want to work, study, or access healthcare without leaving their villages.

# 4. Funded by and for TCC Communities

With over \$69 million in federal grants, TCC is working to build a durable infrastructure that is typically challenging to develop in rural areas. Current projects are in stages like environmental permitting, route plan-

ning, and early construction preparation, with initial fiber work expected in Northway this winter and broader projects anticipated to begin in 2026. By pursuing additional support through grants like BEAD, TCC is committed to expanding broadband access across the interior at a scale that truly benefits the region.

#### 5. A Utility for the Future

Just like electricity and water, reliable internet is essential for daily life. By establishing fiber as a community asset, TCC is creating a stable, long-term resource that residents can depend on for school, work, healthcare, and community life. While satellite services like Starlink provide short-term flexibility, fiber offers a lasting, community-owned solution that will serve the digital needs of the entire region.



Fiber is being laid and made ready for service on the Northway Fiber project.

# Looking Ahead: Building for the Next Generation

For communities in the TCC region, fiber means reliable, tribally owned internet infrastructure that can support long-term essential services. While some initial groundwork is underway, major construction phases are planned for 2026, funded by TBCP, USDA ReConnect, and potentially the State of Alaska's BEAD program.

The goal isn't to replace any existing option but to provide a stable, resilient network that serves the whole community. TCC is focused on building a sustainable resource that empowers residents to stay connected to their homes and communities while participating fully in the digital world.

# **Share Your Recovery Story**

**Inspire Others. Uplift Our Communities.** 

Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) is launching a media campaign focused on the power of recovery, resilience, and hope. Our goal is to highlight positive stories of recovery from addiction, educate our communities about the dangers of substance abuse, and inspire others to see that recovery is not only possible but within reach.

We are looking for Alaska Natives in the TCC region who are willing to share their recovery journeys with us. If you have successfully overcome addiction to substances like meth, alcohol, opioids or other drugs, we invite you to share your story. Your journey can serve as a beacon of hope for others and contribute to a stronger, healthier community.

#### **Ready to Share?**

If you would like to participate, please fill out our story submission form by scanning the QR code or by visiting <a href="https://www.tananachiefs.org/share-your-sobriety-story/">https://www.tananachiefs.org/share-your-sobriety-story/</a>



Thank you for considering sharing your journey to help others see that recovery is possible. Together, we can create a future filled with hope, resilience, and strength.







Fairbanks Rural Operations Technician
Fairbanks Dental Assistant Intern

Fairbanks RN Case Manager

Fairbanks Behavioral Health Clinician II - Graf Rheenerhaanjii

Fairbanks Certified Medical Assistant II

Fairbanks Emergency Medicine Clinical Trainer

Fairbanks Health Information Management (HIM) Technician I

Fairbanks Staff RN

Fairbanks Registration & Admissions Specialist

Fairbanks Staff RN

Fairbanks Registered Nurse - Infusions and Oncology Specialist

Fairbanks Certified Medical Assistant

Fairbanks RN Case Manager

Fairbanks Administrative Assistant I - Medical Services

Fairbanks Dental Assistant I

Fairbanks Environmental Services Technician I

Fairbanks Physician - Primary Care

Fairbanks SAPTA Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist



## **Let's Talk!**

Helping you help loved ones struggling with substance misuse. This support group is open to everyone and is completely free! It does not require commitment or active engagement in services.

Drop in whenever you need support!



Scan the QR Code for more info & join us Wednesdays via Zoom 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

# **UPCOMING EVENTS**

DEC 12

**Executive Board Meeting** 

More information to come

**DEC** 24-25

**TCC Offices Closed** 

Christmas

JAN 1

**TCC Offices Closed** 

New Years Day

JAN 20

**TCC Offices Closed** 

Martin Luther King Day

**JAN 23** 

**Executive Board Meeting** 

More information to come

FEB 17

**TCC Offices Closed** 

President's Day