



Press Release: Utqiagvik Meeting Kicks Off the Alaskan Inuit Food Sovereignty Initiative

January 23, 2019 – Anchorage, Alaska- Inuit from across the North Slope, Northwest Arctic, Bering Strait, and Yukon Kuskokwim regions of Alaska gathered in Utqiagvik for a two-day Steering Committee meeting, held on January 9-10, 2019, to launch the Alaskan Inuit Food Sovereignty Initiative, an effort being facilitated by Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Alaska.

The Initiative is a collective Inuit-led effort with the overall goal of developing an Alaskan Inuit Food Sovereignty Management Action Plan. This Initiative builds off of the work ICC Alaska has facilitated and is in response to a direct call by Inuit.

The Utqiagvik meeting is the first of three Initiative Steering Committee meetings to be held in Inuit regions of Alaska. At this meeting, the committee discussed the status of wildlife management, assessed existing management approaches and concluded by agreeing that a holistic ecosystem-based management system that would support Inuit traditional practices, protect the environment, and enhance biodiversity conservation plans is what would be ideal. They identified existing barriers, then strategized how to get beyond the barriers with a practical, realistic approach. The meeting concluded with the Committee reaffirming the shared vision for Inuit to be meaningfully engaged in wildlife management decision-making; a pathway towards achieving food sovereignty.

Jim Stotts, President of ICC Alaska further articulated the intent and motivation behind the initiative, “Hunting and fishing is the basis of Inuit culture and identity. Prior to outside imposed management systems that have historically marginalized and not included Inuit, the utilization of traditional, holistic management practices over traditional food resources sustained our people for thousands of years. This initiative is seriously investigating the current system because it does not support our food security and food sovereignty.”

In addition to discussion on a shared vision forward, the meeting space created a comfortable environment for committee members to express their passion for advancing Inuit food sovereignty and advocating for our people. One Committee member emphasized that, “Our laws of our land will never change what our elders passed on to us. We should keep it alive so our youngsters can keep using it. We were here way before everyone was here. We lived off land and ocean up to this day...Although the weather is changing, disrupting hunting schedules, our laws of land and ocean will never change. We must keep it alive.”

The Initiative is being led by a 16 member Steering Committee, comprised of members from Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, Maniilaq Association, Kawerak, Inc, Association of Village Council Presidents, North Slope Borough, Northwest Arctic Borough, Alaska Beluga Whale Committee, Alaska Eskimo Whaling Commission, Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council, Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council, Eskimo Walrus Commission, Ice Seal Committee, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, as well as the ICC Alaska President, ICC Alaska Elder Board Member, and a Youth representative.



The Committee will hold its second meeting in Bethel, Alaska to plan and prepare for a statewide Summit which will be the largest meeting and the centerpiece of the Initiative. The Alaskan Inuit Food Sovereignty Summit, will be held in Nome, Alaska in September 2019 and will bring Inuit together from communities throughout our four regions to set the framework for the Alaskan Inuit Food Sovereignty Management Action Plan. The fourth and final meeting will be held in Kotzebue, Alaska to go over the results of the Alaska Summit and to draft the Action Plan to advance Alaskan Inuit food sovereignty. This initiative is made possible through a Social and Economic Development (SEDS) grant from the Administration for Native Americans and the Action Plan is scheduled to be completed by September 2021.

Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) Alaska is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization that exists to be the unified voice and collective spirit of Alaskan Inuit, to promote, protect, and advance Inuit culture and society. ICC Alaska membership includes regional organizations that represent Inupiat, Central Yup'ik, Cup'ik and Saint Lawrence Island Yupik in the North Slope, Northwest Arctic, Bering Straits and Southwest regions in Alaska.

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