



# NEWS

## U.S. Department of the Interior

Office of the Secretary  
For Immediate Release  
April 29, 2004

Contact: Karen Boylan: 907-786-3309  
Jeff Fleming: 202-208-4131  
Dan DuBray: 202-208-7315

### **Secretary Norton Accepts Agreement Between Alaska Natives and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** *First refuge management agreement of its kind with Tribal government*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) – Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton today approved an agreement between the Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The agreement would enable the Council to perform some of the Service's work on the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska during 2004-2005.

The CATG is an Alaska tribal consortium composed of the Arctic Village Council, Beaver Village Council, Birch Creek Village Council, Canyon Village, Chalkyitsik Village Council, Circle Village Council, Native Village of Fort Yukon, Rampart Village Council, Stevens Village Tribal Council, Venetie Village Council and Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government. Members of these tribes live near or within the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, the third largest of the 544 conservation units in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Refuge was established in 1980, and includes more than 8.5 million acres of wetland and boreal forest habitat along 300 miles of the Yukon River, north of Fairbanks, Alaska. It is internationally noted for its abundance of migratory birds.

"For most of known history, Indian cultures, religious beliefs and customs have centered on their relationship with fish and wildlife resources," Secretary Norton said today. "I'm very pleased to be here today to conclude this agreement that is the first of its kind between the Fish and Wildlife Service and an Indian Tribe."

Under the agreement, the Council will perform activities including: 1) locating and marking public easements across private lands within the Refuge boundary; 2) assisting with environmental education and outreach in local villages; 3) monitoring wildlife harvest; 4) surveying moose populations (in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game); and 5) maintaining federal property in and around Fort Yukon. Public use (including sport and subsistence hunting, fishing and trapping) will not be affected by this agreement. All Management authority and decision making will remain with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, as required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act.

**(more)**

**News Release:**  
**Alaska Natives-USFWS Agreement**  
**Page 2**

This agreement is the product of almost two years of negotiations. The agreement was modified after a 60-day public comment period, which included public meetings in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Under provisions of the Indian Self-determination and Education Assistance Act, qualifying Indian Tribes and consortia of tribes may request to perform activities administered by the Department of the Interior that are of geographic, historic or cultural significance to the participating tribe making the request. Five of the tribal villages of the CATG are within the refuge boundary.

Randy Mayo, Chairman of the Council, and Todd Logan, Regional Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System in Alaska, signed the agreement today. The Secretary immediately accepted and endorsed the agreement. Secretary Norton said, "This landmark agreement provides the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with another tool to better engage local Alaska residents in refuge management activities and to build enduring relationships between refuge staff and local residents, including tribal members. Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge has a long history of working cooperatively with the Native people of the region. Refuge staff have great respect for tribal members' knowledge of the area and for their desire to protect its wild resources for future generations of all Americans, a goal which reflects the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System." At the conclusion of the signing ceremony Secretary Norton immediately sent the agreement to the U.S. Congress for a 90-day review period.

Anna Huntington-Kriska, the Council's Executive Director said, "We are honored to begin this unique step in our government-to-government relationship with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This historic agreement is one of the first of its kind, and we look forward to an on-going relationship that will continue for years and will ultimately improve the management and operation of the Yukon Flats for future generations."

More information, including the full text of the agreement, can be found at <http://alaska.fws.gov/media/catg/index.htm>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.