

Summary of the December 3, 2009, Breakout Session on the “Unique Role of Native People and Rural Communities in Southeast Alaska”

Rosita Worl and Rob Sanderson were asked to be co-chairs and they accepted. Rosita agreed to chair the discussion for the day. We began the session with an overview from Rosita on the Tlingit perspective of Native peoples in southeast Alaska and core values:

Recognition that Indigenous Peoples have an ancient and enduring relation to the Tongass.

Recognition that Alaska Natives have legal and political rights apart from other U.S. citizens that are recognized by the federal government.

Recognition that cultural diversity enriches the larger society.

Recognition that the Indigenous Societies of Southeast Alaska have different cultural values and worldviews that distinguish them from non-Natives.

- Group orientation opposed to individualism
- Belief that all aspects of the environment, the universe and our ceremonial objects have spirits
- Spirits of our ancestors remain with human remains and in our land.

Core Cultural Values:

- Haa Aaní: Special relationship to the land and environment that recognizes that we both utilize and revere the environment
- Haa Shagóon: The current generation has ties to our ancestors and responsibilities towards future generations.
- Haa Latseen: Strength of Body, Mind and Spirit. Governs our Relationship Among Ourselves and External Groups (Consultation)

Rob Sanderson pointed out that there are differences of perspective from Tlingit and Haida, Tsimshian, clans, clan houses, urban and rural, and we need to understand these differences and what modern life is like in the village. We listened to the experiences of Native people in the room – of village life, of the connection to the land and the history and movement of Native people, of the challenges and obstacles they faced, and the importance of their perspective as Native people.

Recommendations for Action:

Recommendation 1: In light of this discussion, we recommend the Roundtable should charter a work group to specifically address the Unique Role of Native People in Southeast Alaska. The Roundtable should also address the role of rural communities and their unique issues and needs, many of which are shared, but it is important for this work group to focus solely on Native people and their perspective.

Recommendation 2: The Roundtable should host a two-day workshop on the Unique Role of Native People. At this workshop, we will lay the charter and course and develop the work plan for this work group, based on the points Rosita shared above. The Work Group's primary task in the next few months, therefore, is to define and to organize that workshop. The workshop will include topics such as:

- Education of Non-natives on Native perspective, history and way of life, including space to listen to people's stories and experience.
- Expanding that Education to the Region and Beyond.
- The importance of communication between people and groups with different perspectives. How do we do it better?
- Understanding Village Life Today
- Understanding Differences between the Experiences of Different Native groups (southern, northern, urban, village etc.)
- Developing Sustainable Economic Opportunities in Native communities that are compatible with the way of life.
- Creating public land management that better reflects Native perspectives and increases Native Management of land, including such issues as consultation and co-management.
- Management of Sacred Sites
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge and expanding its use in policy-making
- Understanding the Use of specific resources by specific clans
- Understanding the difference and similarities between Native and Non-Native perspective on conservation and identifying common ground
- Recognizing the Nativeness of the region in our public forums, marketing etc.

Recommendation 3: The Roundtable formally recognize the unique role of Native people in our Charter. We will develop the language for this through the workshop process and make a formal recommendation to the body.