Day 1 – Thursday, September 24
Aired on Fort Yukon radio station

Opening Prayer (Isabelle Salmon from Chalkyitsik, right)

Welcome & History of the Gwich’in Steering Committee
Bernadette Demientieff shared how the Gwich’in people have always lived alongside the Porcupine Caribou herd, and how the land plays a critical role in her life today. She talked about the necessity of doing this work “in a good way,” in a way that cares for the land, animals, and people.

The Importance of Unification: Gwich’in No Borders (Princess Lucaj Johnson)
Princess talked about what the land was like before there was a border between Alaska and Canada, and she called for unity between the Alaskan and Canadian Gwich’in communities. She shared a quote from her elder, Sarah Abel (left), and talked about how when people were hurting the community came together to care for them.

Recording: Princess Lucaj Johnson – Part 1 and Princess Lucaj Johnson – Part 2

History of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Evon Peters)
Evon (right) talked about what it was like to grow up on the land and how the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge came to be. He shared how the Gwich’in practiced what would now be called wildlife management for millennia, but when borders were created the Gwich’in were not consulted.

Recording: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1V_6XhbL1GEXhhHoncrfRthHW7txRp6itK/view

Gwich’in Youth Council Update (Bernadette Demientieff)
Bernadette congratulated the Gwich’in Youth Council on their one-year anniversary and spoke about each council member and how they have grown.

- Isaiah Horace was featured on a three-part podcast by the Hip Hop Caucus: https://hiphopcaucus.org/s2e30/
- Quannah ChasingHorse was featured recently on VICE media: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/ep43bn/climate-uprise

Messages from Congressional Leaders
From left to right: Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA2), Representative Diana DeGette (D-CO1), and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA), offered words of support for the Gwich’in Steering Committee.

Video of 1988 Gwich’in Gathering: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=638&v=oLdEOdh5pA8&feature=emb_logo (right)

Village Check-ins:
- Rhonda Pitka (Beaver): Shared that the pandemic has been very challenging, but support and leadership from the Tanana Chiefs Conference has been essential. Low salmon harvests have been a disaster, with not enough fish for families or dogs for the winter. In Beaver they’ve been working on getting bathrooms, kitchen sinks, and water heaters into homes.
- Kyle Joseph (Chalkyitsik): Chalkyitsik has been locked down since February, but everyone understands how important it is to stay safe.
- Ken Smith, Grand Chief of Gwich’in Tribal Council: Reiterated the importance of the Porcupine Caribou Herd to the Gwich’in ways of life in both Alaska and Canada. Recording: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N7BCGTPvjsK7iJwCROK8jGMQ5FsU5Xx/view?usp=sharing
- Karma Ulvi (Eagle): Karma recently became chief and is also the community health aide. Eagle is working on resolution to rejoin the fight with the Gwich’in.
- Tracy Rispin (Old Crow): Tracy (right) reiterated Old Crow’s support for the Gwich’in Steering Committee and talked about how the pandemic has affected their community. Recording: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fTlIrQFO5sN5TeXp5kQoElyxJ14-N5Uf/view?usp=sharing

Executive Director updates from the Gwich’in Steering Committee:
- The Steering Committee has sent baked goods and boxes of food and supplies to elders in Fairbanks and in the Gwich’in villages.
- The Youth Council is one year old. The Youth Council members traveled to numerous places on behalf of the Gwich’in Steering Committee, and they have grown a lot. They also attended the Arctic Advocacy Training.
- Bernadette spoke on behalf of the GSC at the United Nations, and about how the Society of Native Nations, American Indian Movement, and other allies have joined with the GSC to protect the calving grounds.
- Another major event was the Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit. The report from this event will be available shortly, leading up to Bernadette’s testimony for the U.S. House of Representatives on October 5, 2020. The report brings together Indigenous Knowledge and science to discuss the changes hunters are seeing in rivers, animals, and more. For example, last year Bernadette’s family got 87 fish for winter. This year they got seven. Everyone depends on their fall hunt, and without it there is food insecurity.
• Bernadette worked on a film called Public Trust, which shares the history of how the U.S. government has taken over public lands out of greed.
• Many struggling veterans have gone to the Arctic Refuge for healing and now they stand with the Gwich’in and lobby in D.C. on our behalf because the place is so special to them.

Announcement of Public Trust Premier
Jeremy Hunter Rubingh is the producer of the film Public Trust, which premieres September 25 on YouTube at 4PM AKST. He spoke about his experience directing the film and working with Bernadette and the Gwich’in Steering Committee, including how they spent time in Fort Yukon. The film is available at: https://www.patagonia.com/films/public-trust/. Bernadette said that Jeremy is a good friend of the Gwich’in.

Day 2 – Friday, September 25

Opening Prayer (Betty Flitt)

Welcome (Bernadette Demientieff)

Background on The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (Jody Potts, right)
The Alaskan and U.S. governments never negotiated with tribes until oil incentivized them to settle land claims. Alaska Native peoples did not want to end up in a reservation system, so the 12 regional corporations were formed. The government intended for the corporate system to extinguish tribes. ANCSA has been subject to more congressional amendments than any other piece of legislation! It’s still referred to by some congresspeople as a “social experiment” to solve “the Indian problem.” The Gwich’in people were divided into 12 villages, but really they are one people. Through ANCSA they lost their criminal jurisdiction, so now law enforcement services come only from the state of Alaska, which wants the control and power but not the financial responsibility. ANCSA extinguished Indigenous aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, so they are held under federal regulations. Complications arise when shares are willed down to people who have never been to Alaska.

Congressional Update: Alaska Wilderness League (Kristen Miller)
AWL is a small non-profit organization based out of D.C. working fulltime to protect public lands and waters for Alaska since 1993. They have always had a Gwich’in representative on their board, and it has been Lorraine Netro for more than a decade. They know the ins and outs of Congress and know how to tell the story of the Gwich’in when Gwich’in representatives cannot be there all the time. There are champions from all over
the nation who make protecting the refuge a priority because of the hard work of elders, Bernadette, and all of the Gwich’in people.

**International Human Rights Update: First Peoples Worldwide** (Zoe Osterman)

First Peoples Worldwide works from a foundation of Indigenous values to achieve a sustainable future for all. The program is based at the of Colorado in Boulder. Zoe attended the Youth Council’s first ever gathering in August 2019. The program partnered with the Gwich’in Steering Committee to build their international human rights campaign and arranged opportunities for the Gwich’in Steering Committee to engage with the United Nations. They submitted two reports: one a report on Indigenous human rights in the United States and a second report on racial discrimination. Zoe announced that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination announced they are now investigating the fast tracking of oil and gas development in the coastal plane, which is a major recognition of the human rights of Gwich’in. This is the first international action to recognize human rights violations associated with oil and gas development at this magnitude.

**National Update: Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign** (Desiree Sorenson-Groves)

The Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign was developed after the passage of the 2017 Tax Act. The campaign has devoted staff and a steering committee of 12 organizations including the Gwich’in Steering Committee. There are six campaign teams: communications, lobbying, Alaska, corporate, legal, and field team. They’re preparing for all outcomes of the November elections and doing everything in their power to pass legislation in the next congress protecting the Arctic Refuge. They are also advertising to ensure that oil companies know if they bid on leases in the Arctic Refuge they’ll be facing non-stop opposition.

**Update from Indigenous Allies**

- **Native Movement** (Enei Begaye (top right) and Siqiniq Maupin) – They hosted the “Remembering Forward,” just transition summit and moved into a new office space this year. Recording: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FePXLGxvO9c&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FePXLGxvO9c&feature=youtu.be)
- **Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition** (Jessica Girard)
- **American Indian Movement** (Dave Ortiz) – The American Indian Movement was founded in Minneapolis to combat police violence. Dave told the story of how he joined Bernadette to drop off 100,000 opposition comments to SAE Exploration. SAE Exploration locked him out of the building, but he started drumming.
- **Society of Native Nations** (Mayda Garcia) – Mayda (bottom right) voiced the Society’s support for the Gwich’in Steering Committee. Recording: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yj0zQgg_plPA6vtAYX6_rsi6ORU9HZTL/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yj0zQgg_plPA6vtAYX6_rsi6ORU9HZTL/view?usp=sharing)

**Update on Current Initiatives**
Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit Report (Brie Van Dam) - The Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit report is mostly quotes from Indigenous peoples who attended the climate summit. It includes western science and Indigenous knowledge of climate change.

Book on Indigenous Women (Julianne Warren) - Julianne Warren is coordinating an Indigenous Women’s book, which was inspired by many of the young women on the Youth Council. Bernadette Demientieff wants to show them that many women have struggled but that women have struggled and survived before them.

Corporate Update: Sierra Club (Mike Scott)
Of the top six financial institutions, all but five have committed not to finance drilling in the Arctic Refuge. Their campaign is also targeting mid-size oil companies and the firms that insure oil and gas companies.

Legal Update: Trustees of Alaska (Brook Brisson)
Trustees of Alaska has been working for 30+ years to protect the Arctic Refuge. The Trump Administration did the bare minimum of public process and only translated a small portion of the EIS into some Indigenous languages the day before comments were due. Trustees of Alaska worked with scientists to submit 500+ pages of legal comments and thousands of pages of documents showing the ways in which the government’s EIS was inadequate and failed to accurately estimate impacts on the Gwich’in or the land. More than 1.2 million people commented on this against drilling!

Recently the agency adopted its record of decision (ROD) which is the most aggressive, most impactful program they could. One week after it was released Trustees of Alaska filed their lawsuit. Now the federal government has to answer why they think what they did was legal. The federal government has to make a call for nominations before they can start holding the lease sale, and this is a chance for everyone to comment once more.

“I’m so proud to be Gwich’in.”
-Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director of the Gwich’in Steering Committee
Photos & videos from past Gwich’in Gatherings, the Gwich’in Youth Council, & the Arctic Indigenous Climate Summit

**Reports:**

- Vuntut Gwich’in Caribou Coordinator Elizabeth Staples talked about coordinating work to defend the Arctic Refuge. Their campaign is targeting five of the biggest banks in Canada. The Minister of Environment for Canada officially supported protection of the calving grounds. Federal, territorial, and Indigenous governments in Canada stand together in seeking protections for the calving grounds.

- Regina Lopez Whiteskunk from the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in Colorado spoke about how their tribe has brought together Indigenous Knowledge and science together in defense of lands in the Lower 48. She submitted an essay to the Indigenous Women’s book, and she talked about how she couldn’t have gotten through the Bears Ears defense work without support from her elders.

**Closing & Dedication (Bernadette Demientieff)**

“Together, Apart” was dedicated to Gwich’in elder Stephen Frost (Vuntut Gwich’in, 1933-2020) and Peter Horace-Wright (Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich’in, 1995-2019). Here is a video honoring both of them.