



Tanana Chiefs Conference consulted in the Discovery of Ancient Human Remains found in Interior Alaska

Early Collaboration pays off on Remarkable Archeological Find

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February 24, 2011. Tribal consultations immediately following the discovery of ancient human remains in Interior Alaska contributed to a cooperative working relationship between scientists and Tribal leadership in the region.

Joann Polston, First Chief the Healy Lake Traditional Council studied archaeology in college and has always possessed an intrinsic interest in the ancient history of her village. Alerted to the discovery of 11,500 year old human remains in the traditional lands of her Tribal members, Polston recognized the significance for her community as well as the broader public interest to be expected.

“We want to learn more about our history and I’d like to learn everything we can about this individual” said First Chief Polston, discussing her consent to allow disinterment by professional archeologists. Another factor behind her decision was the need to protect the site against vandalism and the potential knowledge to be gained from closer examination.

The cooperative approach is supported by Jerry Isaac, president of the Tanana Chiefs Conference, the regional non-profit Alaska Native corporation representing Interior Alaska. “We appreciate being involved to facilitate consultations on this discovery” Isaac said.

Tribal officials and researchers are hopeful that DNA will be identified in well-preserved bone fragments and Isaac has expressed his interest to have his own DNA compared to the ancient remains.

Isaac and Polston both agreed on the importance of adopting appropriate protocols for involving Alaska Natives in the consultations and research. The discovery - constituting a first despite many decades of regional research - was not anticipated. Once human remains were found, the researchers consulted Alaska Natives following the guidelines set up for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

Initial results of the discovery and the subsequent research facilitated by tribal involvement will be published in the February 24 edition of the journal *Science*.

ADDITIONAL CONTACTS: Marmian Grimes, UAF information officer, 907-474-7902, marmian.grimes@alaska.edu, Debbie Wing, National Science Foundation, at 703-292-5344 or dwing@nsf.gov.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Journalists who miss the live press conference can download an archived version at www.uafnews.com.

Please contact Erickson to arrange interviews with Isaac.

The full text of the paper is available by e-mailing scipak@aaas.org.

Photos and a locator map are available for download at www.uafnews.com. High-definition video interview clips and b-roll are also available for download. Contact Grimes for access.

ON THE WEB:

Potter biography: <http://www.uaf.edu/anthro/people/faculty/potter/>

Irish biography: <http://www.uaf.edu/anthro/people/faculty/irish/>

About Tanana Chiefs Conference:

http://www.tananachiefs.org/corporate/history_tcc.shtml