



American Indian/Alaska Native Employees Association for NRCS

“Respect, Harmony, and Beauty”

**AMERICAN INDIAN / ALASKA NATIVE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
FOR NRCS
NATIONAL COUNCIL TELECONFERENCE
February 13, 2004**

Those present: Ann Perales, Pat Broyles, Harold Bryant, Ivan Dozier, Glenn Lamberg, April Gansen, Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, Crystal Leonetti, Ciro LoPinto, Rick Chavez, Kurt Cates, Jerry Thompson.

President, Ann Perales called the meeting to order at 11:07 am Central time.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the January 2004 National Council meeting were reviewed. Ciro LoPinto moved to approve the minutes. Glenn Lamberg seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer’s Report

April reviewed the Treasurer’s Report emailed to the National Council prior to the teleconference. She discovered that our credit cards must be used a minimum of 12 times per year to avoid a \$25 fee. Two Lifetime members recently made donations to the association. Thank you letters will be sent from Ann.

Native American Survey

Rick Chavez, Co-Chair of the Secretary’s American Indian / Alaska Native Employees Advisory Council reported on the survey distributed to AI / AN employees in 2003. He reported that the Council did not have the foundation to know what the Indian employee needs were. It cost \$7500 to create the survey and to have it administered. 2846 surveys were sent out, with 1246 responses received. This is a return rate of 43.8%. There were 801 responses with written comments. Analysis is now needed.

The Council will develop a comprehensive report with appropriate recommendations to the Secretary. As of January 20, 2004, there were 2196 permanent USDA AI/AN employees, equaling 2.4% of the total USDA workforce. Of those, 327 are NRCS employees, equaling 2.7% of the NRCS workforce. NRCS has the 2nd largest number of AI/AN employees.

Analysis of the written comments will be time consuming. CSREES is doing the analysis and hope to have a report by April 30, 2004. The Council will write a report after receiving the analysis report and hopes to have that completed by the end of September 2004, including Departmental clearance. The hope is that the Secretary will be ready to give a response by November.

Each of the 7 mission areas are represented on the Council, as well as other organizations such as AIANEA.

At our training conference in July, Rick can give a presentation about the survey results. This will require Departmental clearance. Rick has requested for the Council to attend the conference and for the Council to have a separate meeting on Monday (July 12) and then attend the remainder of the week. Funding must be decided on. Rick wants the entire Council there, 17 members.

A letter will be sent to all employees who received a survey to report the status as Rick has reported to us. Even those who did not respond will receive the letter.

The top areas of concern as shown in the written comments, as Rick read them, are (in order):

Career Development

Recruitment

Hiring

Training

Program Delivery

Education

The optimum hope is that the Secretary can provide comment on the Council's recommendations at the opening ceremonies of the American Indian Heritage Month observance in Washington DC in November. If the administration changes with the upcoming election, the Council would need to re-petition to a new Secretary. A new Secretary would not be bound to what the current Secretary might commit to.

Once the report is cleared and is given to the Secretary, the Council will attempt to put it on their website.

The goal for our conference in July is for the Council to have results, be working on the report, and to be able to give a status report.

Who's Who Directory

Rick Chavez discussed this potential project. Due to some written comments from the survey, he thought the directory could meet some needs and concerns that were shown. The directory would show AI/AN employees from across the US, including Alaska. There are 86 Alaska Native USDA employees. The directory would be useful to find role models, show accomplishments, enhance awareness, serve as a positive recruitment tool, and showcase AI/AN employees.

The Hispanic Employees Advisory Council developed a directory in 2002-03. It includes 114 individuals and shows their picture, a short bio, and their community and agency accomplishments.

Annabelle Romero supports this and will send a letter to the mission areas asking for participation, so that they can solicit volunteer input from USDA employees. All of this will be done electronically, including digital photos. All information will be sent to Rick. He will start to create the pages.

The directory will help solve misconceptions of AI/AN employees and provide information. The Council is asking for AIANEA support by way of letting our membership know about the project, how important it is, and to encourage participation. Rick hopes to get 100 AI/AN individuals from diverse locations, grades, positions, and backgrounds. Much of our membership will be at the training conference, so Rick thought that Rick could talk to members, along with Ann, about this.

Each page is dedicated to one individual. Rick is looking for funding and wants the Council to fund the entire project. Won't be able to print a large supply of the directories. The cost of the Hispanic directory was \$2000 for 250 copies. The inside was black and white, while the front and back covers were in color. Once Rick has certification of budget, he will send a letter to the AI/AN employees. Hoping to have a budget by mid-March.

An optimum goal would be for the Secretary to be able to show the directory at the opening ceremonies of the American Indian Heritage Month observance in Washington DC in November.

A template will be available for individuals to develop their bios and stories. Photos will be approximately 2" x 3".

Rick asked that we start talking about it. Rick will let Ann know when the budget is certified. Rick could send a letter for us to send out, including all information, deadline etc. and contact information for Rick.

Report on SAIGE

Pat Broyles reported on this group that is just getting started. It stands for the Society of American Indian Government Employees and includes Alaska Natives. Civil Service employees are automatically eligible. They will have a website soon. The first conference is planned for this fall in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. It will be in conjunction with the National Congress of American Indians conference.

Pat agreed to help publicize the group. They want to be coordinated with organizations like AIANEA. Their goals are similar to ours. They are organized through the state of Virginia and just got their 501(C)3.

Dues are approximately \$250 for Lifetime, \$15-\$25 for annual (Oct. 1). Ann encouraged SAIGE participation at our conference.

Scholarship Limit

Kurt Cates reported that there was only one scholarship applicant in 2003 and so the National Council agreed to combine the 2 scholarships into one for \$300. For 2004, the Scholarship Committee recommends the amount be revised to \$300 for each scholarship. There is a concern that there is a lack of applicants because \$150 is an inadequate scholarship.

National Council members shared concerns about how the increase would affect the future of the scholarship fund. Ann reported that the scholarship fund began in 1998. We have approximately \$6700 to date and have given out 3 scholarships. We have discussed building the fund so that we only use interest for the scholarship awards. Information from tribal colleges says we should have a minimum of \$10,000 to be self-sufficient.

Harold reported that once we erode the principal of the fund, it will go quickly. He provided an example from the Society of Range Management. In 2003, they had \$47,000 in a scholarship fund and earned enough interest to pay one \$1500 scholarship. In the future, the scholarship fund should move into a mutual fund when feasible.

Harold spoke with the bank that handles the Society of Range Management funds to see if they would be willing to take on one more small account (AIANEA). They agreed that they would consider it.

April reported that we began 2003 with \$4300, added \$2300 in 2003, and earned \$38 in interest. Maybe the account needs to build more before increasing the scholarships. **The request from the Scholarship Committee to increase the scholarships to \$300 each was denied by the National Council.**

Crystal Leonetti made the motion to deposit the \$225 donations recently received from 2 members into the scholarship fund. Harold Bryant seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion continued that there is the potential to give 1 \$300 scholarship instead of 2 \$150 scholarships. Kurt will discuss that with the committee, but he thinks it should be left at two scholarships for 2004.

Harold thanked Kurt for his work on the scholarships, for sticking with it and for caring about it.

Regional Reports

Midwest – Glenn reported

South Central – Harold reported that he is working on research for the INCA display as requested by Dick Gooby. He will consult with the National Council when he gets information. The AI display will go to Alaska and will be there Feb. 23. Crystal is to send the display back to Harold 2nd Day shipping.

On Feb. 22, the 1st Annual Hispanic Farmer and Rancher Conference will take place in El Paso. American Indians will be represented.

Northern Plains – Pat reported that one tribe in Kansas received a \$60,000 EQIP contract.

East – Ciro is working on a consultation agreement with the Oneida Nation. They want to move ahead. Maybe agreement could be included in the Cultural Resources Day of the conference.

2004 Training Conference Update

Ciro reported on the Cultural Resources Day. The CR staff will have their meeting on Monday (July 12) and stay the remainder of the week. The Wednesday agenda was coordinated with the CR staff during a teleconference on Feb. 12.

That day, half of the group will attend a field trip, while the other half attends Cultural Resources concurrent sessions. The groups will trade places in the afternoon. There are 6 topics at the concurrent sessions, each presentation given twice. During the last 1 ½ hours will be an Elders Forum. Half of the Elders in the morning and the other half in the afternoon, will talk about cultural and spiritual aspects of natural resources.

The overflow hotel has 50 rooms reserved and is 7 miles away. The request to the National Office has been sent. The Cultural Resources request has been submitted. Jerry Rouse is working on the SEPM agenda. The SEPM agreement has been signed.

Pat agreed to coordinate the poster session. Harold agreed to coordinate the silent auction.

The general budget has been developed. The registration fee is \$270 early registration by June 10 and \$300 after June 10. The registration form will say that early registration must be pre-paid. Travel cards cannot be used. Visa and Mastercard are the only cards accepted.

Still to do: alternative transportation information to be put on the website (taxis etc.), Ciro to look at field trip sites once the weather gets better, Ciro would like to set up a teleconference for himself, Ann, and the Oneida coordinator.

Note: Oneida land is called homeland, not reservation and equals approximately 1500 acres. Keller George had offered a lot to Ciro in Cloquet and has not been contacted. Ann will contact Keller.

Rick Chavez is on the agenda for Friday (July 16) to talk about the survey and an employee forum. Maybe he could talk about the directory at the Business Meeting. Ann will invite him to the meeting. Andrew Johnson is on the agenda for 30 minutes on Friday.

Next Teleconference

The next teleconference will take place on March 12, 2004 at 12:00 Eastern Time. **Larry Coburn had previously agreed to coordinate the teleconference.**

The meeting officially adjourned at 1:12 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Tanya Meyer-Dideriksen, Secretary