



## Native Village of Nuiqsut

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**Statement of Samuel Kunaknana, President Native Village of Nuiqsut Tribal Council, in support of the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Clean Water proposal, for the The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Water, April 6, 2015, Anchorage, Alaska.**

Good morning. My name is Samuel Kunaknana, and I serve as President of the Tribal Council of the Native Village of Nuiqsut, a federally recognized tribe of Alaska Native people. Before I begin, I would like to thank the esteemed members of this committee for allowing me to testify on behalf of the people of my Tribe.

As Tribal president, I represent the Native Colville River Delta people, a group known as the Kuukpikmiut, and as their representative, I want to communicate just how important clean water is in sustaining the subsistence resources of my community.

For thousands of years the Inupiaq people of the North Slope have subsisted on the bountiful natural resources of our region. We rely upon marine and land mammals and waterfowl to maintain food security. Traditional subsistence foods of our region maintain the health of all of our people, and with the magnitude of oil and gas development on the North Slope in recent times, access to these resources has become more and more limited.

Recently, the quality of our subsistence resources has now begun to suffer, in a large part due to problems related to the quality of our waters. The tundra of the North Slope on which we live might best be described as an aquatic environment, the hydrology of which is quite complex.

The Inupiaq people rely upon a wealth of Traditional Knowledge, passed from one generation to the next via stories and word of mouth. We do not rely upon referenced scientific documentation to understand the interconnectedness of our environment; instead we have lived it for thousands of years.

We know that water flows across the surface quite freely during the warm season, and that our hydrology involves not only surface water flow, but the subterranean movement of water as well. Water that runs over the land in spring and summer not only moves from one waterway to the next, but interflow just below the surface also connects these waterways.

All of these water systems are connected in one way or another, and they in turn are connected to the land surface as well. What falls to the land surface through atmospheric deposition,

including industrial compounds, ends up in the lichen that our caribou feed upon, and in the waters that provide food for our fish and other sea mammals.

When I was a young boy in school, I was told of the food chain, and how all of the animals and fish are connected to the environment. This was nothing new to me, as I learned it from my parents, grandparents and ancestors. This was knowledge passed from one generation to the next.

Many years of industrial development in my homeland has now resulted in water and air quality problems, and ultimately industrial aerosols are deposited on the surface to be carried into our hydrological systems that support our land and sea mammals, and waterfowl. These compounds accumulate within our systems and cause health problems for us.

We are told today that we need to limit our consumption of burbot due to mercury contamination, many of our broadfish are now diseased, and when we butcher our caribou we find diseased organs.

Within our village of 435 people, two children have been diagnosed with leukemia, and one has already passed away. What are the odds of a single child being diagnosed with such a disease within a community of 435, let alone two?

We need better rules to control the quality of water in our region, whether the headwaters of streams and tributaries, or wetlands that support our subsistence resources. We do understand and are working to address the loss of food security due to access problems to our subsistence resources as our region becomes inundated with oil and gas development, and perhaps mining in the future; however, it would be unconscionable to allow the health of the limited subsistence resources we have left continue to erode due to a decline in water quality.

As an elected representative of the Native people of Nuiqsut, I fully support this clean water proposal because it will protect a crucial part of the food chain that will allow my people to maintain food security with respect to the traditional foods we have relied upon for thousands of years.

Thank you very much for your time, and for this opportunity to testify on this crucial issue.