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To Richard Parkin
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Subject Inuit Circumpolar Conference abstract

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Rick,
This is the abstract Jeff Frithsen approved.
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Fish, Family, Freedom, and Sacred Water: The Salmon Cultures of the Bristol Bay Watershed, Alaska, U.S.A.

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Abstract: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) launched an assessment of Bristol Bay, Alaska to determine the significance of its ecological resources and evaluate the potential impacts of large-scale mining on these resources. As part of that assessment, the authors were contracted by USEPA to conduct a cultural characterization of the importance of salmon and clean water to the indigenous people of the region: the Dena'ina and Yup'ik. This paper summarizes the "voices of the people" obtained from 53 interviews in six villages in 2011 regarding the interconnectedness of wild salmon and clean water in their lives. The indigenous people of this region have an unbroken record of wild salmon subsistence from prehistory to now. The interviews and cultural analysis demonstrate that salmon-influenced patterns continue to permeate the culture linguistically, nutritionally, socially, politically and religiously. The Dena'ina and Yup'ik of the region may be the last remaining salmon cultures in the world still reliant on wild foods with wild salmon the keystone species. Loss of salmon or clean water due to mining or other factors would be culturally and nutritionally devastating.