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Roger Brunt, John Heffley

Jeff Kennedy, moderator

Series: Potlatch series

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Roger Brunt from the Northwest Territory talks about the Native Association in Canada. Roger Brunt attended the Inuit Circumpolar Conference in June as the official of the Native Association. He explains the Native Association to Isaac Katuyuk of KBRW and to Jeff Kennedy. Roger Brunt said Native people who are of mixed blood, people on non-status Indians, or Indians not covered under the Canadian Indian Act. Kennedy asked him to explain the situation with legal status and land claims for Natives. Brunt said up to last year the Native people weren't sure if the federal government regarded them as having any aboriginal rights or having the rights to make a land claim. The federal government determined that Native people have that aboriginal right and if they wish to negotiate it either with the Native people of the Northwest Territory or on their own. Kennedy asked what non-status Indians were. Brunt said they are Indians not covered by the Indian Act. Either they were never covered by treaty or they chose not to be covered by the act. If a status woman marries a non-status Indian then she loses her status. Kennedy said this sounded confusing. Brunt said the Native people in Canada were always sort of a separate people. The Native Association was created to protect the Native people. He said he was at the ICC as an observer. He is looking at how other land claims were settled. Kennedy asked if the Alaska Native claims have any relationship with the Canadian land claims. Brunt said they are all part of the process. He said the Native people are not Indians nor are they White. They were always between the Indians and the white people and have been an independent people. The Native Association has grown up with that independence. It is hoped by the Native people in the Northwest Territory that all Native people would be able to get together and negotiate together. He said Native people believe that there are certain structures that they are part of and use the land claims to strengthen their ability to function in the White world. The Native Brotherhood has a different philosophy. They wish to strengthen being an Indian. He talked about the different associations and membership. The Natives don't want to be absorbed by either world. Under the Indian Act there are Natives in every part of Canada but the largest movements are on the prairies and up in the Mackenzie Valley. He said each province and region has their own set up. In the Mackenzie area there is the Native Association and the Indian Brotherhood. He talked about the planned dam on the Slave and Great Bear River. The different associations have different views on the dam. He talked about the proposed gas line route.

Song from the ICC

John Heffley talks about the Native Land Claims Settlement Act. Heffley said the act has benefitted a select few such as the administration. He said the people in the village are not better off. Kennedy asked if he had recommendations for those in Canada who are working on their

own land claims. Heffley said he believes that they should set up one corporation with various representatives who have contact with the people. He talked about the twelve corporations in Alaska. He said a lot of the percentage of money is going to administrative costs. Kennedy said there is the option to merge corporations. Heffley said this is true for the village corporations. Some villages merged with NANA. He thinks that gives them a limited voice. They did not gain any funds other than the corporation dividends. Corporations can keep the money instead of giving dividends. He thinks Canada should look closely at this. He thinks Alaska should have had one corporation. He thinks AFN could have been the central point.

Song by Michael Murphy

Jeff Kennedy asked if a corporation has to make money for stockholders. Heffley said if they are going to ask for a land claims settlement the lands should go to the people since the land belonged to them before. Kennedy asked if this what happened in the lower forty eight states and the land eventually got into the hands of non-Natives. Heffley said on reservations the Indians had a lot of open land and lost their land to treaties. He said that is their right to sell their property. He said surplus could be used to make money. Natives owned land before the Native Land Claims. There are problems now with subsistence rights. There are plans to make access corridors. He believes people can maneuver around Native lands and not have access across it. He talked about restrictions on hunting. He thinks Natives in Canada should work at preserving their hunting and fishing rights. He attended hearings on sea mammal hunting. Natives can't sell hides such as the polar bear and seal. He thinks this is restrictive. He said Canadian Natives should take their time reaching a settlement.