

## James T. Sipary, Sr. Biography

I was born and raised in the village of Nightmute on Nelson Island in 1943. I have been a subsistence fisherman and hunter most of my life. In September of 1959 I joined the Army National Guard. I retired in June of 1994 with the rank of Company First Sergeant.

In 1963 to 1975 I was employed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a janitor and maintenance man. In 1976 I worked for the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) as a janitor. Up until 1996 I assisted in developing policies for the LKSD Classified Union committee and I also served on the Political Action Committee for LKSD.

I started to work as an Information and Education Technician in 1996 with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the Department of the Interior as an Intermittent employee. I have traveled from Dillingham following the coast all the way to Stebbins. I have traveled from the mouth of the mighty Yukon River to Russian Mission. I have also traveled from the mouth of the Kuskokwim River to Aniak. In my travels I found that there are some similarities but there were also some differences on the way our people subsist on our fish and game. What I learned helped me to deal more effectively in my work as an informer and educator in the management and conservation of our natural renewable resources and in the protection of the plants, habitat and environment of our fish and game. This work naturally contributes to maintaining our way of life, our culture and identity. I am happy with my work.

In 1998 I volunteered for the Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC) in the similar work of the USFWS to conserve and protect our natural resources. I volunteered after I heard from our Elders about their concern for the declining salmon run in Bristol Bay, the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers, the Norton Sound area as well as the other coastal villages. There were noticeable decline in the salmon runs in 1996 and 1997. In 1998 the AMCC met to discuss why there were declining salmon runs and the council found that there was the over harvesting of our salmon. I directed the AMCC to propose to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) to reduce the over harvesting of our salmon and to educate our people to conserve so that our salmon would not be depleted. I was able to testify on behalf of our people through the AMCC to the NPFMC to encourage reducing the salmon catch to save our salmon. Our joint effort helped to increase the salmon run so that there is no need at this time to place restrictions on our subsistence harvest of salmon. This demonstrated to all concerned that we can learn to manage and conserve our salmon.

I got involved with the Nelson Island villages to encourage them to be more concerned about the future of our people. We now have the Nelson Island Sub Regional Conference (NISRC) in place where we discuss land issues, higher education, jobs, career development, the pros and cons of commercial fishing and subsistence fishing. In January 2007 we had the first NISRC on Prevention and preparedness on pandemic bird influenza and disasters that may happen in the future. The next conference will highlight Injuries and Prevention on topics such suicide, injuries caused by snow machine and four wheelers, and drug abuse. We want to urge our elders to look to the past to gain knowledge on how our ancestors helped to keep order and resolve social issues that related to the present concept of tribal justice. We believe as some other

groups do that we need to solve our own problems from the grass roots level. Our elders have concern over all members of our group and we have learned from the past that the whole village needs to be involved.

I like many of our people have been in dysfunction due to alcoholism. I began by trying to stay sober one day at a time without having to attend a treatment program like the Phillips Alcoholism Treatment Center in Bethel. I am proud that I was able to stay in recovery and know that if I could do it others can. Like many other people I am not only concerned for my people on Nelson Island but for all other people in Alaska and look to having a better future for all of our people.

I am also on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Board of Directors and now serve on the Alaska Native Joint Elder Advisory Committee for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the National Resource Center for American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian Elders.