

Refuge Information Technician Program



Makllaar
Christopher Tulik
Bethel



Nuraug
David Therchik
Toksook Bay



Imataq
Emmitt Nicori
Napakiak

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge
Christopher Tulik – Lead RIT

Christopher Tulik is the Lead Refuge Information Technician from the village of Nightmute. Chris was one of the first RITs when the pilot program first started back in 1984 and was with the program for about two years. After a break, he returned to the service in 2014 as a Refuge Information Technician based in Bethel.

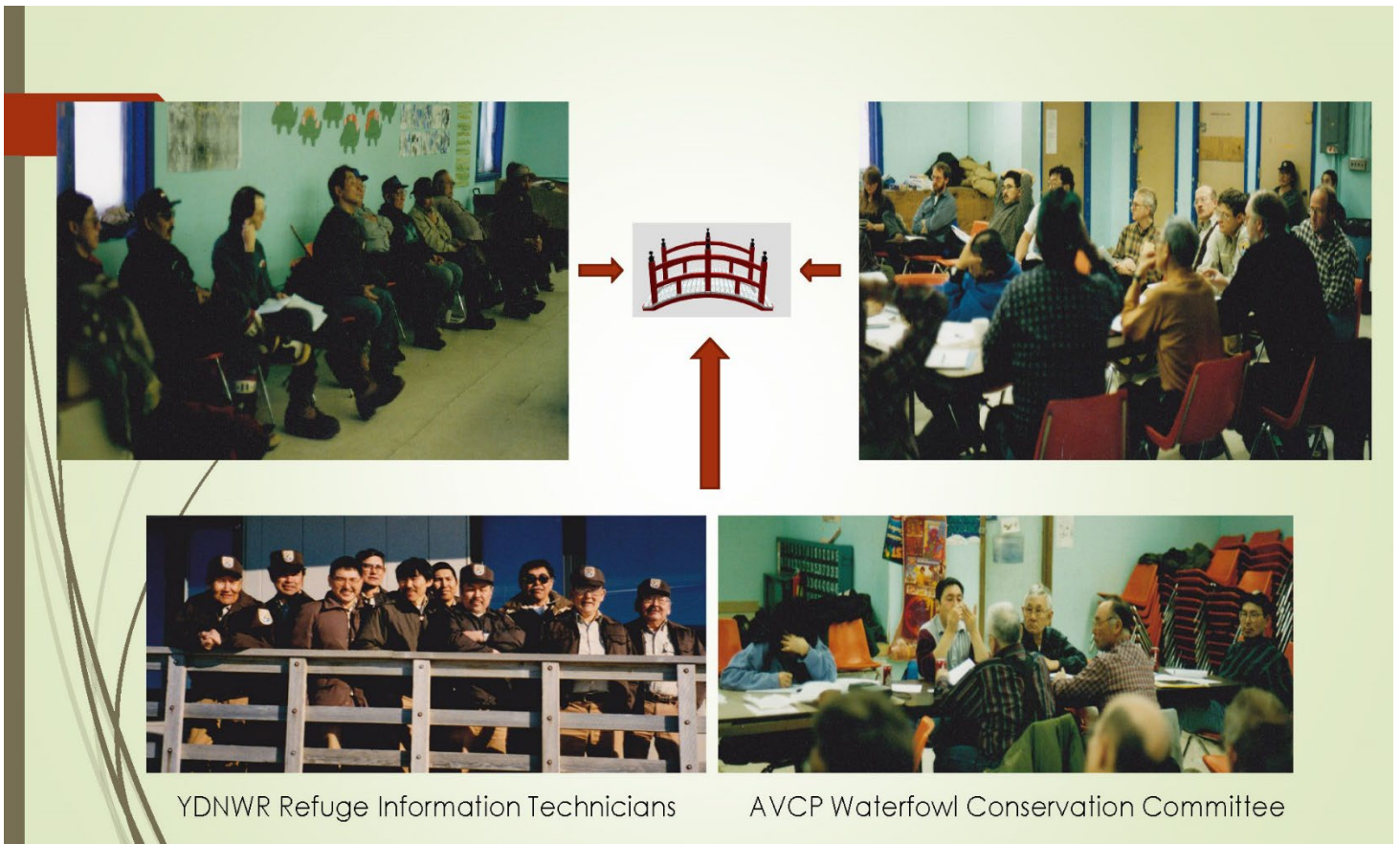
David Therchik is from the village of Toksook Bay. He was one of the newer generations of RITs hired in 2004 to assist the Refuge with outreach, education and tribal consultation.

Emmitt Nicori accepted the Refuge Information Technician position and joined the team on September 12 in 2021. Emmitt was born in Bethel and raised in Kwethluk, a village along the Kuskokwim River. He is the newest member the team to assist the Refuge with outreach, education and tribal consultation.

All three members of the RIT team are residents of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta living traditional subsistence lifestyle with an understanding of the importance of fish and wildlife to the culture of the region and local Alaska Native people.

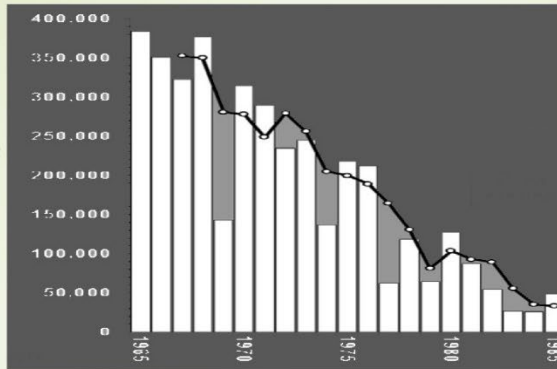


The declining population of the four arctic nesting geese throughout the western flyway was the central point in getting the Refuge Information Technician program started. This pilot program was the first of its kind the USFWS started, and it began here at the YDNWR, leading to the addition of nine new intermittent permanent positions hired under the local hire provision of the Alaska National Interests Lands Conservation Act of 1980. The inception of the Refuge Information Technician program began with a thought and idea of having local people with Yup'ik cultural knowledge and expertise to work with the villages. The RIT program proposal was submitted and it came to pass when this new program created and designed to meet the growing need to involve the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta residents in the management of the refuge resources.



Involving the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta residents required interactive communication with trust and understanding. Given the history of relationship between the Game Wardens and Delta residents, a gap in communication was a cultural barrier to achieve the outcome of saving the four species of arctic nesting geese. People with local knowledge of the Yup'ik culture was needed to fill the gap. So the primary purpose of the RITs is to facilitate communication and increase understanding between the Delta's residents and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service to improve cooperative management of the resources.

The success of the RITs involvement in facilitating communication and understanding to improve cooperation was aided by the dedication of the representatives from the Association of Village Council Presidents and its Waterfowl Conservation Committee. The members of the committee were individuals from different parts of the region with great knowledge of the Yup'ik Culture with understanding of the situation of the declining geese population. Jack William Sr. of Mekoryuk and Matthew Beans of St. Mary's were very instrumental in delivering the conservation message during the early days of traveling and meeting with the Delta residents.



The awareness of the declining population of the four species of arctic nesting geese was already in motion beginning from mid-1970 but large majority of the Delta residents were not aware of the issue until the beginning of the 1980's. The conservation concern of the four species of arctic nesting geese prompted intense negotiations between federal and state wildlife agencies for the Delta residents to voluntarily reduce traditional spring waterfowl harvest citing seriousness of the declining geese population. The 1984 Hooper Bay Agreement was reached as a result of the negotiation of all parties involved which called for a moratorium on all harvest.



The progress and efforts of goose conservation work ran into an issue five months later attempting to invalidate the Hooper Bay Agreement in a court case. The negotiations among Association of Village Council Presidents and its Waterfowl Conservation Committee, USFWS, and the flyway-wide state wildlife agencies continued. The negotiation between the parties resulted in a new 1985 plan called the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan. The plan was similar to the Hooper Bay Agreement but broader in geographical scope in the context of its title. Emperor Goose was also added to the list for which harvest restrictions were imposed to the new plan. The new plan was shared with the Delta villages while the RITs continued to make village visits meeting with the communities to explain the new goose management plan to seek compliance.

Many things were happening from becoming aware of the geese population issue to taking actions to prevent further decline. What came out of the negotiations was the need to inform and educate the Delta residents. Informing and educating the users was not only targeted at the Delta residents, but all users from Alaska to California throughout the western flyway where cooperative approach was needed involving all parties concerned. Information and education became part of the RITs task to inform the residents of the issues and to educate the people about the conservation concerns of the species, and also to gain support.

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Goose Management Plan became a cooperative management plan between Association of Village Council Presidents and its Waterfowl Conservation Committee for the Delta's residents, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and three other western state wildlife agencies, namely Washington, Oregon, and California. This plan was established in an effort to restore the declining populations of the four species of geese to flyway objective levels.



Active participation of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta residents in conservation of the geese and protecting their habitat was critical to the success of the plan in preserving these four species of geese. The refuge is home to over 18,000 residents in 38 active villages on (about 6.5 million acres) private Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act lands within the 19 million acre refuge boundary. These village ANCSA land selections are near the villages based primarily on subsistence needs. So, the Yup'ik culture and the people are dependent on hunting and fishing, and harvesting wildlife resources as a source of food.

To facilitate communication and increase understanding between the Delta's residents and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, RITs serve as a liaison between the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages. RITs traveled to the villages throughout the refuge to visit about 38 villages to engage and connect with the Delta residents with an important conservation message: that working together; we can protect and preserve our fish and wildlife resources for generations to come. This program became an inspiration and was eventually adopted by other Alaska Refuges as a model. This program began about 38 years ago and has contributed to the success of bridging the communication gap with the villages and conservation efforts of the USFWS and the hard work of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge staff.



QUYANA CAKNEQ
(Thank You Very Much)