

## **IEED Grant Helps Kodiak Tribal Business**

By Walter Bonora

In a remote region of the world where start-up businesses are not the common thing, an Alaskan tribe aided by a federal office is making positive economic strides.

With funding provided in part by the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development, the Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak Island purchased Wildsource, a premium Alaskan seafood business producing quality smoked and fresh frozen wild salmon fillets. The deal became final in 2010. The IEED grant helped the tribe better position themselves in a competitive marketplace.

“The grant was timely and strategic,” noted Dave Monture, the tribe’s director of economic development. “The agency was decisive. They acted with dispatch which is not always common with some state or federal offices. In a recession, such assistance can be critical.”

Today Wildsource revenues are beginning to take off and tribal fishermen are supporting the entity with fishery resources. Most recently their wares were prominently displayed in Las Vegas, at the nation’s largest Indian economic business fair known as Reservation Economic Summit 2010.

“Our products are finding their way into independent health food stores and casinos and are on the menu of local Subway franchises in Alaska, boosting our revenues,” added Chris Sannito, CEO of Sun'aq Tribal Enterprises. “Through enterprises such as Wildsource, the tribe is becoming an economic player in our own homeland. The Wildsource brand products deliver on our promise of consistent, high quality, wild Alaska seafood.”

Robert Middleton who heads the Office of Indian Energy and Economic Development looks at their success as an example of how the office helps American Indian and Alaska Native economies. “Throughout Indian Country we actively try to help tribes fulfill their economic opportunities and gain economic self-sufficiency. We do this in part, by pursuing avenues that will create jobs for tribal members in their communities, help with developing economic infrastructures, and give tribes guidance on start-up businesses. In short, we help people develop sustainable economies, on their lands, where it counts.”

The Sun'aq is a marine subsistence culture on Kodiak. Subsistence has special meaning for Alaska Natives and refers to a way of living that emphasizes the importance of respecting the land and its resources. Numbering over 1500 members, the tribe looks for ways to maintain sustainable catches that will add value to their economy.

“Today our tribe lives what we value,” noted Monture. “We value our maritime traditions while taking a modern approach to business.”