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The BIA's Portland Area Office had a communications seminar October 12-13, at Kahneeta Lodge on the Warm Springs reservation. Representatives from the Northwest tribes and agencies talked with journalists and other media experts about ways and whys of improving Indian communications and public relations.

Most of the participants, an informal survey showed, thought some good things happened.

Don Sider from Time Magazine's Washington, D. C. bureau talked knowledgeable bout Indians' problems in getting accurate and adequate coverage in non-Indian publications.

Reid Chambers, formerly Interior's Associate Solicitor for Indian Affairs, emphasized the effects of public relations efforts on the legislative process and in the settlement of controversial issues.

Bill Smith, Skokomish Tribal Chairman and Executive Director of the Northwest Indian Fish Commission, discussed the Indian leader's PR difficulties and what the BIA could do to help.

Roy Sampsel, the Portland Area Office organizer of the seminar, succeeded in his determination to have some "deliverables" result from the meeting. Other speakers included Dr. Sharon Murphy of the University of Wisconsin Mass Communication Department, who focused on the Indian press; Lev Richards, the Oregonian; Rick Meyers, KATU-TV: Bill Marsh, a professional public relations consultant and Lynn Engles, the BIA Public Information Officer from Washington, D.C.

Sider said that national publications have little interest in Indian Affairs - - and even less knowledge. Except for bizarre stories, Wounded Knee and others, "you have a real problem getting to us. You are just one million out of 200 million -- not a very significant part of the population."

He urged the Indians to make media contacts before their story "is ripe." He related how the Passamaquoddy Tribe got Time coverage about a claim to large parts of the State of Maine by alerting him-early, giving him background information am keeping him informed about developments. "When that story ripened -- and it was a good news story -- we knew about it, we understood it and we were ready for it."

Chambers said that the popularity of Indian people and causes is important for achieving Indian goals. Using a local illustration, he pointed out that the Warm Springs Tribe had more than 60,000 acres of land restored to their ownership in 1972 despite the clearly expressed opposition of the Administration. "The President did not want that legislation, but he signed it because Indian causes were popular then. To veto would have been politically bad."

Chambers felt that Indian popularity was a factor in some court decisions, "We have won more cases then we thought we should.

Chambers described this popular support as "delicate, based on romance or guilt, not knowledge." He said that the American public is badly informed about the nature of Indian rights and that support of

Indian causes can be lost in the next few years because of back-lash forces generated by conflicts between Indians and non-Indians --like the fishing rights controversy in the Northwest.

Smith, referring to the fishing rights issue, said, "people can't understand why three percent of the people (the Indians) should have the right to harvest 50 percent of the fish." He said they don't question the right of a small percentage of the population (the orchard owners) to harvest Washington's apple crop. "They understand the orchard owners' property rights, but they don't see that the Indians have a similar property right to the fish."

Smith said violence on Puget Sound and getting some Indians killed would be publicized. "Our job, though, is to try to get heard without that violence." He said that the BIA should do more to help educate non-Indians about Indian Affairs.

Richards said that newsmen get conflicting stories from different Indians and suggested that "Indians should agree among themselves and then have one source to speak for them."

Meyers recommended that tribes take advantage of the federal regulations requiring the broadcast media to serve and be responsive to all community elements. "Make contacts at your local stations and push for your share of time," he urged.

Sampsel announced plans for follow-up activities to the seminar. These included a training program for people working on tribal newspapers and a seminar for tribal officials on public relations. He said that the Area Office would work with tribal leaders to prepare issue papers which could be distributed to the media as backgrounding materials. He promised also to send a list of media contacts in the Area to the tribes and BIA agencies and a list of tribal/agency contacts to the media people.

Engles said that his Washington office would work with the other BIA area offices to help them develop similar programs for improving tribal communications and public relations.