Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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An emergency created by a historic lack of salmon in the Bristol Bay area of Alaska has created the need for emergency funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Kevin Gover announced today the Bureau of Indian Affairs would immediately release $206,000 to be used for emergency assistance to the hundreds of Native Alaskans dependent on the salmon harvest in the Bristol Bay area. ·

"Emergencies come in many forms, they are not just hurricanes ·and tornadoes," Gover stated, "The salmon harvest in Bristol Bay has been the smallest in 20 years; and this will lead to suffering among the Native Alaskans, as surely as if a hurricane had hit the area." Many Native Alaskans depend on the salmon catch as their only source of income, and as the primary means of feeding their families through the Alaska winter. This year's poor harvest means that without some assistance, many Alaska Natives may go hungry this winter. "This is only a small amount of assistance, but it can be used immediately by the Native Alaskans for emergency food, shelter and clothing. We tend to see disasters and emergencies in the terms of storms that blow in and destroy, but the lack of salmon in the nets of Native Alaskans will create emergency conditions in the months to come if we do not act now. The lack of fish in this year’s catch is a true disaster even though it is not as dramatic as the destruction of a storm."

This year's dismal catch, worth less than one third of an average annual catch, has created hardship for Alaska Natives dependent on the salmon. Last year's catch was also below projections, and the accumulated debt of two substandard years is causing many Native Alaskans to look at a winter without enough food, fuel oil, or clothing to face the - winter ahead. "The amount of money here is simply not enough", stated Gover, "But by quick delivery and distribution, possibly we can help see the Native Alaskans through until more relief funds can be found."