Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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A nearly $40,000 Bureau of Indian Affairs grant to the Lummi Indian Business Council in Bellingham, Washington, has translated into a $2.5 million a year fishermen's corporation that provides jobs for tribal members and revenues for tribal coffers.

The tribally-chartered corporation, formed in July, markets the catches of 12 Indian fishing operations to buyers in Japan, France, Belgium and the United States. The results are impressive:

- Profits for individual fishermen, which number over 40, have increased 10 percent since the corporation began.
- The Lummi tribe has raised more than $30,000 through tribal corporate taxes and a participating tribe has increased profits by 10 percent.
- The corporation already has marketed nearly 1.2 million pounds of sockeye, king, silver and chum fish.

Larry Kinley, the chairman of the Lummi tribe, said a little creativity has resulted in a lot of success.

"Obviously, the opportunities this one business project has made possible for the tribe are incredible," Kinley said. "There has been a merging of tribal, federal and private initiatives to create a success."

"The management of this corporation is exemplary," said Stanley Speaks, the BIA area director in Portland. "Other tribes could well benefit from the manner in which the fishermen's corporation conducts business."

Kinley said he is heeding that advice and developing a model plan for other tribes to follow. The plan, which relies on the corporation's experiences with start-up and developing overseas contracts, will be available to other tribes early next year, according to Kinley.

"Quality was established as the corporate philosophy in the initial briefing of the stockholders," said Kinley, who now points out that 95 percent of his fish receive a number one rating from buyers.

The marketing side of the corporation is only phase one of the project. Kinley said plans are to build a processing and cold storage plant for the thousands of tons of fish still to come. "The success of the Lummi fishing cooperative is just further evidence that Indian Country knows how to do business," said the Interior Department's Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Ross Swimmer. "Tribal resources today are being harnessed to create needed jobs and revenues for Indian people." Swimmer, a former tribal chairman who now heads the BIA, said business development is the cornerstone of his policy in dealing with the nation's more than 300 federally-recognized tribal governments. The BIA will spend $63.5 million this year on business development grants and loans.