

## **Mushroom Project for 2005**

### Project Description

UAF **Cooperative Extension Service** has initiated a rural development project that involves providing rural Alaskans, especially those impacted by the forest fires of 2004, with information and outreach education material relating to the economic opportunities and potential benefits from the possible morel mushroom crop next summer.

The history of commercial harvest of post-fire morel mushrooms in Alaska is limited, with the only documented case occurring the year following the 98,000 acre Tok River Fire. In 1991, pickers and buyers from outside Alaska traveled north to pick mushrooms and buy mushrooms from local residents. While some Tok residents made money from morels that year, the CES feels that many more Alaskans could potentially become involved in the commercial harvest of post-fire morels. This rural development project seeks to increase the number of Alaskans who benefit from the possible morel crop, in a range of roles including mushroom picking, buying, and wholesale marketing.

A multi-agency task force has been formed to coordinate the efforts of this project. Including representation from the following organizations: BLM, DNR Lands, Division of Forestry, USFS, UAF, Cooperative Extension Service, RuralCap, Doyon, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Fairbanks Northstar Borough, and the UAF Small Business Development Association. Four focus groups within the task force have been established to look at the following issues areas: Land Mgmt. and Permitting, Education, Marketing and Research. An applied research project to document the events of next summer is being considered, and would look at scientific, social, and economic aspects of a possible morel mushroom harvest.

The mushroom task force has plans to hold workshops in communities affected by last summer forest fires, including Fort Yukon, Tok, Fairbanks, Circle/Central, and Eagle, Alaska. The purpose of these workshops is to present and disseminate education and outreach materials and publications and to reach the target stakeholders.

The goal is to provide information and answer questions about mushroom identification, harvesting, handling, processing, transporting, and selling. Information will also be presented about the required permits, land status, ownership, markets, buying stations, royalties and prices. Information regarding small business development and management, topics such as business planning, record keeping, workman's comp, insurance, liabilities, financing for working capital and equipment purchase, will also be provided. At least we hope!

The Mushroom Task Force will utilize existing networks to reach the target stakeholders, including project articles that are planned for a variety of media outlets. For information about the Mushroom Project for 2005 contact: Ben Seifert, UAF/Cooperative Extension Service, Glennallen Project Office at (907) 822-4477 or email: [fnbes@uaf.edu](mailto:fnbes@uaf.edu).