



Current Issues and Research Agendas from Alaska Native Communities

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Overview of Regional Meetings

- Funded through the National Science Foundation
- Purpose: determine Alaska Natives thoughts, ideas, and opinions on research needs in their respective regions
- Conducted in traditional Talking Circle format
- **Northwest** January 22-24, 2003
- **Southcentral** May 13-14, 2003
- **Southeast** January 22-23, 2004
- **Yukon-Kuskokwim** March 11-12, 2004



Northwest Regional Meeting



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Northwest Regional Meeting

- 11 communities
- Includes 5 major rivers: Buckland, Kobuk, Noatak, Selawik, and Wulik
- 75% are Inupiat Eskimo who rely on a subsistence life style of caribou, reindeer, beluga whale, walrus, musk ox, fish, seals, berries, and various plants



Northwest Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Earth Science*

- Exploration of changes in the local ecosystem: caribou migration, oceanographic changes and the corresponding relationship between the changes and the health of local indigenous people
 - Impact of water, sewer, and solid waste installations in remote Arctic villages on local ecosystems



Northwest Regional Meeting

“The development that is going on in our community is changing our lifestyles. We see that they are building houses and putting in water and sewer and we are worried about the effect of this. For example, not too long ago a pipe burst and 300 gallons of raw sewage went into our river.

We don't know what is happening. We don't really even think about it and we don't realize the positive and negative effects. When development is happening in our community, we have to be involved.”
(Charlie Curtis, Kiana Traditional Council)



Northwest Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Atmospheric*

- Global changes and the impact/relationship to the Arctic ecosystem, such as animal migration, waterway and climate changes
 - Unusual lights in the sky above several Native communities
 - Boundary and weather pattern shifts as reflected in changes and impacts to localized Arctic ecosystems



Northwest Regional Meeting

- Quotes on **Climate:**

- "We've seen a lot of change. For example, there are plants growing where they didn't used to be. The plants are absorbing the sun and rain. It used to get so cold that the kerosene oil used to freeze. We see things now like willow growing. Plants used to be just on the edge of the streams, but now they are growing in the middle. We can't go in the streams anymore." (*Enoch Schiedt, Maniilaq Association*)
- "We are being impacted by global warming. You could notice in our oceans, our ugruk are going out due to the melting, even though we don't have any snow. Their main feed is being over-harvested. There is not enough food, and they know their own way. I'm not talking about us Natives, but we are paying for it and we want to survive." (*Enoch Schiedt, Maniilaq Association*)



Northwest Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Oceanographic Research*

- Impact on preserving the traditional Native lifestyle:
 - retaining cultural traditions
 - physical impact upon communities by changes in water temperatures
 - current and channel changes, water depths
 - migration changes
 - quality, quantity, and availability of fish



Northwest Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Arctic Social Science*

- Impact of social and economic trends upon the local indigenous peoples' traditional ways of life
 - Comparison of historic Native ways to life today



Northwest Regional Meeting

- Quote on **Traditional Knowledge**:
 - “There is a difference between knowledge and wisdom. The person with wisdom came to it naturally. The true elders had the true wisdom and lived the true Inupiaq way of life. The key to our survival is adapting. Due to certain things that happened to our communities since 1960, we’ve had over 40 deaths due to suicide or alcohol, and 70 percent of our kids don’t graduate from high school. Here we are blaming others. Instead, we should control our own destiny.” (*Charlie Curtis, Kiana Traditional Council*)



Northwest Regional Meeting

- **Communication & Research Process Concerns**
 - ***Accuracy of information – Communicating results***
 - Information that is collected by researchers is not brought back to the community for review prior to release of findings.
 - Without this review process, inaccurate information can be introduced into the research process and result in inaccurate findings
 - Ensure research results are presented to participants and local government entities such as local Tribal councils and regional corporations.



Southcentral Regional Meeting

Anchorage, Kenai Pen., Aleutian Islands



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Southcentral Regional Meeting

- Over 200 Islands in Aleutian Chain
- Chain is over 1,100 miles long
- 82,392 square miles of area: Anchorage to Homer plus the Aleutian Islands
- About 38% of the population are Alaska Native with the majority (40,000) residing in Anchorage
- Seabirds, fish, marine and land mammals, plants, berries



Southcentral Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- Earth Science

- Research efforts should determine what changes are occurring in Alaska's glaciers compared to changes on a global scale.
 - Exploration of changes in the local ecosystem, i.e., decline in health and number of wildlife, marine life and birds, introduction of new species and understanding the reasons for these changes and the affect upon the lifestyle of Alaska's indigenous people.



Southcentral Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Arctic Social Science*

- Establishment of a Learning Center based on traditional values with Elders in leadership roles and involved in the creation of all aspects of center
 - Research Native worldviews to discover commonalities throughout
 - Research the effectiveness of a western science-based education system in regards to Native students as it relates to special needs determinations,
 - Opportunities to learn and apply Native knowledge, cultural awareness of educational staff and make appropriate recommendations to State education officials



Southcentral Regional Meeting

- **Quotes on Community**

- “One of the biggest challenges is bringing the elders and youth together to help our young people understand our traditional ways. They need an understanding of our sense of time. For example, when we had our first spirit camp back in 1992 on St. Paul, we couldn’t get the kids to be quiet – the silence that we talked about that is so important in connecting to the creation, so we had to start by saying, okay, you’re going to be quiet for five minutes. You’re going to sit out there for five minutes. When our kids are so programmed and moving through time so fast with their minds, they are completely unable and incapable of connecting to the understanding of the traditional ways. It’s a critical concept that I don’t see anyone addressing.” (*Larry Mercurieff, St. Paul Island*)



Southcentral Regional Meeting

Native Knowledge & Research Process Concerns

- Aligning traditional needs with that of western science applications when completing applications for research projects
- Difficult to submit an effective application because the two areas often approach a subject from opposing views



Southcentral Regional Meeting



“Subsistence is a very divisive issue in the State of Alaska and it’s not the correct word to use in dealing with the resources out there in rural Alaska. When they’re talking about subsistence, sometimes other people or other cultures understand it as the way of human beings. An elder from the Interior of Alaska was telling me, instead of using the word ‘subsistence’ why don’t we start saying ‘livelihood.’ It’s very generic, even the simplest minds can understand livelihood.” ***(Ole Lake, Hooper Bay)***



Southcentral Regional Meeting

- **Concerns in Continuity of Research**

- Coordinate research and use equally weighted priorities. Many organizations participate in research projects throughout the Arctic region, often researching different aspects of the same issue.
- Action-Oriented Results. Studies are conducted over several years with no action taken.



Yukon Kuskokwim Regional Meeting



Yukon Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

- Population 16,774 (Bethel Census area)
- 85.5% Alaska Native
- 56 villages
- Subsistence communities
- Tourism, commercial fishing, government



Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Climate*

- Water issues
 - Rivers shallower,
 - Lakes drying up
 - Increase in different kinds of spiders/bugs not native to Alaska
 - Freezing weather has slowed down



Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Community*

- Sewage
 - Location of land fills
 - Dumping of batteries
 - Method of recruiting subjects for research
 - Mildew in homes



Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Development/Industry*

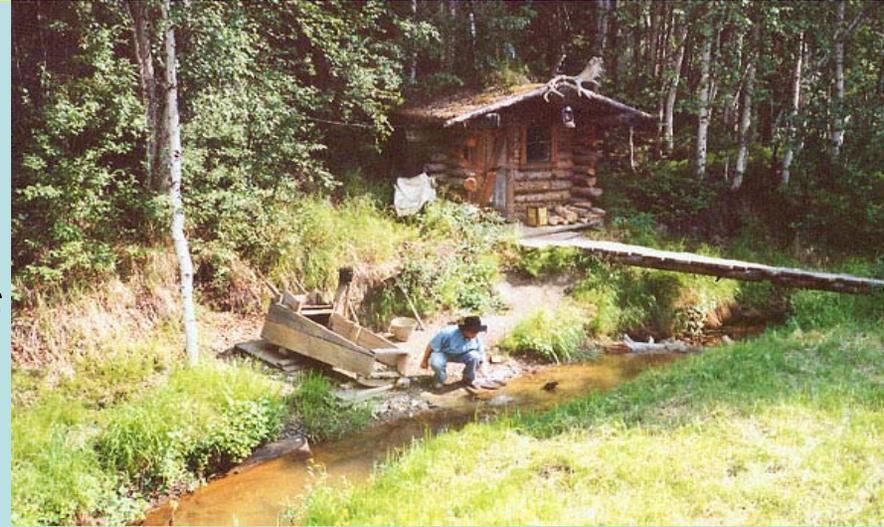
- Bering Sea being raped of its resources
 - Mining, dumping of chemical waste, byproducts, equipment
 - Deforestation
 - Increase in tourism, sport fishing/hunting and problems they bring (fuel, planes, pollution, waste of animals)
 - Noise pollution, hydrocarbons dumped daily, bio-genetically changed foods



Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

“Big companies are hurting us, like the mining companies causing contaminants. They are using heavy equipment and dredges, arsenic, mercury and selenium and other toxics under ground which are then dumped into the main river.

“They have settling ponds, they call them settling ponds, but every time we have rain and high water those settling ponds overflow and flow into the main rivers and we drink the water.” **(John Napoka, Sr., Tuluksak)**



Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

- *Education*

- Global as well as local
 - Native education of our youth
 - Teaching parenting to our children
 - Education and testing is skewed



Yukon-Kuskokwim Regional Meeting

- **Research Concerns**

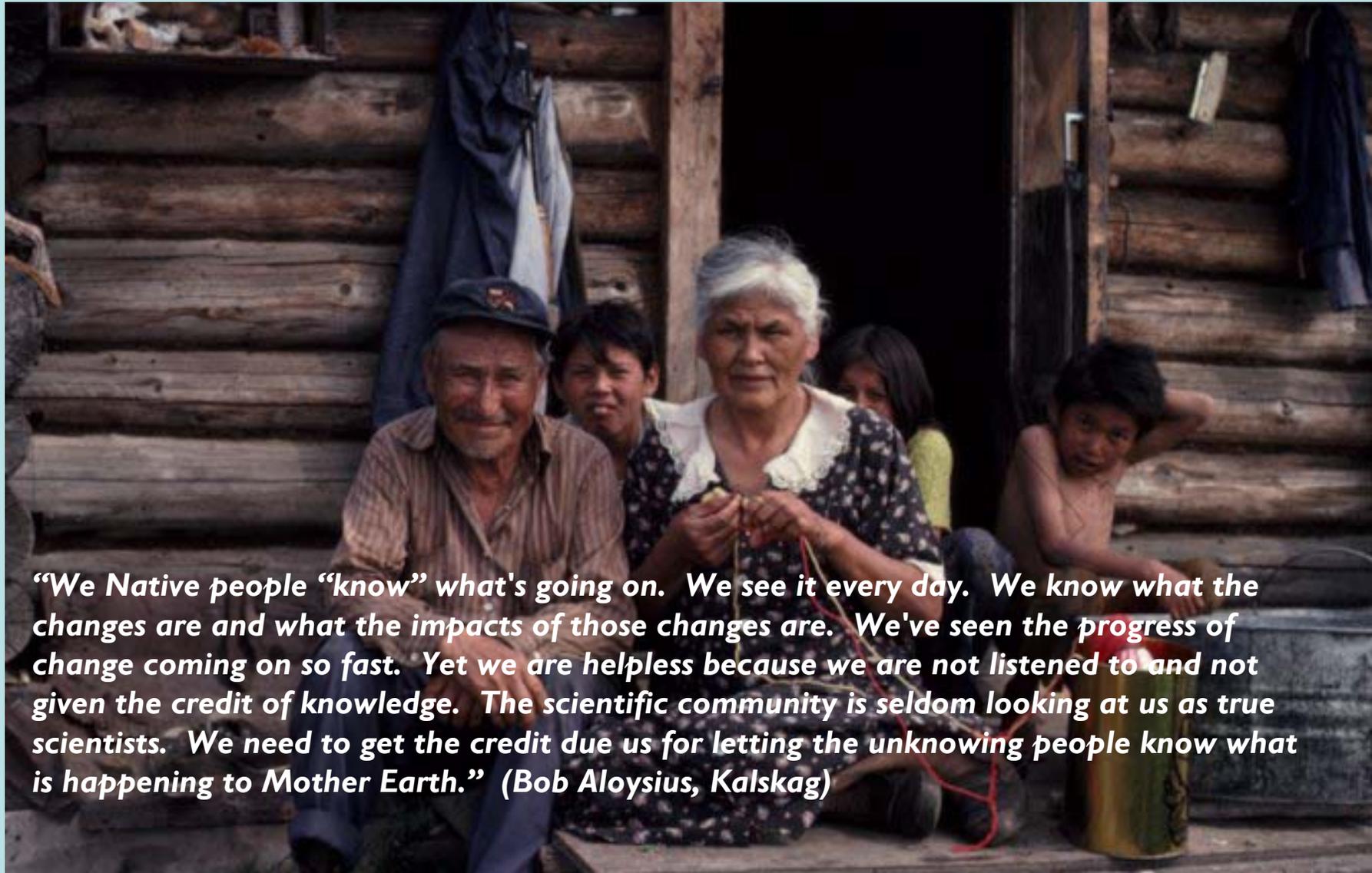
- ***Environment***

- Local observations document changes in wildlife (population, pattern, behavior), plant life, erosions, abandoned beaver dams, atmospheric changes

- ***Health***

- Sickness/deformity/change in taste of fish
 - Increased asthma/respiratory and allergic problems
 - Importance of Native foods





“We Native people “know” what's going on. We see it every day. We know what the changes are and what the impacts of those changes are. We've seen the progress of change coming on so fast. Yet we are helpless because we are not listened to and not given the credit of knowledge. The scientific community is seldom looking at us as true scientists. We need to get the credit due us for letting the unknowing people know what is happening to Mother Earth.” (Bob Aloysius, Kalskag)