

STUDY TITLE: Historical Indicators of Alaska Native Culture Change (TR-15).

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SPONSORING OCS REGION: Alaska.

APPLICABLE PLANNING AREA(S): Gulf of Alaska; Kodiak; Cook Inlet; Shumagin; Aleutian Arc; North Aleutian Basin; St. George Basin; St. Matthew Hall; Bowers Basin; Aleutian Basin; Navarin Basin; Norton Basin; Hope Basin; Chukchi Sea; Beaufort Sea.

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PROJECT MANAGER(S): W. Davis.

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KEY WORDS: Gulf of Alaska; Kodiak; Cook Inlet; Shumagin; Aleutian Arc; North Aleutian Basin; St. George Basin; St. Matthew Hall; Bowers Basin; Aleutian Basin; Navarin Basin; Norton Basin; Hope Basin; Chukchi Sea; Beaufort Sea; Alaska; cultural impacts; human population; literature review; synthesis; development; impacts; sociocultural change; historical review; Alaska Region.

BACKGROUND: The report is based on a search of the anthropological literature on the culture and history of Alaskan Native coastal communities and populations and considers previous impact of modernization on social and cultural change, with specific focus on the range of factors and consequences likely to result from intensive industrial activities, such as outer continental shelf (OCS) petroleum development. The findings should provide baseline and background information which will assist in assessments of complex and diverse communities and which will aid in projecting the chain of consequences likely to flow from current trends and OCS activities. This study was implemented as part of the Alaska OCS Social and Economics Studies Program, initiated by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (now the Minerals Management Service) in an attempt to predict and evaluate the effects of Alaska OCS petroleum development upon the physical, social, and economic environments within the State.

OBJECTIVES: (1) To identify those sociocultural aspects of Alaskan Native communities that are or have been susceptible to change, as induced by OCS-related and other activities.

DESCRIPTION: The first phase of the study was marked by an attempt to understand historic impacts on Alaskan coastal communities in order that they might be identified in the literature. This was followed by a comparative analysis of anthropological literature based primarily on eleven studies selected for their comprehensive perspective. The combined input of this varied research represented thirty years of field work. The concluding phase of the study effort was a synthesis of the information, consisting of ideas derived from the extant anthropological literature and ideas generated by the author. Conclusions put forth by the author were drawn from two sources, including indirect support from the published literature and previous research with Native peoples of Alaska.

SIGNIFICANT CONCLUSIONS: Aspects of small Native Alaskan communities which appeared most susceptible to change were varied and included: (1) adoption of new technology; (2) an increase in physical mobility of people in and out of villages; (3) an increase in the diversity of human relationships as the social world of villagers expands; (4) an increase in interception of political structures with villages; (5) an increase in conflicts, stemming from an increase in issues about which to differ; and (6) a continued fluctuation of cash gathering and subsistence activities. Those aspects of Alaska native cultural change which appeared least susceptible to change included: (1) the family, which will continue to be one of the most resilient aspects of Native culture; (2) a continuation of the strong sense of village identity; and (3) the seasonality of yearly activities.

STUDY RESULTS: Family and kin were consistently reported as being key to Native life. Change within these relationships were assumed to be indicative of the importance of change. Family ties serve as the primary link which binds both the network of villages together and the villages to urban areas. Major factors which have influenced the change in families over time include the adoption of Western values concerning divorce and remarriage, a reduction in infant and child mortality (thereby creating an increase in the average number of offspring each marital pair has had to raise), and other individuals, non-Eskimo and non-kin, which have become increasingly important in communities with the present cash and wage economy.

The Church has been considered to be a key social indicator and has become an integral part of the village, providing a social center, new avenues for leadership, a mechanism for the resolution of conflict, and perhaps replacing former kin-based factions with church-based factions. The school has also been considered a key social indicator. Other possible indicators of change include racial and cultural homogeneity, reference group identification (e.g., attitude and behavior influenced by a set of norms assumed to be held by others), and social horizons (i.e., connections between communities and identification with the outside world), which suggests a historic basis for the current directions of change observed.

The recent development of a renewed interest in traditional arts and language has indicated a continued validation of the distinct ethnic groups in Alaska. Traditional economic patterns and organization of Native Alaskan culture have been greatly modified in the direction of increased specialization within the village, use of new technology, and by the increase of cash and related dependence on outside funds, goods, and jobs. Tasks are still organized largely by sex and age, but new variables of skill, education, and external contacts now enter.

Traditional resources continue to be harvested, however they are now done with new tools, new forms of transportation, at greater distances and at newly regulated times of year. Industries which have flourished as a result of outside influence include fur trading, mineral development, commercial fishing, and military installations and other construction activities. These activities, as well as the continuity of subsistence activities have perpetuated seasonality and fluctuation in the economies of small Native communities.

A brief consideration of some technological changes suggested that modern material pieces (e.g., snow machines, guns, etc.) were relatively easy to adapt to village cultures, and may have, in some instances, enhanced that way of life.

Recent trends seemed to indicate increased levels of political organization within and between Native groups. At least four levels of "tribal" organizations appear to exist in Alaska today, including: local communities, or villages; clusters of villages into regional groups; Regional Corporations; and the Alaska Federation of Natives.

The problem of alcohol consumption in Native Alaska is discussed with the following generalizations drawn: response to alcohol appears to have been that alcohol use was acceptable from the beginning, with the consumption of large amounts occurring seasonally. Drinking is now part of village lifestyle and, for some, represents a dominant leisure time activity. One potential result of OCS development activity, or any other industrial development which involves increased transportation services, is represented by an increase in the likelihood of greater alcohol availability and consumption.

STUDY PRODUCT(S): Davis, N. Y. 1978. Historical Indicators of Alaska Native Culture Change. A final report by Cultural Dynamics for the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management Alaska OCS Office, Anchorage, AK. NTIS No. PB-294180/AS. Social and Economic Studies Program Technical Report No. 15. Contract No. 14-12-0001-29002. x + 148 pp.

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