

Traditional Ecological Knowledge of 20th-Century Ecosystems and Fish Populations in the Kuskokwim Bay Region

Abstract: This study documents traditional knowledge of 6 Yup'ik Eskimo elders of the lower Kuskokwim Bay area currently residing in the villages of Quinhagak and Goodnews Bay. Informants described their observations of the abundance and distribution of local anadromous and freshwater resident fish species over the past 88 years (1916 to 2004). The study focused on fish life history, migration, spawning, distribution, past and present subsistence activities, and long-term trends in subsistence fish populations in the lower Kuskokwim Bay drainages. Information was gathered on six species of Pacific salmon (including rainbow trout), Dolly Varden, Arctic char, lake trout, Alaska blackfish, burbot, northern pike, rainbow smelt, round whitefish, Bering cisco and Pacific herring. According to these 6 key respondents, the most important species for local subsistence harvest over the course of their lives were Chinook, sockeye, chum, and coho salmon, Dolly Varden, Arctic grayling, Alaska blackfish, rainbow smelt, and Bering cisco. Although much has changed over the course of the lives of these 6 people in regard to harvest technology, processing methods, and access to other goods and resources, the fish species that were valued and harvested 80 years ago are still consumed today.

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