

Community Coastal Impact Assistance Program

Protecting and Conserving Subsistence in Coastal Areas

Award Amount

\$ 63,250

Grantee

Bering Straits Coastal Association

Project Contact

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Location

This project will be located in the Bering Straits Coastal Association region which includes the area of the former Bering Straits Coastal Resource Service Area, generally the Norton Bay and Seward Peninsula area in Western Alaska. All 15 communities within the coastal zone of the area serviced by the Bering Straits Coastal Association: Brevig Mission, Diomedede, Elim, Gambell, Golovin, Koyuk, Savoonga, Shaktoolik, Shishmaref, St. Michael, Stebbins, Teller, Unalakleet, Wales, and White Mountain. The other communities that are not currently occupied or occupied on a seasonal basis may be involved in this project as appropriate: Tin City, Council, King Island, Mary's Igloo, Port Clarence, and Solomon. The project will be managed from Unalakleet located at 63.8816 North Latitude and 160.798 West Longitude.

Project Duration

Project Start date: July 1, 2013
Project End Date: April 30, 2015
Project Duration: 2 years

Project Description

The purpose of this project is to protect and conserve coastal areas through the collection and dissemination of key information about subsistence species and use areas. The project will benefit the natural coastal environment of the BSCA region by providing state and federal resource managers and permitting agencies with a single source of information about subsistence. Easy access to the following information will lead to better decisions: Current areas of subsistence use, a summary of all studies about subsistence in the area, an analysis of data gaps, information about changes in distribution of subsistence species, information about impacts to subsistence areas from a changing climate, and information about the condition of subsistence species. The products from this study will lead to more informed management decisions because resource managers will have more information about risk and uncertainty. The more information managers have, the greater the benefit to the natural coastal environment. An added benefit will result from improved local stewardship because residents will have information about current conditions and how their actions can reduce impacts to subsistence

areas and habitats for subsistence species.

Subsistence has been identified by the BSCA as the highest priority in the region. Subsistence provides an important source of nutritious food, it sustains cultural traditions, and it is the most important component of the way of life of for the people in this region. Area residents are concerned about potential threats to subsistence uses from development, from increased hunting pressure from outsiders, and from impacts related to climate change. Potential pressures on subsistence use areas include increases in tourism, expansion of commercial trawling in Norton Sound, increased mining exploration and development, proposed new roads, and potential oil and gas development in the Arctic. These activities could result in degradation of coastal areas, displacement of subsistence species, changes to migration patterns for subsistence species, and impacts to access to subsistence resources by area residents. Changing climatic conditions and long-distance transport of pollutants have raised concerns about impacts to subsistence habitats. Residents have noted changes in migration and distribution patterns, changes in the numbers of subsistence species, changes to habitat, anomalies in the condition of fish and wildlife, and new species not seen previously in the region.

The BSCA Program Director will manage this project and ensure completion of project tasks with assistance from a subsistence specialist contracted with the BSCA. The Program Director will develop a request for proposals for a qualified consultant to assist in meeting the project goals and objectives. With approval from the BSCA board, the Program Director will select the consultant and enter into a contract. The contract will describe the project approach and methodology. The consultant will assist with the project tasks described below during the 2-year project.

Year 1

- Complete a literature search, web search and agency inquiry about information related to subsistence uses and potential impacts to subsistence use areas in the region (e.g., impacts from climate change, increased shipping, increased tourism, large-scale commercial fishing, and development projects).
- Complete an annotated bibliography of studies and reports about subsistence use, changing environmental conditions and impacts to subsistence.
- Complete an analysis of data gaps and information needs which will include a review of the literature and interviews with state and federal subsistence specialists to determine their priorities for future subsistence research.
- Interview 30 community leaders in the 15 BSCA communities about current issues, priorities for future subsistence studies, and how local and traditional knowledge should be incorporated into studies.
- Hold public meetings in at least 5 BSCA communities to discuss impacts observed by residents to subsistence habitats, including impacts from changing climatic conditions, impacts from development, and local and long distance transport of pollutants.
- Encourage residents to participate in the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's Alaska Climate Events Program that maps climate-related events. Residents will be

encouraged to report impacts of climate change on habitats by subsistence species (e.g., changes in location, numbers, migration patterns, or appearance).

Year 2

- Distribute copies of the most relevant existing studies to school libraries in the 15 BSCA communities.
- Complete a draft and final report summarizing major findings of relevant studies, information identified during the public meetings, and information from residents about the condition of subsistence species.
- Distribute copies of the final report to the 15 BSCA communities, state and federal resource management agencies and to others upon request.

The Program Director will invite the communities, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence and the Environmental Public Health Program of the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to participate in this project.

Measurable Goals and Objectives

Year 1

- Complete an annotated bibliography of subsistence studies.
- Complete a summary of data gaps and priorities for future research.
- Provide copies of all project reports and brochures to state and federal permitting agencies that manage subsistence species and their habitat for their use in resource management decisions.

Year 2

- Distribute copies of relevant studies to libraries in the 15 BSCA communities.
- Complete draft and final reports with an analysis of subsistence studies, local and traditional knowledge, data gaps, subsistence research priorities for the future, and actions residents and state and federal managers can take to conserve and protect subsistence areas.
- Distribute final report to community leaders within the BSCA region and state and federal agencies that manage coastal resources.

CIAP Authorized Use

This project is consistent with Authorized Use #1 – Projects and activities for the conservation, protection, or restoration of coastal areas, including wetlands. Cultural preservation is recognized by federal regulation as a coastal use (15 CFR 930.11(b)), and subsistence is a vital part of cultural preservation in the BSCA. Also, subsistence provides a healthy and economic food source. A direct connection has existed between the people of this region and the subsistence way of life for thousands of years.

This project will provide information to local residents and state and federal agencies about ways to protect and conserve subsistence species and subsistence use areas. The indirect benefit will be informed management decisions through improved information about the condition of

subsistence species, use areas and impacts from development and changing environmental conditions. Specifically, the following benefits will result from this project.

- The synthesis of existing information about subsistence into one document will provide state and federal resource managers and permitting agencies with a single source for information.
- The study will identify existing gaps in information that will lead to more informed decisions. Knowing what information gaps exist will allow managers to consider potential risks and uncertainty from management decisions and prioritize future decisions.
- Information about subsistence is important for managing coastal areas. Federal agencies manage subsistence under guidance from the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). The State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game addresses subsistence issues through its Subsistence Division. Easy access to subsistence information will lead to better decisions when considering impacts to both subsistence species and their habitats. Growing pressure on subsistence areas have resulted from an increase in mining exploration and development and climate change. There is a potential for accelerated impacts from new roads and expansion of commercial trawling areas.

The final project document will include recommendations for future subsistence studies gathered from interviews with communities and state and federal agencies. These recommendations will help managers target data gaps when allocating future funds. Subsistence information benefit to managers when addressing impacts to subsistence, subsistence resources and habitats of subsistence resources.