LOOKING AT CHANGE

Norton Sound residents have long depended upon natural resources to support their traditional subsistence way of life. Because of their long-term, multi-generational understanding of the region, residents often can recall short- and long-term changes in harvest opportunities, escapement, colonization, climate change, and harvest pressure. A multi-dimensional understanding of the ecology of the region, and specifically salmon cycles over time, can be provided by recording this knowledge, tying it to biological information, and placing it into a geographic context.

OUR OBJECTIVES

Document Norton Sound local and traditional knowledge in order to describe observed changes to the salmon resources and environment in a geographic context that would serve as an aid in fisheries management, and freshwater and marine ecosystem research.

Increase the capacity of the regional Native non-profit organization to become more meaningfully involved in both biological and social research projects.

HOW WE DID IT

This project worked with communities in the Norton Sound region, from St. Michael in the south to Wales in the north, and including Diomede and St. Lawrence Island (Savoonga). We used a locally-hired intern as well as a research assistant from each community to...
help conduct interviews with at least four experts within each of the nine communities participating in the project. We used a semi-structured interview guide along with maps to interview participants. Community experts were also asked to quantify environmental changes in measurable ways so that the information could be compared across the region.

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

While the specific changes each community experienced are different, there are broad similarities in the types of changes and their impacts on communities. There is a wide concern from participating communities about both changes to salmon populations they utilize and environmental changes.

PRODUCTS AND OUTREACH

Our report is available for use by resource managers and researchers. We have added searchable interview transcripts to the Eskimo Heritage Program archive, which is open to the public and researchers conducting research for non-commercial purposes.

WHAT’S NEXT?

The information from this project continues to be valuable in advocating for continued and improved opportunities for salmon harvest by region residents. Kawerak is now conducting a similar project about traditional knowledge of non-salmon fish used for subsistence.