

REPORT OF THE STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS WITH ALEUTS by Joanna Burger
September 10, 2003

INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of our trip was to meet with the Aleut communities on Unalaska, Nikolski and Atka in a series of one-on-one, small groups and more formal meetings to present and discuss the Amchitka Science Plan and to solicit input regarding all phases of the plan. We were particularly interested in their views regarding our biological sampling plan, and any additional species to be added. We were accompanied by Robert Patrick of I/PIA.

Our trip was a success in many different ways. It was extremely important for CRESP to meet the Aleuts in their native communities, and to talk to other stakeholders (particularly in Unalaska). We had several meetings at each of the islands, and found that the face-to-face small meetings were extremely important. People were often much more willing to talk to us in small groups or singly, and to provide very valuable feedback than in more formal groups. While we had expected the Aleuts to be shy in the villages of Nikolski and Atka, and outspoken in Unalaska, this was not the case. We were warmly received everywhere we went, and there was no animosity toward us or the project. Everyone seemed to welcome the project, particularly as we got further west (closer to Amchitka). People were quite willing to discuss different aspects of the Science Plan and the biological sampling.

We also learned some important lessons about working in the Aleutians and with the Aleut people. Working with Bob Patrick proved to be extremely helpful, we made a good team. We benefited greatly from the food consumption survey that APIA had recently completed at Unalaska and Nikolski. We also are looking forward to identifying the on-site project director, because people are now expecting this project to go forward.

Our schedule was as follows:

18 August M Newark-Anchorage
19 August T Anchorage to Dutch Harbor
20 August W Dutch Harbor/Unalaska
21 August Th Unalaska
22 August F Unalaska
23 August S to Nikolski
24 August S Nikolski
25 August M Nikolski to Dutch Harbor
26 August T Dutch Harbor (Atka flight finally canceled)
27 August W fly to Atka
28 August Th Atka
29 August F Atka to Dutch Harbor
30 August S Dutch Harbor to Anchorage and Anchorage home
31 August S Arrive home

UNALASKA

We had meetings in Unalaska with different stakeholders, including the Aleuts, commercial fishermen, interested museum anthropologists, scientists and teachers, and others. We talked to some of these people for a half hour to two hours, and many had extremely important observations and suggestions. We left copies of the complete plan (both hard copy and CD) with the library, school, Unalaska Corporation, and Tribal Office. Several people provided especially important ideas and suggestions, and we should keep them firmly in mind as we move forward.

1) Tracy Syring: Tribal Administrator for Unalaska. She was the initial contact for Bob Patrick. She met with us and introduced us to the appropriate environmental and other tribal people.

2) Mike Swetzoﬀ - tribal liaison with the corporation and city of Unalaska. His family lives at Atka. We had a good discussion with him about the main issues that the Aleut are concerned with: drinking and drugs, PCBs, evacuation of the Aleut during the Second World War, and contaminants in fish (including mercury). "They aren't very concerned about Amchitka until they hear otherwise," was his final assessment.

3) Sharon Livingston - The tribal Environmental Person. We had a good conversation with her about the issues of Amchitka, how to set up a meeting for Friday night with the right people, and about our overall Amchitka Plan. She sent out an email notice of our meeting to all the business in town and to others on their list. We gave her a complete copy of the plan for her files.

4) Janis Krukoff - APIA coordinator for the tribal conference next month on tribal governance and several other issues. A real activist, she put out a notice on her electronic newsletter information about the project and our meeting.

5) Julie Durks - Administrator for Atka (based in Unalaska). An artist in her own right, she handles the tribal budgets and grants.

6) Rick Knecht - Anthropologist and curator at the Museum, who is quite interested in contamination in general. We talked with him about the possibility of getting some fish bones from their 4,000 year old archeological dig. This would make an interesting comparison with the current studies we will be doing.

7) Jim Dickson - Environmental person for the City of Unalaska. Quite knowledgeable about the Aleutian chain and its marine resources.

8) Shawn Dickson - a biologist who is particularly knowledgeable about the local food customs and subsistence harvests, which she discussed with us.

9) Jeff Richardson - editor for the local newspaper, *The Dutch Harbor Fisherman* (fisherman@arctic.net) and quite interested in the research, Amchitka and contamination in the region. He had covered the May DOE meeting and was anxious to hear a broader perspective on Amchitka and its hazards.

10) Don Graves - Research and Development for Unisea.

11) John Nordin - Production Manager for Westward Seafood

12) Sinclair Wild - Surimi Production Manager for Alyeska Seafood. The latter three will be particularly helpful when we think about commercial fisheries. After some initial suspicion they all graciously allowed us to tour the fish processing plants and photograph the processes. This was very illuminating.

UNALASKA - GOVERNMENTAL CONTACTS

The fishing fleet has regulations, law enforcement, and observers to contend with, and these can be of help in our sampling regime. People we met with who will be useful:

1. Ernest Soper - Special Agent, NOAA, NMFS, 907 581 2061 or fax 907 581 2064 (Ernie.Soper@noaa.gov). He is in charge of enforcing the fishing regulations. He has the technical capability of tracking boat movements and activities through a Vessel

Monitoring System which is satellite-based. He knows a lot about the boat captains who might be most helpful because they are usually in compliance, and want to have ways to help when they have had an infraction (to make us, so to speak). He provided us with the names of the CEO of the Adak Fisheries LLC (cannery in ADAK closest to Amchitka).

2. Kjetil Solberg, cell: 907 250 0419, Fax 907 592 4241, office phone 907 592 4366, email: ksolberg@adakfisheries.com. and a boat captain for the Seafisher, who might be helpful Phone 206 282 3277 and fax 206 282 6738.

3. Mary Schwenzfeier - Alaska state shellfish observer program coordinator. She has people on the crab boats, and when they catch bycatch they could take samples. She is working to determine the crab boats that will be operating closest to Amchitka.

NIKOLSKI

Travel in the Aleutians is very problematic. Our flight to Nikolski was delayed for several hours because of winds, rain, and fog. The flights are often canceled (after people wait around the airport for half the day). We flew in a seven passenger twin engine Navajo operated by Pen Air (a company which currently has no competition and is not beloved by the islanders, even though it is their lifeline, so to speak). The flight to Nikolski is only an hour, and we flew below the dense cloud bank the whole way.

We arrived in Nikolski to find that more than half the village and all of the kids had turned out to greet us, and the school teachers who returned with us. We were met by the Tribal Council President and the chief environmental person for the tribe. They took us to the trailer where we will be staying, and we started to arrange our meeting. The meeting was held at the school and was well attended by over half of the adult population, including the Elders. The issues they brought up included mercury and PCBs, migration of the marine fish and mammals (from Amchitka to here), keeping their grandchildren safe, volcanoes and earthquakes, and the entire marine food web. They were especially interested in adding several kinds of subsistence foods such as salmon (which we had in our "probably omit" category, fish eggs (that they mix with berries) and octopus.

People to keep in contact with here included:

1. Tyler Schlung - the local teacher. Very interested in keeping the children involved in these issues and perpetuating traditional Aleut cultures and way of life. We left a copy of the entire plan with him for the School Library which doubles as the town library. Val Dushkin- tribal elder; good source of information on subsistence use. Pauline Dushkin - also provided information on cooking and food preparation. Specifically asked about mercury in these foods.

2. Arnold Dushkin - Council President. Arranged the meeting and able to get out the elders and others in the community.

3. George Bezezekoff - Environmental manager - very interested in the issues and in the ecosystem of the whole Aleutian chain.
4. William Ermeloff - the oldest person in the community, knows more about past subsistence within the community.
5. Constantina Landt - An Aleut who has lived away from Nikolski for many years and is now re-learning the local Aleut ways and helping George with environmental issues. Very interested in mercury and other contamination, because of her two young daughters. She had just participated with her daughters in a Culture Camp in Unalaska, and was stranded for six days because the plane couldn't fly due to weather conditions.
6. Dwight Johnson - manager of the Lodge, and very interested in the environmental problems. Since the children were asking us what we were doing,
7. Tim Stamm - one of the young men of the village who does a large share of the subsistence hunting and fishing, bringing back food for the elders, others in the village, and then his own family. He set up the meeting with the town's children.

We also held a meeting for the children in town, and everyone showed up. This was all of the people between 5 and 17. They were very serious, listened attentively to our talk, and then asked a lot of questions. In many ways this was the highlight of the trip. I circulated our list of species to collect, and we had quite a lively discussion about what other species they eat (fish eggs, octopus, Silver Salmon), and how much they ate of each type of food. Surprisingly, many of the older kids (10-18) were doing a lot of the fishing for the village, including going out several miles to catch Halibut. They go in small skiffs, and have to shoot the Halibut so they can drag it back to town (without it fighting their line). Some of these kids also go out duck hunting, egg-collecting (puffins, gulls, eiders), puffin hunting, and seal hunting. As we watched, this was the really active subsistence age group. The kids from one family mainly fished, as their mother had an aversion for guns, but for the most part, the kids spend a great deal of time engaged in subsistence activities, providing fish and other items for elders and others in town who cannot engage in these activities anymore.

ATKA

It took us over a day to actually get to Atka, due to the weather, both in Dutch and in Atka. This is not unusual, sometimes the planes do not come in for a week or two, or three. This was a stark reminder that weather conditions here will drastically affect our plans and planning. The weather alternated between cold, driving rain, and partly cloudy (but still chilly) days. We set up the elders meeting for 6 pm, at the request of the mayor of Atka, George Dirks. He put out the word on the VHS network, and called a number of people. Given that there are less than 90 people in town (and many are children) and many were out of town at their fish camps since the salmon were "running", the attendance of 10 elders was quite good. We then met separately with Alex Zachoney

(who runs the fish processing plant), Ray Golodoff, the environmental officer (who was ill at the time of our meeting), as well as a number of other people in town:

1. Mark Snigaroff - Council President - a younger gentleman who was quite interested in Amchitka, and asked lots of good questions.
2. George Dirks - Mayor of Atka. He was also quite interested, and wanted a copy of the complete plan for their office. He asked questions about future biomonitoring plans, as well as the recent work with terrestrial contamination on Amchitka.
3. Ray Golodoff - American Native Act (ANA) environmental technician for the town. ANA is an EPA grant mechanism for funding environmental work in these village. He is quite interested in all environmental issues. He takes care of all environmental issues with the town, such as the military sites, drums, and cleanup protocols. He reports that people don't worry about Amchitka on a daily basis, since it is too far for them to fish routinely, but they worry that fish and seals might migrate from Amchitka to Atka. He also reminded us that in the old days, subsistence trappers would venture up to 400 miles away, as far as the island of Kiska.
4. Margie Lokan - She is with the Atka Fishermen's Association, and has conducted a survey of consumption of the residents in the town, both terrestrial and marine foods. She asked very good questions, and wanted to know what could be done if there ever was a problem. She expressed concern about mercury in their foods.
5. Alex Zachoney - He runs the Atka Fisheries, which is the fish processing plant in town. They process only Halibut, which they get with a long line. They use herring on the long lines, and the boats go out for 3-5 days. We watched the preparations for departure.
6. John Golodoff - one of the original inhabitants of Attu who was a prisoner of war in Japan during the Second World War. They were sent back here to live, rather than Attu because "they didn't think there was anything left there for us," He lives out on Korvin Bay (the only one who lives there permanently), and lives almost entirely on subsistence. He was smoking Silver and Red Salmon when we visited him.

LESSONS LEARNED - Logistics

1. Air travel in the Aleutians is very difficult: out of 6 flights, only the flights to and from Dutch were "reasonably" on time; and one flight was over a day late. Our travel this time was constrained on both ends, and we were luckier than usual according to most of the people we talked to. We need to allow several extra days on both ends.
2. Even in August, it can be cold, rainy, and difficult to work because of the wind and rain. Maintaining safety among researchers will require some down days.
3. Everyone will need to be equipped with rain gear, cold weather gear, boots and clothing for weather ranging from warm (rarely even t-shirt weather) to very cold.

4. The cold water, wind, and rainy temperatures will limit how much time people can spend collecting organisms in the intertidal.

5. Many of the planes are very small (5-7 seaters) and it is not often possible to switch to different flights. Because of delays flights are almost always overbooked. The flights of PennAir within the Aleutians are all dependent on one another, so even if weather is good where you are, if the plane had to go somewhere else, it is not available for you. The pilots ONLY overnight in Dutch, so they have to have good enough weather to be able to come and get you (say in Atka) and get back to Dutch, or they won't go.

6. FedEx took 6 days for one package we sent, and 3 days for the other. The FedEx delivery from Anchorage to Dutch Harbor is via the Post Office. It probably pays to just use priority mail.

7. All of one's luggage does not necessarily get on the small planes to places like Atka and Nikolski. They take passengers first, then hand luggage, then perishables and US mail, then other things. On one of our flights (to Nikolski) some things did not get on. This suggests that one should have everything one absolutely needs in hand luggage (including some food in case food does not arrive). We needed to take our own food to both Nikolski and Atka. Fortunately two large supermarkets are close to the Grand Aleutian Hotel in Dutch Harbor.

8. If we send things ahead, they should be sent by US mail rather than any other means, because mail gets priority over all other cargo. Sometimes it is a week to three weeks before other cargo arrives at places like Nikolski and Atka. The same may be true of Adak (although these flights go directly from Anchorage to Adak).

9. The Penn Air flight from Dutch to Anchorage (which leaves somewhere around 9:00, depending) holds about 15 people and has no bathroom, but this flight usually goes, because the fog and wind build up with the day, and the 12:30 Alaska Air flight often cannot go (again, it is the same problem, it must come from Anchorage and return to Anchorage the same day). It sometimes gets all the way to Dutch and the pilot decides that he does not want to land (due to winds, rain, fog or whatever), and goes back to Anchorage.

10. Good earplugs are required on all small flights within the Aleutians - I used theirs, but they were not nearly good enough.

11. Other equipment that is necessary is

A. Alaska-based cell phone that can operate at Dutch Harbor. We were severely hampered. As it turns out Mike's cell phone service which worked in Anchorage in May, no longer works there due to a change in provider.

B. GPS. Travel around the islands is iffy and fog can settle in quickly.

C. Two-way radios. These are generally required for travel away from the smaller towns.

D. Travel on the islands is by 4 wheel drive truck or 4-wheeler off road vehicle. These can be rented at Dutch Harbor Airport and at Atka (from the City Council). We couldn't find a rental source at Nikolski.

12. Communication: All of the Aleuts have telephones in their home, and many have computers and email access. The schools we saw were well-equipped, although Atka School did not have internet access. However, for us, face to face meetings with one person or small groups proved essential. They are expecting us to return next year with progress reports. We also learned that the people are extremely polite, even when they disagree with what you are proposing. Their suggestions are often subtly provided.

LESSONS LEARNED - Sampling

1. The Aleuts are particularly interested in bird eggs (gulls obtain their food resources entirely from the marine environment and thus eggs reflect this environment). This will entail sampling on land (and the need for 4-wheelers) on Amchitka. They eat both gull and eider eggs.

2. We may be able to hire a commercial boat out of Adak to do our commercial fishing.

3. Some of the Aleut foods (such as Octopus, which everyone wanted added; it is both eaten and a top predator) may require the assistance of Aleut hunters (requires skill and their unique trapping methods). Our plan calls for 40% of the sampling to be accomplished by Aleuts.

4. In some of the villages (particularly Nikolski, and to some extent Atka), it is the younger people who do the hunting and fishing. We found that the 13-20-year olds were particularly into hunting and fishing, and often provided others in the village with these items. Many of the elders (some of whom were only 50+) no longer hunted or fished, and relied on the youngsters. Often 16-18 year olds would go out for Halibut fishing with one older person (30-40).

5. Halibut and Pacific Cod are extremely important foods in the islands.

ADDENDUM:

We met with a number of officials, individuals, and other stakeholders in both a public meeting and private meetings on Adak in June 2004, just prior to conducting our biological sampling. The public meeting mainly served to inform the Adak community, and to solicit input on our sampling regime. The importance of Halibut, Cod, and Dolly Vardin were mentioned, as well as the need for Aleut commercial fishing.