

Subcommittee on Emergency Management,  
Intergovernmental Relations and the District of Columbia

Hearing on:

“Extreme Weather in Alaska: State and Federal Response to Imminent Disasters in the Arctic”

September 13, 2003  
10:00 am  
909 West 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Testimony by:

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Mr. Chairman and Committee Members;

My name is Vivian Korthuis, Project Development Director for the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) in Bethel, Alaska. AVCP is the regional Tribal non-profit corporation for the fifty-six Tribes located along the Yukon River and the Kuskokwim River and Bering Sea Coast in Western Alaska.

Thank you for inviting AVCP today to address you regarding the Tribal issues related to Disasters in the Arctic.

The Arctic is changing, which means our homeland is changing. The Elders in our region are observing these changes. Our communities are being directly impacted. We have seen floods, extreme weather, rivers and streams changing course, and lakes drying up on the YK Delta. The impact these events have had on our villages include changes to our traditional hunting and fishing areas to the relocation of whole communities.

Over time, we have established community response teams which include the local health aides, city and tribal police, schools, tribal administrators, and local community leaders who have taken it upon themselves to plan and implement local disaster responses.

Many of our villages do not have adequate infrastructure that is required to take care of our people in crisis.

We have seen this recently with the example of the flood in Crooked Creek. In this situation, we witnessed the resilience of our people and our communities. As a regional Native Tribal Consortium, we must address every disaster in our region with the resources available to us. We rely on the Tribal Administrator to take the lead in planning for and responding to community disasters which may occur at any time of the year.

Overall, our region is truly not prepared for a large scale weather or industrial related disaster occurring either along the Yukon or Kuskokwim River or along the Bering Sea Coast. Our 56 Tribes and communities will take the lead in anything that occurs within the village. But, our villages will need help.

The help our villages need comes in many ways including appropriate planning, preparing for and responding to, and mitigating long lasting environmental impacts from erosion, floods, and extreme weather. The best way to do this is at the community level. We know what works in our villages and how best to prepare for either an unexpected crisis or a planned relocation of a community.

The region must improve the capacity to be disaster resilient. We recommend that every community have an Emergency Plan. Some villages are not prepared and some villages are. The key players in the community involve the local Tribal Police or the Village Public Safety Officer as well as the City Managers and Tribal Administrators. The Health Aides also play a key role. Funding must be made available for community planning.

The region also needs a centralized response and recovery plan. AVCP has been working on this for the past several years. We propose to develop the Western Alaska Emergency Response Center which will aid in coordination of all emergency responses in the region. Funding must be made available for this project. In addition, we are advocating for the Nunivak Deep Sea Port Response Center as well as the Hooper Bay Airport Expansion to mitigate any potential environmental crisis in the Bering Sea.

We will continue to see erosion on our rivers and Bering Sea Coast, floods that happen every spring and fall, and the effects of global warming. This issue is coming up more and more. We are not prepared for any off-shore shipping or industrial disaster that may occur on the Bering Sea Coast. The closest response center is the Coast Guard Base in Kodiak, which is hours and depending on weather-days away from our villages. This protection from disasters in our region, from the Federal Government, is essentially absent.

The best way we know how to deal with disasters in the Arctic – our homeland - is at the community level and we are requesting assistance from both the State and Federal Governments to be completely prepared and ready to respond to any disaster along the Yukon River and Kuskokwim River and Bering Sea Coast.

Thank you.

Attachment: “US Fish & Wildlife Service: Yukon Delta NWR Coastal Miles”



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Yukon Delta NWR Coastal Miles



Sources: Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom, Intermap, increment P Corp., GEBCO, USGS, FAO, NPS, NRCAN, GeoBase, IGN, Kadaster NL, Ordnance Survey, Esri Japan, METI, Esri China (Hong Kong), swisstopo, and the GIS User Community, USFWS, Region 7, Division of Realty and Conservation Planning