

MIDDLE KUSKOKWIM FOOD RESOURCES SURVEY:
STATUS REPORT

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Middle Kuskokwim Food Survey - Status Report

Last year the Subsistence Section of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game conducted its first food survey in the Middle Kuskokwim River. The results of this survey were summarized in a report to the Board of Game during their Spring 1980 meeting. The purpose of this status report is to:

- (1) review the data compiled last year by the previous Resource Specialist in Bethel;
- (2) reevaluate the methodology and interpretation of the results in last Spring's report;
- (3) present the status of current research efforts.

The Section originally became involved in the Middle Kuskokwim area as the result of concerns expressed by the local Advisory Committee, Nunam Kitlusisti and local residents that competition for the moose resource in Game Management Unit (GMU) 19A was on the increase. Although the moose population in this GMU appears to be at a healthy level, the concern was that increased floatplane activity and boat traffic were affecting the local residents' ability to harvest moose during the open fall season.

Last January, the Middle Kuskokwim Advisory Committee submitted 2 proposals to the Game Board:

- (1) Make GMU 19A a subsistence hunting zone, but restructure 19B so it would include all the foothills areas. This proposal was not considered as it was not submitted to the Board 75 days before its Spring 1980 meeting as dictated by statute.
- (2) Change the methods and means section to permit moose hunting in 19A only with motors having less than 55 horsepower. This proposal was also rejected by the Board.

The previous Resource Specialist stationed at Bethel supervised a technician in conducting the Section's survey of subsistence resource use in the Middle Kuskokwim area. The villages surveyed included Stony River, Sleetmute, Red Devil, Georgetown, Chuathbaluk and both Upper and Lower Kalskag. These villages included 176 households, 48% of which were surveyed.

The results of this survey were summarized by the previous researcher as follows:

- (1) Twenty-six percent of surveyed households felt they had enough meat for the winter.

- (2) Moose meat provided the bulk of the protein in most of the villages surveyed; alternate protein sources included fish (notably salmon), store bought meat, and other game species. These were supplements to the diet, but none were viable replacements for moose. Protein items were the major focus of household meals. There was only limited access to store bought foods.
- (3) There were variations in hunting patterns exhibited among the 7 villages.
- (4) There were variations in average household size among the 7 villages (ranges not given).
- (5) Sharing of moose was widespread within the villages. Because of this practice, interest was expressed in having moose seasons at other periods of the year besides the September season.
- (6) There was no coherent widespread opinion of who were "outside" hunters in the area.
- (7) The need for additional data was stressed.

Because of the proposals submitted to the Board by the Middle Kuskokwim Advisory Committee, the Section is continuing with its research effort in the Middle Kuskokwim area. There was a change of Resource Specialists

in the Bethel office this summer. With the change came the need to evaluate the previous research projects. It was decided that the Middle Kuskokwim survey provided an important first step, but contained many deficiencies of methodology and interpretation.

General problems included:

- (1) Inadequate coordination of the research effort with local village councils. This resulted in negligible dissemination within the villages of the intent of the research effort and lack of cooperation in some villages. For example, in the Kalskag area, the sampling was less than 40% and consisted only of those households who were willing to cooperate.
- (2) The time devoted to the survey effort was too short (1-2 days/village) to reach all households or to develop more than a narrow understanding of the village situation or the total complex of subsistence use.
- (3) A local homesteader performed the survey work and not the Resource Specialist herself. This led to some village perceptions that the principal researcher herself did not consider local concerns important enough which in part, may have resulted in some localized uncooperation. The other problem was that homesteaders themselves are considered "outsiders" by some villagers.

(4) Use of a direct question survey as the research tool resulted in several problems. Direct questioning is culturally inappropriate in most of the Kuskokwim villages and serves to alienate the local respondents. The degree of alienation inversely reflects the reliability of the data. Also the survey was overly species-specific (moose) in its investigation. This overemphasis fails to give results that reflect the totality of resources utilized and their interrelationships. Nor does it give a realistic picture of the seasonal sequence of resource availability or patterns of use.

The interpretation of the results suffered from being overly general and lacked adequate qualifiers: numbers were given but without a clear description of their context; averages were presented without noting ranges etc. The data themselves were presented in a way that was misleading and suggested the conclusion that there were very few problems with resources within the study area.

The Section considers this research effort an important first step in generating data about the Middle Kuskokwim. However, many of the questions examined previously are still unanswered and need additional research. Last year's food survey revealed pitfalls both in methodology and interpretation that will enable the Section to better respond to these problems.

This year's research effort will start in December 1980. The various village councils of the Middle Kuskokwim villages will be contacted for their input and cooperation in conducting the research. The present

Resource Specialist will visit a few villages during Russian Christmas to introduce herself as well as to explain the purpose of the upcoming research. Other pertinent agencies and Native non-profit organizations as well as media services will also be contacted to achieve the broadest dissemination of information possible about the survey.

The survey itself will utilize informal interviews and maps as the means of gathering data. The interviews will follow an interview schedule and the maps will serve as a focus of conversation to generate information, as well as documenting village use areas. The researcher will try for a 100% sample of households in the smaller villages and a minimum of 50% sample in the larger villages. The sampling will be done on a random basis and will not be based on non-response.

The survey will be conducted in February by the Resource Specialist and the Technician III from Bethel. The technician will be bilingual and from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta area. Where possible local interviews will be used to improve village coverage and cooperation.

Objectives of this research effort include the following:

- (1) Notation of subsistence resources utilized by local residents and the seasons of harvest.
- (2) Determination of areas locally important for the subsistence harvest of resources.

- (3) Determination of general timing and level of harvest and the appropriateness of both to the functional well-being of the villages.
- (4) Notation of any conflicts, whether perceived or actual, in local resource utilization.

The results of this year's survey efforts will be summarized in a report (Middle Kuskokwim Food Resources Survey - II) that will be available to the Board prior to the Spring 1981 meeting.