

TESTIMONY OF
THE SHISHMAREF EROSION AND RELOCATION COALITION
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE
JUNE 30TH, 2004

HEARING ON ALASKA NATIVE VILLAGES
AFFECTED BY FLOODING AND EROSION

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The Shishmaref Erosion and Relocation Coalition thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. I am Luci Eningowuk- Chairperson of the Coalition. The Coalition is made up of the governing bodies of the City of Shishmaref and the Native Village of Shishmaref (the federally recognized tribe), and the board of the Shishmaref Native Corporation. We have provided a packet for you today with additional information, photos, and a CD with a video file of the November 2003 storm.

I plan to address four points that are important to the community of Shishmaref. They are: (1.) relocation of the existing community to the mainland; (2.) ongoing beach erosion and efforts to minimize its impact; (3) lack of funding for immediate infrastructure needs; and (4) the need for state and federal multi-agency coordination.

The Coalition is committed to the relocation of the community. A relocation project is under way and is currently in its early planning stage. The relocation project must be completed, as the integrity of our community is dependent upon it. Our goal for the project is to provide for an expedited relocation of the community to the mainland. Within this effort, the project must provide both a safe place to live and conditions that support the subsistence life style for the people of Shishmaref. The people of Shishmaref are committed to keeping our community intact, and we are committed to preserving our heritage, which includes the subsistence way of life passed on to us by our ancestors.

Before I begin, on behalf of the Coalition, I must commend the United States Department of Agriculture's - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), for their work in assessing suitable relocation sites. Their research team has shown the greatest respect of our needs, and has proven that working with a high level of cooperation is possible. To date, the NRCS has assessed nine sites identified by the community. With their assistance, we have narrowed the search for a mainland location.

Introduction – Background

The community of Shishmaref is situated on a barrier island no wider than 1/4 of a mile and 3 miles in length. Shishmaref is located approximately 20 miles south of the Arctic Circle and 50 miles northeast of the Bering Strait. The community is home to 600 people mostly consisting of Inupiaq Natives. The community is a traditional native village that is heavily reliant on subsistence lifestyle activities based in and around the

Chukchi Sea. The local economy is subsistence based, supplemented by part-time and seasonal jobs, and the sale of traditional arts and crafts.

The community, was established as a year round settlement, as a result of the introduction of government services including education and health care. Prior to this, tribal members moved within our traditional lands for the subsistence harvest. Our ancestors followed the seasons, moving from the rivers and streams, to the coast, and then on to the coastal islands. This tradition is still followed today.

Our subsistence lifestyle takes us to our camps in numerous locations along the mainland and coastal islands. We travel by snowmachine over the ice and by boat when the ice is no longer safe. Our primary subsistence foods include: bearded seal, walrus, fish (salmon, white fish, trout, and herring) moose, musk-oxen, caribou, ducks, geese, ptarmigan, berries (salmon berries, blackberries, blueberries, and cranberries), and assorted greens. To preserve the fish and meat, we hang it on drift wood racks to dry. Many of our residents store their food in the permafrost to provide natural cold storage. Subsistence foods are also stored in containers of seal oil, which is a natural preservative.

The land under Shishmaref is a fine, silty sand that is highly vulnerable to erosion. Permafrost is prevalent throughout the area and normally is found at a depth of 3 feet. The permafrost binds the moist sand together and helps slow the rate of erosion. On average, the island's northern shore has experienced erosion of 3-5 feet per year. Higher rates of erosion were experienced during the storms of: November 9th and 10th, 1973; October 4th, 1997; October 7th, 2001; and most recently November 21st and 22nd, 2003. During these storms, highly susceptible areas had losses of as much as 125 feet horizontal distance.

Every year, until the protective winter pack ice returns, we agonize that the next storm will be the one that wipes us out. To date, we have lost numerous storage buildings and boats, an ATV, 2 snowmachines (snowmobile), meat-drying racks, and buried food. Tragically we have lost 1 home; so far we have been able to move 18 threatened homes and the National Guard Armory. Moving the structures is a labor-intensive process, which includes placing the structure on beams, hooking them up with heavy chains, and dragging them to a safer location on the island utilizing available heavy equipment. However, those of us living here know, that it is merely a matter of time before we experience greater losses. We are quickly running out of space on our ever-shrinking island.

We experience erosion creeping in from both the southern lagoon side and the northern Chukchi Sea side of the island. High tide is 3 feet higher than the normal tide. During high tide storms, the wave action can increase an additional 3 feet or more above the high tide. The impact to the island is that more of the exposed bluff is in direct contact with the water, erosion is accelerated, more of the bluff is undercut, and in many locations the waves crest over the bluff.

The community of Shishmaref had determined that the threat to life and property from reoccurring beachfront erosion required immediate action. The community established the Erosion and Relocation Coalition. The makeup of the Coalition is the governing members of the City of Shishmaref and the Native Village of Shishmaref (Indian Reorganization Act), the board of the Shishmaref Native Corporation, along with

representation from the Elder and Youth Councils. The Coalition was formed to provide a unified community voice, *One People, One Voice*, to seek assistance in providing immediate erosion protection for the island while we focus our efforts on relocation to the mainland.

Shishmaref is not alone; other Alaska Native Villages are facing a significant threat from ongoing global climate changes. Areas that have in the past been protected by our durable permafrost are now at risk. More and more communities are reporting problems with persistent erosion and flooding.

(1.) Relocation of the existing community to the mainland

The situation at Shishmaref is dire, and we believe that a disaster is pending that will cause loss of life and property. The rate of erosion and the number of flooding events has accelerated. Even though the storms have been moderate in level, the damage is more severe in recent years. The community has expressed and reconfirmed its desire to retain community integrity through relocation. Overwhelming support was shown through a community wide vote held on July 10, 2002. The community and Coalition would like to stress the immediacy of the problem and continue to push for an expedited relocation of Shishmaref to a safe place on the nearby mainland location- Tin Creek.

The Coalition, with the support of Kawerak, Inc., has to date coordinated and communicated with: NRCS, The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Alaska Division of Emergency Services, the National Park Service, the Alaska Native Health Consortium, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Land Management, the Bering Straits Native Corporation, the Bering Straits Regional Housing Authority, the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative, Tel-Alaska, the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Housing and Urban Development, the Alaska Federation of Natives, the State House and Senate, and we have worked with our Alaska congressional delegation. Our experience has shown that there is a lack of continuity between the various federal and State programs and agencies. There is an extensive amount of executive branch interpretation. For the most part, we have found that none of the agencies have programs that cover the full range of our needs. Matching requirements, in many cases are exorbitant, precluding us from qualifying for assistance, as Shishmaref has no viable funding source.

Our community is heavily reliant on subsistence, as are most rural Alaska Native Communities. Our diet is based on the animals and plants found nearby. Relocation of our community to an area away from our home territory would have a devastating impact on how we exist and who we are. Consolidation with another community is not acceptable, as it will cause extensive competition for subsistence foods, and depletion of natural resources. Our way of life is centered around subsistence; it is the driving force of our existence. This is illustrated by the scattering of Alaska Native Villages across the State.

The no action option for Shishmaref is the annihilation of our community by dissemination. We are a community tied together by family, common goals, values, and traditions. We are different from our neighbors. The community of Shishmaref has a long and proud history. We are unique, and need to be valued as a national treasure by

the people of the United States. We deserve the attention and help of the American people and the federal government.

Our plight has attracted statewide, national, and international attention. To date, we have provided information to the following media organizations; regional media, AP Wire, Anchorage Daily News, KTUU Channel 2- Anchorage, Alaska Public Radio, The New York Times, People Magazine, The New Yorker Magazine, National Geographic, The Weather Channel, plus several international media groups from Canada, Britain, Japan, France, Germany, Norway, and the calls keep coming. The international press is particularly interested to know what the federal government is doing to help us.

(2.) Ongoing beach erosion and efforts to minimize its impact

The use of federal funds places a requirement for advance planning. This requirement precludes an immediate relocation as an intact community. Because of this, we anticipate that even an expedited relocation will take years to prepare for. In the meantime, we continue to seek assistance to provide shoreline protection for the immediate community. Our Strategic Relocation Plan for resettlement is anticipated to begin by 2009.

Kawerak, Inc. our regional non-profit tribal government consortium applied for and built on our behalf, a 450 foot armor rock gabion seawall. The funding came from the Indian Reservation Roads (IRR) program (23 U.S.C 200-204), which allows 100% federal funding. Nineteen villages that participate in Kawerak's program helped to fund our project, with funds identified for their benefit under the IRR program. The project was developed to protect the main street in the community and the road to the airport, at their locations closest to the threatened bluff. Five barges of rock were brought in from Cape Nome. Kawerak barged in heavy equipment and used local labor to build the project. The cost of the project was in excess of \$2 million. Kawerak attempted to develop a cooperative project with the Army Corps of Engineers, but found that the Corps' programs would have used all funds as local match for federally required feasibility studies (a requirement under a majority of the Corps' programs). There was too great a risk that the Corps would find that the project was not in the best interest of the federal government. With the village's immediate plight, the decision was made for Kawerak to go forward to plan, design, and construct the 450 ft. seawall. From the time of this decision, it took approximately 2 years to develop and build the project. Kawerak worked closely with Shishmaref, the Corps, the NRCS, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the development of the project.

We have been approved for a Section 14, Emergency Shoreline Protection Project with the Army Corps of Engineers. The project is to provide protection for the shoreline in front of our school, approximately 230 ft. The Section 14 has a \$1 million federal cap and requires a 35% match. The State has committed to provide the local match for this project. We request that the federal government waive the local cost share requirements for Alaska Native Village projects associated with flooding and erosion.

In addition, Shishmaref has worked closely with the State to find additional funding to protect an additional 3000 feet of the community. The legislature has put \$2 million into appropriations, but the appropriation is not yet final. These funds are intended to provide for local match to Federal programs. However, we continue to have serious concerns that these funds would be required to go towards feasibility studies

instead of construction. We recommend that federal programs designed to help communities at risk, must be redesigned by Congress to minimize burdensome planning requirements. The emphasis must be placed on funding actual construction. In addition, amendments to legislation must be written that considers the ability of a community to fund the local match, waiving the local match requirement should be allowable.

Disaster programs are designed to do cleanup after the emergency, rather than allocating funds for prevention. Both the State and federal agencies have told us they couldn't provide assistance until a "Disaster Declaration" has been made. The declaration itself requires a dollar value for the damage. In our case, because no value is provided for the lost land, and because we have been able to tug homes out of harms way, we don't qualify. Alaska Native Villages don't have the infrastructure found elsewhere within the United States, therefore there is little value assessed when there are losses within Alaska's rural communities.

(3.) Lack of funding for immediate and future infrastructure needs

Shishmaref does not have modern water and sewer. The City hauls water to individual homes where there are interior storage tanks ranging in capacity from 32 –200 gallons. Honey bucket haul systems (septic handling), with a capacity of 200 gallons, are located in front of every 2-4 homes. The City hauls these containers to the landfill 1.5 miles to the west end of the island. In 2002, shortly after the community voted to relocate, we learned that agencies who had previously identified infrastructure projects for Shishmaref would no longer provide us with assistance (new clinic, tank farm, water and sewer). We believe the decision made by funding agencies to either assist or not, needs to take into consideration the human impacts. We had passed an ordinance that required that all new construction must be moveable. Alaska Village Electric (AVEC) had designed our tank farm project so that it could be relocated, however, this was not acceptable to the funding agency, the Denali Commission. We prefer that the water and sewer project be reserved for our relocation site. Haphazard actions and decisions have far reaching negative social and economic impacts.

Currently, there is no infrastructure at the new site. We request assistance to build an emergency evacuation building at the Tin Creek Relocation Site. A structure that would be the command center and provide room for evacuation offices, clinic, school, and warehouse for emergency supplies, should the island have to be evacuated. Continued development of current basic essential health and sanitation needs must be done. The community needs a healthy environment.

We don't know the actual costs to relocate the village. We believe that much of the infrastructure that will be needed for the new location has been deferred from our current location. Because of this, the deferred infrastructure development that would have been needed on the island (roads, clinic, water and sewer, etc.) should be considered in the equation of calculating the costs for the relocation.

(4.) The need for state and federal multi-agency coordination

The process of relocating an entire community requires extensive interagency cooperation and coordination. There is currently no one agency stepping forward to take the lead. To be blunt, no agency's programs are designed for a project as complex as a full village relocation. Each agency has its realm of responsibility, and often there is a gap in responsibility program to program. We have reviewed the GAO report (GAO-04-

142) completed in December 2003 and encourage you to consider their recommendations. We strongly agree that a coordinated effort to address issues caused by erosion and flooding of the threatened Alaska Native Villages is necessary. We believe that whichever agency is assigned to lead the effort, must be one that has proven itself to be proactive in addressing the needs of Alaska Native Villages.

The situation facing Shishmaref needs to be categorized as an emergency. Overly burdensome federal regulations must be eased. Many of the federal requirements drive up the costs. We believe that the relocation could be accomplished at a significantly reduced cost if the agencies were allowed to act under emergency exceptions, and if the agencies were not required to implement overly burdensome feasibility studies and cost benefit analysis. We are not requesting a lessening of the engineering or NEPA requirements but an approach that utilizes common sense.

The GAO report provides excellent recommendations to address the needs of Alaska Native Villages threatened by erosion and flooding. We urge Congress to take action based on their report. However, our situation is urgent, we are unlikely to survive until new Statutes, Regulations, or Policies can be developed and implemented. Because of this, we request that Shishmaref be identified as a demonstration project with maximum flexibility authorized, and that it be used to help determine what changes are needed in the Statutes, Regulations, and Policies overall.

Shishmaref does not have the necessary internal administrative capacity to facilitate such a massive effort without additional funding and technical assistance. Kawerak, Inc. provides staff support and facilitation to Shishmaref, but is limited primarily to the transportation components of the relocation. Shishmaref requests additional assistance from the federal government.

Conclusion:

Shishmaref is where it is because of what the ocean, rivers, streams, and the land provide to us. If the land and water couldn't sustain us, we would have moved on long ago. Subsistence is our economic base; why do you work if not to feed your families? Our grocery store is out there, in the water and on the land.

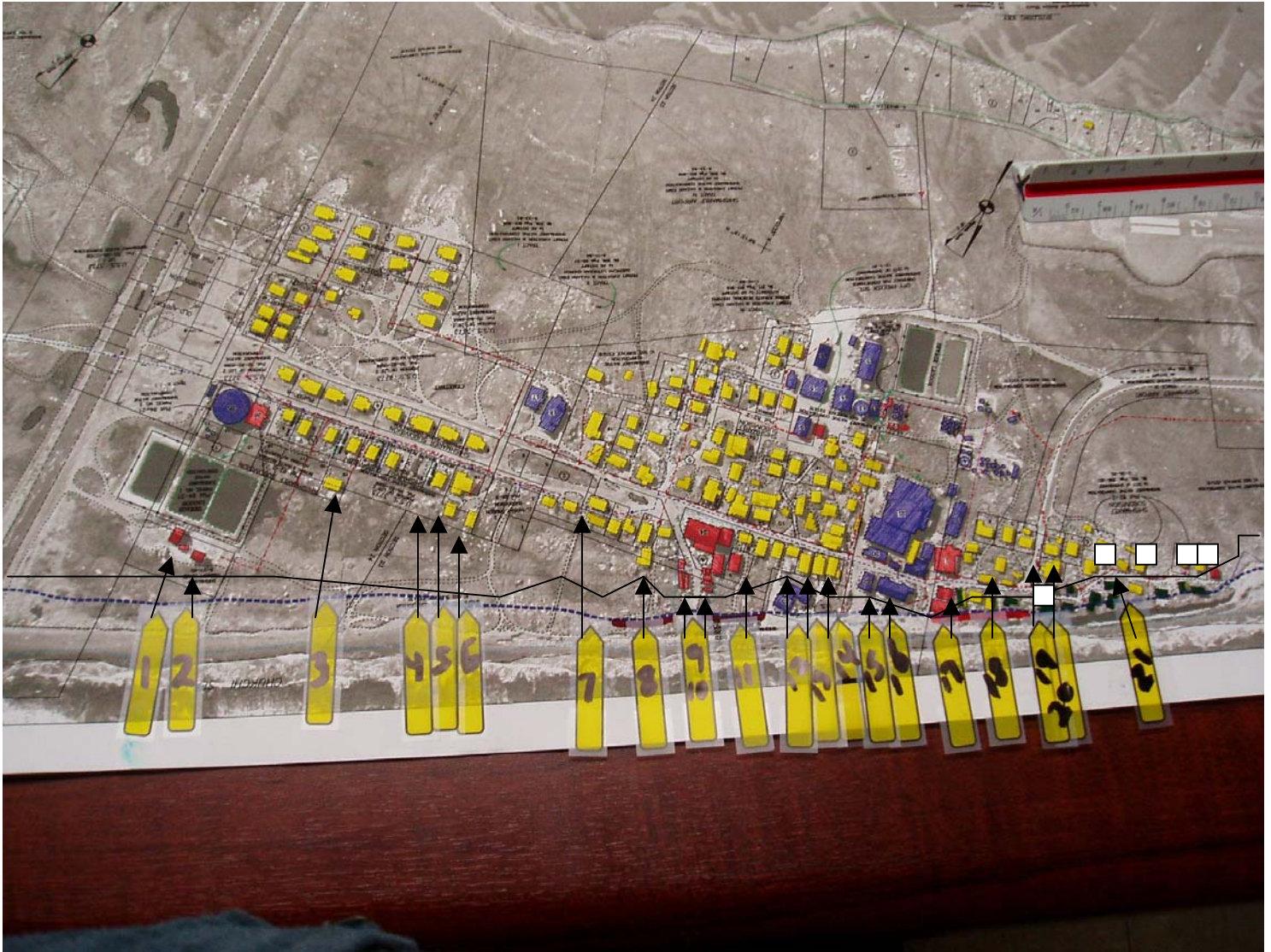
We are Shishmaref, we are Inupiaq Natives. Subsistence is our way of life, we are hunters and we are gatherers. Who and what we are is based on where we live and the way we live. We have been here for countless generations. We value our way of life, we value the environment as it sustains us; it provides for our very existence.

I have been very fortunate in my life; I have traveled to many places including the home of our federal government, Washington, D.C. I have seen our national treasures. Shishmaref too, is a national treasure. But, right now, we are barely holding on, as we watch the sea eat away at everything we, and you, have built.

We are a proud people, it is very difficult for us to ask for your assistance. But we do ask for it, for our very existence, for my people, please remember, that we are your people too, I am here today to ask for your help.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today, and to share with you about my home, Shishmaref.

Shishmaref Measurements 06-14-04



- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 – Tannery Building 2 – Cottage Building 3 – Charlene Ningealook 4 – Alfred Pootoogooluk 5 – Archie Kiyutelluk 6 – Jim/Janet Barr 7 – Alvin Pootoogooluk Sr. 8 – Bill Jones 9 – East – Bulk Tank 10 – West – Bulk Tank 11 – Margie Ningealook 12 – Winfred Obruk 13 – Nora Kuzuguk 14 – Jenny Kuzuguk 15 – Red School 16 – Blue School 17 – Native Store Warehouse 18 – Lloyd Kiyutelluk 19 – Shelton Kokeok | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 – Signa Kokeok 21 – Nathan Weyiouanna |
|---|---|

Current estimated beach line
 Measurement edge to building →
 Homes moved 2002

**Shishmaref
Erosion
Measurements
2001-2004**

		Distance from Edge				Date			Date			Date	
	Location	Fall 2001	1-Jul-02	Loss	11-Nov-03	loss	25-Nov-03	loss	*14-Jun-04	loss			
	Tannery												
1	Tannery Bldg	124	122.5	1.5	118	4.5	118	0	117	1			
2	Cottage Industry	64	61	3	57	4	57	0	54	3			
3	Houses												
	Charlene Ningealook	300	300	0	258	42	255	3	250	5			
4	Alfred Pootoogooluk	205	205	0	201	4	200	1	195	5			
5	Archie Kiyutelluk	200	200	0	188	12	172	16	172	0			
6	Jim/Janet Barr	190	190	0	144	46	144	0	144	0			
7	Alvin Pootoogooluk Sr.	195	195	0	195	0	195	0	195	0			
8	Bill Jones	90	90	0	72	18	66	6	58	8			
9	Bulk Tanks												
	East	65	65	0	57	8	31	26	30	1			
10	West	69	69	0	61	8	25	36	24	1			
11	Houses												
	Margie Ningealook	105	104	1	86	18	60	26	60	0			
12	Winfred Obruk	105	94	11	67	27	67	0	67	0			
13	Nora Kuzuguk	100	89	11	67	22	58	9	52	6			
14	Jenny Kuzuguk	100	89	11	75	14	66	9	53	13			
15	Red School	72	66	6	42	24	20	22	16	4			
16	Blue School	47.5	38	9.5	17	21	17	0	17	0			
17	Native Store												
	Warehouse	50	50	0		50		0		0			
18	Houses												
	Lloyd Kiyutelluk	66	66	0	61	5	57	4	43	14			
19	Shelton Kokeok	55	55	0	32	23	31	1	21	10			
20	Signa Kokeok	117	117	0	91	26	90	1	80	10			
21	Nathan Weyiouanna	65.5	65.5	0	13	53	5	8	1	4			



Looking west from center of town



Teachers quarters



Center of town beach front



Center of town looking east



Homes and drying racks



West end permafrost exposed and melting



Final work Kaverak Seawall Project – 450'

