

MEMORANDUM

To: Chris Price, Administrator

From: George Pletnikoff, Environmental Coord.

Subject: Ecosystem Research

Date: August 7, 2002

**At the last Tribal Council meeting, July 22, 2002**, I presented a MEMO to the Council regarding our proposed ecosystem research project for Unalaska Bay. (Bay area) As you know, the Council approved our concept and encouraged us to proceed with the proposed project. As this project has much to do with our subsistence concerns over available resources, our concerns on the health of the Bay's ecosystem, I will be sharing this MEMO with interested people at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, (USFWS) Alaska Department of Fish and Game, (ADF&G) UNISEA, Westward Seafoods, Alyeska Seafoods, City of Unalaska, Oceana, Alaska Oceans Network, Ounalashka Corporation, (OC), the local Advisory Board of Fish, Unalaska Native Fishermen's Association, Alaska Marine Conservation Council (AMCC), the Tribal Governments of our region, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, (EPA).

**The Tribal membership in Unalaska is only 7% of the population**, or 286 Unangan. Almost all these people are members of the Qawalangin Tribe, but not all are shareholders of OC or The Aleut Corporation. This may not seem to be an important statistic, but one which surfaces as we discuss Tribal and OC interests. The Tribe is very hopeful that OC may develop a natural resources department in the future to work closely with us on issues such as this for the benefit of the members of both organizations, since there is an overlap in membership.

**As you know, subsistence is the life of our Unangan people.** As with all of our Alaska Native Brethren, this issue plays the lead role in our survival. Without subsistence, we have no culture. It defines our language, our stories, our dance and music, and our tools. As important an issue as this is to our people, and our children, our Tribe needs to direct research to ensure we have healthy environments to provide subsistence resources. The Bay area encompasses approximately 100 square miles of marine ecosystem. It is from within this area that most, if not all, of our subsistence activities are limited to during most of the year. This activity takes place during the months of May – August, primarily. The other eight months, the weather is usually so unpredictable, the seas and wind so strong, that subsistence activities outside the Bay area very rarely takes place. And, with the vastness of the Bay area, many of our members who do depend on subsistence do not have large enough vessels to travel these distances. We may also have seen a decline in subsistence activities during the past twenty years or so for many reasons. The difficulty of getting to the resource, the decline in resource, the cost of getting to the resource, and perhaps the issue of most concern, the perception that the Bay area is contaminated, may be some of the reasons. It is very unfortunate that this seems to be the case since Unalaska has been the number one fishing port in the Country for the past decade, and we are finding it difficult to get our subsistence foods.

**The competition for resources,** especially in our Community, is becoming fierce. Commercial, recreational, charter boat businesses, and subsistence needs are all competing for a limited amount of resources. Unalaska/Dutch Harbor is widely known as the number one fishing port of our Country, yet very little is known of its rich cultural history of its indigenous peoples, the Unangan, which have flourished for millennia. Before our people even had a chance to meaningfully participate in the development of our Bay Area, World War II and large international fishery interests put monuments down, (buildings, docks, and plants,) competing for precious little useable land, and the never ending taking of natural resources to the point of crashing stocks almost in all species of commercial fish and crab. *This was not done by subsistence users.* And because of our unique designation as the number one fishing port of the United States,

our Tribal membership were and are actively kept out of the very lucrative Community Development Quota (CDQ) program enjoyed by over fifty other coastal communities in the Bering Sea region. Residents and members of these CDQ Communities enjoy millions of dollars of resources to help educate, train, hire, and in many other ways, help their tribes which we have not been able to accomplish. ***Our families are being deprived of financial security!*** Good health benefits, educational opportunities, and private business opportunities are all available to the members of these groups. We, on the other hand, are left wondering how we are able to pay for these benefits.

**Economic development** is very crucial to the survival of our people, as long as our people participate in its development and benefits. More than cash payments, jobs are what will strengthen our families; however, this may never happen without resources. And should these resources continue to dwindle and become more and more scarce, our food source becomes threatened.

**The North Pacific Fishery Management Council** has developed a program in which our Community may be interested. Sitka Tribe of Alaska has taken advantage of this. It is called the Local Area Management Plan, or LAMP. I propose that the Tribe begins an earnest effort into developing a LAMP for the Unalaska Bay Area. This project seeks to gather all resource users and interested groups to discuss our fishery resources and their use. With your guidance and approval, we can begin this process. It will take much time and work, but we are fast running out of time in that some subsistence resources are becoming harder and harder to find. We are Unalaska's first peoples, and are here to stay. We need to begin now.

**Secondly, we need to address the health** of the Bay Area. We need to begin looking at the Bay Area as an intricate ecosystem where what happens to one part of the Bay has a direct affect on the rest of the Bay. Hundreds of fishing boats, bottom trawlers, large foreign trampers and freighters, three large fish processing plant outfall lines, the sewage treatment plant's outfall line, are all pumping millions of gallons of waste into the Bay Area on a daily basis. This has a very direct and detrimental impact on the health of

the Bays ecosystem. We need to begin to address this issue before our food sources are forever gone.

**I have been in contact with** Mr. George Oweletuck of Alaska Oceans Network, and just received a letter of interest from Mr. Geoff Shester of Oceana, North Pacific Office, both of whom are interested in supporting our efforts. We will invite these gentlemen to our conference as well. I am sure EPA, ADF&G and the USFWS are also very interested in working more closely with the Tribe in this research effort as well. Perhaps there are funds we can access from these organizations which would help us put together a team to begin to address the questions needed to be asked. Also we can plan a conference of all interested parties for this winter. Sometime in November would be good. This would allow us time to do the necessary research and prepare for the conference. With this memo, I am asking that each of its recipients please respond if this sounds like a good time. If not, please suggest another time that would be good. We can work closely on the agenda items for the conference. My email address is [qtep@arctic.net](mailto:qtep@arctic.net).

**Along with beginning to address the issues** in the Bay area, perhaps we can begin to address some of the wider issues facing Bering Sea research and fishery concerns.

**Finally, I have been in contact with** Diana Cote of ADF&G. We will be working on the Local Area Management Plan (LAMP) for Unalaska. Again, this can be an agenda item for discussion in the November conference. In the mean time, I will be working closely with her to begin the process.

Should you or any of our recipients have and questions or suggestions, please let me know. Thank you.