

Heritage Resources

Background

This diverse and culturally complex area is known, archaeologically, as an area of Pacific Eskimo co-traditions. In late prehistoric times, the population of this extensive region fell into two major linguistic divisions, Aleutian and Eskimoan, with the dividing line between them falling on the Alaska Peninsula, near 159 degrees west longitude. Both groups shared many traits as they were derived from a common Eskaleutian language. Cultural influences from the Bering Sea coast can be seen on the Peninsula in Paleoarctic sites at Ugashik Lake and at the mouth of the Kvichak River on Bristol Bay. The Northern Archaic tradition appeared in the area about 5,000 BP (before present), with sites at Kvichak River and in Katmai National Park.

By 7,000 years ago, maritime hunters were living on the Alaska Peninsula and probably throughout the Pacific area. This culture is referred to as the Takli Alder phase (of Ocean Bay tradition) on the Pacific Coast of the Peninsula. At the base of the Alaska Peninsula, the 4,500 year old Pedro Bay site shows variations from the Ocean Bay II tradition as does the Brooks River Strand phase on the Bering Sea slope of the Peninsula. At the Brooks River site, the arrival of Arctic Small Tool people from the Bristol Bay region is evident by 3,800 BP and lasted until 3,100 BP.

The next wave of influence from the north shows up around 2,300 BP in the Norton culture, which was resident until 1,000 BP and marked a shift to an economy based on coastal resources. Norton appears to have shared this marine orientation with the developing Kachemak or Kodiak tradition on the Pacific Coast. They shared many characteristics but Norton doesn't seem to have ever firmly established itself on Kodiak or the Pacific Coast.

The last centuries of the first millennium AD were ones of fusion of ideas and cultures of the Bering Sea and Pacific traditions. This period is seen as the time of the development of the historically known Yup'ik Eskimo. The triggering event for this growth was the florescence of the Thule Eskimo culture to the north and its rapid spread to the east and the south from its origins around the northern Bering Strait. By around 1,100 AD, the ancestors of the historically known Pacific Eskimo may have been present on the Alaska Peninsula.

A long series of events, and the ongoing operation of cultural processes tending to obliterate cultural differences was involved in the formation of the Yup'ik Eskimo culture. The Norton influences and possible migrations of the late first millennium of the Christian era, the subsequent Thule influences transformation on the Alaska Peninsula at the beginning of the second millennium, or the ongoing local development cannot explain fully the later prehistoric and ethnographic cultures of the region. Ethnographically and archeologically, there also is an impressive body of material and nonmaterial culture with a distinctive North Pacific cast variously shared by the Yup'ik Eskimo, Aleut, Eyak, and other Northwest Coast peoples.

By 1500 AD, in Cook Inlet and on the upper Alaska Peninsula, Dena'ina Athabascans were expanding from the east, establishing themselves as far south as Lake Iliamna and Lake Clark.

In Prince William Sound and on the western coast of the Gulf of Alaska, Kachemak influences were little impacted despite expanding contact with the Athabascans. By European contact times, their descendants, the Chugach Eskimo, inhabited the area and were expanding their territory.

On the Aleutian Islands, the Aleutian Tradition of maritime hunters developed and remained strong until the invading Russians disrupted that area. It is possible that the Aleuts ventured as far east and north as the lower Alaska Peninsula to Aniakchak.

Although the prehistory archeological database for the planning area remains limited and sketchy, evidence indicates a record of the first entries of humans into North America in the post-Pleistocene era, approximately 11,500 years ago. Sites vary in age from around 7,000 BP to the age of first European contact – 1750. Archeological sites associated with the historic past also abound. The earliest are those associated with the Russian colonization of Alaska. The gold rush era also created a large number of sites. The state Office of History and Archeology lists approximately 1,207 sites within the boundaries of the Bristol Bay Area Plan and more sites are being discovered every year. The National Register of Historic Places lists approximately two dozen sites in the planning area.

Goals

The Alaska Historic Preservation Act establishes the state’s basic goal: to preserve, protect, and interpret the historic, prehistoric, and archaeological resources of Alaska so that the scientific, historic, and cultural heritage embodied in these resources may pass undiminished to future generations.

Management Guidelines

A. Heritage Resources Identification. Identify and determine the significance of all heritage resources on state land through the following actions:

1. Cooperative efforts for planned surveys and inventories between state, federal, and local or Native groups;
2. Heritage resources surveys conducted by the Department of Natural Resources personnel; and
3. Research about heritage resources on state land by qualified individuals and organizations.

B. Heritage Resources Protection. Protect significant heritage resources through the following actions:

1. Review of construction projects or land uses for potential conflict with heritage resources.

2. Cooperation with concerned government agencies, Native corporations, statewide or local groups, and individuals to develop guidelines and recommendations on how to avoid or mitigate identified or potential conflict.

C. Cultural Surveys Prior to Land Offerings. Cultural surveys or inventories should be conducted prior to the design of land offerings in areas the state Office of History and Archaeology determines have high potential to contain important heritage sites and for which information is inadequate to identify and protect these sites.

D. Heritage Resources and Municipal Conveyances. The Office of History and Archaeology will review plans for land conveyance and notify the Division of Mining, Land and Water if there are known sites in the area being considered for conveyance. DNR will consider retaining heritage sites in state ownership, especially if they are on the National Register of Historic Places.

E. Heritage Resources in Timber Management Areas. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Office of History and Archaeology (OHA) will review proposals for timber management activities through the interagency review processes for the Five-Year Schedule of Timber Sales and Forest Land Use Plans for individual sales. Areas of reported significant historic, archaeological, or paleontological sites should not be disturbed. Timber operations shall not occur within 300 feet from the boundaries of known sites unless the OHA determines, in consultation with the Division of Forestry, that certain activities can occur without significantly impacting the heritage resource. The OHA shall assess the extent and significance of the heritage resource and work with the Division of Forestry to develop site-specific mitigation measures to protect the heritage sites while allowing timber management.

F. Heritage Resources Adjacent to Recreation Facilities. Recreation facilities that might subject heritage sites to vandalism because of increased public use should not be placed adjacent to the heritage sites.

G. Heritage sites should be reported when found. The Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) is an inventory of all reported historic and prehistoric sites within the State of Alaska and is maintained by the Office of History and Archaeology (OHA). The AHRS is used to protect heritage resource sites from unwanted destruction. Knowledge of possible heritage remains prior to construction can aid in avoidance of project delays and can prevent unnecessary destruction of heritage sites. While over 22,000 sites have been reported within Alaska, this is probably only a very small percentage of the sites that may actually exist but are as yet unreported. The AHRS is not complete or static, so heritage sites, when found, should be reported to the OHA.

Figure 2.1 Bristol Bay Area Plan - Historical & Archaeological Sites

