DAY IN OUR BAY:
VOICES & VIEWS
from Bristol Bay

Inside guide to the film
“Day in Our Bay” is a unique community initiative that showcases the lives and feelings of the people of Alaska’s Bristol Bay region. Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC) invited its shareholders to share their voices, views and values through a digital storytelling competition shot on October 15, 2011. Sixty-two entries were submitted from across the region as shareholders of all ages took part in this innovative competition. The entries were edited and compiled into a short film.

Our tradition of storytelling has been passed down through generations. Now, we want to share these stories with you.

“This project provides a unique opportunity for Alaskans who live in the Bristol Bay region to share their voices and values with the world. We are a region that is facing the potential of monumental change, so it’s never been more important for Alaskans and people worldwide to get a better understanding of who we are.” – Jason Metrokin, President and CEO, BBNC

Featured villages:

Aleknagik • Chignik Lake • Clarks Point • Dillingham • Ekwok • Kanakanak • Koliganek • Kokhanok • Levelock • Manokotak • Naknek • New Stuyahok • Pedro Bay • Port Alsworth • Togiak
“We learn how to take care of things and they, in turn, take care of us. The way of life, they call it – Yuuyaraq.”

- Tim Wonhola Sr., New Stuyahok

Our Land
Bristol Bay is a vast, pristine coastal region of Southwest Alaska.

Our Food
Fish, Moose, Caribou, Beluga, Walrus, Berries, Greens …

Our People
Eskimo, Aleut, Indian.
The Bristol Bay region is located in Southwest Alaska. Three of Alaska’s major ethnic Native groups – Eskimos, Aleuts and Indians – have lived in the region for roughly 10,000 years.

There are about 7,500 residents in the Bristol Bay region, which includes the Bristol Bay Borough, Dillingham Census area, and the Lake and Peninsula Borough.

There are 31 villages in the Bristol Bay region, many of which were featured in Day in Our Bay. (Featured villages shown here in bold.)

Bristol Bay was named in 1778 by Captain James Cook “in honor of the Admiral Earl of Bristol” in England.

“I am created from my land. I am created from my rivers.”

– Music/vocals from Petla Noden, Dillingham
Communities within most areas of the state, including the Bristol Bay region, can only be reached by air or water. We rely on airplanes to bring food and mail to our villages. Those who live in smaller villages must fly to larger communities to access most healthcare services.

Alaska is the largest state in the nation, but has very few roads connecting its cities and villages. The waterways are our roads. We use boats to get to nearby villages, to transport fuel and other bulk goods, and to fish – both commercially and for subsistence foods.

For shorter distances, we travel by snowmachine in the winter or by ATV in the summer. In many villages, there are more snowmachines than cars! Sled dogs are also still used.
Our people speak Yup’ik, Aleut, Alutiiq and Athabascan. Yup’ik is the most common language.

Many Bristol Bay-area schools are teaching Yup’ik to students.

Below are some of the words heard in *Day in Our Bay.*
(Yup’ik unless otherwise noted.)

**Chada** (Dena’ina Athabascan), **Ap’a** (CHA-da), (UP-ah)

**Tamuanaq** (DUM-muah-NAK)

**Naunerrluk** (now-NUQ-thlook)

**Akutaq, agutak** (ah-GOO-duck)

**Mingqaaq** (MENG-qaw-k)

**Maqivik, Maqi** (ma-KEE-wick)

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**Dried fish**

**Eskimo ice cream**

**Grass baskets**

**Steam house**

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**Yuuyaraq** (YOO-yuh-guq) (Way of life)
Every time you have fresh king salmon, all the senses are alive. There’s a connection with your ancestry. You sit there and eat a meal that has been eaten over and over by people before you. And you share a meal with your kids, and they’re going to pass it on. It’s incredible.

On the Rack – We dry most of the fish we catch. The fish is filleted, the bones removed and the meat scored to allow for the best drying. The fish are hung in the drying rack, and turned often. Sometimes we smoke the fish in a smokehouse for added flavor.

In the Net – Our people place long nets into the water to catch the fish we preserve and eat year-round.

In the Can – One way to preserve fish is to can it, a fairly new method learned only in the past 200 years or so, after non-Native explorers came to the area.

On the Table – Fish is our main food source, and we eat it in a variety of ways: baked, boiled, fried, or smoked and dipped in seal oil. Little goes to waste. The fins, tails and heads are made into soups. The roe is boiled or eaten raw, like caviar. What is not used is given back to the land and water, so that the Earth will return the food to the people.

Fishing is an integral part of life and the culture of our people.

Our region is home to the world’s largest wild sockeye salmon fishery. All five major species of salmon – chinook, sockeye, chum, coho and pink – spawn in the waters here. The region also has one of the state’s largest herring and halibut fisheries. Other marine species, such as yellowfin sole, grey cod, shrimp and clams, are abundant.

– Pete Andrew Jr., from video by Alannah Hurley, Dillingham

“Every time you have fresh king salmon, all the senses are alive. There’s a connection with your ancestry. You sit there and eat a meal that has been eaten over and over by people before you. And you share a meal with your kids, and they’re going to pass it on. It’s incredible.”
“Someday I hope to hunt bigger game for the people who can’t.”
– Alex Nielsen, Kokhanok

For millennia, Alaska Natives have lived off the land. Those of us who can hunt and fish share the bounty with those in our community who are unable, such as Elders or the infirm.

We also share our food during celebrations and ceremonies, when everyone brings something for the community potlatch.

Community sharing has helped us survive over the generations in an isolated and sometimes harsh environment, where the people of the village have had to rely on each other to live and prosper.

In addition to fish, we hunt large mammals, including caribou, moose, brown and black bears, as well as seals, whales and walrus. We also hunt migratory birds, freshwater fish and smaller mammals, such as rabbits, ptarmigan, and spruce hens, like the one held by Alex Nielsen (shown above).

Learning
“I want to learn how to make bread and moose bone soup like my grandma, and smoke fish like my mom, and hunt like my Chada. That’s what I want to do.”
– Autumn Sioux Jensen-Roehl, daughter of Karla Jensen, Pedro Bay

Sharing

Using
Little of any animal goes to waste. The bones, fat and antlers – even the guts – may be used for food, clothing, tools, art and other important items.

The seal, for example, provides meat for food. Its whiskers provide decorations for clothing, and traditionally were used as needles. Seal oil is a great dipping sauce for fish and other subsistence foods, or can be burned for light and heat.
“We want to teach our children how to clean, prepare and cook the subsistence foods we have.”
– Arline Franklin, Manakotak

In the summer, we pick salmonberries, blueberries, blackberries, huckleberries, wild raspberries, and low- and high-bush cranberries. Women pick various grasses and plants to use for food, to make baskets and for medicinal purposes.

We also search for “mouse food” – food that mice have gathered. To find their stores, we use a stick to prod along the tundra. When we locate a soft spot or a mouse hole, we dig until we can retrieve the mouse food.

Akutaq or agutak, also called Eskimo ice cream, is a treat. The recipes are as varied as the people. The base ingredient for akutaq is animal fat, often whale or seal oil for those of us who live on the coast, or caribou fat for those who live inland. The fat is flavored with berries, plants or fish.

Many people today replace the animal fat with shortening, and add sugar for sweetness.

“We not only is it a way of eating, but it’s a way of life. It’s the way that we connect amongst our many generations.”
– Alannah Hurley, Dillingham

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Sour dock Akutaq

(made by Diana Gamechuk, Manakotak)
- A couple handfuls of shortening
- Sugar to taste
- Raisins
- Mandarin oranges
- Boiled sour dock (Picked along the river. Take out the stems, boil until tender, then cut up.)

Whip the shortening until it is smooth. Add sugar and whip by hand until it is creamy, like frosting. Add raisins and Mandarin oranges, mix well after each. Add sour dock and mix well. Enjoy.

* Sour dock should be cooked before consumption. Do not eat raw.
We use our resources for everyday life needs, as well as for art that can provide an economic benefit.

Nothing goes to waste. Any material not used for tools, food, art or celebration is given back to the land properly – either buried or placed into the water – so that the lands and waters will return the foods in the future.
Traditionally, our ancestors made everything they needed, whether it was grass baskets, clothing, parkas or tools. The knowledge for making the things needed for our survival has been passed down over the generations.

**Fur parkas** – These coats are made using furs from animals found in the region. Generally, you can tell where a parka was made by distinct patterns that develop in villages and within families. Each element of a parka is distinctive to a village, including the stitches, beads and shapes of the pelts.

**Baskets** – Intricate grass baskets made in the region are known around the world. Grass is collected from the coast, and is sometimes dyed. It is then hand-woven into style and shape. Baskets are used for storage and transporting items, as well as for decoration. Some families add beaded embellishments.

**Ivory carvings** – Ivory is gathered either through subsistence hunting or beachcombing. Traditionally, our ancestors used ivory to carve tools and weapons. Many of today’s ivory carvings are decorative art and are sold in galleries and gift shops across the world.

Some of our methods have advanced with time. Many carvers now use electric tools rather than other handmade tools. Women sew with metal needles instead of needles made of bone.
Dancing

We dance as a way of telling stories and preserving our way of life. When Elders teach their children and grandchildren Native dances, they pass on knowledge of a tradition and the stories of hunting, fishing and other subsistence activities. The motions and the song work together to tell the story. Men play drums, generally made of animal skins and wood. Women use dance fans that usually are made of woven grass and caribou whiskers or feathers. Men use dance fans made of wood and feathers.

Dancers wear kuspuks, modeled after parkas, but lighter to allow for more fluid movements.

“It’s traditional. We use it for healing from sicknesses. Spiritually, mentally, physically, that’s how we heal and go through the process of grieving.” – Olia Sutton, Togiak

We use the steam house – or maqivik – to heal our minds, bodies and spirits. The heat and steam cleanse our skin, allowing us to focus inward to heal our minds and spirits.

Sweating rids the body of wastes, regulates body temperatures and keeps the skin clean. Sometimes we bring herbs or plants such as naunernluk into the maqivik to help with healing ailments like arthritis.

Our people have used steam houses for thousands of years. Evidence has been found that steam houses or steam baths have been used by many cultures over time, including American Indian, Russian, Finnish and Roman.

Olia Sutton, Togiak

Laney, Arrianna and Coral Woods, from video by Alannah Hurley, Dillingham
As a child, we grew up knowing that when the bells rang, there was church.”

– Brenda King, Chignik Lake

For the past 300 years, traditional teachings have seen influences by Russian explorers – and later Europeans and Americans – who came into the area.

Russian influence is seen throughout the state’s coastal regions: distinctive crosses sit atop round domes of the Russian Orthodox church and fill nearby cemeteries.

Recent settlers – from the 19th and 20th centuries – also influenced the languages of our people. For a time, settlers and missionaries discouraged the use of our Native languages. Over the past few decades, our people have worked to preserve our ways, finding new and innovative methods to teach our children the words, stories and traditions of our culture.
It’s important to all Alaska Natives to preserve the traditional way of life before it is lost. We instill in our younger people the ties to the land and our community. We teach them the ways of our ancestors and the meanings of our celebrations, and encourage them to pass their knowledge to their children.

“The younger generation, I can see that they never saw as much change as I did. They can only know about these changes through cameras.” – Tim Wonhola Sr., New Stuyahok

Today’s technology can help and hinder these efforts. Today’s youth have learned to use the technology in various ways to record and share the traditions. Still, Elders worry much may be lost in the translation from a low-tech, oral teaching to a high-tech digital world.
“The place where I draw peace is in remembering the land. This is truly, as a lot of family said, God’s country. The memories we have are always going to be with us. The things that Gram has taught us, or any of our Elders, we like to think we’ll be able to draw some of their wisdom forward for the other generations.”

– Brenda King, Chignik Lake

“When I think about the future of Bristol Bay, I hope the fish and the wildlife and the land and the water can still sustain us. That people may still subsist here in the region. This is what we have to pass down to our kids.”

– Everett Thompson, Naknek

Future generations

Peducia Andrew and her grandson
Alex Nielsen, Kokhanok

Mariano Floresto, Clarks Point

Toby Wonhola, New Stuyahok

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Preserving your stories

1. Define what you want to preserve. Do you want to preserve the story of a family tradition? Record stories of an Elder’s younger days? Or show how a mask was carved?

2. Define how you want to preserve it. Will you use audio recordings? Will there be photos or other visuals? Would this best work on a website or in a scrapbook?

3. Make an outline or a script of what you want to do. This will provide a guide for your work.

4. Interview people, ask questions, do research if it helps the story.

5. Put it all together, using your outline as a guide.

6. Share your work.

For more information about the Bristol Bay region or this project, please visit

- www.bbnc.net
- www.dayinourbay.org

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Bristol Bay Native Corporation

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Pictured: Paul George, Clarks Point

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Nora Flores
Brian Abraham
Twin Hills
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Professional video mentors traveled to Bristol Bay communities to teach video workshops to participants. They are: Carl Battreall, Nathaniel Chambers, Laura Ganis, Brice Habeger, Todd Hardesty, D.K. Johnston, Dan Lee, Zak Melms, Chris Scarafile, Beth Skabar and Tom Trainor.
Day in Our Bay takes you to a place few have been.

A place where generations of Native peoples have flourished through traditional use of the land and what it provides.

Our story is told from an insider’s perspective, creating a unique glimpse of life in Bristol Bay. Join us as we share – through film, word and song – meaningful insights from the people of Bristol Bay about the places, the cultures, and the lifestyles of our hometowns.

Day in our Bay is the culmination of an unusual and extensive project supported by Bristol Bay Native Corporation and brought to life by its shareholders. The film began with a contest that put video cameras in the hands of Bristol Bay region residents. It challenged them to share what was most important and meaningful to them about their lives and their land. The end result is a 15-minute film that skillfully weaves together individual stories to create a compelling introduction to life in Bristol Bay.

Watch the full video at http://dayinourbay.org.