

First Alaskans Institute

Community Engagement Update

Week of July 15, 2020

As a statewide Native nonprofit, our FAI team is very connected to our home communities, regions, and our statewide Native family. During one of our weekly virtual team meetings, we share community engagement updates on various happenings in our communities to help guide our work. In an effort to share our knowledge harvest - recognizing this is not a comprehensive overview of all current Alaska Native news - here are some of the updates that were shared about what our communities are experiencing:

Community Updates - 7/15/2020:

Our communities remain vigilant and are actively pursuing ways to prepare for and respond to COVID-19

People are sharing reports of friends, family members and colleagues who have contracted COVID-19. They are asking for prayers and posting reminders to loved ones to follow the guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus. They are sharing their experiences with symptoms and stories of recovery to inform others. They are stressing the importance of keeping pods small, encouraging social distancing and quarantining (even with a negative test result, which can sometimes be a false negative) and wearing masks.

COVID-19 cases continue to rise across the state. Since the beginning of July, the cases doubled in the Y-K Delta to 26 cases total. YKHC urges residents to only travel for essential reasons, wash their hands, keep 6-foot distance and wear a mask in public:

<https://www.kyuk.org/post/halfway-through-july-number-covid-19-cases-related-y-k-delta-doubles>

- The Emmonak Traditional Council put the community on lockdown after their first positive COVID-19 case. Neighboring villages of Kotlik and Alakanuk are taking measures to protect themselves because of their proximity to Emmonak.

St. Michael went into lockdown after the community had its first positive COVID-19 case. They are taking safety extra measures, such as requiring face masks in public, quarantining, curfew and not allowing inter-village travel. They are encouraging testing and will consider reopening the community when 80% of the community is tested.

Currently, Kotlik is allowing upriver residents of St. Mary's to access the community for harvesting activities such as harvesting salmonberries. The Village of Kotlik mandates masks in public and is encouraging social distancing.

If you have any questions, updates or suggestions, please send them to info@firstalaskans.org. Quyanapqak!

<https://www.facebook.com/779779642383537/photos/a.782225142138987/1201762686851895/?type=3&theater>

- The Kotlik Laufkak store has restrictions in place for shoppers:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/122365277908218/permalink/2064448987033161/?tn=-R>

The Bethel City Council met on July 14 to consider expenditures of their CARES Act funding to manage COVID-19 response. Funds will support businesses and non-profits, PPE and housing travelers who need to quarantine: <https://www.kyuk.org/post/how-bethel-plans-spend-84m-cares-act-funding>

Ten positive COVID-19 cases were confirmed in Fort Yukon. To prevent further spread, residents were urged to stay home, stay away from Elders, not share beverages and to take other safety precautions: <https://www.facebook.com/kfieldsfyu/posts/10160191449207782>

The community of Arctic Village is taking a number of measures to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, including cleaning Elders' homes, practicing social distancing, requiring and handing out masks, having travelers get tested, and quarantining. Keeping busy helps with the isolation some may feel. Residents are remodeling a local church. They are also thinking of ways to support those in recovery from the virus in a safe way.

Kodiak COVID-19 cases are on the rise with five cases in the past week, totaling 15 in all since the spread of COVID-19. Five are locals, the remaining 10 are non-residents: <https://kmxt.org/2020/07/newscast-wednesday-july-15-2020/>

The Norton Sound Health Corporation (NSHC) and community of Teller have ramped up their community response after a positive COVID-19 case. NSHC stressed the importance of social distancing and quarantining and keeping your social circles small, along with practicing basic COVID-19 safety precautions such as wearing a mask and washing your hands frequently. They recommend testing and quarantining if you believe there is a chance you've been exposed: <https://www.facebook.com/NortonSoundHealthCorporation/posts/971470869967990>

The Native Village of Unalakleet rolled out a CARES Act scholarship fund to disperse up to \$750 to eligible tribal members for training that can help them gain employment during COVID-19: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/241218712573141/permalink/3676285919066386/>

Every Wednesday at noon, the public can hear from the State's Public Health leadership team, live online for their COVID-19 Science ECHO. Follow the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services on Facebook for info on how to join: <https://www.facebook.com/alaska.dhss/posts/10158335426629929>

COVID-19 cases continue climb across the state and visitor numbers are on the rise. Juneau had 1,200 out-of-state visitors in May, concerning local residents. On Sunday, July 12, Alaska reported 116 cases statewide which is the first time a daily case count has exceeded 100. The

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77 cases reported Saturday, July 11 were the previous record. There was one new case in Juneau, bringing it to 58 cases total so far. They are keeping numbers down despite being one of the bigger cities in the state: <https://www.juneauempire.com/news/coronavirus-cases-continue-climb/>

Sen. Dan Sullivan gave city leaders in Juneau an update on COVID-19 relief coming from Washington, D.C. He talked about the Coronavirus Relief Fund Flexibility Act, which will allow cities more leeway when it comes to what relief funds can be spent on: <https://www.juneauempire.com/news/more-funding-will-come-sullivan-says-but-when-is-another-matter/>

The Klawock Cooperative Association is providing assistance to tribal member households impacted by COVID-19 in the form of a \$400 food card per household, and \$150 for electric, heating, fuel, propane or Viking fire bricks to a KCA dwelling. They are also offering to shop for Elders who don't want to risk shopping: https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2587152094936058&id=100009238795538

The City of Klawock has a mask order in place with some exceptions: <http://www.powreport.com/2020/07/city-of-klawock-mask-order-has.html>

Fairbanks and North Pole governments reverted to shutdown status due to the spread of the virus. Government administrative offices are closed to walk-in visitors. Access to services in both cities will be similar to the statewide shutdown last spring with residents asked to contact city workers by phone, internet or by appointment:

http://www.newsminer.com/alerts/fairbanks-north-pole-governments-revert-to-shutdown-status-due-to-virus-spread/article_29542596-c641-11ea-bf0e-eb681a34f4d1.html

- Borough Mayor Bryce Ward, City of Fairbanks Mayor Jim Matherly, and City of North Pole Mayor Michael Welch signed a proclamation encouraging the community to wear cloth face coverings or masks:

<http://www.fnsb.us/Documents/COVID%20Masking%20Proclamation%20July%202020.pdf>

Fort Wainwright confirmed community spread of COVID-19 in their post. Because it is an open post, members of the military often interact in the Fairbanks community. This has Fairbanks residents worried about the further spread of the virus:

http://www.newsminer.com/alerts/fort-wainwright-confirms-community-spread-of-covid-19-on-post/article_fdc09652-c317-11ea-9489-9f4ede40f6b7.html

Huslia has opened travel to all year-round residents and inter-village travel is also open. They recommend people contact their COVID Coordinator prior to travel:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10222830265929001&set=gm.2030841217059303&type=3&theater&ifg=1>

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As COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Fort Yukon, the community is taking precautions to prevent further spread. They are encouraging testing, providing cleaning supplies, requiring masks, setting a curfew and closing the liquor store. They are giving daily updates on the radio. Non-residents are not allowed to travel to Fort Yukon and travel is only open for medical and essential workers: <https://www.facebook.com/745737781/posts/10160180661217782/?d=n>

The North Slope Borough (NSB) Public Health Department notified the Arctic Slope Native Association that an Utqiagvik resident tested positive for COVID-19 in Anchorage. They are isolating in Anchorage right now. The Samuel Simmons Memorial Hospital emphasized the importance of following COVID-19 prevention guidelines: <https://arcticslope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ASNA-Press-Release-July-13-2020.pdf>

Many of our communities are preparing for the 2020/2021 school year

The Anchorage School District (ASD) is rolling out various options for the start of the 2020-21 school year, including a mix of in-person schooling, virtual learning and boosting homeschool options. The uncertainty as the start of school nears is causing anxiety, tension, and uproar amongst parents and teachers: <https://www.asdk12.org/asdoptions>

- ASD will have a listening session about any “ASD systemic program, process or practice” on July 21. Social justice and racial equity advocates are looking forward to testifying: <https://www.asdk12.org/domain/1184>

The Juneau School Board has made face masks mandatory in the lead-up to the school year. They are still talking about what the start of the new school year will look like, considering a combination of online and rotating schedules. They are sharing their plans online in a Smart Start 2020 document: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nQ9nuyjfkjTtZ3boTQ-ll1oAKYDebktdlGG7g5nwSA0/edit?fbclid=IwAR0bbH2N5c1JbSRU_9-Alo7ktG5OM1HKAucc4Y2VDdEgvWGW9H-CHlbtu6g

The Klawock Tribe is distributing back-to-school backpacks for students, through Tlingit & Haida. Tlingit & Haida is providing backpacks to all tribal students in Southeast Alaska: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2626543297663604&set=a.1416441435340469&type=3&theater>

Our Native ways of life as we know it continues – always has, always will – as our peoples harvest from the lands and waters

Salmonberries and cloudberry are ripening and people are picking across the state. People who can't make it to their home communities from the cities are dreaming of picking berries in places like the Kwethluk River. Salmonberry picking in Kodiak has begun. Blueberries are coming out in Unalakleet, but some are still really tart. Alaskans have been submitting photos

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and updates of berry picking on the Alaska berry pickers page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/333707110118908/>

There is no commercial fishing in Kotlik, Alakanuk, Emmonak and Mountain Village (located in Yukon River District 1), and they will transition to fall season management beginning July 16. The remaining upriver districts and subdistricts will transition to fall season management as the fall chum salmon migration reaches those areas. Commercial fishermen in those villages will be feeling the loss of the season soon, as commercial fishing provides income for some for the entire year. However, many have gotten their share of salmon for subsistence fishing:

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/applications/dcfnewsrelease/1188006705.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2nLUasY08RPtP1dgGVqTldkcgP5RwHIOHg6_pOvGXR2bYAw7QqILTIRyc

There are lots of humpies in Unalakleet, and folks are putting up dry fish. Community members in Shaktoolik are also putting up dry fish, and some people are deciding to stay in camp a little longer to enjoy the outdoors and be in a safe place.

Lots of people on the North Slope are enjoying summer activities such as boating, hunting, and harvesting natchiq (ringed seal), ugruk (bearded seal) and tuttu (caribou). Some are making misigaaq (seal oil) and drying out their kiniqtat (dried seal meat kept in seal oil).

Racial equity topics continue to be raised around the state

Two ordinances dealing with policing policy were on the agenda at an Anchorage Assembly meeting on July 14. They considered potential actions to address police use of force and increase transparency with the public. Many are advocating for these policies to be embedded into municipal code so they are more permanent and cannot be changed without a public process: <https://www.ktva.com/story/42369239/police-use-of-force-and-transparency-ordinances-introduced-in-anchorage-assembly>

The Alaska Institute for Justice, in partnership with FAI, hosted Alaskans Unite, a panel discussion on racism in Alaska's communities on July 9, and it is now available to view online. Panelists included Dr. E.J. Ramos David, PhD, George Martinez, Jr. and Kevin D. McGee. Our very own Ayyu Qassataq, Vice President and Indigenous Operations Director and Barbara Wáahlaal Gíidaak Blake, Alaska Native Policy Center Director, both moderated and participated in the discussion:

<https://www.facebook.com/AKIMMIGRATION/videos/331019001630330/?v=331019001630330>

Celeste Hodge Growden, President/CEO at Alaska Black Caucus, and our very own President/CEO, Liz La quen náay Medicine Crow (Haida/Tlingit) shared about voter disenfranchisement. They said, "Of the many systemic inequities we and other Peoples of Color face in this country, voter disenfranchisement is one of the most insidious for it operates under the subterfuge of including all eligible voters while still using every available mechanism (from

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timing, languages, redistricting, rural v. urban status, funding, bureaucracy, and the list goes on) to deprive us of the ability to elect those who represent us and to make real change. Election officials in Alaska must eliminate all barriers to equitable voting access in both rural and urban Alaska.” Read the op-ed in the Anchorage Daily News:

<https://www.adn.com/opinions/2020/07/16/peoples-of-color-heres-how-to-vote-safely-in-2020/>

Iġisagvik College designates Juneteenth a college holiday. “As we are 'Unapologetically Iñupiaq,' so do we stand in solidarity of this date for our friends and our family, and we say Black Lives Matter,” said President Pearl Brower in the announcement:

http://www.thearcticsouder.com/article/2027ilisagvik_designates_juneteenth_a_college

Many of our regions have come up with creative ways to keep us connected while maintaining the physical distancing necessary to keep our people and communities safe

First Alaskans Institute’s 37th Annual Statewide Elders & Youth Conference and 9th Annual Howard Rock & Ted Stevens Smokehouse Gala will be held virtually to protect the health and wellbeing of our peoples. Liz La quen náay Medicine Crow (Haida/Tlingit), President/CEO of First Alaskans Institute, says that Alaska Native cultural knowledge and expertise in surviving pandemics and epidemics made the choice of going virtual easy. “It leads us to centering what is most precious to us – and that is our Elders and our youth. It’s kind of a decision that makes itself because we have to center who is most important. We’re not going to endanger their lives.”: <https://www.knba.org/post/elders-and-youth-conference-will-be-held-virtually-fall>

The Fourth of July is one of the Arctic's biggest celebrations, and this year many communities across the Northwest Arctic and North Slope adjusted their celebrations in light of the pandemic. For example, in Kotzebue, the annual Lovie Harris Baby Beauty contest went virtual, with parents submitting homemade photo shoots to the Lovie Harris Facebook page:

http://www.thearcticsouder.com/article/2028july_4_festivities_reflect_the_spirit_of_the

Our people and organizations all over the state are making virtual space for cultural sharing, storytelling, connectedness and learning

Sealaska is hosting a photo contest focusing on shareholders’ ways of life and inviting people to vote on the photos on Facebook. People are enjoying the #SealaskaWayOfLife photos from across the region:

https://www.facebook.com/sealaska/posts/3042300545805876?_tn_=-R

Outer Coast and Sealaska Heritage Institute began planning a Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) that would be offered during the same timeframe as the Outer Coast Summer Seminar, which runs June 27 to August 1. The Lingít MOOC had over five hundred people enrolled, and gatherings started five nights per week with anywhere from 60-160 participants

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in Zoom meetings. People can still sign up to the Lingít language course, which is emceed by X'unei Lance Twitchell. They have invited Elders and other teachers from across Southeast Alaska to lead classes and share their knowledge. It's a great opportunity to access languages at no cost, you just have to be able to get online: <http://outercoast.org/tingit/>

- Language learners taking the Lingít language course are enjoying practicing with flash cards on the Quizlet app. People can add and create their own sets: <https://quizlet.com>
- Follow Alaska Native Languages to get information and updates about Alaska Native languages: <https://www.alaskanativelanguages.org>
- MIT also some other global languages available to take for free, in addition to other courses: <https://ocw.mit.edu/courses/global-languages/>

Other community happenings and news

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is seeking comments sought by Aug. 10 for the Alaska Native Veterans Land Program Proposed Rules:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/241218712573141/permalink/3667403326621312/>

- BLM hosted a virtual public meeting to provide info and answer questions for the Alaska Native Vietnam-era Veterans Land Allotment Program of 2019 on July 16: <https://www.facebook.com/BLM.NPRA.SAP/videos/619311542037113/>

The Ikayuqti Elder Assisted Living Facility in Unalakleet is hiring for several positions, including administrator, administrator designee, resident manager, caregiver, cook and janitor:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/241218712573141/permalink/3676221152406196/>

Congratulations to ultrarunner Carol Seppilu (St. Lawrence Island Yupik) who successfully completed her run from Teller to Nome to raise awareness about breaking the cycle of alcohol and drug abuse and it's impacts on our families and communities! She says, "Being physically active has been the most effective way to improve my own mental health. I feel incredibly blessed to have discovered my love for running." She shared reflections on her journey:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10223581313663671&set=p.10223581313663671&type=3&theater>

- She shared her story about raising awareness about suicide awareness in the Anchorage Daily News: <https://www.adn.com/sports/2020/07/09/in-her-quest-to-raise-suicide-awareness-a-nome-woman-plans-to-run-the-71-mile-teller-highway/>

A Colorado company agreed to a \$7 million cleanup of a former open-pit uranium mine near Hyaburg and Kasaan in Southeast Alaska. They plan to close and clean the open-pit mine area, which includes cleaning up radioactive waste. The remote area is used by residents for fishing halibut and other activities. Island members are hoping the salmon run will return to what it was before the mine was built: <https://www.adn.com/business-economy/2020/07/14/colorado-company-agrees-to-7-million-cleanup-of-former-uranium-mine-in-southeast-alaska/>

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The Inter-Island Ferry Authority (IFA) goes between Hollis and Ketchikan is providing ferry service once a day for six days a week. This is a decrease from two times a day. Surrounding community residents are concerned about how this will impact their communities. In an effort to continue to keep their passengers and crews safe, beginning July 15, IFA will require passengers to complete a Passenger Wellness Screening Form before allowed to board their vessel: <https://interislandferry.com/travel-updates/>

The 354th Fighter Wing conducted an active shooter and force protection exercise at Eielson Air Force Base:

http://www.newsminer.com/news/local_news/eielson-to-conduct-active-shooter-exercise/article_409815d8-c591-11ea-9bce-074db60a8d47.html

The University of Alaska Board of Regents selected Pat Pitney to serve as the university of Alaska's interim president: <https://www.alaska.edu/pres/interim/>