
Alaska Native Villages Affected by Flooding and Erosion

Alaska Forum on the Environment

February 2-6, 2009

2003 Report Introduction and Background

- Who is GAO?
 - In 2003, Congress directed GAO to study Alaska Native villages affected by flooding and erosion.
 - GAO-04-142, December 12, 2003
 - Our 2003 report focused on nine villages: Barrow, Bethel, Kaktovik, Kivalina, Koyukuk, Newtok, Point Hope, Shishmaref, and Unalakleet.
-

2003 Report Introduction and Background

- We reported on
 - (1) the extent to which Alaska Native villages are affected by flooding and erosion;
 - (2) federal and Alaska state programs that provide assistance for flooding and erosion and the extent to which federal assistance has been provided to Alaska Native villages;
 - (3) the status of efforts to respond to flooding and erosion in selected Alaska Native villages; and
 - (4) alternatives that Congress may wish to consider when providing assistance for flooding and erosion of Alaska Native villages.

2003 Report Findings

- Flooding and erosion affects 184 out of 213, or 86.4 percent, of Alaska Native villages to some extent.
- The Corps of Engineers and the Natural Resource Conservation Service administer key programs for constructing flooding and erosion control projects.
- Of the nine villages we reviewed, four (Kivalina, Koyukuk, Newtok, and Shishmaref) were in imminent danger from flooding and erosion and were planning to relocate, while the remaining five were taking other actions.

2003 Report Findings

- Alternatives that could increase service delivery for Alaska Native villages:
 - Expand the role of the Denali Commission;
 - Direct federal agencies to consider social and environmental factors in their cost/benefit analyses;
 - Waive the federal cost-sharing requirement for these projects; and
 - Authorize the “bundling” of funds from various federal agencies.

Current Project Introduction and Background

- Request by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery.
 - Update of our 2003 report.
 - Focus on relocation efforts.
 - Report due date is May 13, 2009.
-

Current Project Introduction and Background

- We will report on:
 - (1) the flooding and erosion threats that Alaska Native villages currently face;
 - (2) the federal and state programs available to assist Alaska Native villages facing potential disasters;
 - (3) the status of village relocation efforts; and
 - (4) how federal assistance to relocating Alaska Native villages is prioritized.
-

Current Project

- We have been working with the relevant federal and state agencies to assess their effort to assist relocating villages.
- We have visited seven villages (Alatna, Allakaket, Kivalina, Koyukuk, Shaktoolik, Shishmaref and Unalakleet).

Current Project

- Some issues that have been raised:
 - Relocating all at once or migrating gradually over time;
 - Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA);
 - No lead federal agency; and
 - Funding.
-

Contact Information

Jeff Malcolm
Assistant Director
U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)
Natural Resources and Environment Team
Phone: (202) 512-6536
E-mail: malcolmj@gao.gov
www.gao.gov
