

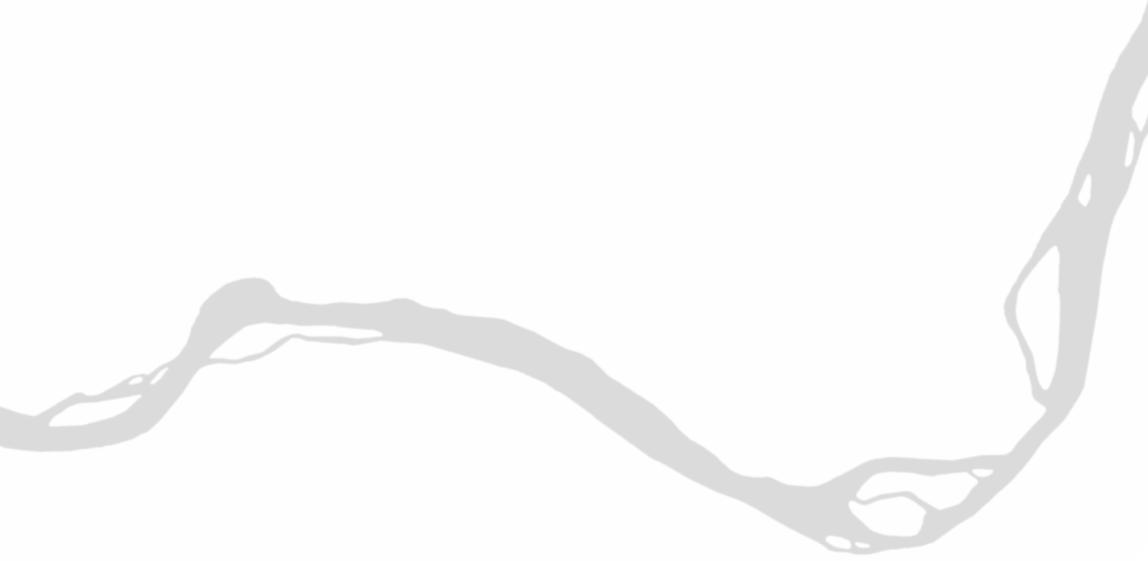
MY SIDE OF THE RIVER

AN ALASKA NATIVE STORY

ELIAS KELLY



MY SIDE OF THE RIVER





AMERICAN INDIAN LIVES

SERIES EDITORS

Kimberly Blaeser

*University of Wisconsin,
Milwaukee*

Brenda J. Child

University of Minnesota

R. David Edmunds

University of Texas at Dallas

K. Tsianina Lomawaima

Arizona State University

MY SIDE OF THE RIVER

An Alaska Native Story

ELIAS KELLY



University of Nebraska Press  Lincoln

© 2023 by the Board of Regents of the University of Nebraska.
All rights reserved.

The University of Nebraska Press is part of a land-grant institution with campuses and programs on the past, present, and future homelands of the Pawnee, Ponca, Otoe-Missouria, Omaha, Dakota, Lakota, Kaw, Cheyenne, and Arapaho Peoples, as well as those of the relocated Ho-Chunk, Sac and Fox, and Iowa Peoples.



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kelly, Elias, author.

Title: My side of the river: an Alaska Native story / Elias Kelly.

Other titles: Alaska Native story | American Indian lives.

Description: Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [2023] |

Series: American Indian lives

Identifiers: LCCN 2022045150

ISBN 9781496235091 (paperback)

ISBN 9781496236340 (epub)

ISBN 9781496236357 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: Kelly, Elias. | Yupik Eskimos—Alaska—

Biography. | Subsistence economy—Alaska. | Conservation of natural resources—Alaska. |

Traditional ecological knowledge—Alaska. | BISAC: HISTORY / United States / State & Local / West (AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, UT, WY) | LCGFT: Autobiographies.

Classification: LCC E99.E7 K415 2023 |

DDC 979.8004/9714092 [B]—dc23/eng/20221026

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022045150>

Set in Sabon Next LT by A. Shahan.

To my family . . .
and many elders who
guided me along the way

Contents

Abbreviations ix

Introduction i

PART I

1. Hunting, Fishing, and Resource Management in Native Alaska 9
2. Wildlife Management 17
3. Yukon River Fisheries 25
4. Subsistence 32
5. Federal and State 41
6. Roots and Moratoriums 50
7. Alliance Seekers 60
8. Whitefish Fishing 66
9. Yup'ik Economics 75

PART II

10. Social Morals and Obligations 87
11. Calendar Cycles 94
12. Environmental Realms 102
13. Spiritual Realms 110
14. Is It Too Big? 118
15. More Native Teachers 126
16. Educational Endeavors—*Poaching for Dummies* 133
17. Sustainable Management 141

- 18. Misnomers of Management 150
- 19. Status Quo 159

PART III

- 20. Paimiut River 169
- 21. Fish and Game Hats 177
- 22. Shortsighted 185
- 23. Genetic Tributaries 193
- 24. John Paul Edwards (1971–2001) 202
- 25. River Ecology 211
- 26. Civil Obedience 219
- 27. Sense of Time 227
- 28. Lessons of Humility 235
- 29. A Whale, a Whale 243

PART IV

- 30. Bad to the Bone 253
- 31. Alaska Sovereignty and Land 260
- 32. Cooperative Management / Co-management 267
- 33. One Nation and ... 277
- 34. Treaty Obligations 286
- 35. Management Options 294
- 36. Wisdom of Elders 302
- 37. Story of Tribes in Alaska 311
- 38. All Things Considered 320

Abbreviations

Alaska fish and wildlife management is complex, influenced by many organizations, and acronyms are unavoidable. The tongue-twisters are easy to get garbled, so I include a list for reference.

ADF&G	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
AFN	Alaska Federation of Natives
ANCSA	Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
ANILCA	Alaska National Interest Land Claims Act
ASL	age, sex, and length
AVCP	Association of Village Council Presidents
AYK	Alaska Yukon Kuskokwim
BEG	biological escapement goal
BIA	U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs
BOF	Alaska Board of Fish
BOG	Alaska Board of Game
CDQ	Magnuson-Stevens Act Community Development Quota Program
CPUE	catch per unit effort
FSB	Federal Subsistence Board
FSL	U.S. Forest Service Forest Science Lab
GMU	game management unit
OSM	U.S. Office of Subsistence Management
SEG	sustainable escapement goal
UAF	University of Alaska–Fairbanks
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



MY SIDE OF THE RIVER





Alaska. Adapted from Mary F. Ehrlander, *Walter Harper, Alaska Native Son*



(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017). Map by Dixon Jones.

≡ Introduction

“We’re going dip-netting for salmon; you should come with us,” my sister Lucy said. I looked at the large dip net she was holding and wondered about this fishing method.

June 1980. I was visiting my sister Lucy and her family in Fairbanks. This was the first time I had heard of dip-net fishing for salmon. Driving the Richardson Highway to Chitina, I tried to imagine how this net could be used to catch fish. We pulled into Chitina Fish and Game to purchase State of Alaska fishing licenses and punch cards. The parking lot was busy with fishers, and I was comforted to know that we were not alone in this quest. Later, at O’Brian Creek, a happy fisherman walked to a grill holding a fresh-caught salmon and a dip net. I smiled at the urgency of his step.

As we carried our gear over the remnants of old railroad tracks to a more likely fishing spot, it was hard to imagine that train services used to exist between Cordova and this part of Alaska. I sat on the bolder rocks with a dip net resting in an eddy, and it was exhilarating when a fish thumped the net—I quickly twisted the net upright and pulled out a wiggling fish. When the fish are running, this was exciting. But when the fish are slow, it was easy for me to look across the river and remember what my in-law Jerry said when he slipped the dip net into the water.

“I know it looks foolish to see ourselves using this little stick on this river.”

This river is over a half mile wide, with so much room for fish to swim. In hindsight, a traditional fishwheel, permitted for Alaska Natives, is not much bigger. This is the Copper River: the current is strong and swift, and the water is cold and glacial fed. The copper color glistened on the surface and the churning of the river was loud.

This is the river Katie John's story came from.



In 1990 leaders in Alaska tried to address the needs of the state's rural Natives, arguing that the state constitution needed to be amended to recognize Native hunting and fishing. For the state government, the issue could not be ignored, and the language of the state constitution was at risk. This was when the misconception was created that Katie John was a criminal for fishing for Cooper River salmon to feed her family. Katie John had never violated any state or federal laws and was never issued a citation or pleaded "guilty" or "not guilty." At this time Katie John, an Athabaskan elder, filed a federal court case against the State of Alaska, claiming that for subsistence fishing, federal management responsibility applied on all of Alaska's navigable waters—not only on federal lands. The U.S. Supreme Court agreed with her. The name Katie John became synonymous with Alaska Native subsistence fishing rights on federal and state lands.

I am an Alaska resident and U.S. citizen. Many Alaska leaders agree that fish and wildlife management issues are complex and difficult. In the center of this complex identity is Native subsistence hunting and fishing. To the State of Alaska, "subsistence" has never been a kind word; when state leaders try to recognize Native subsistence users, they come up with unconstitutional legal issues. Although the Constitution claims "no person will be deprived of life, liberty, and property without due process of the law," this is misleading in the context of subsistence. When Alaskans stand together, we create a sense of solidarity, and the North Star on our state flag brightens our hope for the future. But when we sit and talk about hunting and fishing, there is too much legal jargon in the Constitution and lawyers only argue what the words mean or what they were intended to mean.

Since arrival of the first Russians, the natural resources of Alaska have shaped federal, state, and local governments. Alaska statehood in 1959 and the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) passed by the U.S. Congress recognized the major landowners and legalized federal and state management of all fish and wildlife. ANCSA extinguished aboriginal rights to hunting and fishing and created Native corporations

to manage Native lands despite the concerns of Native elders. Many spoke and wrote about ANCSA and how Alaska Natives have no more hunting and fishing rights.

This is the reason Katie John shared her story in that court case. After the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game claimed all wildlife management responsibility, many Natives have distanced themselves from management and use civil disobedience as a dare for subsistence harvests, whether or not the season is legally open or who has authority. Despite closures, Natives continue to fish for king salmon on the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers.

The use of any traditional ecological knowledge in current management schemes is trivial compared to the Western management doctrines that influence regulations. The challenge is how traditional information can be used compared to sound scientific information in federal and state management guidelines. Final management decisions are often influenced by non-Native hunters and fishers, whose like-minded perspectives support their convictions of how we all should live, forever changing the values and ethics of our ancestors with the way we now hunt and fish and the shared traditions of our harvest. After ANCSA, federally recognized tribes' claims of existence have created issues of hunting, fishing, and resource management responsibilities that are still questioned.

Although ANCSA extinguished traditional Native rights, it did not extinguish traditional stewardship obligations. This is the major misconception of ANCSA and the reason why many Alaska leaders agree that Alaska Natives have no management responsibilities. Indeed, traditional management doctrines are compelling, and it is time to compare these principles with current management applications for wild resources we all think are in jeopardy, such as wild Alaska salmon.

In 2014 the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission was created as a federal co-management agreement with Alaska Natives for *shared responsibility* of salmon. Then, in 2016, the Ahtna region also signed a federal agreement creating the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission. The Ahtna region is home to Katie John and her people. The agreement allows Ahtna Natives to help manage hunting and fishing activities on Native corporation and federal lands. The Richardson Highway, a major road system, connects the Ahtna region with the rest

of Alaska, and the influence of non-Native hunting and fishing activities is unavoidable. This is the potential conflict the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission hopes to address.

The intertribal fish and resource commissions work with local tribes via co-management guidelines and pseudo-management responsibility. Although these agreements are only with the federal government, the State of Alaska is concerned for Alaska residents' interests. Provisions of these agreements apply on federal and corporation land and allow the intertribal commissions to circumvent corporation land as public lands subject to state regulations. The agreements do not involve the state, and the commission has no authority over state land or waters, so if any Native is caught hunting or fishing outside of this jurisdiction, the question of which regulations have precedents will need to be addressed. If these Natives use their state-issued identification cards where legal precedents have indeed extinguished aboriginal rights, their identity and the commissions' jurisdiction is at stake.

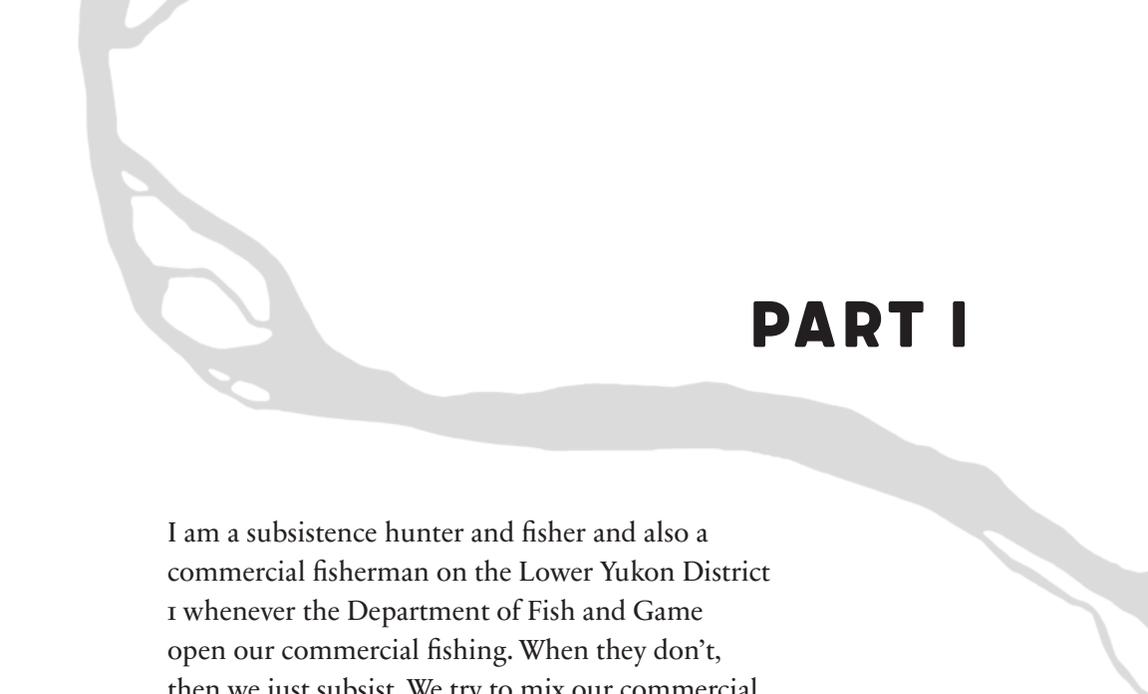
I am a tribal member of Pilot Station Traditional Village, from Pilot Station, a small Native village on the Yukon River. There are 229 tribes in Alaska, and every tribe is fragmented from every other tribe. Tribal identity is evolving and crucial to every Native issue, from child custody, education, social services, and economic development to food security. ANCSA created nonprofit regional corporations such as the Association of Village Council Presidents and Tanana Chiefs Conference to address and provide Native services and advocate for fish and wildlife concerns. These nonprofits offer their services only to tribal members.

Because ANCSA extinguished Alaska Native aboriginal rights, it is not unusual for Alaska Natives to talk of Native empowerment and the creation of a regional or statewide tribal government. During these events, federal and state agencies step back and wonder if Natives can use tribal sovereignty as a tool for unity.

I am also an Alaska Native Yup'ik Eskimo. Our Native elders are the center of every family, community, and cultural activity. Elders tell stories about hunting, fishing, and gathering resources with a message of being respected hunters, fishers, and gatherers: respected Natives.

Most Alaskans have heard about the many impacts of ANCSA. Despite the influence of Katie John's story, the intertribal fish and wildlife co-

management agreements continue to use Western management doctrines of strict harvest regulations that are constantly changing and being refined. Unlike Western wildlife management doctrines, Alaska Native traditional wildlife management tools support community stability and enrich family values. I grew up learning to trust my culture. My family lives in Alaska, which I call home. The Yukon River is part of that home. Here is a story of my side of the river.



PART I

I am a subsistence hunter and fisher and also a commercial fisherman on the Lower Yukon District whenever the Department of Fish and Game open our commercial fishing. When they don't, then we just subsist. We try to mix our commercial and subsistence because both of them are one. We can't subsist if we don't earn a little money, then we're stuck with what we're going to be doing.

A long time ago it wasn't like this. The subsistence hunter or fisher a long time ago didn't have laws except the Yup'ik laws, which we always had. The Yup'ik laws are different from Department of Fish and Game laws. They take care of the land, they take care of the game, they take care of the fish and nobody overfishes. That's how I was raised and I'm trying to do the same thing for the Yup'ik people, but I get bumped into Department of Fish and Game laws and then that's it.

— **JOHN HANSON**, Alakanuk elder, October 14, 2004, Region 5, AYK Regional Advisory Council—
Federal Subsistence Management Council

1 ☰ Hunting, Fishing, and Resource Management in Native Alaska

“You cannot set net for fish today. Fishing is closed. You have to let the fish go.”

My sister Agnes was trying to explain in Yup’ik to my *uppa* (grandfather) Walter Kelly what the white man was saying in English. The last spring ice had floated past Pilot Station, so families were busy getting fish camps ready, and many Yup’ik men had already set gillnets to catch a fresh taste of the first Yukon salmon. It had been a long winter; fresh salmon was a delicacy everyone looked forward to.

“My grandpa said there will be lots of salmon and the east wind and weather will be good for salmon.”

Standing by the fish-drying rack, the wildlife trooper nodded his head and told Agnes to tell the old man that fishing was closed and that the sunny weather and wind had nothing to do with salmon.

He said, “Tell your grandpa to take his net out or we will take it away.”

At the time Agnes was an eighth-grade teen who had learned to speak English at the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Elementary School in Pilot Station, and she happened to be with our grandfather to translate. Telling a respected elder that he could not harvest salmon because the non-Native said so would haunt her for the rest of her life. “My grandpa asks why you want to take away his net,” Agnes said to the trooper as he walked away, asking a curious onlooker about the homes of Dan Greene and Noel Polty.

The Western assertion of power, order, and justice over all wild resources had arrived at our village. Like many villages Pilot Station is in the middle of nowhere: there are no roads to any other community, and airline transportation is limited.

Alaska became a state in 1959. In 1960 the state government claimed authority for all fish and wildlife management with enforcement help from U.S. Fish and Wildlife troopers. Uppa Kelly's date of birth was estimated to be around 1889. In his first encounter with the wildlife trooper, I can only imagine the devastation and confusion he must have felt when he was told he could not fish anytime. Before, fishing had been a practice centered to his way of life; when it was time to hunt, when it was time to fish was when we needed the food. Not tomorrow, next week, or next month. This is the same language Agnes used when she told her story, anguished that she was the one telling Uppa Kelly what to do. To Uppa Kelly, all fish and wildlife belong to Mother Nature. This is our traditional way.



During Uppa Kelly's lifetime, dynamic changes to hunting and fishing practices came with the introduction of non-Native rules, enforcement, and punishment as a means of harvest regulation. These practices are central principles of colonial assimilation, and for Natives, the concept of all fish and wildlife belonging to someone was new and compelling—a colonial ownership based on powers of strength and claims of wealth in a divide-and-conquer nation. It was an alien concept.

To Uppa Kelly, the idea of his fishing gear being taken away as a lesson of obedience to the new law and order was arcane. If a trooper takes my net, I have no means to feed my family. Traditional Natives never took away valuable tools and means to harvest wild resources from others as a system of justice to Mother Nature or as punishment with the assumption that a Yup'ik tells Mother Nature what to do. Creating hardships for another family is not the Native way. Mother Nature has a way of taking care of herself. Elders know that fish and wildlife provide food, that we must respect and not waste the food or consequences will be dire. My parents would tell us not to waste food, or hardships will come and food will be scarce. The same lesson they learned from their parents.

One reliable tool of any resource management is to seek continuous feedback from involved participants to judge whether the management framework is successful—or not. In a manager's perfect world, feedback of information from users of the resource is considered useful to know

if any regulation efforts are working. It is difficult to know if this management tool was usable before 1970 in Native Alaska for several reasons. The primary reason is the lack of a written record documenting Native tradition. Everything about my ancestors' way of life was passed with oral stories. Unfortunately, oral stories tend to change from generation to generation, like the whispering game, where one player listens and whispers into the ears of another, who then retells the story. Without conclusive evidence, many non-Natives accept the notion that it is difficult to support oral records and Native reasoning and dismiss them as nothing more than anecdotes of how things used to be.

Like the whispering game, these stories change due to a natural order of chaos theory where the least resistant path is one of disorder. Suppose you hear one storyteller with a conclusion that sounds acceptable. Later you hear the same story from someone else with a different conclusion but the message is similar. Like the fables of Aesop, the elders told stories with similar messages and Natives understood the meaning because they heard it before from someone else. This idea is intriguingly similar to the early stories of the Holy Bible. The challenge is interpreting the conclusion to those unfamiliar with Native customs.

Similarly, it is difficult to prove if there is a successful Native traditional management practice that has worked to sustain a particular species. A process with external application tasks helps manage the wild resource and assure replenishment to allow harvests the next season. Western academic fish and wildlife management principles call this practice "sustained yield," where enough of the renewable resources are allowed to be replenished every season as sustainable, and enough resources are harvested to allow some yield. In Western science, observations are written and documented, but Natives tell theirs as oral stories, making it difficult to prove management guidelines.

Early fish and wildlife managers in Alaska used the *Alaska Sportsman* magazine as the original scientific journal for fish and wildlife conditions and reports on rural areas—not all rural community, but those accessible to urban Alaskans on the road system or those used by Alaskans with their own air transportation to favorite areas for access to hunting and fishing. The *Alaska Sportsman* magazine taught Western doctrines of outdoor management principles and generalized all of Alaska as the

same. The early managers assumed that management applications with positive results in one region would also work in other areas.

Eventually, managers recognized that biosystems along the road system had different hunting and fishing use and demand. With human population growth, as food security models and leisure activities developed in urban Alaska, different ideological management applications began to take precedent. As progressive human population growth became a concern with more hunting and fishing use and access, the economic idea of supply versus demand over all natural resources began to be addressed as part of the sustained yield principles of management. For rural Natives, fish and wildlife provide food, and all efforts for security focus on the next harvest. Urban development and a market economy food distribution system recognized hunting and fishing as leisure activities that produce wild supplements from domestic food sources.

A crowded society quickly becomes hungry for more, and only thinks about itself when talking about user access and how this privilege of riches and use should be divided. Overcrowding of hunters and fishers resulted in preferential access to wild fish and animals, nurturing the colonial concept of ownership responsibilities and need for conservation measures with a festering idea that resources are not finite. Overuse became a concern, and with any potential threat of overharvesting came a need for order and justice, accompanied by the idea that all wild resources belong to all Alaskans, that the privilege of access should be the same for everyone. As this developed, urban Alaskans recognized wild fish and animals no longer as primary food sources but as resources that could be managed to prosper the demands of population growth and access for leisure activities. With this trend, aesthetic appreciation and scenic attractions enticed visitors to travel to Alaska and see its beauty and plenty wild resources.

As the State of Alaska took wildlife management authority, preservation and conservation became principal management guidelines. The near decimation of wild buffalo in the Midwest provided reason for wildlife principles, and southeast Alaska's history of cannery fisheries and the impacts of a market economy on wild salmon provided reasons for fishery guidelines. We cannot make these same mistakes. The Alaska Statehood Act created management departments to regulate wild

resources, powered by the concept of sustained yield. All Alaskans fell into one unit; all hunting and fishing regulations apply to everyone, regardless of affiliation with any group, ethnicity, place of living, and reason for use. Those who created these regulations did so under the assumption that no one would be discriminated, that no preference would be given, and that all this was done for the good of the resource. The wild resources of Alaska belong to everyone.

However, rural Alaska Natives were left to fend for themselves when management efforts ignored their concerns and their explanations of their existing hunting and fishing practices. The Natives' conventional thought processes may seem simple and illogical to the non-Natives who created all current regulations—and who accepted the mainstream concept that Natives have no management practices of their own. The Native way is seen as uncivilized, with none of the science and modern technology considered useful for Western management guidelines. Natives are seen to hunt and fish without law and order or stewardship responsibilities.

Conventional theory suggests that unregulated hunting and fishing is a constant threat to fish and animal populations, and that management is necessary to ensure that what Natives catch can be a sustainable resource for years to come. If Natives hunt and fish without management guidelines, the wild resources could become a conservation concern, and if there is a shortage, the burden of harvest restrictions will apply unfairly to non-Natives. Regardless of what Native ancestors practiced, management institutions continue to ignore Native concerns and recommendations.

Alaska leaders recognized the Native practice of respect to the natural world but continually misunderstand traditional management principles that have sustained harvest of wild fish and animal for generations. If these Natives have been harvesting wild resources for generations, what has kept them from overharvesting? The Native approach is influential, innovative, and unique: the idea is to harvest what is needed for sustenance and leave the rest of the resources for Mother Nature to manage so that the next season the resource will be replenished. Every season is a new cycle of life. State leaders recognized and incorporated this concept into the Alaska state constitution as sustained yield.

How can we prove what it is about Native ways that have allowed Natives to continue harvesting wildlife for generations? One management observation Natives talk about is respect for fish and animals. Respect for Mother Nature. Is respect a physical or spiritual task of Native management? Did Natives see Mother Nature as a deity, or do Natives see themselves as children of Mother Nature? Although non-Native leaders recognized the concept of sustained yield, they misunderstood and took for granted that Mother Nature needs to be managed to guarantee preservation of wild resources. When troopers take away any hunting or fishing gear, their ulterior motive is a lesson of obedience with the claim that to conserve the wild, we must take away the means of harvesting. To teach this lesson with more intimidation, non-Natives started to tell the Natives when, where, and how to fish and hunt. A practice of showing Mother Nature who is the real boss, who will protect her resources from these savages.

Creating hardships on others and asserting oneself as the boss of Mother Nature is not the Native way of showing respect. If intimidated, Mother Nature has a way of showing her fury, and there is nothing that humans can do to stop her.



The St. Mary's Mission was a Catholic boarding high school for Alaska Natives located in St. Mary's, Alaska. I graduated from the mission in 1982. Like many Natives, I grew up hunting and fishing and enjoying the outdoors. I participated with the University of Alaska–Fairbanks (UAF) Upward Bound, a summer program offered to Alaska Native high school students. After six weeks of intensive math, science, and English lessons, students could go on a road trip to visit the Alaska state capital of Juneau or hike the famous Chilkoot Trail, used by early gold rush pioneers at the turn of the century.

I've read some of Robert Service's bard tales of the gold rush, watched the black-and-white 8mm movie reels of Charlie Chaplin and the string of real pioneers climbing the Chilkoot pass. During the Upward Bound program, I chose to hike the Chilkoot Trail, and several of us convinced some students that we would find gold on the trail.

Waking up on the second day, some students complained about ach-

ing backs and sore feet. We had three more nights and had not started our climb up the steep and rocky pass. “Why did I pick this?” someone complained over breakfast. “I could have gone to Juneau with those others.” Trying to be enthusiastic and encouraging, I asked if anyone had seen the fox skeleton hanging about a mile from the trailhead. It was ten feet up in a spruce tree, strung together like a taboo skeleton or a dreamcatcher in middle of nowhere. “You guys need to look around and pay attention,” I told them. I was in my realm.

As we completed the Chilkoot Trail, the experience encouraged me to venture and leave home to see what life was like in many parts of Alaska.

“If ten years from now, you find no one speaking your language, don’t come to me and ask me what happened. Ask yourself what happened.”

This quote was posted on the classroom door of our high school Eskimo language teacher, Andy Paukan, our Yup’ik teacher and a respected Native from St. Mary’s. Andy was a strong Yup’ik of tradition and culture. All the students at the school were Alaska Native. Andy’s respect to elders, respect to others, and respect to his family taught many of us a strong will to honor our culture and tradition—to think Native.

After high school, I became a struggling young college student at UAF, where all my professors were non-Native and the challenge of trying to learn Western academia with my Native way of thinking was failing. As my major course of study, I enrolled in the natural resource management program. It is a broad subject, and I enjoyed the ambiguity of the classes I was required to take. As a young student, I was encouraged to study fish or wildlife, but I enjoy these activities too much to be bound working in them on a daily basis, and I reasoned to myself that I would have nothing enjoyable to do on my vacations from work.

Western education follows a set order of principles and doctrines. That this is the way it is and the only way it shall be acceptable was the motto of every college instructor. It was easy to feel rejected or self-piteous when my instructors told me I had a failing grade and needed to try harder. It sounded illogical as I thought about how to make my Native ways logical. I reminded myself that I speak and think in broken English and was still learning. Many elders had encouraged me to go to school, but it seemed like I had failed. When I was struggling and feeling rejected, I thought about quiet moments along the Chilkoot Trail.

My parents taught me to trust my traditions and my culture. In 1982 I was on the trail when Uppa Kelly passed, and I missed his funeral. The trail was a rite of passage for me from adolescence to young adulthood and helped nurture my way of thinking with Mother Nature. I learned to trust my instincts. There are no accidents; things happen for a reason. What compelled many non-Natives to hike over this Chilkoot Trail? I know many left families and homes behind. What were they seeking?

College is not the same as high school. My instructors gave me a failing grade. The university sent a letter expelling me, and this taught me a valuable lesson. I would have more challenges. I was already a Native and I knew my Native ways. If I was to succeed, I needed to learn to think like a *gussak* . . . to think like a white man.

2 ≡ Wildlife Management

“Man, you guys make moose hunting look easy.” Ben Nukusuk was telling this to a group of Natives from Pilot Station.

There were several of us inside this little slough excursion. With my brothers James and Martin and cousin Ben Alick, we were a large group. Those of us from home had already caught our meat for the season, but this weather was too nice not to take a boat ride. Although each of us had gone our separate ways earlier that morning, we ended up together in this little dead-end slough, where moose and geese was always a reason to visit. Ben Alick and my brother James had grown up together, and this companionship made them excellent hunt partners. The beach in this slough was dry, and the beach grass and open setting made plenty of room to accommodate all of us. For some reason we enjoyed visiting this spot. Although there was no open meadow, the alder and willow were tall and thick and the moose were well fed and fat. There is one weakness about the moose: when we call them, they come out to see who we are.

There were enough of us that a long haul to carry out meat could be accomplished with one trip if a moose is caught far inland, by working together and everyone carrying a load. But we were not inclined to do so. From our elders we had learned a way to hunt that would make sport hunters skeptical and envy Native ways of helping each other. We used new tactics as a result of hunt regulations all Alaska residents must abide by. The first enforcement of these regulations was a dark period for traditional Native responsibility toward all wildlife. Elders felt resentment when Fish and Game came to Pilot Station and became boss of everything. With these regulations came a period of trial and error, and the skills learned were taught to young Native minds of our

generation. As a result, we hunt as if the wild moose is tame. When we call it like domestic livestock, it comes willing, exposed, ready to be shot. Some may claim that the animals willingly give themselves to the hunter.

We were all in this small slough helping Ben Nukusuk and his hunting party from Hooper Bay.

Since 1999 the moose population numbers in this part of Alaska have been exceptionally abundant, and this did not happen by accident. The difficult stories happened before this abundant population growth. Some are not pleasant. Restrictive state hunting regulations imposed on the Natives shattered the trustworthiness of all federal and state wildlife management intents. According to the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, all Natives are to follow state regulations despite traditional Native harvest ethics and guidelines. For a period, Native hunting was done in secret. Legally this is called poaching. If we want to understand how we got to this current situation, we must learn where we came from and the hardships endured to learn these lessons. Through this difficult period Mother Nature was there guiding what the elders tried to explain to management and their regulatory methods.



My youngest son, Nicholas, was ten years old when he caught his first moose. With my wife, Janice, we were taking an evening boat ride. Hunting with small open skiffs is a way of life. We were cruising as we passed the entrance to this lake. The thick willow and alder allowed us to see so far into the brush. With time only for a brief glimpse, we saw a young bull moose with several female cows and calves as we passed the lake entrance. I slowed and allowed the boat waves to quiet and calm. We agreed that this was a good time for a first catch. Several times Nicholas had helped shoot at moose with a smaller rifle. This was not a large antlered bull, but it was adequate for a first kill. In Alaska Native cultures, first kills are a significant event. Janice was ready in case the animal was wounded, spooked, or made a run. I was there to teach a hunt with a guaranteed success.

I turned into the lake at idle speed. The moose came into view, eighty yards away. “Wait,” I whispered. I watched the ears, as it was unsure of

what we were. At idle speed the sound of the motor was quiet. At sixty yards the moose twitched its ears and was about to turn. I whispered again for Nicholas to wait and called to the moose. This was my first call. The moose turned and looked to my calling. In a calm voice I coaxed the animal and it stood willing. At forty yards Janice whispered to Nicholas to load his rifle and gave the okay to shoot. All our children learned to shoot with open sights; scoped rifles require extra care and maintenance. For Natives who travel and handle rifles every day, scopes will never guarantee any more accuracy than without. The first shot rang loud and hit the moose in a non-vital area. It turned to run into the brush with a limp. I told Nicholas to aim lower; all our rifles are sighted for accuracy at one hundred yards. I called louder, and the moose turned and stood broadside. At twenty yards Nicholas hit a vital spot and the moose fell, ten feet from the boat on dry beach grass.

With water from the lake, we gave the moose a taste of freshwater and praised its spirit for sharing Native traditions. All the meat was cut. Nicholas delivered meat to his namesake family, and elders shared choice parts such as the heart and liver. As this was a first kill, we kept none for ourselves but gave all meat away to teach our young hunters that in times of need, hunters will provide for elders and community. It is a lesson from Mother Nature that if the hunter respects the catch, Mother Nature has more lessons to teach and that being bossy, aggressive, and intimidating is not part of Native management. Sharing the success of our harvest teaches our young to be respected providers and respected Yupiit.



Early colonial America and Russian explorers' harvesting Native wildlife resources impacted coastal communities of Alaska. Dangers to wildlife numbers in Alaska is not unusual; animals have become extinct and reintroduced. Sea otters in the Aleutian Islands and muskoxen in western Alaska are examples. Although in the colonial period hunting focused on fur and large animals to help feed early whalers and fur trappers, the gold rush era brought a non-Native user with a different mentality: that Alaska offers instant riches, prestige, and wealth. Into the new century these new Alaskans developed the state, and the wild fish and

animals provided food to them. The fur industry provided an economic stimulus for trapping, and wild salmon was developed into a market economy and exported. Salmon was packed, salted, shipped, and sold. Although non-Native Alaska played an influential role in management or lack of management in all wild resources, the post-ANCSA era has had the most impact to Native Alaska. If anything, this is a period of resentment that the 1971 ANCSA extinguished Native responsibility for wild resources and similar to the salmon experience with Uppa Kelly, it was non-Natives telling Natives what to do.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Wildlife Division and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) hold all wildlife management responsibility. Wildlife management in Alaska is unique, especially true for Native Alaska. Post-ANCSA, these two agencies trying to help Natives often created confusion. For Native Alaska, there are two hunting and fishing regulation booklets, one from the state and one from the federal government. Each has different area coverage for management guidelines; ADF&G uses game management units (GMU), and USFWS use regions, giving broad areas where hunting regulations, seasons, and bag limits are set, depending on the condition of whatever wildlife is managed. Regions or units next to each other may have similar hunt guidelines and others may have completely different regulations or closures. Every hunter needs to be aware of these guidelines and whether a legal permit, license, or tag is required. Both agencies issue annual hunting regulation booklets with regional contact information for questions or concerns. It is the responsibility of every hunter to know the rules; otherwise, wildlife troopers may give hunters citations and fines for any number of reasons.

Ignorance is no excuse for an illegal harvest. Unconsciously this creates resentment for Natives that their every action is closely monitored as if the hunters are children. This is not a good analogy, but it is unfortunately the case. The phrase to describe this management tool is “wildlife micromanagement.” What makes it complicated for Alaska Native hunters and fishers are the non-Native harvest ethics all regulations continue to represent.

Scrutinizing wildlife management efforts in other parts of the world is often necessary for recovery of numbers to acceptable levels after the