



**Arguing initiative**

Supreme Court weighs possibility of altering Yes for Salmon initiative before vote.

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**Disrupted service**

Severely iced-over cell tower causes service disruptions in Western Alaska.

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**Unique bird**

Crested auklet looks like a bassist in a punk band and smells like a tangerine.

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**HANGING ON THE BALANCE**



PHOTO BY PAULA DOBBYN

The road that connects Port Heiden and the old village, Meshik. Goldfish Lake is on the left. Bristol Bay is on the right.

**Community takes steps to adapt to climate change**

*Like dozens of other Alaska coastal villages, Port Heiden grapples with severe effects*

BY PAULA DOBBYN

For the Bristol Bay Times-Dutch Harbor Fisherman

Climate change is a deeply personal issue in Port Heiden.

"There are people who are still scarred from seeing those bodies," said Jaclyn Christensen, a resident and tribal official in Port Heiden, an Alutiiq village in western Alaska with about 100 people.

Behind her desk at the Native Village of Port Heiden offices, balancing her baby daughter Emerys on her lap, Christensen recalled one of the more traumatizing aspects of the severe coastal erosion her isolated village is experiencing. It happened in 2004.

"My brother-in-law and my sister-in-law, and others in the community, literally had to take the bones of their ancestors and move them from the former gravesite down at the old village to the new gravesite," said Christensen. "Those ocean waves were washing those bodies away."

Located on the Alaska Peninsula, 424 miles southwest of Anchorage, Port Heiden is a cluster of homes at



PHOTO BY PAULA DOBBYN

Jaclyn Christensen and her daughter, Emerys. Christensen is a resident and tribal official in Port Heiden.

the mouth of the Meshik River on the shores of Bristol Bay. It's a community on the frontline of climate change in Alaska, where temperatures are rising twice as fast as the global average.

Like dozens of other coastal villages in Alaska, Port Heiden is grappling with how to adapt to climate change effects, including rising ocean levels, disappearing sea ice, extreme erosion and flooding. With its volcanic soil and exposed location on the peninsula, Port Heiden is nat-

urally vulnerable to powerful storms and erosion. But climate change is exacerbating the problem. Between April 2017 and April 2018, the community lost between 35 and 65 feet of shoreline at its old village site, according to University of Alaska Fairbanks researchers.

The village is ahead of the game though. Unlike other Alaska villages facing the prospect of forced reloca-

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**Report: 95 caribou taken on Nushagak**

*Last year's harvest of 378 set the record for federal subsistence hunt*

BY ISABELLE ROSS  
 KDLG News

Hunters did not come remotely close to reaching the harvest limit of 218 caribou during the Nushagak Peninsula federal caribou hunt. The hunt closed on March 31, and so far the hunt reports show that 95 caribou were killed.

"It's actually probably a little bit above average if you look at the long term," said Andy Aderman, a refuge biologist at the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. "We've had a couple years with zero. That was kind of at the low point of the herd, and people didn't even bother to go hunting. On the other end of that, last season was far and away the greatest harvest."

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**Nonprofits get \$1.2M from Unalaska**

*Convention and Visitors Bureau sees \$25,000 boost in city funding*

BY JIM PAULIN

Bristol Bay Times - Dutch Harbor Fisherman

Nonprofit organizations, providing a variety of social and cultural services, received \$1.2 million from the Unalaska City Council last week for the next fiscal year starting July 1.

The Unalaska Dutch Harbor Convention and Visitors Bureau received the biggest funding boost, while others stayed the same, got less money, or received a little more.

The CVB's budget increased from \$175,000 to \$200,000, to cover a major

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## PORT HEIDEN

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tion, or “climigration” as some call it, Port Heiden has already made the move.

### ‘It’s completely gone’

The loss of sea ice around Port Heiden has allowed angry storms to barrel ashore, swallowing barrier islands and devouring the pumice-rich, volcanic soil upon which the village sits. The erosion is so severe that villagers started moving from their former town site, called Meshik, to higher ground in the 1981. A couple of dozen homes and other buildings, including the school and clinic, were jacked up and moved inland. Others didn’t make it before the sea swallowed them.

“My husband’s house, where he grew up, it’s completely gone. It’s washed away. The whole footprint of that property is gone,” Christensen said.

A lone house still stands in Meshik. But a bulldozer was preparing to take it down last week. As the heavy machinery readied for action, Port Heiden residents gathered at Ray’s Place, the town community center. They were there to plan for their future.

As the sun streamed through the building’s large windows, residents sat around a conference table and on couches for a two-day workshop on “adaptation planning.” Organized by the Bristol Bay Native Association, the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium (ANTHC), Alaska Sea Grant and other partners, the workshop allowed residents to discuss a new vulnerability assessment for Port Heiden with experts, and to identify priorities as the village plans for the years ahead.

Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA) sponsored the workshop with funding from the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. The vulnerability assessment is a report that examines the strengths and weaknesses of a community’s ability to adapt to climate change impacts. Port Heiden’s was prepared by Erica Mitchell with ANTHC.

During the workshop, residents discussed changes they are seeing in the weather, with vegetation, the tundra and shoreline, and the behaviors of the fish and wildlife. The changes run the gamut from an increasingly dry tundra and the fear of grass fires, to shrinking snowpack, and the loss of traditional hunting and gathering spots as animals and plants respond to warming temperatures.

Just a week before the meeting, for example, a large group of walrus hauled out



PHOTO BY PAULA DOBBYN

A bulldozer prepares to take down the last house in Meshik.

unexpectedly near the village. Residents were surprised because they are apparently not used to seeing them.

“We just had walrus on our beach and I was like, ‘Can we eat them?’” said Christensen, prompting laughter in the room.

### ‘A fact of life’

Climate change is both an emotional and practical matter for the people of Port Heiden.

“It’s been happening for so long. It’s just a fact of life,” said John Christensen Jr., tribal president and Jaclyn’s husband.

He was 6 when his family relocated from Meshik to higher ground farther inland. He doesn’t remember much about it. But years later, when he was older, Christensen helped to tear down his grandparents’ house after it became uninhabitable.

“We just used an excavator, pulled it down and lit it on fire,” he said. “It just had to be done.”

The last residents left Meshik in 2008. With just one house left, the old village is practically gone. But more changes are on the way.

A lakeside road that connects Port Heiden to Meshik will likely wash away with the next big westerly storm, said Richard Buzard, a University of Alaska Fairbanks graduate student who is measuring shoreline erosion in Port Heiden and other western Alaska villages for his doctorate degree.

The road, on a storm-eroded 30-foot wide land barrier, is the only thing preventing Goldfish Lake from pouring into the ocean.

Meshik used to be located between Goldfish Lake and the ocean and residents have traditionally used the lake for subsistence fishing and recreation.

As fresh water from Goldfish Lake seeps through the eroded bluffs, holding the lake back from the ocean, a complete breach becomes more likely with every passing day.

“We can say with certainty that the lake will breach this year,” said Buzard, whose work is funded by Alaska Sea Grant and managed by Jacquelyn Overbeck, a geologist with the Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys.

When Goldfish Lake finally surrenders to the ocean, it’ll be another loss for the community, yet one that residents know is coming.

“I guess we’ll get used to it,” said Annie

Christensen, John’s mother.

Annie remembers when she and her family had to abandon Meshik. Although it’s been decades since they left, it still evokes strong emotions.

“I miss living near the water. There’s no lake or water where I live now. And you have to have a car to get anywhere. We used to be able to walk anywhere,” Christensen said.

### Potential upsides

While climate change has meant profound loss to older Port Heiden residents, some also see opportunity and potential.

Warmer temperatures mean a longer growing season for gardeners. Small raised bed and greenhouse gardens are becoming more common and the variety of vegetables grown is diversifying, according to the vulnerability assessment.

Since 1960, average temperatures in Port Heiden have increased several degrees and this trend is expected to continue. The average monthly temperature in Port Heiden in January 1961 was 21 degrees Fahrenheit. Between 2040 and 2049, the average January temperature is expected to hit 27 degrees, according to University of Alaska Fairbanks.

And when Goldfish Lake breaches, it could open the door to a new, much-needed boat harbor.

Before the Goldfish Lake road got whittled down to a thin strip of dirt, people used it to take their boats to Meshik and launch them from a protected lagoon. But since erosion has made the road unsafe, fishermen have had to launch their vessels from the beach, a much more dangerous proposition.

“A rogue wave picked up my boat and tossed it back onto the trailer,” said John Christensen Jr.

One of Port Heiden’s major priorities is

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### UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Nushagak Cooperative, Inc. Project No. 14873-000

NOTICE OF PRELIMINARY PERMIT APPLICATION ACCEPTED FOR FILING AND SOLICITING COMMENTS, MOTIONS TO INTERVENE, AND COMPETING APPLICATIONS

(April 6, 2018)

On March 22, 2018, Nushagak Cooperative, Inc. filed an application for a preliminary permit, pursuant to section 4(f) of the Federal Power Act (FPA), proposing to study the feasibility of the Nuyakuk River Hydroelectric Project (Nuyakuk River Project or project) **to be located on the Nuyakuk River, near Dillingham, Alaska.** The sole purpose of a preliminary permit, if issued, is to grant the permit holder priority to file a license application during the permit term. A preliminary permit does not authorize the permit holder to perform any land-disturbing activities or otherwise enter upon lands or waters owned by others without the owners’ express permission. The project would utilize approximately 218 acres of land owned by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The proposed project would consist of the following new facilities: (1) a 100-foot-long, 20-foot-high intake structure; (2) a 1,200-foot-long, 50-foot-wide by 15-foot-tall concrete-lined power conduit; (3) a 100-foot-wide by 100-foot-long powerhouse forebay with a surface area of 0.23 acres; (4) a 100-foot-wide by 60-foot-long concrete powerhouse containing two 5 megawatt (MW) bulb-type turbines for a total installed capacity of 10 MW; (5) a 100-foot-wide, 500-foot-long tailrace discharging to the Nuyakuk River; (6) a project substation; (7) a 135-mile-long, 25 kilovolt transmission line extending from the substation to the communities of Aleknagik, Koliganek, Stuyahok, Ekwok, and Levelock; and (8) appurtenant facilities. The estimated annual generation of the Nuyakuk River Project would be 72.8 gigawatt-hours.

Applicant Contact: Mr. Bobby Armstrong, Nushagak Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 530, Dillingham, AK 99576; phone: (907) 842-5251.

FERC Contact: Julia Kolberg, phone: (202) 502-8261 or e-mail: Julia.kolberg@ferc.gov.

Deadline for filing comments, motions to intervene, competing applications (without notices of intent), or notices of intent to file competing applications: 60 days from the issuance of this notice. Competing applications and notices of intent must meet the requirements of 18 C.F.R. § 4.36. The Commission strongly encourages electronic filing. Please file comments, motions to intervene, notices of intent, and competing applications using the Commission’s eFiling system at <http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/efiling.asp>. Commenters can submit brief comments up to 6,000 characters, without prior registration, using the eComment system at <http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/ecomment.asp>. You must include your name and contact information at the end of your comments. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at [FERCOnlineSupport@ferc.gov](mailto:FERCOnlineSupport@ferc.gov), (866) 208-3676 (toll free), or (202) 502-8659 (TTY). In lieu of electronic filing, please send a paper copy to: Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE, Washington, D.C. 20426. The first page of any filing should include docket number P-14873-000.

More information about this project, including a copy of the application, can be viewed or printed on the “eLibrary” link of Commission’s website at <http://www.ferc.gov/docs-filing/elibrary.asp>. Enter the docket number (P-14873) in the docket number field to access the document. For assistance, contact FERC Online Support.

Kimberly D. Bose,  
Secretary.



PHOTO BY PAULA DOBBYN

An old pipe pokes out of the eroded bluff holding back Goldfish Lake.

# PORT HEIDEN

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getting a harbor built so that fishermen don't have to brave the open water to get their boats into the sea. When Goldfish Lake eventually merges with the ocean, the lake bed will become the protected location for a harbor, said Scott Anderson, the tribe's environmental planner.

### Other challenges

Besides battling with climate change, Port Heiden faces many of the same challenges as other towns in Bush Alaska. Topping the list is the staggeringly high cost of living.

Round-trip airfare to Anchorage this month cost \$1,182.50 per person. A carton of Cheez-Its goes for \$8.80 at the village's only

store. A box of Kleenex fetches \$6.50.

Environmental contamination is another huge problem. Port Heiden was used as a military installation in the 1940s, housing as many as 5,000 personnel. The Air Force later built a White Alice Communication System site in the village during the Cold War, used to help relay signals about enemy attacks. Soil contaminated with PCBs, TCE, other chlorinated solvents, diesel and petroleum were left behind.

Although clean-up efforts have been ongoing since the 1980s, hot spots still exist, according to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and much more remediation needs to be done.

The beach at Port Heiden looks pristine at first. Shells, driftwood, and pumice rocks dot the shore. Shorebirds peck at insects in the sand. Waterfowl bob in the waves. But



PHOTO BY PAULA DOBBYN

A rusted pipe sticks out of the eroded bluff holding back Goldfish Lake in Port Heiden.



Meshik's eroded bluffs tell a different story. Rusted pipes, old wires, wells and septic systems emerge from the bluffs, remnants of the abandoned site. Each storm slices more of the bluffs away, revealing more junk.

Plastic bags filled with contaminated soil lie near the beach, waiting to be hauled away by barge.

While there's a lot of cleanup left to do, Port Heiden is forging ahead with efforts to make itself a more resilient community. It has a robust recycling operation financed through grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. And it recently built a new seafood processing plant that's not yet operational.

It also built the Meshik Farm, a collective effort to improve food security with animals including pigs, chickens, reindeer and a cow.

### No to the status quo

There's been mixed success with animal husbandry. Some of the reindeer were eaten by a bear in 2015, according to public radio station KDLG. Others got away.

The fierce winds that are common in Port Heiden blew the plastic covering off a high tunnel used to grow crops.

"I think the fact that we try to do something and fail, or try to do something and

succeed, that just speaks volumes. We're not going to raise a flag and say we're the best reindeer herders in the world. Because we're not. But we tried," said Christensen.

"The fact that we fight for the betterment of ourselves speaks for itself. We don't just want to continue the status quo," she said.

Port Heiden aspires to become a regional hub of commerce and aviation. Once the seafood plant gets running and the boat harbor is built, it'll be better positioned to move in that direction, according to Anderson and others who attended the workshop. The village also has a lighted runway capable of handling large aircraft, including C-130s.

The village has challenges but one thing going for it is its forward-looking attitude and can-do spirit. It was evident even decades ago when the village applied for grant funding for erosion control and relocation.

"I was most impressed with the amount of qualitative thinking that had gone into this project," wrote Dee Derr, a state official with the former Department of Community and Regional Affairs, in 1979. "This is a city that appears to be one that works together closely. All of the people obviously have a personal interest in this grant."



The **Bristol Bay Times** &  
The Dutch Harbor **Fisherman**

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