

BEFORE *Bristol Bay*



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Dedicated to those who came before, who shared their wisdom of the land.

Dear Reader,

I want to begin with a land acknowledgement by thanking the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq, Dena'ina/Tanaina, and Yup'ik/Yupiaq peoples of Bristol Bay. We recognize the thousands of years of stewardship and acknowledge the people of the region as they continue to be the caretakers of the land.

Celebrating and preserving cultural heritage is essential to the mission and values of Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC), where our mission is Pinircarluku Yuuyaraput, "Enriching Our Native Way of Life." As a Yupiaq from Tuyuryaq (Togiak), I have been very fortunate to work on the *Bristol Bay Online! Native Place Names Project*, an ongoing mapping project that has more than 1,300 names identified across the region. The project is an initiative of BBNC's Land Department and has given me the opportunity to work with Elders from the region to collect and preserve important place names that have been gifted to us by those who came before.

Cultural preservation goes hand in hand with land management. For thousands of years, Bristol Bay lands and waterways have sustained and connected our region, people, and cultures. Place names give the landscape power and meaning and represent generations spent living on the land.

This project is near and dear to my heart. As a young person growing up in Tuyuryaq, subsisting off the land, I learned how important it is to be aware of where you are, whether you are traveling on land or by water, and the importance of learning landmarks to help identify where you are. With *Bristol Bay Online!*, we are ensuring this important knowledge is passed on to future generations.

I hope you enjoy learning about the *Bristol Bay Online! Native Place Names Project*.

Quyana, Chin'an, Quyanaa

Francisca Demoski

Francisca Demoski
BBNC Land Manager





For thousands of years, our people have lived on this land, known this land, and named this land.

Qigcikluku nunamta atullerkaa

Have respect for our land and its resources (Yup'ik)

Nunapet carlia'arluki

Taking care of our lands (Alutiiq)

Qaghishin shegh ghu dita

The earth is good and I use it (Dena'ina)

They named places lush
with berries.

They named places
where caribou ran.

And they named waters
where salmon returned,
like magic, every year.



Salmon
niklliq (Alutiiq)
łeqa (Dena'ina)
sayak (Yup'ik)

This knowledge was gifted to
their children.

As young people grew, they
learned how to navigate on
water and over land.

They learned how to find
sustenance.

They learned what had
happened on the land in
generations past.

They taught their own children.

And so it went.



When strangers came on ships, they did not know where the berries grew, or where the caribou ran.

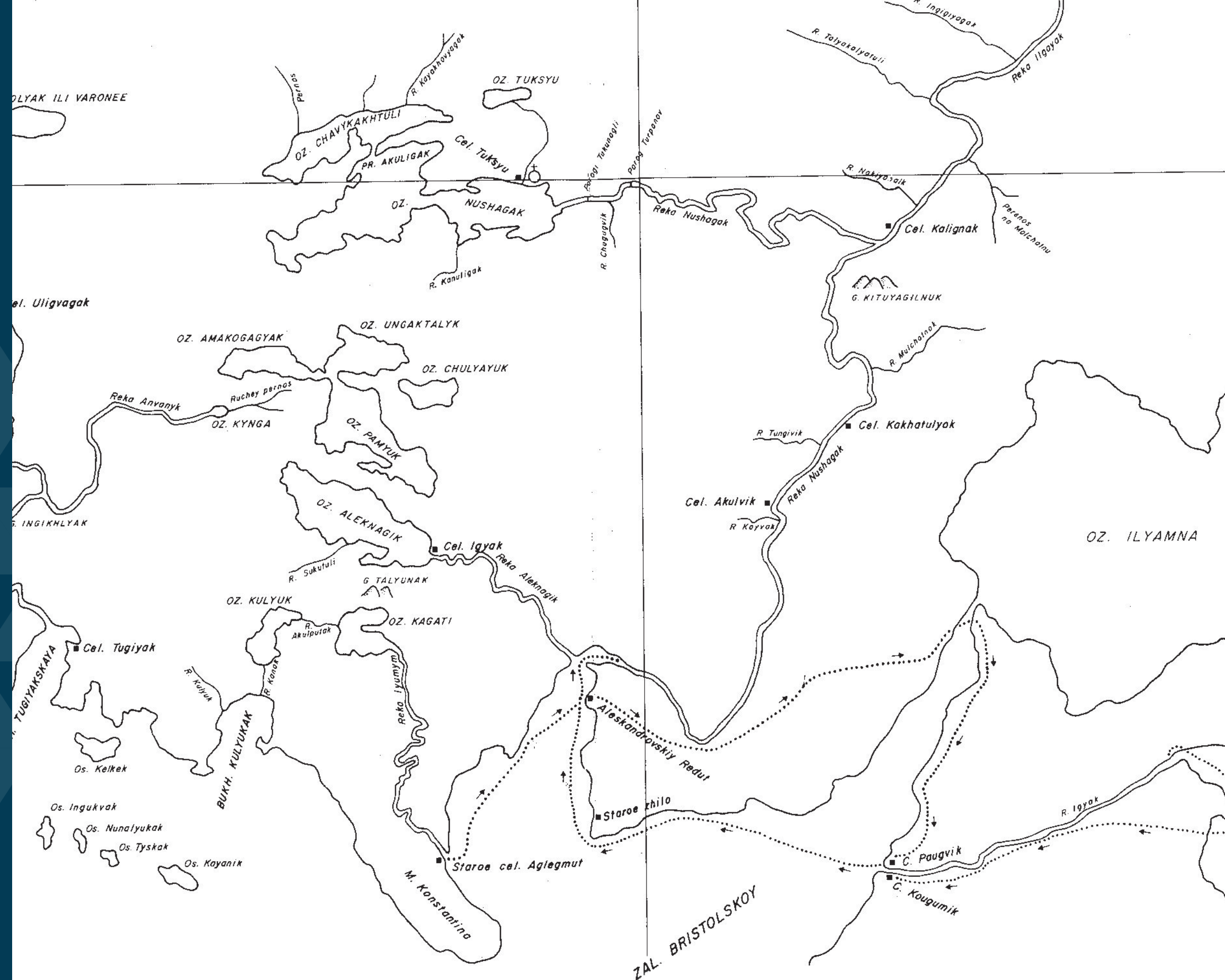
They did not know that a battle had been fought here.

Or that a fire had occurred there.

Instead, they named the land after explorers. They named it after royalty who would never see the land, feel its coastal breezes, or taste its rich salmon.

In 1778, Captain James Cook of the British Royal Navy journeyed to Alaska. He named Prince William Sound and Elizabeth Island after children of the King of England. In early July, his expedition arrived at either the Kvichak River or Naknek River. He named it River Bristol after the Earl of Bristol.

The bay became Bristol Bay.



1829 map of Bristol Bay by Ivan Vasilev, courtesy of Bristol Bay Heritage Land Trust. | 7



Explorers like Cook passed their knowledge on through written journals and maps, shared with the rest of the world. People learned this geography, and called the land by these written names.

As traders and settlers came to Alaska, they adapted some Native place names, using pronunciations that were easier in Russian or English. They named other landmarks and cities after politicians, resources, or geographic characteristics.

Place names that had been passed down for thousands of years were used less and less. Wisdom of the land—the gift of generations of ancestors—began to disappear.



Throughout Alaska, there is a movement to document Native place names—to preserve our rich history and heritage.

In some cases, Native place names are officially reclaimed and used.

The highest mountain in North America was known as Mount McKinley for more than a century. Its place name was reclaimed in 2015. Future generations will know it on maps and in common reference by its Koyukon Athabaskan name: Denali, the Great One.

The people of Utqiagvik, the northernmost city in the United States, reclaimed the name of their community in 2016. For more than a century, it had been known as Barrow. Now Alaskans know Utqiagvik for its original Iñupiaq name, which references a place for gathering roots. Imagine how important this place name was for generations of Iñupiat living in the harsh conditions north of the Arctic Circle.

"Without land, we are nothing."

- Harvey Samuelsen, 1926-2004



In Bristol Bay, a vision for preserving Native place names began to take shape. The late Harvey Samuelsen was an Alaska Native leader who always advocated for the people of Bristol Bay. He spoke passionately about the land and wanted to preserve place names while Elders could pass them on.



Beginning in 2003, several groups and individuals came together to begin the important work of collecting Native place names in Bristol Bay.

Momentum built over the years. Place names from different communities, representing different languages, were collected: from villages in the Nushagak River and Iliamna Lake watersheds to the Chigniks.

Cihniq – Chignik Bay

Chignik Bay was called Cihniq by the Alutiiq people which translates as “big wind.” Alaska’s modern fishing industry was developed in ports like Cihniq where there was good anchorage and excellent access to fertile fishing waters. Canneries started operating here as early as 1889. However, in the years before the World Wars, the residents of Cihniq were renowned as far away as Europe for cultivating a different species – fox.

Fox farming was a popular and rewarding practice in the late 19th century, and many Cihniq families established fox farms outside the village or on nearby islands. By remembering Native place names like Cihniq, we are reminded that even so-called “modern” communities have a deep history, and that there was a time when our people made a living from activities that no longer exist today.





Qikulek – Clay

Situated just north of Becharof Lake and accessed from the north side of Upper Nanvarnaq Lagoon on the Egegik River, are the Whitefish Creek Lakes, once known by the Yup'ik word Qikulek. Although its modern name suggests fishing as a primary importance, the area holds greater significance to those who hunted large, bearded seals in skin qayaqs (kayak) in Bristol Bay.

Shareholder Nick Abalama Sr. remembers stories of hunters traveling up the river from Egegik in qayaqs. Walking waist deep into the water and stomping on the bottom would yield handfuls of white clay. This clay would then be mixed with seal oil, and the mixture would be used to cover the qayaq used in seal hunting. The seal oil acted as water repellent in the deep waters of Bristol Bay, and the white color of the clay made the qayaq an ice-like white, serving as camouflage when approaching the maklaks (bearded seal). For the hunters, this collection of small lakes became known as Qikulek, “clay.”

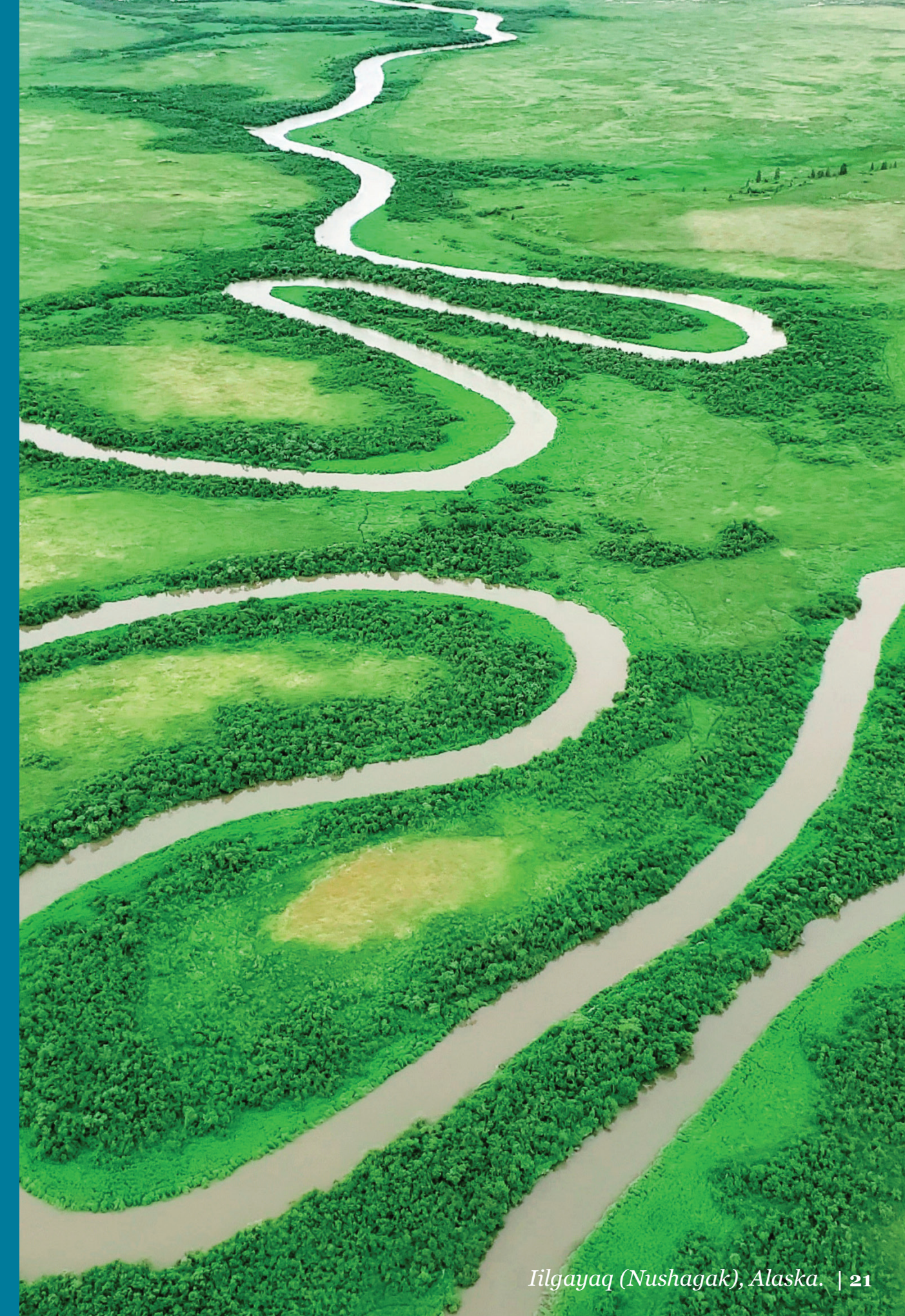
Ilgayaq – Nushagak

The original meaning for the Yup'ik word Ilgayaq (Nushagak) is unknown, yet we know much about this old village and river area. Everyone could identify the location on the map, but no one could explain the meaning of the name. After talking and listening at a Koliganek meeting in 1996, Anuska Petla began remembering a story about a warrior.

Long ago during the time of the war, one enormous man and his wife lived near a small river. All fall his wife was working. Her husband asked, “What are you working on?” She replied, “I’m working on our escape route.” One day while she was cooking in the house, she saw a shadow of a person peeking in the window. Casually, without any sudden moves, she lifted her cooking and put it aside. She told her husband, “The warriors have already surrounded us.”

The husband jumped into the dugout his wife had been working on and came up on the other side of the river. After he had escaped, he called out to his opponents, “Ak’a pikna eneka tevaqa!” (I already portaged thru my house!) He escaped, and it was impossible to catch him. Then his wife followed him.

After telling this story, one person mentioned that the root word of Ilgayaq, *iiq* means “to hide.” Others agreed and mentioned that in the war stories the warriors might have come to this area to hide. This warrior story is also known through dance. Though we do not know exactly the history and meaning of Ilgayaq, through group remembrance and dance, we are able to know something of this place and its meaning within our history.





Curyung – Where the Water Turns Murky

Where the Nushagak and Wood rivers meet in southwestern Alaska, there is a place called Curyung. In Yugtun, the language of the Yup'ik people, Curyung means “murky water” or is described as the “the place where the water turns murky.” There, the glacial silty sediments from upriver mix together to create murky water, which then spills into Bristol Bay.

Eventually, the nearby U.S. post office was renamed after a 19th century Senator, and the local town began to be referenced by the same name. That is how the place called Curyung came to be widely known as Dillingham.

This information was shared by Courtenay Carty, Tribal Administrator for Curyung Tribal Council.

Qizhjuh Vena – Salmon up the River

The body of water north of Iliamna Lake, known to tourists and map-makers as Lake Clark, is called Qizhjuh Vena by the Dena'ina people. Qizhjuh translates into English as “place people gather” or “old Kijik” and Vena as “lake.” Because Old Kijik Lake has always been a reliable source of salmon, Dena'ina people made the area their home long ago.

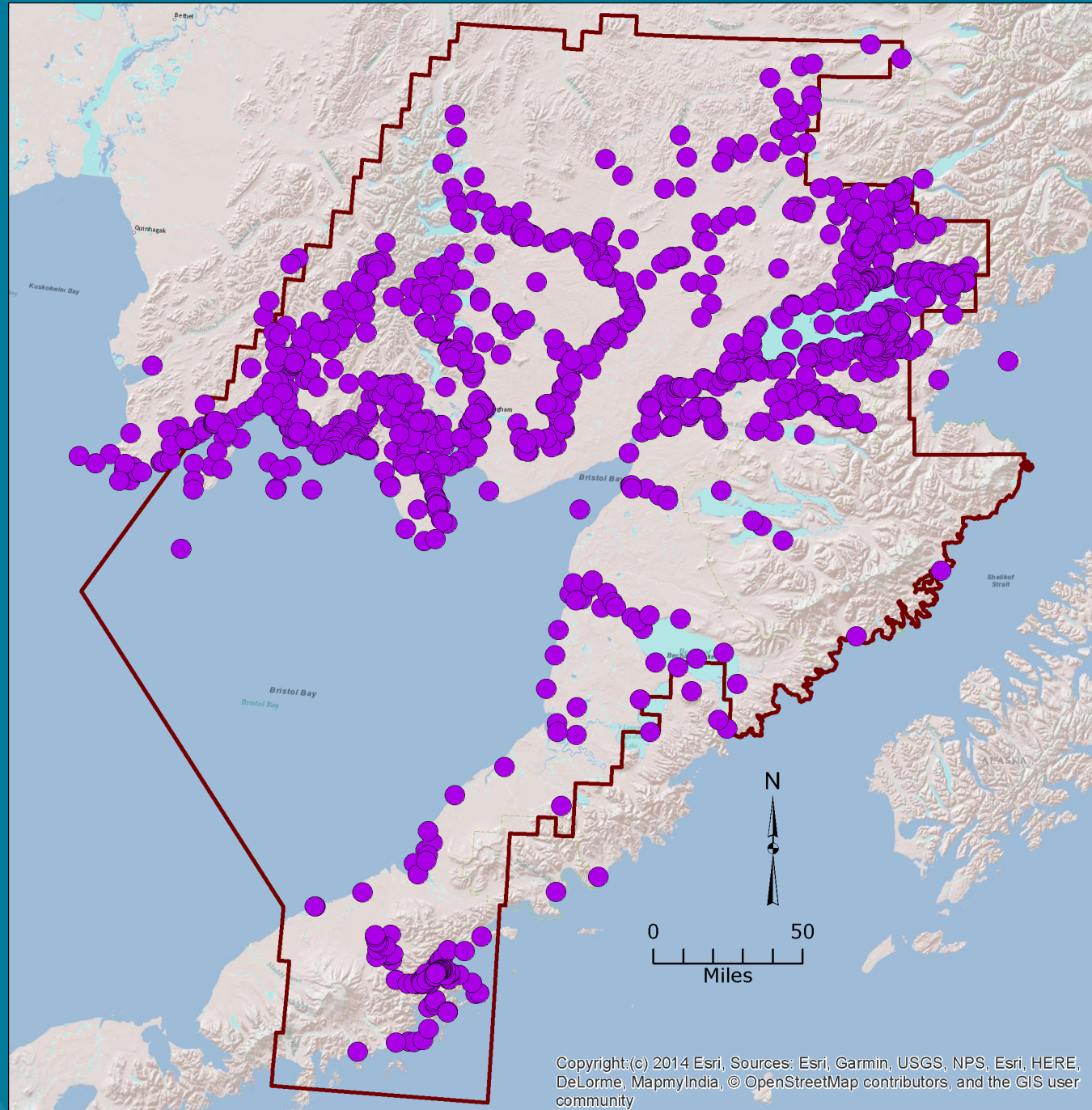


Butch Hobson has contributed to the Dena'ina pronunciation of place names for the Bristol Bay Online! database.



Bristol Bay Online! is a program of the BBNC Land Department. It is designed to collect, preserve and increase accessibility to Native place names information for the people of Bristol Bay.

BristolBayOnline.com is the public-facing website for the program. It features an interactive map showing place names, their locations, meanings, and variations. Audio files were added so people can hear the proper pronunciation.



bristolbayonline.com





Eva Yanez, and Anecia and Mike Toyukak.

To keep the work going, the BBNC Land Department partners with the BBNC Education Foundation to offer grants for projects that contribute to place names preservation.

BBNC's Land Department also developed agreements to share place names data with the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Lake Clark National Park and Preserve.

There are more names and stories to collect.



Luki and Pauline Akelkok.



Aerial view near Perryville, Alaska. | 29



Top left: Alice Downey, Donna Kearns, and Eileen Griggs.
Middle left: Palescovia Johnson.
Bottom left: Wass Chunak and Nick Gumlickpuk.



Hjalmar Olson and Gust Bartman.

You can help preserve these names and add to our collective efforts.

Get in touch with the BBNC Land Department or Education Foundation for information about small grants, or tips and tools for Elder interviews.

The wisdom of the land is still there.

It's been there since before Bristol Bay was named Bristol Bay.

And it's waiting for you.

AlexAnna Salmon with her daughter Addi in Igyaraq (Igiugig), Alaska.



“I equate knowledge of place names as an equivalent marker as monuments and such of the Western world. In our world—that didn’t hoard materialistic items to pass down for millennia, that didn’t build shrines to memorialize special places; that didn’t leave a footprint—it is our name that reminds us of why a place is special.

As I travel by foot, boat, plane, four-wheeler through or over my homelands. I repeat the names of these places as a way to remind me of the rich heritage I come from, a way to remember my grandmother and her teachings, and a reminder to gift this information to our future generations.

And may they continue the tradition of naming in our way as they have their own lived experience in a place we have lived for thousands of years!”

- AlexAnna Salmon

Before Bristol Bay was developed by the BBNC Land Department in collaboration with:

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layout, editing

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Bristol Bay Native Corporation
Anchorage, Alaska

There are many individuals and organizations who have helped bring
Bristol Bay Online! to life. To all of them,

Quyanaasinaq.

Chin'an gheli.

Quyana cakneq.

Thank you very much.



Bristol Bay Native Corporation Land Department | (800) 426-3602 | bbnc.net

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