

Heritage and Cultural

The North Slope region contains a long and rich history of human habitation. Numerous sites across the North Slope containing sod houses, graves, storage pits, ice cellars, bones, and relics attest to the historical use and presence of Iñupiat and Western people within the planning boundary. Cultural resources are generally considered “historical” in age around the 50-year mark, and therefore require further consideration under historic preservation law.

The North Slope Arctic coast served as a migration corridor for early nomads arriving from Asia across the Bering land bridge. Archeological evidence of human occupation and use of the Arctic coastal plain dates back to 10,000 B.C. The new migrants began exploring the Brooks Range foothills when glaciers began retreating to the Brooks Range. The Paleoindian period between 13,700 and 9,800 years ago, was the first widespread Native American cultural tradition that was well-documented by the archaeological record. These groups were likely small, mobile bands that hunted large game. As the environment changed at the end of the Pleistocene era and the large mammals on which they survived disappeared, the Paleoindian tradition disappeared. The Mesa site, south of Utqiagvik in the foothills of the Brooks Range, is the best documented site of the period.

The record of human existence on the North slope is characterized by several distinct cultural periods marked by changes in tool style. The environmental characteristics of the Arctic shaped Iñupiat culture into a semi-nomadic society with a tradition of whaling and an emphasis on seasonal inland hunting. This pattern of land use remained unchanged until the second half of the 19th century with the arrival of westerners, new tools, and other natural events.

The discovery of bowhead whale paths led to a dramatic increase in commercial whaling activity between 1850 and 1890. Several whaling stations were built along the coast and provided regular contact and trading with the Iñupiat population. Smallpox and influenza outbreaks decimated North Slope Iñupiat populations during the final quarter of the nineteenth century. A simultaneous decline in caribou populations resulted in famine and caused inland Iñupiat to relocate to coastal communities, such as Utqiagvik. By 1910, the population decline reduced the Iñupiat population to between 20 and 25 percent of its 1850 population.

Many traditional uses of the land continue today in the Iñupiat and Nunamiut communities and surrounding areas. These traditions, cultural practices, and subsistence lifestyle are passed down to the younger generations of Alaska Native people.

In 1900, a report by the US Navy provided the first written documentation about petroleum resources on the North Slope by verifying oil shale deposits along the Etivluk River. The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) completed the first comprehensive survey in 1901 and published the results in 1904. The USGS report noted the presence of geological formations that could have petroleum deposits as well as natural oil seepages near Cape Simpson. The

Iñupiat people knew about the existence of oil seeps on the North Slope long before they were formally located and described by the U.S. Geological Survey in 1901. Some of the first documented petroleum deposits and oil seeps were found near Cape Simpson. Following extensive exploration work by the USGS and the Navy, producible oil was first discovered at Umiat, along the Colville River. Natural gas was first discovered at Umiat and Utqiagvik. In 1949, the South Barrow Gas field was developed. The federal government began exploring for oil in 1923 with the establishment of the Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4.

Some of the lands used by Alaska's first people have been conveyed to individuals as Native Allotments. Within the planning boundary there are currently 145 allotments totaling almost 11,000 acres. The number and acreage will change as more allotments are conveyed under existing federal laws. Lands with heritage and cultural significance will be managed according to the following goals, objectives and management guidelines.

Goal

Cultural Resources. The Alaska Historic Preservation Act establishes the State's basic goal: to preserve, protect, and interpret the historic, prehistoric, and archaeological resources of Alaska so that the scientific, historic, and cultural heritage values embodied in these resources may pass undiminished to future generations.

Objectives and Management Guidelines

Objective A. Preserve, protect, and interpret the historic, prehistoric, and archaeological resources within the planning area.

- **Guideline A-1.** Identify and determine the significance of cultural resources on state land through the following actions:
 1. Cultural resource surveys conducted by qualified personnel;
 2. Research about cultural resources on state land by qualified individuals and organizations; and,
 3. Cooperative efforts for planned surveys and inventories between state, federal, and local or Alaska Native groups.
- **Guideline A-2.** Protect significant cultural resources through the following actions:
 1. The Office of History and Archeology (OHA) within the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) reviews authorizations, construction projects or land uses for potential conflict with cultural resources. The office determines if there may be an adverse effect on heritage resources and makes recommendations to mitigate these effects.

2. Cooperating with concerned government agencies, Alaska Native corporations, statewide or local groups, and individuals to develop guidelines and recommendations on how to avoid or mitigate identified or potential conflict.
 3. Require the establishment of buffers a minimum of 50' or greater around significant cultural resources as part of the overall protection process when subdividing or otherwise using state lands.
- **Guideline A-3.** If determined by OHA during an agency review of a proposed disposal that a cultural survey may be required, further coordination between OHA and DMLW prior to the land disposal is warranted. A Cultural Resources Investigation Permit is required for cultural resource contractors surveying on State land. This permit authorization is managed by the State Archaeologist within OHA. Cultural surveys shall be considered where OHA reported sites exist or where there is a high potential for such sites to exist. The extent and type of the cultural survey within the area of the proposed land disposal shall be determined by OHA in consultation with DMLW.
 - **Guideline A-4.** Recreation facilities that might subject cultural sites to vandalism because of the increased public use should not be placed adjacent to the cultural sites.
 - **Guideline A-5.** The Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) is an inventory of all reported historic and prehistoric sites within the State of Alaska and is maintained by the OHA. The AHRS is used to identify known cultural resource sites and ensure they are addressed during a project should one be proposed where a cultural resource exists. By knowing of possible cultural remains prior to construction, efforts can be made to avoid project delays and prevent the destruction of cultural sites. While over 45,000 sites have been reported within Alaska, this is estimated to be only about 1% of the sites which may actually exist but are as yet unreported. The AHRS is not complete or static, so heritage sites, when found, should be reported to the OHA.

Objective B. *Other Guidelines affecting Heritage and Cultural Resources.* Many of the resource guidelines found within Chapter 2 either directly or indirectly affect heritage and cultural resources in the planning area. Other guidelines will affect cultural resources. See other applicable sections of this chapter.