

Mekoryuk

People and Place

Location

Mekoryuk is situated on the mouth of Shoal Bay. It is on the north shore of Nunivak Island in the Bering Sea and is about 30 miles off the coast. The community is in the Bethel Census Area and is located about 149 air miles west of Bethel and 553 miles west of Anchorage. Mekoryuk is included in the Yukon Delta Wildlife Refuge and makes up 7.4 square miles of land and 0.1 square miles of water.

Demographic Profile

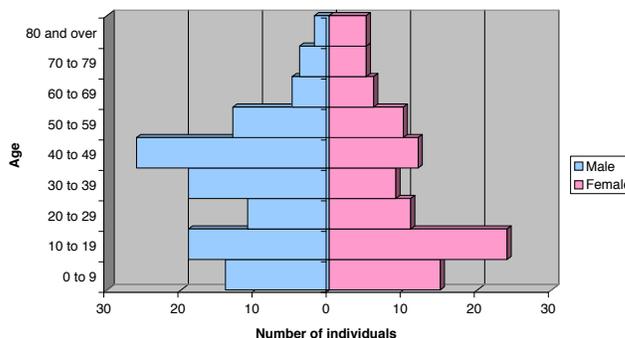
There were a total of 210 inhabitants of Mekoryuk at the time of 2000 U.S. Census and of those a significantly large amount, 53.8% were male. About 46.2% of the population was female. The population of the community has fluctuated quite a bit since 1910 when there were 127 occupants to the largest point which was at the time of the 1970 Census when there were 249 occupants. In 2000 about 3.3% of the population was White, 90.5% were American Indian and Alaska Native, and 6.2% were of two or more races. A total of 96.7% of the population recognized themselves as all or part Alaska Native or American Indian. About 0.5% of the population was Hispanic. The median age in the community was 35.6 years of age which is very close to the American median age of 35.3. There were a total of 96 housing units in the community in 2000, 23 were vacant, and of those six were vacant due to seasonal use. No one in the population lived in group quarters. Of the population age 25 and over about 68.9% had graduated from high school or gone on to further schooling, 5.0% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, and a very large percent (31.1%) never graduated from high school.

History

Historically the Native Eskimo people present in the area of Mekoryuk have been the Yup'ik peoples, specifically the Nuniwarmiut people who are Cup'it Eskimos. Nunivak Island itself has been peopled for approximately 2,000 years. In 1821 the first outside contact occurred with the Russian American Company. The Company documented 400 people living in 16 villages on the Island. In 1874 a summer village camp by the name of "Koot" was noted at the modern day site of Mekoryuk. There was an epidemic in 1900

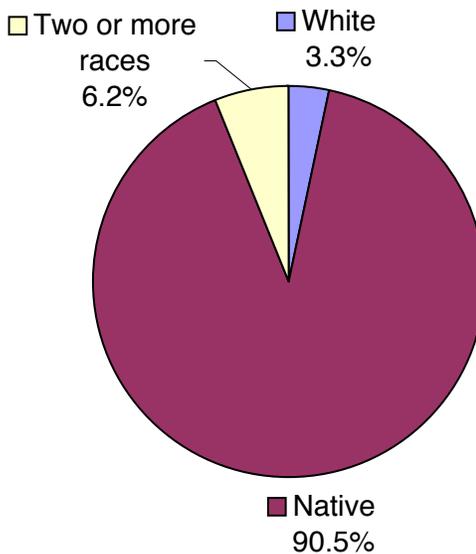
**2000 Population Structure
Mekoryuk**

Data source: US Census



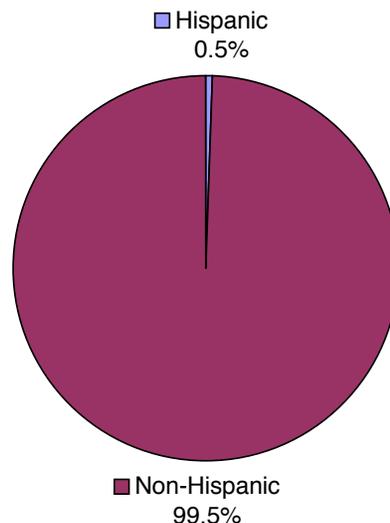
**2000 Racial Structure
Mekoryuk**

Data source: US Census



**2000 Hispanic Ethnicity
Mekoryuk**

Data source: US Census



which decimated the population. Only four families in the village survived. An Eskimo missionary built the Evangelical Covenant Church in the 1930s in the village and a BIA school was built in 1939. The school brought people who moved from other parts of the island to the village. An Eskimo-Russian trader introduced reindeer for commercial purposes in 1920. In the 1940s the operation was purchased by the BIA and in 1945 a slaughterhouse was constructed. The reindeer were bred with caribou from Denali Park and the offspring are larger and more difficult to handle than other reindeer in the state of Alaska. In 1934, 34 musk-oxen from Greenland were brought to the Island in an endeavor to save the animal from extinction. Presently the herd numbers at around 500 musk-oxen with calves from the herd having been relocated and introduced to other areas of Alaska. In 1940 a post office opened in the village. During this time women lived in semi-subterranean sod houses with the men living in one or more men's community houses called "qasgir" and at which time traditional ceremonies and beliefs were still practiced by the Native people. Extensive change was brought about to the Island in the 50s and 60s. In 1957 an airstrip was built and the Territorial Guard was formed which caused the men to go to Fort Richardson which is located by Anchorage for training. By 1957 the only permanent community on the Island was Mekoryuk and around this time many of the families moved to the community of Bethel to be closer to the high school. Families returned to Mekoryuk for fishing and sea mammal hunting in the late spring. In 1969 the City became incorporated. In 1978 a high school was constructed in the community.

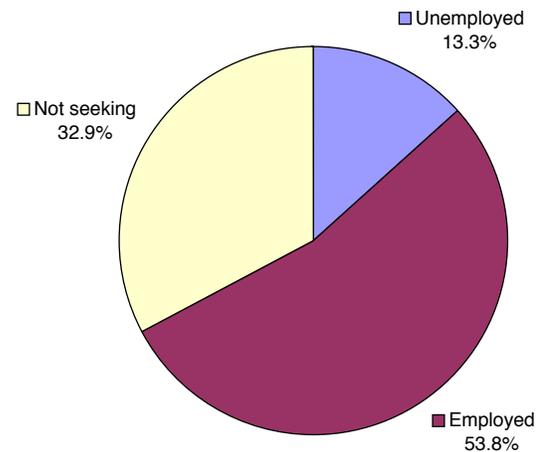
Infrastructure

Current Economy

In Mekoryuk employment is provided for the most part by the school, City, Village Corporation, commercial fishing, construction, and service industries. A major employer in the community is Nuniarmiut Reindeer and Seafood Products Co. Many families earn income from the production of Native crafts or from trapping. The processor, Coastal Villages Seafood, processes halibut in the community. In 2000 a total of 113 commercial fishing permits were issued to residents of the community and 50 community members were licensed crew men. Nearly

2000 Employment Structure Mekoryuk

Data source: US Census



all families are involved in subsistence and most families have fish camps. In 2000 of those residents age 16 years and over about 53.8% were employed, 13.3% were unemployed, and 32.9% were not in the labor force at the time of the Census. Nearly 64.9% of those which were employed were classified as having been government workers. The per capita income for those in Mekoryuk was \$11,957 in 2000 with the median household income of \$30,833. About 21.9% of residents were below the poverty level.

Governance

Mekoryuk is a second-class city which was incorporated in 1969 and has a Mayor form of government which includes the mayor, seven person city council, five person advisory school board, and various municipal employees including a Village Police Officer (VPO). The city is not part of any organized borough. The city enforces a 2% sales tax, but has no other taxes. The regional Native corporation for the area is the Calista Corporation with the village Native corporation being the Nima Corporation. The village council and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) recognized IRA Council for the village is the Native Village of Mekoryuk. The village is a member of the Coastal Villages Region Fund, a Community Development Quota (CDQ) group that promotes employment opportunities for residents as well as participation in the Bering Sea crab and groundfish fisheries. Coastal Villages Region Fund is active in the community, operating a fish processing plant in Mekoryuk. The

closest office of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to the community is located in Bethel. A National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) field office is located in Bethel and a main office is located in Anchorage. The nearest Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) office is located in Anchorage.

Facilities

The community is very dependent upon air transport for cargo, mail, and passenger services. A 3,070 foot gravel runway which is owned by the State supplies year-round access to Mekoryuk. The approximate cost according to Travelocity and Expedia to fly from Anchorage to the community is \$459 with a connection flight through Bethel (price given for date as close to September 1, 2003 as possible). There are two companies which provide airline services in Mekoryuk. Goods are delivered to the community either once or twice a year from Bethel by barges. The shoreline is protected from the extreme waves of the Bering Sea by a breakwater. Locals use ATVs, boats, and snowmachines for travel within the community. There are several places for tourists to stay if visiting the community including the Mekoryuk B&B, the IRA B&B, and Rosie's B&B. There is one school in the city, Nuniwarmiut School which teaches grades K-12. The school had a total of 40 students in 2000 and five teachers. Health care is available at the Mekoryuk Health Clinic which is owned by the City and is operated by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC). For sanitation services, the City of Mekoryuk operates a flush and haul system, and the water is delivered from a city-operated reservoir. Police services are provided by both the City Village Police Officer (VPO) and the City Public Safety Office. The electric utility is AVEC which is operated by REA Co-op and the City with a main power source of diesel. The water system is operated by the City. The water is taken from a well and then is treated and stored in a tank available at a central hauling point for residents. Approximately 90% of the homes in the community are served by a new flush/haul system which is operated by the City and funds have been supplied to connect to the remaining homes which still use honeybuckets. The school has its own well and currently is in need of a new water treatment system. The landfill in the community is operated by the City.

Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

Commercial Fishing

There were a total of 113 commercial fishing permits which were issued to residents of Mekoryuk in 2000 and a total of 50 licensed crew members which were residents of the community in 2000. There were 37 community members which were the owners of vessels which were involved in the federal fisheries and 2 which were involved in the salmon fishery.

Of the total of 113 commercial fishing permits which were issued to residents in 2000, 86 were fished. A total of 51 permits were issued for the commercial fishing of halibut and of those 48 were fished in 2000; 19 were issued using hand trolls statewide (17 fished), 31 using longline vessels under 60 feet statewide (30 fished), and one using a mechanical jig statewide which was fished. In regards to herring roe a total of 60 permits were issued of which 37 were fished: 11 using gillnets by Nelson Island (10 fished), four using gillnets in Security Cove (none fished), one using a gillnet in Bristol Bay (not fished), 35 using gillnets around Nunivak Island (27 fished), 8 using gillnets in Goodnews Bay (none fished), and one using a gillnet in Norton Sound (not fished). In regards to other groundfish a total of one permit was issued to a resident of Mekoryuk for miscellaneous saltwater finfish using longline on a vessel under 60 feet statewide, although it was not fished in 2000. One permit was issued for the commercial fishing of salmon using a drift gillnet in Bristol Bay and it was fished in 2000.

No vessels delivered landings to the community of Mekoryuk in 2000, however a processor is present in the community now, a halibut plant, Coastal Villages Seafood, Inc. Coastal Villages Seafood is operated by the CDQ for the area, Coastal Villages Region Fund which operates a total of five halibut and salmon plants in communities included in the CDQ.

Mekoryuk was recently allocated a sum of \$3,645 in federal salmon disaster funds because of the recent falling salmon prices attributed to foreign farmed fish.

Sport Fishing

Sport fishing seems to be present in the area of Mekoryuk with one business in operation in the community in 2002 according to the ADF&G; which was listed as having been a saltwater guide business

and providing saltwater fishing charter services, tent/cabin camp services, and drop off services. In 2000 there were a total of six sport fishing licenses which were sold in the community with five of the total sold to Alaska state residents.

Subsistence Fishing

Little information about subsistence uses of specific resources is given by the ADF&G for Mekoryuk. The information that is available reports that in the most representative year of 1990, 100% of households used herring in the form of herring sac roe. According to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) important subsistence staples of the community are salmon, reindeer, seal meat, and

seal oil. The DCED also mentions that most families in Mekoryuk have fish camps. As reported by ADF&G it has been established that residents of Mekoryuk harvest annually approximately 704.2 lbs of wild food per person per year, which equates to a daily wild food harvest of approximately 1.929 lbs per person. Also according to ADF&G in regards to salmon, a total of 92 household permits were issued to those from Mekoryuk in the year 1999 for the harvesting of subsistence salmon. A total of 1,664 salmon were harvested by residents in that particular year of which the majority was chum salmon. Residents of Mekoryuk and the Native Village of Mekoryuk tribal group are eligible to apply for halibut subsistence certificates.