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Human Health and Well-being Presentation Summary

The State of Alaska contains America's only Arctic territory. The Alaska Native (AN) population, about 125,000, represents 20% of the 625,000 residents of Alaska. The majority of the AN population lives in rural Alaska, in very small communities with access only by water or air transport. The vast majority of non-Alaska Native residents live in one of Alaska's urban centers. The AN culture, and the expense of food transportation to remote villages, result in rural AN communities depending heavily on traditional wildlife food sources. The rural AN population is the most subsistence diet dependent population in the U.S.

The small, remote nature of the 180 rural AN villages results in very fragile infrastructure and marginal resource support for health care, sanitation, communication and transportation.

This set of conditions is similar to small Arctic communities in most of the circumpolar countries.

The last 40-50 years has brought a marked warming trend to much of the Arctic in the western hemisphere, and in the eastern Russian Federation. This has gradually produced major environmental and ecosystem changes.

The remote isolated populations are, thus far, the most affected, and their problems have not attracted much attention.

The most urgent need in Alaska is a "remote sensing system," to detect emerging environmental and ecosystem trends, and to provide a means to identify emerging threats.

Alaska Native villages, and the small regional communities that support them can provide a network of integrated monitoring sites. Agreement on a set of "core indicators," with compatible data systems, could provide village, regional, national and international planners and analysts with information for mitigation and adaptation planning.

Many rural residents feel powerless when they are confronted with the results of Arctic climate change.

A very important result of village-based monitoring is that it empowers communities of every size to participate in a meaningful response to climate change.