

## **Bering Sea Ecosystem Study (BEST) Nelson Island Natural and Cultural Heritage Project**

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The Bering Sea Ecosystem Study (BEST) is a multi-year study of the Bering Sea ecosystem funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). One component of BEST is the study of human communities along the Bering Sea coastline. The primary goal of the BEST Nelson Island Natural and Cultural Heritage project is to create and preserve a holistic documentation of the unique natural history and cultural geography of Nelson Island. This documentation was created with the help of elder experts in five Bering Sea communities, in collaboration with non- Native scientists and younger community members, and includes traditional place names, weather and ice conditions, harvesting patterns, animal and plant communities, and related oral traditions. Nelson Island, the traditional homeland of the Yupiit, or Yup'ik Eskimos, has a population of 1,200 and is located on the Bering Sea coast between the mouths of the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers.

A three-week circumnavigation of Nelson Island occurred in July 2007 with twenty elders, students and village helpers, along with Calista Elders Council staff and three additional scientists. During the circumnavigation and at community gatherings after the trip, elders shared close to one thousand names. These names include historic sites and landscape features of all shapes and sizes, from tiny sloughs to deep ocean channels and many names were shared as part of stories.

NCAR EOL has developed web sites for use in other Arctic data applications using the Geographic Information System (GIS) Mapserver software package. The unique aspect of this project was to modify this software to display the human dimensions information gathered during the circumnavigation. The web site displays a map of Nelson Island and the many Yup'ik place names that were collected. These place names include all village types, spring and fall hunting camps, summer fish camps, reindeer stations, and permanent winter villages, as well as many historic and prehistoric sites. The web site also documents the stories that the elders shared with the group as they remembered information about a particular place, along with photos taken during the trip. The poster describes how this information is displayed and will show examples from the web site. All this information will be preserved for future generations at <http://mapserver.eol.ucar.edu/best> and in the book "Our Nelson Island Stories". The hope is that both Yup'ik and non-Yup'ik readers will learn from the elders' rich subsistence lifestyle experiences and live better and safer lives.

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