

PROGRAM #4: WITNESSING CLIMATE CHANGE IN HUSLIA ALASKA

THE EFFECTS OF GLOBAL WARMING IN HUSLIA ARE INVISIBLE TO THE NAKED EYE, BUT EXPERIENCED HUNTERS, TRAPPERS, AND TRAVELERS RECOGNIZE EVEN THE SMALLEST CHANGES TO OUR COUNTRY. MY GRANDFATHER, TONY SAM, SR., HAS LIVED IN THE BUSH HIS WHOLE LIFE. HE'S TRAVELED THE RIVERS MANY TIMES WHILE HUNTING, OR JUST TO ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL SCENERY. HE REFLECTS ON THE CHANGES HE'S SEEN OVER THE YEARS:

“Tony” Sam, Sr.: “Oh long time ago, like maybe 20-30 years back in wintertime from November, it used to be cold weather off and on. Sometimes we get sixty-five-below, but now we don't get that no more. Now it really change to warm weather. In the lakes, there used to be lot of islands, and they're all turning into water now; it just, sinking. Long time ago the moose in the fall time after it get cold, they used to get poor, but nowadays, they're mostly in good shape. All the little animals, marten, mink and all those I hardly see them anymore. There are way less animals than a long time ago, even fish. It 's getting warmer and warmer all the time. The river changed quite a bit because all the rivers that I traveled many years, that bank is way around and the bar is building up. Where our camp used to be, it's almost a half a mile back.”

BUTCH YASKA, A MASTER SNOWSHOE MAKER AND LIFE-LONG RESIDENT OF HUSLIA, HAS WITNESSED ALL THE CHANGES TO OUR LAND. HE SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EFFECTS ON PERMAFROST, LAKES, AND TREES:

“Butch” Yaska: “I remember islands were pretty big in the lakes. Now the permafrost melted and the some of those islands are getting smaller. I notice where there used to be lots of water, the lake was full of water, and there was no grass in those lakes. There's a lot of grass lakes now a days. Where there used to be lots of water, it's all grass and moss; that grass won't freeze in that area. After you get out in the middle of the lake, where there's no grass, then the ice is solid. That's the way it is right now, so you have to watch out. I think there's lots of beaver on the Huslia River. Different animals lives on that; wolverines, or wolves or what ever, they catch the beaver and it grow right back next year. So, there's beavers all the time. There's lot of birch when you go out into the woods; walk through the birch ridge. The birch are pretty big, and long, straight, and most of them are rotting inside, but it's still growing.”

JACK WHOLECHEESE, A RESPECTED MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY, HAS STRONG OPINIONS ABOUT EVERY ISSUE CONCERNING OUR VILLAGE. GLOBAL WARMING IS A MAJOR ISSUE THAT MANY PEOPLE DON'T STOP TO THINK ABOUT, BUT JACK TAKES THE TIME TO EXPRESS HIS FEELING - ESPECIALLY ABOUT THE QUESTION: IS IT TOO LATE TO STOP GLOBAL WARMING?

“Jack” Wholecheese: “We're having warmer winters than long ago. The Elders used to be able to tell the weather, but even they can't any more- the whole climate is changing. We have too short a falls where it gets cold, then it freezes up, then it warms up and thaws out. It makes nothing but slush. The creeks and rivers don't freeze, and warms up again and just makes overflow so makes it hard for people to travel. We're getting really early springs and all the snow melts early, and if you ever go out to the river where we used to have that old lagoon, you'll see it dripping all the way up, that's permafrost and its melting and hits that soft sand out here in front of town, and that's where it's cutting

in. About 10 years ago really, all the lakes started drying up. With this global warming, it's too late you can't just block it off now; it's started and it can't be reversed. If they come up with something, boy that would be a miracle because I don't think Mother Nature would do it on her own."

I'M HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR, SHEILA ESMAILKA, FROM HUSLIA ALASKA

FUNDING FOR THIS SERIES WAS PROVIDED BY THE WORLD WILDLIFE FUND. THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR WAS ORVILLE HUNTINGTON. WE WERE GUIDED BY THE VILLAGE ELDERS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS OF HUSLIA, WHO HAVE SPENT THEIR LIVES HUNTING AND FISHING TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES. WE THANK THEM FOR THEIR GUIDANCE AND FOR SHARING THEIR VOICES. PRODUCTION ASSISTANCE WAS PROVIDED BY KATHY TURCO AND ALASKA'S SPIRIT SPEAKS: SOUND & SCIENCE WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO SHARON STRICK AND GEORGE ATTLA, JUNIOR. FOR THE HUSLIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS, I'M RYAN OLIN.