

ALASKAN ATTITUDES TOWARD NATURE  
By George W. Rogers  
Institute of Social, Economic and Government Research  
University of Alaska, Juneau, Alaska

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Alaska frequently makes the news today as a battleground between the old apostles of unlimited progress and those of the new gospel of survival through limited growth in their struggle for the mind and spirit of the Nation. This combative atmosphere has influenced Alaskan attitudes toward Nature (here defined as forces working independently of Man and his acts), but more often our true attitudes are confused or misrepresented by borrowing handy labels and slogans from this battle to classify and describe them. Visitors form their impressions by cataloging and counting bumper stickers and outside researchers by analyzing testimony recorded from public hearings held by Federal committees in Alaska without being fully aware of the selectiveness of their samples or that the statements may be imported fabrications. Even the reasonably certain generalization that a majority of Alaskans appear to favor construction of a trans-Alaska oil pipeline is not necessarily a safe basis for jumping to conclusions as to underlying attitudes toward Nature.

This paper will seek other approaches to discovering the basis from which past, present and future attitudes may be formulated. The purpose is to provide a means for putting the discussions which may follow into perspective.

Past dominant Alaskan attitudes toward Nature can be deduced from the type of society which existed at any selected point or period and its economic performance in relation to natural resources and the environment (read "Nature"). Actions, or rather the results of actions, speak louder than the words of official policy or slogans. At a 1969 wilderness conference I dealt with the similar subject of wilderness and development in terms of major periods of Alaska's economic history.<sup>/1</sup> Recognizing the dangers of heroic generalization, these were identified successively as Native Alaska, Colonial Alaska, Military Alaska and the emerging Sovereign State of Alaska. The first was described as reflecting a ~~man~~ commonly recognized and accepted kinship of all living things which made unnecessary any definition of wilderness (for present purposes read "Nature") or of development. The environment was Home and Nature included Man. Such philosophical concepts had no place in the second Alaska, for here the objective was to extract a limited range of natural resources as quickly and economically as possible for distant beneficiaries. The environment or Nature was either ignored or ruthlessly destroyed in a single-purpose process of exploitation. The third Alaska also was oriented to satisfying outside needs (the military defense of the hemisphere), but space and location rather than natural resources were to be exploited. The subjugation or modification of the environment and Nature were attempted as in the second case, but there was a difference. The construction of permanent facilities on a large scale and the long-term sta-

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<sup>/1</sup> Maxine E. McClosky, editor, Wilderness, the Edge of Knowledge (Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1970), pp. 143-153.

tioning and functioning of garrison forces within Alaska required that this be done with knowledge and understanding. A start was made on the scientific study of the physical environment.

A contemporary Alaska is emerging in the political context of the creation of Alaska as a State of the Union in 1959, with its stated objectives of social and political as well as economic development, and the Native land claims settlement of 1971. Alaska can no longer be considered simply as a store house of natural resources to be drawn upon by the Nation or foreign nations as needed or as a distant defense bastion. The Statehood Act of 1959 decrees that we are engaged in building a new American society or polity in Alaska. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 not only recognizes the hereditary claims of Alaska's indigenous peoples to the land and resources of the new State and the extent to which these claims have been infringed, but decrees that they shall be equal partners in this larger social, political and economic experiment and provides them with land, money and corporate organization to achieve true equality. In short, Alaska is no longer an overseas colony to be exploited for the economic benefit of a remote home country, but is to be a place in which people are to live, establish homes and develop communities.

What kind of a home is desired determines the attitude toward Nature, among other things. Social and economic structure of the existing and emerging systems can provide a basis for discovering this, and the principle source drawn upon here will be the detailed social and economic characteristics of the Alaska population published in the 1970 census reports.

The broadest meaningful classification of Alaskans is by Native (descendants of the indigenous aboriginal inhabitants) and non-Native people. Between 1880 and 1940 Native Alaskans comprised from 98.7% to 44.7% of total population. Although this had fallen to 16.9% by the 1970 census, it still is significant enough to have an important influence on any attempt to calculate an Alaska attitude toward Nature. This group of Alaskans identify strongly with Alaska and its land. Atomic Energy Commission attempts to convert northwestern Alaska into a nuclear testing grounds and the Corps of Engineers promotion of construction of the giant Rampart Dam on the upper Yukon on the 1960's met with firm and successful protest, and more recently Native villagers have filed suits in court to halt invasion of their ancestral lands by a trans-Alaska pipeline.

There is a temptation to over-idealize the Alaska Native attitudes however, by reference to abstraction <sup>of</sup> the past as well as the present statements of political leader. The kinship of all living things which held together the fabric of aboriginal society was made explicit and vital by its statement in the rituals of that society. Disruption of Native society destroyed the basis of much of these beliefs, and they can no longer be assured <sup>m</sup> to determine contemporary Native Alaskan attitudes. During the initial <sup>de</sup> ~~of~~ decades of fishery over-exploitation, the Indian commercial fishermen was as adept a stream robber as his white brother. The initial introduction of repeating firearms among the Eskimo was reportedly accompanied by the wanton slaughter of migrating caribou and other game, limited only by the exhaustion of ammunition supply.

Today the Alaska Native is far below all other Alaskan racial groups, including Negroes, in economic wellbeing, and faced with the choice of supporting a development that may provide increased employment or opposing it because of detrimental effects upon the environment, he will come down on the same side as the Chamber of Commerce.

A Native renaissance does appear to be in the making, however, which could provide a restatement of traditional attitudes as a vital force in forming general Alaskan attitudes. The Native political movement of the 1960's emerged in an era of world-wide environmental awareness and concern and multiple identity searches of individuals, minority groups and even whole nations. The economic and social creativity launched by the 1971 settlement act is conditioned by this broader background and may result in the formation of an "Alaska attitude", a truly indigenous contemporary view of Nature. Whether it could become the dominant attitude, however, is another matter.

There will be a certain interaction with non-Native society from this process, but it will be weakened by racial prejudice and by the limited physical proximity of the major racial groups. The 1970 census indicated that whereas 65.8% of the total non-Native population of Alaska resided in the two metropolitan centers of Anchorage and Fairbanks, only 13% of the Native population were counted there. <sup>(Table 1).</sup> Of these "urban Natives," 9% were inmates of institutions located in these centers and observation would suggest that of the remainder, most are living on the fringes of this society rather than being part of it. Interaction is taking place

between Native and Non-Native society on a statewide basis at the political level, however, and at the level of the youth sub-culture. A comparison of the preliminary numbers of persons of Native ancestry enrolled under provision of the settlement act with the census count of Natives, on the other hand, suggests that there also has been a substantial degree of assimilation into the dominant society with a corresponding loss of traditional Native attitudes.

The commonest characteristic on the non-Native Alaskan is high mobility. The majority are sojourners in Alaska for varying lengths of time - - a single construction season, a two-year military tour of duty, the normal span of a federal government career until retirement. This is apparent from a comparison of the non-Native Alaska age-sex pyramid with the normal configuration which shows an abnormal bulge in the earlier working-age brackets and a very narrow base and top. The 1970 census reported that of all non-Native persons five years of age and older, only about forty percent lived in Alaska five years ago. <sup>(Table 2)</sup> The percentages were lower in earlier census reports.

Two general conclusions can be drawn from this. Although there is a growing number of second and third generation Alaskans in this group, the majority do not have the Native Alaskan's roots in Alaska or sense of identity with the land and Nature. The attitudes toward Nature, therefore, would be expected to be imported attitudes and an opinion poll would be required to discover the whole catalogue of different views to be found in the Nation as a whole. In the absence of a non-Native attitude poll the probable mix of attitudes and the weights to be assigned

to each can be approximated from an economic orientation classification of the population. Using a variety of social and economic characteristics data for total white population (census details by race are limited to white, Negro and persons of Spanish heritage). Table 3 presents the distribution of population by major industrial classification of occupation of unrelated individuals and families (occupation of family head plus dependents living with the head).

The largest group in 1970 (28.3% of total white population) were members of the armed forces, civilian employees of the Department of Defense, and dependents (although not included in this analysis, 51.1% of all other non-Native Alaskans were similarly oriented). The size of this population component over-time is a function of National defense policy decisions, <sup>but the individuals within it are turned over as</sup> determined by personnel rotation policy. Orientation of individual attitudes, therefore, centers more on "The Service" than on place. The official attitude toward Nature (never expressed in such terms) is one of setting aside and managing parts of the military reservations in Alaska for the exclusive outdoor recreation use of military personnel and their dependents. Nature is a source of important amenities valuable in maintaining personnel morale. This might be taken as the official view, the individual views being reflected in behavior in and the use made of the recreation areas. The defense oriented population's political participation in Alaska is virtually nil and, therefore, we cannot resort to voting records for further clues.

Within the white population oriented to commodity production (22.1 percent of the total) the construction industry over the past three decades has been strongly identified with defense and exhibits similar

in mobility. Attitudes of workers and dependents are probably strongly determined by their vocations which involve massive assaults upon Nature with heavy earth moving equipment and the committing of four-lane highways and other giant public works upon the landscape. Similar but varying degrees of violence are present within the natural resources product classification at the mining (principally oil and gas) and logging levels of extraction or harvest. The work force is an amalgam of oil field workers from the continental United States and Canada, timber tramps from the Pacific Northwest, hard hats from centers of heavy construction in the Far West and Deep South. An in depth portrait of the character and attitudes of many of these individuals is given in Norman Mailer's 1968 novel, Why Are We in Viet Nam? which draws upon his extensive field investigations in certain districts of Alaskan towns.

The presence of manufacturing (fish products, lumber, pulp, petroleum products ) is a moderating influence as it involves large capital investment which must yield maximum returns over relatively long periods of time. The U.S. Forest Service's primary processing requirement, for example, is in part a strategy for recruiting private economic interest in support of sustained yield management of forest resources. Fishing and fish processing workforce is extremely seasonal and consequentially highly non-resident. The resident Alaska component (fishermen and family members working in canneries and other shore facilities) is made up dominantly of Native Alaskans who piece out the remainder of their annual income by combinations of subsistence hunting and fishing, trapping, fire fighting,

part-time wage employment and welfare. The non-resident fisherman is generally white of Scandinavian or northern European ancestry and although he works within Alaska for a relatively brief period each year, is a long time repeater. Both groups have a strong interest in the survival of the resource, one because of residence in the fishing area and both because of financial and vocational investment, although in times of personal economic distress they will violate conservation regulations. Although strongly individualistic, they will present a united front to any threat to their livelihood, ~~de-~~ developments threatening potential such as oil spills from giant tankers in the Prince William Sound fishing region or offshore petroleum developments. This protective solidarity can also be expressed in continuing lobbying for extermination of all natural predators including seals, sea lions, walrus, beluga whale and brown bear.

White Alaskans oriented to the distributive industries sector of the economy (27.2% of total white population) defy any easy generalization. The majority are in white-collar occupations and tend to identify vocationally with the professional and management class and it might be assumed that they would share their philosophical views and attitudes. My observations based upon three decades of living in Alaska, however, lead me to the conclusion that reactionary social and economic forces and anti-intellectualism are stronger within this group than others in the Alaskan society. Generalization cannot be made in either direction, however, and for present purposes I would describe this as an ambiguous swing group in any attempted calculus of the total

Alaskan attitude toward Nature and assign its numbers proportionately to the Defense, commodity producing and professional-public administrative groups as indirect or supplemental weights.

The 1970 White population oriented to professional and non-defense public administrative activities (17.1% of total white population) contrasts strongly with the commodity producing oriented population in the nature of their vocational activities, level of economic rewards and educational attainment (94.9% of those 16 years old and over completed twelve years of school or more, 52.9% completed four years of college or more). It is not surprising that it is in this group that Alaska members of the Sierra Club will be found and that it provides the backbone of the Alaska Conservation Society and similar organizations. In some cases the attitudes here take the form of slavish following of an imported "party line," but in others they represent conscientious attempts to formulate guidelines for the creation of a harmonious interplay between man in Nature in the development of Alaska highest potential as a place to live as well as make a living.

The few statistics introduced may give some sense of the complexity and the proportion of the elements which would be included in such an exercise, but I am not in any position at this time to bring to a conclusion or attempt to calculate the Alaska attitude toward Nature. I can end with the observation, however, that whatever its dimensions, the Alaska attitude differs from any Outside attitude in that Nature is not an abstraction or part of a slogan, but a reality which is dealt with by all Alaskans in terms of their individual ways of life and personal ideologies.

28 September 1973  
Juneau, Alaska

TABLE I  
ALASKA 1970 POPULATION BY RACE AND  
MAJOR CENTERS

	<u>Total Population</u>		<u>Native Population</u>		<u>Non-Native Population</u>	
	<u>No. Persons</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No. Persons</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No. Persons</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>TOTAL STATE</u>	<u>320,647</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>51,138</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>251,519</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Anchorage Center (a)	126,333	41.7	4,795	9.3	121,538	48.3
Fairbanks Center (b)	<u>45,864</u>	<u>15.2</u>	<u>1,876</u>	<u>3.7</u>	<u>43,988</u>	<u>17.5</u>
Sub-Total	172,197	56.9	6,671	13.0	165,526	65.8
Balance of State	130,450	43.1	44,457	87.0	85,993	34.2

(a) Anchorage Center includes Greater Anchorage Area Borough, Elmendorf Reservation and Fort Richardson Reservation.

(b) Fairbanks Center includes Fairbanks North Star Borough, Fort Wainwright Reservation and Eielson Reservation.

TABLE 2

ALASKA 1970 NON-NATIVE POPULATION RESIDENCE  
IN 1965 BY MAJOR CENTER

	<u>Anchorage Center</u>		<u>Fairbanks Center</u>		<u>Balance of State</u>	
	<u>No. persons</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No. persons</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>No. persons</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Total Non-Native persons</u>						
<u>5 years of age &amp; over</u>	<u>107,126</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>39,516</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>78,648</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Resided in Alaska	43,052	40.2	13,306	33.7	34,247	43.6
Resided outside Alaska	48,957	45.7	20,081	50.8	31,392	39.9
Residence not reported	15,117	14.1	6,129	15.5	13,009	16.5

TABLE 3

ALASKA 1970 WHITE POPULATION BY ECONOMIC ORIENTATION  
OF FAMILIES AND UNRELATED INDIVIDUALS

	Thousands of persons	Percentage	Data Source and/or Basis of Estimate
<u>Total White Population</u>	<u>237.8</u>	<u>100.0</u>	<u>1970 Census, PC(1)-D3, Alaska, Table 138.</u>
1. Not in labor force (family head & dependents, unrelated individuals) / <u>a</u>	12.8	5.4	<u>Ibid.</u> , Table 204 employment status, White family heads, assumed average family size two persons. Unrelated in- dividuals in other households and group quarters <sup>estimated</sup> entirely at percent total, 16 yrs. or over not in labor force of total population 16 yrs. & over (27.7 %)
2. Department of Defense	67.3	28.3	White members of armed forces & family heads, <u>Ibid.</u> , Tables 164, 204. Civilian employees, Alaska Department of Labor, <u>Statistical Quarterly</u> , Dependent ratios, Alaska Command.
3. Commodity producing; Natural Resources / <u>b</u> Construction	24.1		All other industrial classifications calculated from <u>Ibid.</u> , Table 204, families by industry and race of head, assumes families in all classifications are average size for all white families (3.71); Table 180, occupation of all employed persons by industry and sex unrelated individuals data calculated by deductions family head data and females living with husbands estimated an as- sumption ratio to all females the same in all industrial classification.
Sub-Total	<u>52.2</u>	22.0	

/a Students, retired workers, inmates of institutions, etc. not actively seeking employments.

/b Agriculture, fishing, forestry, mining, manufacturing.

TABLE 3 Cont'd

	Thousands of persons	Percentage	Data Source and/or Basis of Estimate
<u>Total White Population</u>			
4. Distributive industrial <sup>es</sup> /c	64.8	27.2	
5. Professional and public administration (other than Dept. Defense):			
Education and related	11.1		
Other Professional	11.0		
Public administration (excl. Dept. Defense) /d	<u>18.6</u>		
Sub Total	40.7	17.1	

/c Transportation, communications, utilities, trade, finance, real estate, insurance, service.

/d Uniquely government activities only  
(e.g. judicial, legislative, etc.) All other government activities allocated to appropriate industrial category (e.g. education, transportation, etc.)