

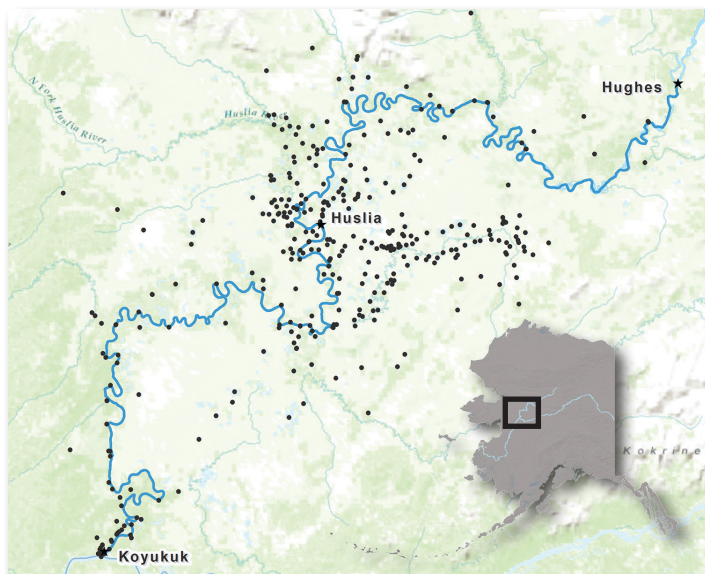
Mapping traditional place names along the Koyukuk River - Koyukuk to Hughes

INTRODUCTION

Koyukon Athabascan peoples have settled along the Koyukuk River in Northwestern Alaska for thousands of years utilizing the surrounding landscapes for subsistence and cultural resources. However, recent changes in climate, technology, resource availability and life ways have significantly impacted land use patterns in the region as well as use of the Denaakk'e (Koyukon) language. At present the Koyukon population totals about 2,300 and of these about 150, the youngest in their fifties, still speak the language. In addition, tribal Elders, important keepers of both language and traditional subsistence use areas, are aging and opportunities to record their knowledge are rapidly diminishing.

"If place names are left undocumented then the owners and history of those places remain invisible. Place names provide clear evidence of land use and demonstrate Native presence in an area"

Gary Holton, Alaska Native Language Center



Study area map representing the 366 spatially verified place names along the Koyukuk River from Koyukuk to Hughes.

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of the project are to collect, preserve, cultivate and pass on the rich knowledge and culture of the Koyukon people with regards to traditional place names and subsistence use areas along the Koyukuk River from the villages of Koyukuk to Hughes. Place names provide important information regarding navigation, resource availability, cultural history, land ownership and changes in land use. Archiving information of this nature helps ensure that local and traditional knowledge will be passed to subsequent generations.

To achieve project goals USGS is working in collaboration with a diverse group of team members including the Yukon-Koyukuk School District, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yukon Drainage Fisheries Association, the communities of Koyukuk, Huslia and Hughes, and their traditional knowledge holders.



Above: Sarah McCloskey (USGS) verifies place names on USGS topographic maps with (left to right) Benedict Jones and Franklin "Kaki" Dayton Sr. in Koyukuk (credit: Catherine Moncrieff). **Right:** Karin Bodony, George Yaska Sr., Shirley Sam, Elsie Vent, Eliza Jones and Benedict Jones review maps at a meeting in Huslia. Shirley Sam listens to Benedict Jones as he shows her where her parents and grandparents had camps (credit: Susan Paskvan).



SUMMARY


The project began by collecting hundreds of existing place names from Alaska Native Language Center (ANLC) archives, previous place names work and pertinent literature. Next, the team traveled to the Koyukuk River communities of Huslia and Koyukuk and met with Elders and community members to identify and verify place names on USGS topographic maps (Figure 1) and receive feedback from local communities regarding final product preferences. At this time the team also presented the project to local classrooms. Information collected from place name interviews (including place name source, alternate names, alternate spellings, place name meanings and associated stories) were integrated along with the place name location into a geospatial database (Figure 2). The final database was proofed and archived at the ANLC. In addition Community Elders, youth and project team traveled by boat from Koyukuk to Hughes and placed traditional place name signs along their route (Figure 3), engaged Elders and youth along the river corridor, collected environmental data and made presentations at community centers in each of the three villages.



Figure 1 - A subsection of the final Koyukon place names map focused on the Huslia area.

| PlaceID | Source | Traditional Name | English Name | Alt Name 1 | Alt Spelling 1 | Meaning / Translation | Location Type | Comment 1 |
|---------|--|--------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---|---------------|---|
| 1 | DoyonOral, Sam, Nelson, Huntington, Jette, Solomon, Dictionary | Hulyek'etno' | Huslia River | Rolyekatno (Je) | Hulyik'atna' (Dic) | River with a steep bank (DO), River under the timber (Je) | River | Huslia River, goes to (flows from) Hukkegh Yeie' (Galena Mt.) |
| 2 | DoyonOral, Solomon, Jette | Meneelghadze T'oh | Koyukuk | | Mineelghadze't'oh (Dic) | At the foot of the Koyukuk Mountain | Village | |
| 3 | Attla82, Eliza, Dictionary, Jette | Kk'uyt'ots'ene | Koyukuk River | Denh Yegge | K'uyt'ots'ina (AB2) | | River | Denh Yegge is an old name, all bendy. That mean's river through high land. Way up, way above Allakaket. |
| 4 | Jones, STE002 | Taats'eeltluh Denh | | | Taats'eeltluh Denh (So) | Place where someone jumped in the river | Place | Long time people used to get in trouble. He was medicine man. Marshall came. He jump off barge. |
| 5 | Solomon, Nelson, Eliza | Teyh Keey | | Tiyh Keeya (N) | | Lake where the hill ends (EJ) | Fishing | It's said that people used to go to this place in the spring because of the blackfish there. (So) |

Figure 2 - Example of the database and the corresponding fields recorded for each place name.

 = An example of tying all the project components together

OUTCOMES

- Interviewed 9 Elders in the community of Huslia, 3 Elders in Koyukuk and 2 Elders in Hughes
- Created a geospatial database to catalog 675 place names and 366 place name locations
- Collected video and voice recordings of place name stories, meanings and pronunciations
- Located 6 previously undocumented old and current winter trail systems

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Integrate traditional place names into the USGS Geographic Names Information System (GNIS)
- Create a river atlas and various map products for publication and distribution throughout the Koyukuk River region
- Create an interactive website that integrates place names with recordings of video and voice interviews
- Incorporate traditional placename information into climate change studies

PROJECT TEAM

Eliza Jones – Ph.D, Koyukon Athabascan Linguist and Elder
Susan Paskvan - Yukon- Koyukuk School District
Karin Bodony - U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Catherine Moncrieff - Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association
Sarah McCloskey - U.S. Geological Survey - Alaska Science Center
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ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTORS AND SUPPORT

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Figure 3 - Local youth post place name signs along the confluence of the Koyukuk and Huslia river.