

Former Naval Air Facility Adak

The former Navy Air Facility Adak is located off the Alaskan mainland near the center of the Aleutian chain, approximately 1,200 miles west-southwest of Anchorage, Alaska. Adak Island's coordinates are latitude 51°53'0" N, at longitude 176°38'46" W. The Bering Sea surrounds the island to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south. The Navy manages approximately 79,200 acres of the northern portion of the island, which is owned by the U.S. Department of Interior. The southern portion is both owned and managed by the U.S. Department of Interior through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The total land area of the island is approximately 180,000 acres.



The first inhabitants of Adak Island were the Aleuts. Archaeological evidence reflects occupation as early as 9,000 years ago. The Aleuts hunted whales, seals, otters and sea lions, as well as island birds, and fished Adak's freshwater streams and the surrounding seas. They lived in large, communal, subterranean structures of grass and earth built over driftwood or whalebone frames. The Aleuts developed technologies such as sophisticated kayaks and waterproof clothing to deal with the cool marine environment. Aleut settlements were often located in coves along freshwater streams. Remnants of prehistoric Aleut settlements remain on Adak today.

Russians first visited the Aleutian Islands in the early 1740s and were trading with the Aleuts by the 1750s. As recently as 1827, Adak was a busy trading settlement with a population of 193 Aleuts. By 1830, Russian settlers had occupied Adak and relocated the Aleuts to Russian settlements in Kodiak, the Pribilof Islands, and Sitka. Adak Island became part of the Alaska Territory, which was subsequently purchased from Russia by the United States in 1867. Even after the permanent Aleut villages were abandoned, seasonal and subsistence use of the island continued.

By 1910, over hunting by outsiders had nearly depleted the once-abundant sea otter and fur seal populations. In 1913, Adak Island was included in the 2.9-million-acre Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge (renamed the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in 1980) established by the President. This refuge was set aside as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds and fur-bearing animals and as an important fisheries habitat.

Seasonal and subsistence use of the island by the Aleuts continued up until the time of World War II, when Aleuts in the island chain were evacuated to internment camps and future land use was restricted (Philemonof 1999). In 1940, the island was added to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Navy presence on Adak Island was authorized by Public Land Order No. 1949, dated August 19, 1959, which withdrew the northern half of Adak Island (approximately 79,200 acres) from the National Wildlife Refuge for the Navy's military use. In 1980, the island was included in the Aleutian Islands Unit of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge by enactment of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). ANILCA governs disposal of Adak because the withdrawn land is part of a statutorily established wildlife refuge. Therefore, the island can be disposed of administratively only through the provisions for land exchanges authorized in Section 1302 of ANILCA.

Military Uses of Adak

Since the early 1940s, the northern half of Adak Island has been used for military operations. During World War II, Adak Island became the site of a military base operated by the Army Air Corps for defensive action against Japanese forces occupying Attu and Kiska Islands in the Aleutian chain. In the spring of 1944, Adak's population included at least 32,000 military personnel. In preparation for a major offensive on the Japanese-occupied islands of Kiska and Attu, as many as 90,000 troops on ship or shore were mobilized to the Aleutian arena. Since the war, the military presence on Adak has fluctuated, depending on United States defense policy and federal appropriations, and has generally not exceeded 6,000 persons.

After the war, the base was transferred to the U.S. Air Force (renamed Davis Air Force Base) and, according to Army Corps of Engineers records, encompassed all of Adak Island. The U.S. Air Force withdrew from Adak in 1950, and the Navy assumed all facilities on Adak Island. In 1953, only 15 officers and fewer than 200 enlisted men were assigned to the base. In 1959, Public Land Order No. 1949 withdrew land described as representing approximately 61,000 acres (the resurveyed land mass is 79,200 acres) of Adak Island (approximately the northern half) for use by the Navy.

By 1966, military and civilian personnel totaled almost 1,000, a number that stayed fairly steady through the 1970s. By 1981, the population had doubled to 2,000. In 1984, the Adak Naval Station was renamed Naval Air Station (NAS) Adak. By 1990, over 5,000 people were at the base, almost 3,000 of whom were military, the remainder composed of military dependents and civilian employees. In 1994, NAS Adak was designated as Naval Air Facility (NAF) Adak.

The former base has two areas with extensive development. The first is the "downtown" area of Adak, where NAF was located and which includes the airfield, port facilities, landfills, sewage treatment facilities, light industrial, administration, commercial, recreational, and residential areas. The second main developed area, formerly used by NSGA, includes the northern part of the island and areas around Clam Lagoon. The NSGA area is no longer used; the downtown area

is being used under an interim lease to the Adak Reuse Corporation, a subsidiary of the Aleut Corporation.

By 1994, all military dependents had been transferred from Adak. As of February 1996, following military draw down and closure of NSGA, approximately 500 military and 50 civilian personnel were stationed on Adak. Subsequent to its listing under Base Realignment and Closure in July 1995, the military mission at Adak was ended on March 31, 1997.

For information on historical places, please check out the ~~Historical Guide~~.

NAF Additional Information

Supporting Documents

US Navy: Institutional Controls Education Evaluation Survey 429.95 KB

US Navy: Adak Dig Permit 382.94 KB