

# Fish abound once again at abandoned Batzulnetas

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for the Tundra Times

In the Mentasta Valley is a region called Nabesna. Within this region was a small village called Batzulnetas.

The village sprawled along the Tanada Creek to where it drained into the Copper River. It was located in a valley surrounded by the Wrangel Mountains and overlooked Mount Sanford.

The land there supported 50 to 100 people during the winter, and many more people came into this area during the summer months to fish for salmon out of the Copper River. About 40 or 50 years ago, people began moving out of this village to areas more accessible to jobs and schooling, until no one remained in the village.

The families that had utilized this area for fishing continued to do so until the Alaska Department of Fish & Game closed the area to fishing.

Two women whose families lived and fished at Batzulnetas are Katie John, 72, of Mentasta, and Doris Charles, 85, of Dot Lake. Because of their families' involvement with this area, both of these women applied for and received Native allotments at Batzulnetas. This area is completely surrounded by federal park land which make access difficult.

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These two women dreamed of being able to fish for salmon at this site again. After four years of legal action, John and Charles were given permission to cross park lands and to put a fish wheel in the Copper River. With the aid of relatives, local residents and the Park Service, John and Charles were assisted in setting up a fish wheel.

Both women were adamant about being at Batzulnetas to see their dream come true. John was ready to walk the narrow, rough and muddy three-mile trail to get to the site. Charles, however, was unable to walk the distance, and with the aid of the Park Service and local residents, both women were given rides in off-the-road vehicles.

The women oversaw the placing of the fish wheel, and on July 1, they watched the wheel begin operation.

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