

Elements threaten historic villages

Five sites in Alaska, including remnants of ancient Native culture, are included in the 1982 annual report of threatened national landmarks issued by Interior Secretary James G. Watt this week.

The report lists 68 landmarks throughout the nation that face serious or imminent threats or damage, and the steps that are under way to correct the problem.

In Alaska, the sites are all designated as national historic landmarks and administered by the National Park Service.

The so-called Yukon Island main site, in Kachemak Bay, was designated a national historic landmark in 1962 to preserve a Native village on an ancient beach. The archeological site represents the oldest and most continually occupied Native site in Cook Inlet, dating from 750 B.C., according to the report.

The Yukon Island site was submerged in the 1964 earthquake and has been damaged severely by wave activity, the report said. The Bureau of Land Management is conducting studies to determine where the archeological resources are now located. The site is federally owned.

The Birnirk site near Barrow, also designated in 1962 and federally owned, is a prehistoric Eskimo village which shows the cultural development of the Native residents from about 600 A.D. to the present, the report said. Threats to the landmark stem from

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Extinct villages

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erosion, ongoing human activity in the area and continued looting, the report said.

The site has been claimed by a local village corporation under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the land is expected to be conveyed before the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, the report said.

The Gambell sites on St. Lawrence Island, designated in 1966, contain house pits, ice cellars, graves and ivory artifacts.

Excavation at the sites has led to the understanding of the geographical and cultural history of the Bering land bridge that linked Asia and North America, the report said.

The Gambell sites have been threatened by souvenir hunters and exposure to the elements, the report said. An estimated 85 percent of the visible surface remains are damaged. Materials below the frost line remain intact. The sites are privately owned.

Another site in Sitka, designated in 1966, consists of five acres of flat land with trees and grass and a gravel parking lot. The land is owned by the state of Alaska and administered by the Division of Parks. Excavations have revealed remnants of the 1802 attack on a Russian trading post by Tlingit Indians.

The report said the Sitka site has strong commemorative and historical values to local Natives, but has been damaged by heavy recreational use, including an illegal boat launch on the property. The state is working on a plan to upgrade the area, the report said.

The Palugvik site on Hawkins Island in Prince William Sound, designated in 1962, is a former Native village.

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