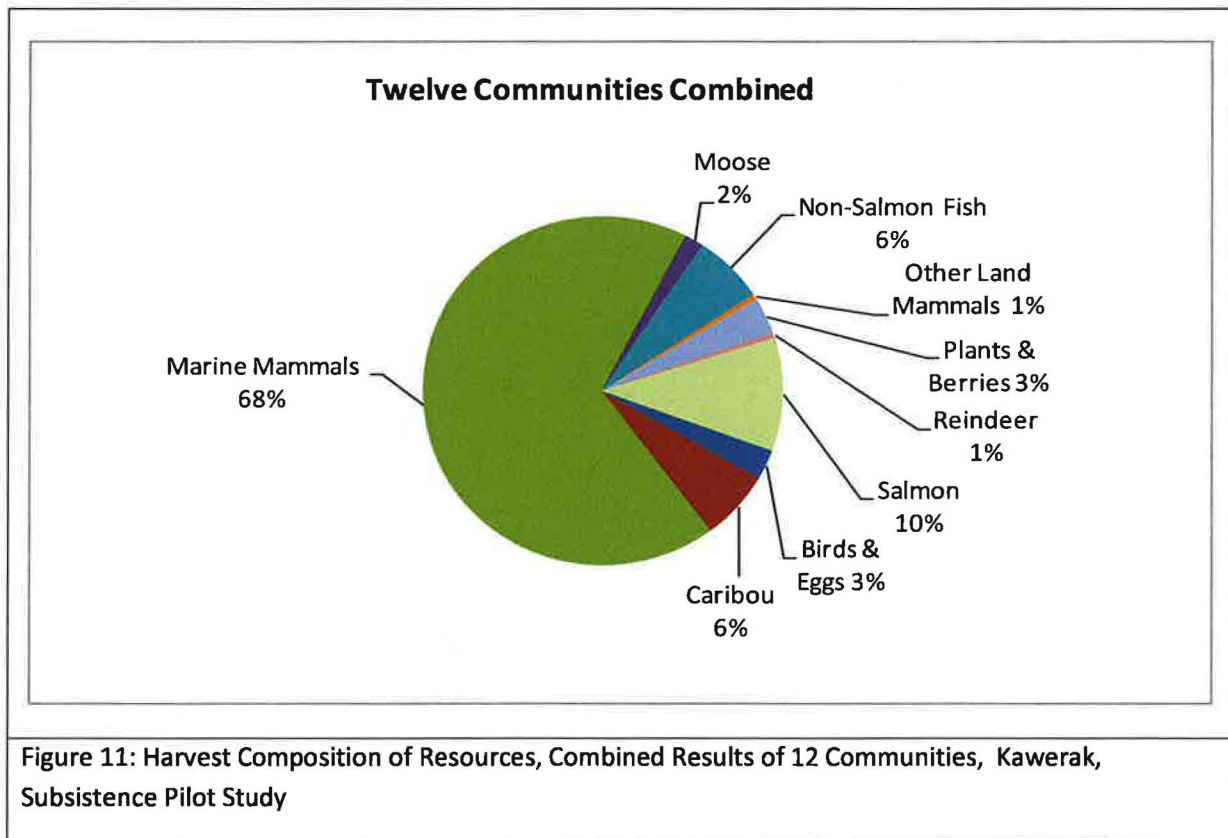


## Appendix C - Subsistence and Cultural Significance

Indigenous peoples have lived along the western coastline of Alaska since time immemorial, with the earliest documented human activity dating back 10,000 years (Oceana). The livelihood of the earliest residents depended upon their ability to hunt and gather from the harsh Arctic environment. In 1725 with the arrival of explorer Vitus Bering, the residents began to trade with explorers, whalers, and miners (Kawerak). Today, thousands of years later, their modern day descendants remain heavily committed to subsistence hunting and gathering. The act of subsistence hunting and gathering extends far beyond the physical need for food. It represents not only their cultural identity and heritage, but is also a process by which individuals develop self worth and create bonding experiences where one generation teaches the next (Oceana).

A survey conducted by Kawerak in 2005 and 2006 of approximately 1,200 households across 12 communities in the Bering Strait region revealed that households subsistence harvest an average of 3,760 pounds of food per year (Kawerak, Subsistence p302). Their results showed marine mammals accounted for 68% of the food gathered, followed by salmon at 10% and fish other than salmon at 6%. When combined it reveals that 84% of all gathered food comes directly from the sea with only 16% taken from the land and land animals. The high reliance on the sea is necessitated by the cold climate and short growing season, which hamper cultivation of crops and production of livestock.



The demographics from western Alaska Boroughs show the region as predominately native, with a sizable majority of the population self-identifying as Alaskan Natives/American Indians, either alone or in combination during the 2010 census. This demographic data correlates with the comments received from the region, which stated the sea as being vitally important as a food source and urged the Coast Guard to create strong environmental protections from ship traffic. Given the longstanding reliance on the sea as a food source and as a source of cultural identity for Native Alaskans it is understandable why this concern has been so prominently raised in the public comments.

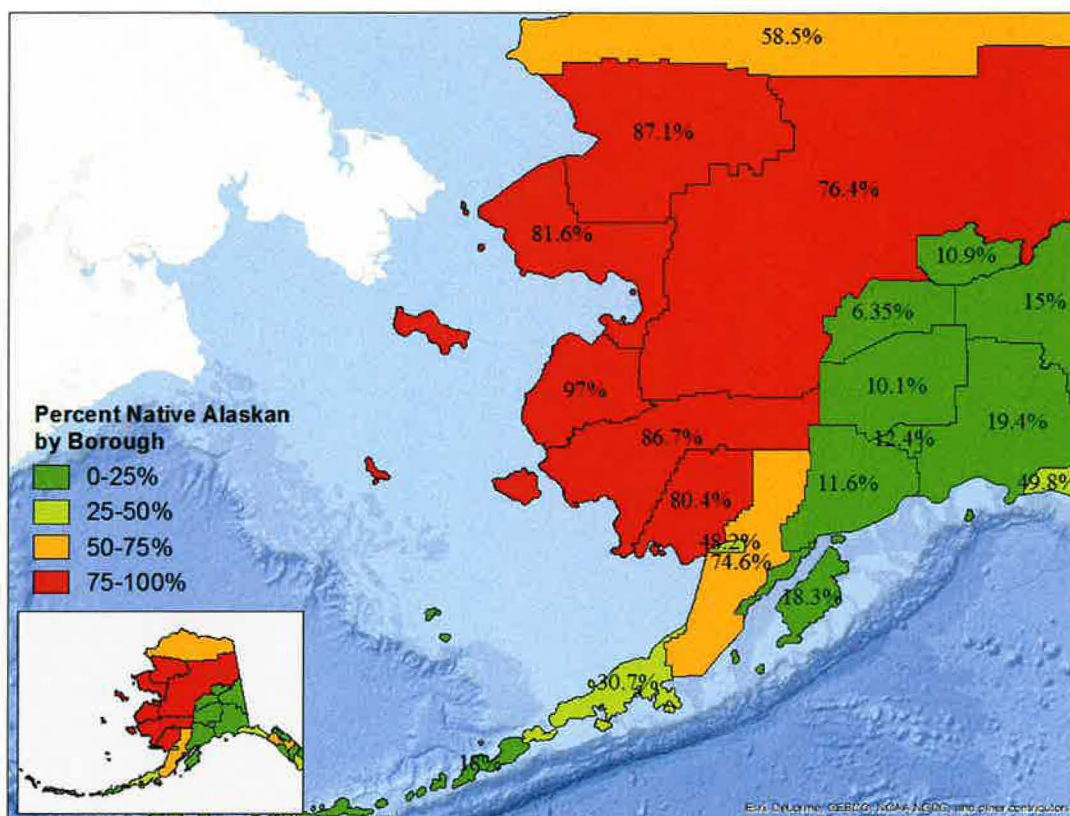


Figure 12: Alaska Boroughs, Percent Native Alaskan or American Indian, either alone or in part. The map was created using a geographic shapefile from the State of Alaska Department of Labor and is based on 2010 census data (AKDOL).

The Coast Guard recognizes that the majority of those who live in western Alaska are Alaska Natives who rely on the sea as a food source and cultural identifier. The Coast Guard has taken this

strong reliance on the sea into consideration throughout the Bering Strait PARS. The purpose of the study is to identify ways of reducing the risk of marine casualties and thereby preventing environmental damage. In consideration of the connection between Alaska Natives and the sea, a large-scale shipping accident in this region would be particularly damaging because it would not only damage the environment and marine life but also deprive Alaskan Natives of a critical food source and disrupt the local communities' cultural wellness. This is true not only for coastal villages, but also for villages far away from the sea that rely on species of anadromous fish and migrating waterfowl as food sources.

Over the course of this study, the Coast Guard has done its best to reach out in person to tribes, individual coastal communities, and native umbrella organizations to discuss the PARS study, solicit input, obtain local traditional knowledge about what is actually happening in the study area, and identify areas of particular concern.