



HISTORY

The Selawik area has been inhabited for at least 10,000 years, and possibly 15,000 years or more. It was a place for winter camp and for harvesting freshwater fish year-round. A Russian naval officer recorded the village as “Chilvik” in the 1840s. In 1880 the first American census of Alaska recorded 100 “Selawigamute” people living near the current site. Missionaries established a church and school at Selawik in 1897. Reindeer herding was introduced to Selawik during the 1920s. Selawik was first established under the 1926 Alaska Native Town Site Act. The community incorporated as the City of Selawik in 1974.

THE PEOPLE

The population of Selawik has steadily increased during the past century. Around 920 people currently live in Selawik. Based on historical population trends, Selawik’s population is projected to increase to about 1,170 by the year 2020. More than 95 percent of Selawik residents are Inupiaq Eskimos.

GOVERNMENT

The City of Selawik is incorporated under the laws of the State of Alaska, and is a community of the Northwest Arctic Borough. The tribal government, the Native Village of Selawik, was re-formed under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA).

LOCATION

The Selawik area is known in Inupiaq as Akuliḡaaq, which translates into English as “where the river meets together,” and Siilvik, or “where the sheefish spawn.” The current village of Selawik is located at the mouth of the Selawik River where it flows into Selawik Lake, about 90 air miles east of Kotzebue. Selawik is spread across three of the multi-channeled river mouth that are linked by structural bridges. Selawik is within the 2.15 million acre Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, a crucial breeding and resting spot for migratory waterfowl that straddles the Arctic Circle.

Climate and Topography

Winter temperatures in Selawik range from 10 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit) to 15 degrees above. Summer temperatures average from 40 to 65 degrees. Temperature extremes have been recorded from 50 degrees below zero to 83 degrees above. Snowfall average 35 to 40 inches per year, rainfall 10 inches. Winds average 20 knots all year. The Selawik River is navigable from early June to mid-October. The river is frozen the remainder of the year. Meandering rivers, flood plains, numerous lakes and tundra with scattered low bushes and no trees characterize Selawik topography.

Transportation Services and Facilities

Air – There are two airstrips in Selawik: a city-owned, 3000’ long by 70’ wide gravel airstrip located at the Siilivitchaq or “Spud Farm,” about 15 miles from town, and a state-owned 3,000’ long by 60’ wide gravel airstrip with a 2,670’ long by 60’ wide crosswind strip that is one of 256 airports owned and maintained by State of Alaska DOT&PF, the largest aviation system in North America. The city airstrip is for noncommercial flights only. The state airstrip serves passenger and cargo planes. Passenger air carriers offer multiple daily flights to Kotzebue. A round trip ticket from Selawik to Kotzebue costs about \$280. Flying in cargo from Kotzebue is expensive. Cargo rates start at 72 cents per pound for loads exceeding 5,000 pounds and go up based on weight to 85 cents per pound for loads under 500 pounds.

Land— There are no automobiles in Selawik. Four-wheelers (ATVs), motorcycles and snowmachines are used extensively for local and regional ground transportation. Historic trails that parallel the Selawik River and other nearby waterways are used for inter-village travel and subsistence activities. In winter months, Selawik residents also use the river itself as a snow machine route.

Water/Marine—Crowley Marine barges cargo, fuel and supplies upriver from Kotzebue beginning in late June and ending in September, depending on river conditions. There is a docking facility and barge landing area on the west bank of the east channel of the Selawik River in town. Additionally, Selawik residents utilize small crafts on the river, which is one of the major drainages for the Kobuk region of northwest Alaska, for small cargo loads, inter-village travel, pleasure trips and, especially, a wide range of subsistence hunting and fishing activities.

Local Governmental Services

Water—A central treatment facility pumps 8,000 to 10,000 gallons of water a day from a floating intake—a small power jet pump situated inside an insulated box on floats—about 40 feet from the shore of the Selawik River. The 580’ long waterline is heat traced to prevent freeze-up in cold weather months. The river water is chlorinated and fluoridated





before it flows into a 300,000 gallon heated storage tank. Water is circulated throughout Selawik from the tank via five circulation lines that reach the east, west and middle river banks. Ninety-five percent of the occupied houses in Selawik are connected to the public water lines and have indoor plumbing. Occupants of the remaining five percent (about 10 houses) rely on water hauled from the river or from neighbors. Many residents of both plumbed and non-plumbed houses augment their personal water supply by collecting rainwater and ice.

Sewer—Vacuum stations pump wastewater through a single force-mainline to a naturally occurring sewage lagoon in the form of a 200-acre tundra pond located 2,400 feet (almost half a mile) outside of town. Households that rely on honeybuckets either transport their waste to the lagoon on ATVs or snowmachines or, if they don't have a vehicle, dump their honeybuckets into the river.

Solid Waste Disposal—Selawik residents haul their own refuse to an Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation-permitted solid waste disposal site outside of town. The site is an open dump spread across 18 acres of wetland tundra. A city-owned bulldozer is used to compact the highest concentrations of garbage once a month.

Public Safety—Selawik is within the service area of the Alaska State Troopers detachment headquartered in Kotzebue.

Other Services and Utilities

Health Services—Village health aides, who are certified in CPR, First Aid, EMT and Community Health, provide routine medical examinations and basic health care for minor issues at the Selawik Clinic, which is owned and operated by Maniilaq Association. Emergency services and treatment for serious medical problems necessitates Medivac to Kotzebue.

Telecommunications—Kotzebue-based OTZ Telephone Cooperative provides in-state telephone service to Selawik residents and businesses, and long-distance service is provided through a combination of AT&T, Anchorage-based GCI and Kotzebue-based OTZ Telephone. Internet service is provided through Inutek.net, a cooperative effort between OTZ, Maniilaq Association and Anchorage-based GCI Communications.

| Telephone Service | Residential | Business |
|--|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Basic local service (single land line) | \$25/mo. Residential | \$35/mo. Business |
| Long distance | \$.15/min. + \$5/mo. fee | \$.18/min. |

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Cellular phone service | Plans with unlimited minutes begin at \$39.95/mo |
|------------------------|--|

| Wireless Internet | 256K Download | 1.5Mbps Download |
|-------------------|---------------|------------------|
| | \$25/mo | \$45/mo |



SCHOOLS

The Davis-Ramoth school is a pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade school attended by around 245 students per year. The school employs around 20 teachers. It has 15 classrooms, a library, a woodshop and gymnasium. Post-secondary education is available in Selawik through online classes provided by Chukchi Campus, a rural division of the University of Alaska.

Electricity—The Alaska Village Electric Co-op provides electricity to Selawik via diesel generations and wind turbines. Monthly residential rates factoring in the Power Cost Equalization (PCE) subsidy are 19 cents per kilowatt-hour for the first 1-500 kWh, 58 cents per kilowatt-hour for 501-700 kWh per month and 48 cents per kilowatt-hour for every kWh per month over 700. Small commercial rates are 58 cents per kilowatt-hour for the first 1-700 kWh per month and 48 cents per kilowatt-hour for every kWh thereafter.

Media

The City of Selawik offers cable television for \$80 per month. Selawik residents also receive news and community information via the Kotzebue-based radio station KOTZ-AM. The use of Citizens Band radio is widespread. The Arctic Sounder, a regional newspaper, is delivered to stores, the school and local subscribers.

Employment/Economy

The Selawik economy is based on cash and traditional subsistence. The village is located amidst some of the richest fishing and hunting grounds in Alaska. Caribou and moose are plentiful, along with a wide variety of freshwater fish, including Arctic Char, sheefish, grayling and northern pike. Seasonal fire fighting jobs are available with the Bureau of Land Management. Crowley Marine hires a few Selawik residents for part-time lighterage work in the summer. Three residents hold commercial salmon fishing permits. Local hunters sell furs, and Selawik artisans create bone and ivory carvings and traditional masks that are sold in gift shops throughout Alaska.

Housing

There are approximately 80 households in Ambler, averaging about four people in each residence. Half of village homes are owner-occupied, and the median home value is \$114,600. Those that rent their homes pay a median rent of \$538. Most homes are detached, single-family homes, though there are a few multi-family dwellings of 5-9 units apiece.