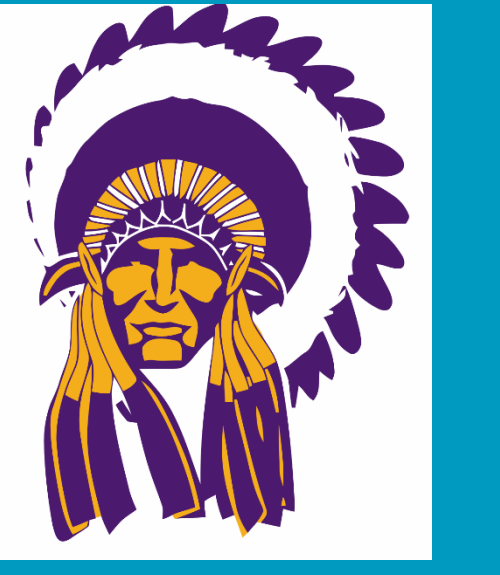




Culture Erodes with the Coast: Relocation and Mental Stress in Newtok, Ak.

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Research Question

How does cultural loss from relocation due to coastal erosion cause mental stress in Newtok, Ak?



Fig. 1 shows a house collapsing due to coastal erosion. (Light, 2017)

Introduction

Coastal Alaskan villages must move in order to survive. Without important hunting places, subsistence gathering areas, or cultural heritage sites it will be immensely difficult to maintain strong cultural ties to keep a solid foundation of identity, leading to a magnitude of mental stress (Wolsko et al., 2007).

Relocation

The Yupik are among the first of many Indigenous tribes in the United States to deal with coastal erosion-caused damages of their homelands. Many Yupik villages along the Yukon-Kuskokwim (YK) Delta in southwestern Alaska have decided to simply relocate due to coastal erosion (Schenck, 2014). The solastalgic - the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment – impacts of the relocation on community health are immense (Albrecht et al., 2007). It is critical that the impacts of coastal erosion be studied to understand the psychological impacts on people whose cultural identity is intrinsically tied to their cultural place.

Literature Review

Research is being conducted on relocation efforts of Alaskan villages due to coastal erosion. The village of Newtok is such a village that is being forced to relocate due to the increasing dangers of their home. As far back as 2011, Newtok village has been steadily adapting their relocation plan for a more organic movement (Alaska Dept. of Commerce, 2011). The village can only relocate seasonally due to melted ice paths, making it immensely difficult for a consistent residence move (Alaska Dept. of Commerce, 2011).

Many villages along the Yupik-Kuskokwim Delta are losing cultural ways of life. The loss of culture comes with the decimation of key areas that are important to their ways of life. Hunting grounds, gathering areas, and cultural heritage sites are being lost to the sea (Wolsko et al. 2006). Without these critical land spots, the Yupik will be unable to sustain a culturally healthy lifestyle due to the rupture of their way of life (Wolsko et al. 2007).



Fig. 3 graphs coastal erosion over time next to the village of Newtok (Ellis, 2016)

Methods

Focus groups will be conducted first that will allow comparable data that can relate individual-to-community

- Community can come together to express their concerns together.
- Can relate experiences across multiple identities (age, sex, familial status).
- Yupik can describe the best way for the community to relocate.

The focus groups will concentrate on four types: Mental health service workers, elders, young adults, and community leaders. These groups will provide a substantial overview of the solastalgic impact, shift in cultural ways, and relocation efforts. The focus groups will also provide understandings of relocation on mental stress that will guide the following method.

Next, semi-structured interviews will be conducted in order that:

- Individuals being able to clearly express their grievances.
- Free flowing yet guided direction to allow for natural conversation.
- Yupik people being able to express their knowledge they are comfortable sharing with.

Due to the low population of Newtok, random selection will provide an accurate representation. Participants will receive a cash gift of \$400 as a consideration along with various gifts. Food will also be provided to all participants.

- Maximum Rate of Erosion (feet/year)
- Custom
- ≤72.8
 - ≤16.4
 - ≤9.8
 - ≤3.3
 - ≤1.0
 - Erosion Not Assessed

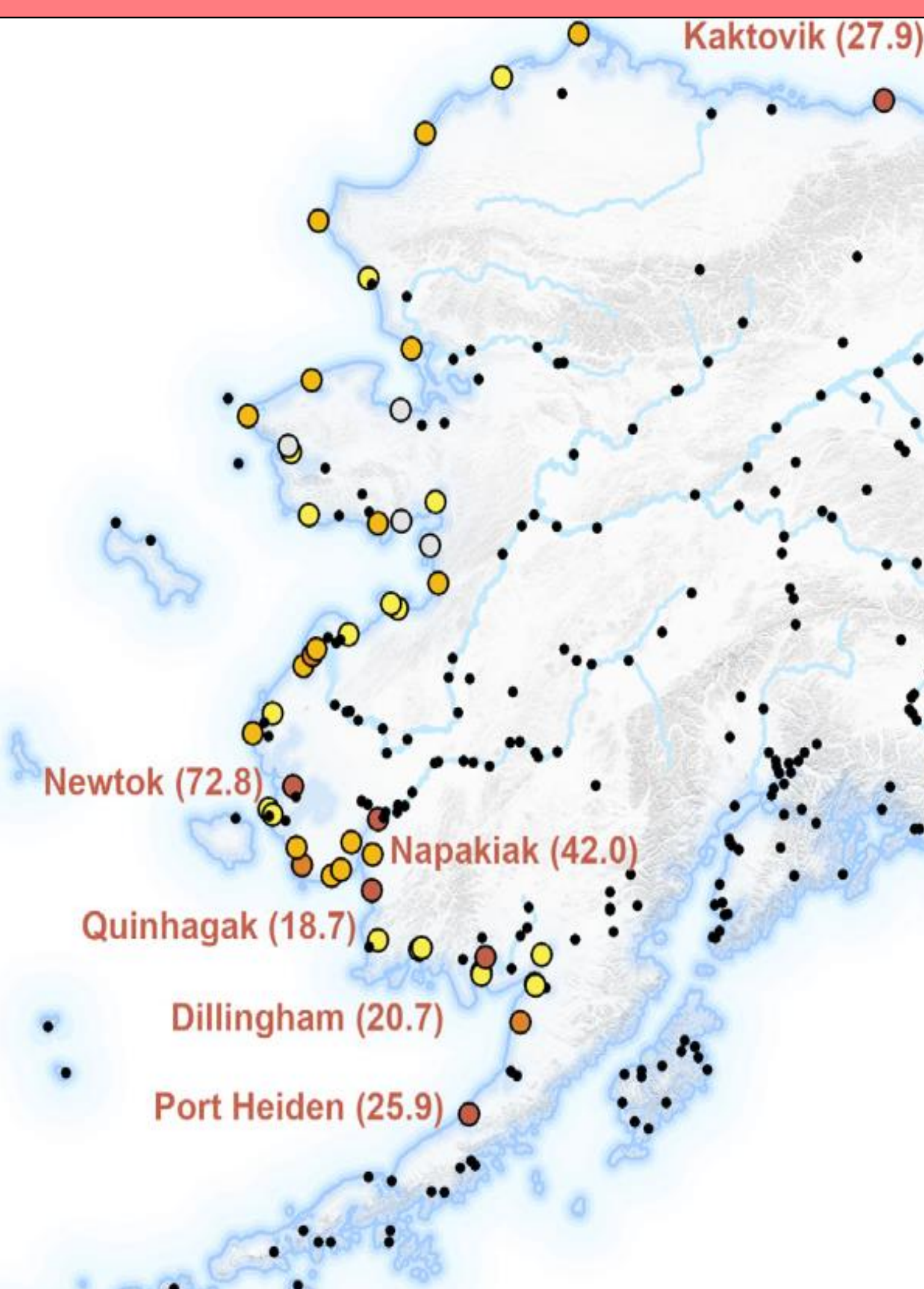


Fig. 2 shows erosion rates across several villages (Overbeck, 2020)

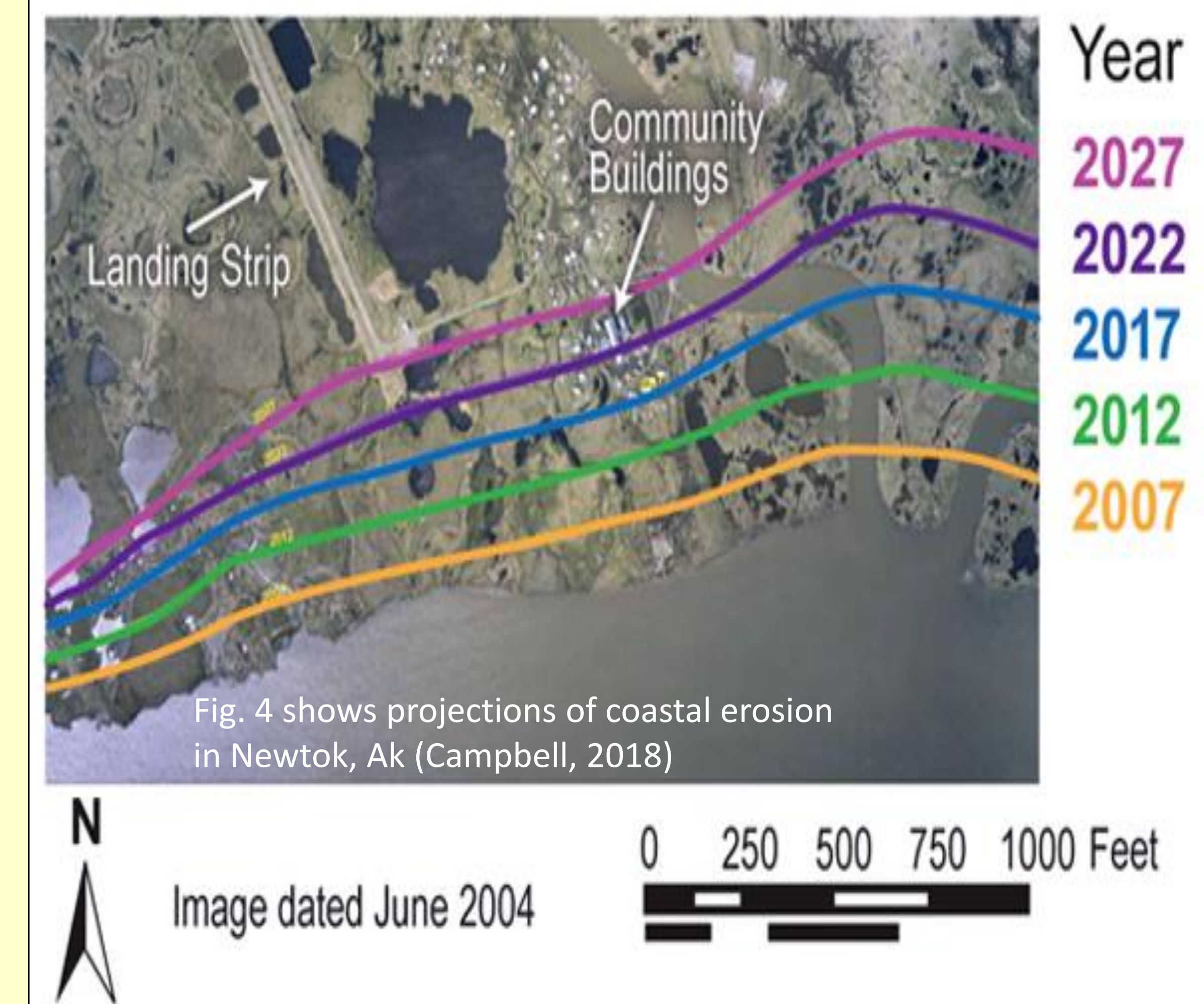


Fig. 4 shows projections of coastal erosion in Newtok, Ak (Campbell, 2018)

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