

NEWS

The Evergreen State College
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for further information

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Eight students from The Evergreen State College have been awarded a \$30,244 grant from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a seven-month study on the physical, biological and human resources of the Alaska Peninsula.

Working under the direction of Evergreen Faculty Biologist Dr. Oscar Soule, the students plan to leave the first of May to begin gathering information and drafting recommendations for land management of the 500-mile long peninsula which is considered by some federal biologists to be the most productive wildlife habitat in Alaska.

"Our study is vitally concerned with the redistribution of responsibility for the lands on the peninsula," Project Coordinator Jack Van Valkenburgh, an Evergreen senior, explains.

"When the federal government passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971, it set in motion a process of native, state and federal land selections. Federal land selections for new national parks, wildlife refuges, forests, and wild and scenic rivers are supposed to be completed and approved by Congress by the end of 1978," he says. "Before that process of land selection can be completed, more information on natural and sociological aspects of the peninsula must be made available."

Van Valkenburgh says half of the students involved in the summer project spent ten days in Alaska earlier this year conducting interviews with federal, state and native officials; professors at the University of Alaska, and representatives of private

industries including Shell Oil, Phillips Petroleum and the Bristol Bay Native Corporation.

The data they gathered forms the foundation for the studies they'll begin next month at six different locations on the peninsula.

Two social science students will concentrate their efforts on surveying local populations about their ways of life and their needs and expectations for land use. At the same time, six field scientists will gather baseline information on plants, animals and other natural resources.

Some 2000 persons live on the peninsula, an area larger than the State of Massachusetts. Most of them are involved in the salmon fishing industry, which Van Valkenburgh says is "the most productive in the world."

The area is also the last major habitat of the brown bear, and supports the entire world population of Black Brant, Emperor and Cackling geese, he says. In addition, the area is a center for Alaska sports hunting. Its native populations also rely on the area for their subsistence hunting and fishing.

"By the time we complete our study in mid-September, we hope we'll have complete information on not only the resources of this rich area," Van Valkenburgh says, "but on the plans that different groups have for developing its resources. Those human expectations are as important a part of our study as the actual resources themselves."

Working with Van Valkenburgh and Dr. Soule on the study will be students Mark Rutherford, Esther Lev, Leslie Smith, Bruce Yost, Maggie McNamara, Dave Hayward, and Linda Leigh. Together, they'll share tents and "whatever local housing" they can find as they complete the study they've been working toward since last September.