

# The Village of Igiugig

The Village of Igiugig is a small, self-sufficient community with approximately 70 year-round residents, located at “Water Down the Throat” (ig-ee-ah-gig), where Lake Iliamna drains into the Kvichak River. Igiugig has strong cultural and environmental values drawn from its Dena’ina, Yup’ik, and Alutiig peoples. These values and a commitment to self-determination underpin the work of the Igiugig Village Council, which strives to create a prosperous present and future for the community while carefully stewarding the lands and waters that support a subsistence way of life. This work is guided not only by a vision of a thriving village, but by a recognition that what is good for Igiugig is good for the world.

In addition to providing essential services and infrastructure for the community, Igiugig Village Council has embraced technological innovation alongside traditional knowledge, expanding the vision of what is possible for remote communities in Alaska and elsewhere. The projects outlined below illustrate Igiugig’s ongoing commitment to sustainability, self-sufficiency, and self-determination. While some projects are well underway, others are in the making or visions for the coming years. Together they provide a testament to Igiugig’s continuous efforts to enhance the well-being of its people and the lands and waters on which they depend.

## PROJECTS

### Renewable Energy

Igiugig’s Energy Vision is to improve energy self-sufficiency using local renewable resources and workforce, with the goal to minimize environmental impact and maintain cultural identity. Igiugig stands to beat its target of transitioning off diesel fuel by 2025 through integrating wind, solar, and hydrokinetic power, providing a model for other rural communities across the globe.

- **Hydrokinetic Power:** Igiugig completed energy profiling and permitting of the upper Kvichak River to become a test site for emerging hydrokinetic companies in the United States. They worked with a developer of renewable power systems to install, test, and improve a hydrokinetic run-of-the-river [RivGen](#) device in 2019 to provide power to the village’s grid. A second device will be installed in 2021, along with the smart grid system and energy storage system described below. These combined technologies will provide a fully renewable baseload power supply to meet the village’s energy needs.
- **Igiugig Northern Field Lab for Optimized Wind Energy:** [Igiugig’s wind energy research program](#) involves deploying and testing both vertical and horizontal axis wind technologies that address the unique challenges of northern regions. A locally designated field lab allows for the direct translation of research results into real-world implementation. The site contributes to the research of integration of companion renewables, as well as energy harvesting and storage for remote communities. It also delivers community education for wind farm operations and maintenance.
- **Autonomous Microgrid & Energy Storage System:** Igiugig serves as a testing ground for cutting-edge microgrid and battery technologies suitable for integrating renewables in remote and high-latitude geographies. Igiugig is currently transitioning to SMART microgrid technology, automating the generation and storage of energy from multiple renewable sources and increasing the overall efficiency of the system.

### Tribal Sovereignty & Land Protection

The people of Igiugig have lived on the lands and waters surrounding the village for time immemorial. To return their ancestral homeland to its natural and rightful stewards and safeguard one of the most pristine landscapes on earth, the village of Igiugig is pursuing multiple strategies, including:

- **Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs):** In 2020, Igiugig established the first tribally designated protected area under tribal law in Alaska. This IPA serves as a model for returning stewardship of Alaska Native areas to tribal communities. Igiugig seeks to expand the IPA to further protect the important cultural and habitat resources of their ancestral lands.
- **Igyararmiuni Ciunerkaput - Igiugig’s Sustainable Future Strategy:** Undertaken in partnership with the Harvard Kennedy School Nation Building Lab, Igiugig is mapping and assessing the extent, status, and ownership of Igiugig’s ancestral homeland. The outcomes of this project will inform a *‘Traditional Use Area Lands Assessment and Stewardship Plan’* identifying threats and opportunities to village sustainability, including opportunities to consolidate lands under tribal ownership and to establish Indigenous co-management of state and federal land.

## Business Ventures and Start-ups

- **Industrial operations:** Igiugig Village generates employment opportunities and revenue for the community through its two industrial companies, Iliamna Lake Contractors and Iliaska Environmental. These operations also provide the capacity, equipment, and materials required for environmentally responsible infrastructure development and construction projects. Iliaska Environmental's quarry at Diamond Point showcases sustainable and locally-owned resource extraction, generating income for the region while ensuring minimal impact on plant and animal life. The fact that the quarry blocks a critical access route for the controversial proposed Pebble Mine project is symbolic of the village's vision for sustainable economic development and refusal of outside interests dictating socio-economic and environmental change.
- **Lodging:** Igiugig owns and operates two commercial construction camps and a historic lodge in the region, which offers a starting point to explore ecotourism opportunities. These are important avenues for future endeavors for the village.
- **Tribally-owned telecommunications:** Reliable and affordable telecommunications are becoming increasingly critical to rural village life. To ensure that the community and businesses of Igiugig and the surrounding area have access to cost-effective and reliable broadband, IVC has applied for a FCC license to deploy communications services with the intention of setting up a tribal telecommunications company. This will help ensure that quality educational options are available locally, that locally owned and operated enterprises can take advantage of business opportunities, and that village representatives are able to participate in national matters without traveling great distances at significant expense to have a voice in legislation, court actions, and other events that impact the village.
- **Agricultural Production:** Igiugig's remote location makes localized food production critical to the health and nutrition of the village. Igiugig established a community greenhouse and local food program producing fresh vegetables, eggs, and chickens to supplement the village's subsistence harvest. With further investment and capacity-building, this operation could be expanded to access the ready market of local sportfishing lodges that currently fly in produce from urban centers, an important next step for bridging food security with economic diversification.

## Cultural Preservation and Revitalization

Igiugig has emerged as a leader in cultural preservation in the Bristol Bay region. By uplifting the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge, languages, and subsistence way of life the community instills in its youth the core Indigenous values that have enabled survival in this homeland for millennia. Examples of cultural preservation and revitalization projects include:

- Creating a physical "language nest" in Igiugig with Yup'ik signage, place name mapping, and language immersion classes.
- Partnering with regional and national organizations on an array of research projects such as; Upper Kvichak archeological documentation (21 identified sites); monitoring preservation easements, subsistence resources, and climate change; publication of plant knowledge, oral histories, children's books, etc.
- Revitalizing a traditional dance group that participated in Indigenous-led exchanges both within the United States and internationally.
- Creating a region-wide "Communities Teaching Culture" program in 13 villages across Bristol Bay, resulting in curriculum development for the school districts.
- Promoting remote learning capacity for culture and languages through Apps designed to preserve the two highly endangered dialects of Lake Iliamna Yup'ik Eskimo and Dena'ina Athabascan.
- Hosting cultural camps for the community and villages across the region.
- Sharing cultural preservation and revitalization practices at local, regional, and statewide forums.
- **Repatriating ancestral remains:** Igiugig [secured the return of the remains of 24 ancestors](#) taken in 1931 by anthropologists from the Smithsonian and kept at the Museum of Natural History. In 2017, they were reburied at the former village of Qinuyang, which was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 2021.
- **Igiugig Community Cultural Center:** Designed as the first modern fossil-fuel-free building in the region, once built, the center will provide a venue for lifelong learning and language revitalization activities, a repository for cultural resources, and a commercial kitchen that will allow the village to integrate locally grown and locally-harvested food products. The effort to finance this project is ongoing and is a central focus for the community.



IGIUGIG, ALASKA



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