

Cloud, Sky — Qilak

QILARUARTUQ ERNERPAK. – IT’S KIND OF CLOUDY TODAY.



Photo: Clouds in the sky over Karluk Lagoon.

Cloud cover, precipitation, wind, and fog are persistent features of Kodiak’s environment that reflect the continual passage of storms through the region. The Gulf of Alaska is almost always partly cloudy, and there are usually less than seven clear days a month. The city of Kodiak is completely overcast fifty percent of the year, with an average daily cloud cover of about seventy percent. Although many people associate cloudy weather with the stormy winter season, summer days often have lingering low clouds and rain.

For Alutiiq people, cloud cover and the bad weather that accompanies it influences daily life. In the dark days of winter, clouds further limit the daylight available for outdoor activities and hide the moon that can provide light for evening chores. In spring, heavy cloud cover can block the solar radiation needed to increase air and water temperatures and stimulate plankton blooms. This can delay the arrival of spring resources— the fresh fish, sea birds, and sea mammals that Alutiiq people anticipate after a long winter of relying on stored foods.

In classical Alutiiq society, a person’s behavior was thought to influence the weather. On Kodiak, menstruating women were secluded in special huts. One reason was to shield their eyes from the sky, so they would not invite bad weather. In Prince William Sound, a woman who wished for good weather might take a wooden bowl to the beach and beat on its bottom with two sticks. Then she would lie down, wish for good weather, and pretend to sleep. On waking, she would look at the sky and say, “I was dreaming it would be fine weather tomorrow.”