

Current — Carwaq

CARWAQ TUKNIUQ. – THE CURRENT IS STRONG.



Photo: Whale Passage, a narrow marine channel known for its strong currents. View east toward Afognak Bay.

Perched on the edge of the continental shelf, the Kodiak Archipelago lies in the path of the Alaska current. Driven by wind and freshwater, this warm oceanic flow courses out of the central Pacific and circulates counterclockwise along the Gulf of Alaska's coast. This current, and Alaska's high coastal mountains, shield the gulf from the cold climate of Alaska's interior, creating a more temperate environment than found at comparable latitudes.

In addition to moderating the climate, the Alaska current delivers many things to coastal water. The current carries nutrients that sustain the small marine organisms at the base of the food chain. These organisms then provide food for the fish, birds, and even mammals harvested by Alutiiq people. The current also delivers resources from distant shores. It carries driftwood to Kodiak from the forested coasts of the Pacific Northwest as well as the wreckage of Asian ships. This flotsam once provided craftsmen with raw materials.

Not everything the current brings is beneficial, however. Coastal currents help spread the red tide, blooms of marine algae that make shellfish poisonous. And it was the Alaska current that dispersed tens of thousands of gallons of crude oil across the Alutiiq homeland in the wake of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill.