

Wolf — Kaganaq

KAGANAT YAQSIGTUT MAAKEN. – THE WOLVES ARE FAR FROM HERE.



Photo: Wolf and bear tracks in the muddy shore of the King Salmon River, Alaska Peninsula, 2010.

Wolves (*Canis lupus*) occur throughout mainland Alaska, from the rainforests of Southeast to Unimak Island in the Aleutians and as far north as the arctic coast of the Beaufort Sea. This huge range, nearly eighty-five percent of Alaska, illustrates the animals' great adaptability. Like people, wolves can exist in many different habitats.

Although wolves are not indigenous to Kodiak Island, they are a part of the mainland Alutiiq world. Alutiiq people once trapped wolves for fur. Although large furbearers like bears, wolves, wolverine, and lynx were sought less frequently than the smaller fox, mink, marten, and fisher, Prince William Sound hunters devised special snares for these larger animals. When an unsuspecting animal got its head stuck in the noose, it struggled to get free. This motion caused a log to drop, hoisting the animal into the air and strangling it.

Wolves also appear in Alutiiq rock art. An ancient rock painting from Kachemak Bay seems to illustrate the transformation of wolves into killer whales or vice-versa. This image may indicate that Alutiiq people believed in a “killer-whale-wolf” creature, similar to that from Yup'ik mythology. This creature was a powerful predator, taking the form of a killer whale to hunt at sea and a wolf to hunt on land.