

Glacier — Cikusinaq

CIKUSINAT URUGCAURTUT. – THE GLACIERS ARE STARTING TO MELT.



Photo: Koniag Glacier on central Kodiak Island.

In the Alutiiq language, the term for glacier varies by region. Among Kodiak area Alutiiq speakers, the word is cikusinaq. The root of this word, *ciku-*, means ice, piece of ice, or iceberg. Add the suffix *-sinaq*, meaning large or great, and you get cikusinaq – large ice. In contrast, Alaska Peninsula Alutiiq speakers pluralize cikuq, the word for ice, using *cikut-* many pieces of ice, as their term for glaciers. All of these words reference the size of glaciers, helping people distinguish between common pieces of ice and the massive ice sheets that shaped the Alutiiq homeland into the mountainous, fjorded region we know today.

During the last glacial epoch, a time that stretched from about 120,000 to 10,000 years ago, enormous streams of ice ran out of Cook Inlet, and off the Kodiak Mountains carving valleys, cliffs, and mountains, as well as deep bays. During the first glacial advance, ice-covered all of Kodiak, with only mountain peaks rising above the ice. During subsequent advances, ice-covered most of the archipelago, but did not reach all the way across southwest Kodiak Island. This region's lower, rolling topography reflects its distinct history. Less glaciation and more exposure to wind and water rounded the topography of southwestern Kodiak.

Geological studies suggest that deglaciation of the Kodiak region, the melting and retreat of glacial ice, began about 17,000 years ago. Western areas of the archipelago were ice-free about 14,000 years ago. As the ice retreated, freshwater filled valleys forming Kodiak's major freshwater features, including Karluk and Red lakes and the rivers that drain them.

The Koniag Glacier, found today in the mountains behind Kiliuda Bay, is a remnant of the glaciers that once covered Kodiak. This small mountain glacier flows off Koniag Peak and is about 7 miles long. In 1963, the Kodiak Historical Society named the glacier for the Alutiiq People. Koniag is a term sometimes used for early Alutiiq settlers.