

Natural Geography In Shore Areas (NaGISA): a biodiversity study.

Brenda Konar and Katrin Iken (University of Alaska Fairbanks).

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What lives in our ocean “front yards”? This is the question that University of Alaska Fairbanks marine biologists Katrin Iken and Brenda Konar are trying to answer during their research in Kachemak Bay as well as Prince William Sound and Kodiak Island. Although it may seem that the intertidal rocky beaches and the shallow subtidal kelp zones should be well known, this is not the case. Which organisms live there, what communities they build, how they interact and what factors may impact them is often only superficially known. Funded through the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council Gulf Ecosystem Monitoring Program (GEM), the UAF researchers have started an intense biodiversity study of Kachemak Bay in 2003 and 2004. With the help of members of the local communities from Seldovia and Port Graham, samples at various sites in Kachemak Bay were taken and are now in the process of being analyzed in the Fairbanks lab. The first results of this project indicate that Kachemak Bay rocky shores indeed harbor very high numbers of species, i.e. have a high diversity. These data will not only be compared to other regions within the Gulf of Alaska, but also with other eastern Pacific locations in California, Mexico and South America and western Pacific regions in Asia. The project is part of an international nearshore biodiversity program (NaGISA), which itself is part of the large international “Census of Marine Life” initiative. Kachemak Bay will become one important dot on a large map of the world’s ocean, trying to understand this important ecosystem better.