EROSION EXPOSURE ASSESSMENT—WALES

Richard M. Buzard, Mark M. Turner, Katie Y. Miller, Donald C. Antrobus, and Jacquelyn R. Overbeck



Wales, Alaska, in 2012. Photo: Alaska Division of Geological & Geophysical Surveys.





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| Report of Investigation 2021-3 Wales |
| State of Alaska |

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Contents

| Wales Erosion Exposure Assessment1 | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Acknowledgments2 | |
| References | |

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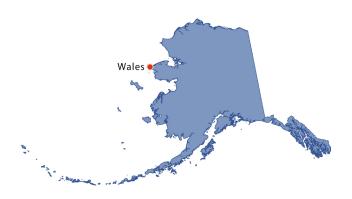
WALES EROSION EXPOSURE ASSESSMENT

This is a summary of results from an erosion forecast near infrastructure at Wales, Alaska. We conduct a shoreline change analysis, forecast 60 years of erosion, and estimate the replacement cost of infrastructure in the forecast area. Buzard and others (2021) describe the method and guidance for interpreting tables and maps.

Source data for this summary include the following:

- Shoreline change assessment ArcGIS shapefiles from Overbeck and others (2020) updated to the vegetation line if appropriate.
- Infrastructure AutoCAD outlines and metadata from Division of Community & Regional Affairs (2004) Community Profile Map series.
- Added infrastructure such as roads, water and sanitation facilities, and outbuildings, delineated if visible in the most up-to-date high resolution (≤ 0.66 ft [20 cm] ground sample distance) aerial orthoimagery (Overbeck and others, 2016).

Wales is located on the western tip of the Seward Peninsula, between the Bering Strait and the Chukchi Sea. The community is constructed on vegetated and non-vegetated sand dunes. Erosion in Wales occurs in the form of scouring during high water events such as storm surge that redistribute sand across the beach and dunes (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [USACE], 2007). This coastal erosion process is non-linear because dunes can recover after storm events; sand transported to the near-shore during a storm is redistributed to the beach,



and vegetation grows back. Dune and beach erosion disturb the land surface and can damage or undercut structures. Wales is exposed to erosion that may undermine infrastructure in the following 60 years, but we cannot forecast beach and dune erosion in Wales using the method by Buzard and others (2021) because the model depends on linear erosion of a clearly identified shoreline. The shorelines delineated from aerial imagery show erosion could be up to 5.6 feet per year, but there is great uncertainty because the shorelines are not easy to identify due to wave action (Overbeck and others, 2020).

Beach erosion and storm damage can be monitored with repeat beach elevation measurements using GPS or digital elevation models. DGGS extracted elevation profiles from a 2004 lidar digital elevation model at transects along the beach. DGGS also conducted GPS surveys in 2012 and 2015 along the same transects. At least three storms impacted Wales during this time: October 2004, September 2005, and November 2011 (USACE, 2009; Kawerak, 2012). Continued monitoring and a longer record of beach elevation can help identify whether and when infrastructure may become exposed to erosion.

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