



Saint Paul Harbor, Saint Paul Island, AK

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 28, 2020**

### **St Paul Island Adopts COVID-19 Travel Ban**

In response to federal and state emergency declarations responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Saint Paul City Council unanimously adopted a resolution on Thursday, March 26, banning all non-essential travel to the island through April 15, 2020. The resolution complies with State of Alaska health and travel mandates and includes exceptions for essential businesses.

Fisheries-related businesses with state approved pandemic response plans are covered by the exception. Saint Paul is home to a Trident Seafoods plant which processes Bering Sea crab (mostly snow crab) during the winter months, and halibut that is harvested by the local small boat halibut fleet in the summer months. The Trident plant recently concluded crab processing operations for the season and is expected to transport plant employees to the mainland in coming days.

City of Saint Paul City Manager, Phil Zavadil indicated that “the City Council adopted this resolution both in response to the State’s mandates but also in recognition of our community’s limited ability to treat individuals who might develop serious COVID-19 related symptoms.”

Saint Paul Island is home to approximately 400, mostly Unangan (Aleut), residents. The Saint Paul Island Community Health Center, which is run by the Southcentral Foundation, an Alaska Native-owned, nonprofit health care organization serving nearly 65,000 Alaska Natives throughout the state, has no resident doctors and possesses one ventilator. Zavadil noted that “residents with severe medical conditions are usually medivaced by plane to Anchorage area hospitals.” However, at a time when many hospital facilities are expected to be overwhelmed with severe COVID-19 cases, Zavadil pointed out that “we need to first of all prevent contagion on the island, hence the travel ban, and secondly be prepared to treat cases locally through quarantining and other CDC recommended methods.”

Mayor Jacob Mercurief, a lifelong resident of Saint Paul, noted that “our isolation and remoteness is usually a disadvantage, but at a time like this, if we adopt the necessary precautions, we can protect our community which consists of many elderly, from the pandemic.” Mercurief stated that “by adopting this resolution, Saint Paul is not only seeking to protect community residents, but is doing its part to prevent further burdening the State of Alaska’s health care infrastructure.”

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