Overhauled Saint George Harbor Could Stem Island Exodus

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Stephanie Joyce/KUCB

After decades of lobbying and planning, a project to overhaul the boat harbor on St. George Island is finally moving forward. The state is accepting bids for the project design, and hopes to have fully developed construction plans by 2015.

St. George mayor Pat Pletnikoff says the sooner, the better.

Despite being in the middle of the Bering Sea’s most productive fishing grounds, St. George’s economy is struggling, and as a result, the population has declined precipitously in the last few decades.

The community has a harbor, but its design leaves it open to wave action, particularly during the Bering Sea’s frequent winter storms. As a result, attracting the fishing fleet’s business has been difficult. With improvements to the harbor’s design, Pletnikoff is optimistic that St. George can prosper.

Last year, Senator Mark Begich also included a provision in the Coast Guard Reauthorization Bill directing the agency to study St. George as a possible port of refuge for vessels transiting the Arctic. Plentikoff says that could help defray some of the estimated $30 million in construction costs for the harbor.

The state has already pitched in $2.5 million to the project, and voters approved a $3 million bond in November. Bidding on the design phase of the project ends today (Wednesday) and the state hopes to select a contractor shortly thereafter.