

Interior Rivers Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc.

(IRRC&D)

Mission Statement:

The mission of the Interior Rivers RC&D Council is to create long-term jobs and improve village living standards on behalf of all residents of the region.

1. Description of Region

The Interior Rivers region refers to the portion of the Kuskokwim Rivers drainage system that stretches east to west from Lime Village on the Stony River to Lower Kalskag, approximately 203 miles downriver, and includes the villages of Grayling, Anvik, Holy Cross and Russian Mission lying along the banks of the Yukon River as well as Shageluk, due east on the Innoko River. The Interior Rivers region encompasses approximately 35,000 square miles (22,400,000 acres).

The 2000 U.S. Census established a total population in the Interior Rivers Area of 2,539 people. 62.6 % resided in the nine villages on the Kuskokwim-Stony River area and 37.4% resided in the five villages on the Yukon-Innoko Rivers. Together, Upper and Lower Kalskag are the largest village on the Kuskokwim River. Russian Mission is the largest on the Yukon River. Lime Village was the smallest with a population of 45 in 2000.

The people of the Interior Rivers region are primarily Yup'ik Eskimo and Athabascan Indian (Ingalik and Holikachuk). Based on the 2000 Census, over 84% of all residents are Alaska Native; 14% are Caucasian; and 1% is African American or other racial origin. In most villages, 90-98% of the residents are Alaska Native.

Government is the region's single largest employer, accounting for half or more of all salaried jobs. These jobs are primarily associated with village schools or local government. Some state and federal employment is also available in some villages. Native for-profit and non-profit organizations provide other important employment opportunities, such as village health aide jobs provided through the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation. Service sector employment includes local retail businesses and private utilities or cooperatives. Construction, firefighting, commercial fishing, guiding and trapping are additional sources of seasonal wage employment; however, the work is limited or sporadic.

2. Goals

- Complete the organizing and planning for the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) and begin compiling and composing draft CEDS.
- Develop a process/protocol for eco-tourism within interested communities and for the

region.

- Assist communities with developing and emergency response plan.

3. Goals Accomplished

- With major support and contribution from USDA NRCS RC&D Coordinator, a 5-year Area Plan and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was submitted to State of Alaska, Department of Community, Commerce & Economic Development, Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR) on behalf of Interior Rivers RC&D Council, Inc. A copy of the Area Plan is posted on Interior Rivers website: www.interiorrivers.org. The Area Plan includes a complete description of the region in respect to natural setting, climate, government(s), employment, housing, utility services, health care, transportation, land resource and use, and Native Corporation status. The Area Plan addresses four elements which are: community development, land conservation, land management, and water management.
- In late fall of 2009 a region-wide tourism survey was conducted of all postal patrons. The responses proved vast diverse opinions. With the outcome of the survey Interior Rivers decided not to pursue tourism as an organization, but to provide individuals with the resources to consider pursuing tourism and/or developing a local business on their own. Business development resource outreach trips to Kalskag, Grayling, Russian Mission, Crooked Creek, and Sleetmute were conducted by the executive director. Of this, interested individuals were provided resources available and invited to attend a business resource meeting in Aniak March 2010. Approximately 20 people from surrounding villages attended a 2-day resource meeting with personnel from AK SourceLink and University of Alaska Rural Outreach Program for Entrepreneurs (ROPE).



Attendees had the opportunity to access AK SourceLink's website resources and to navigate the website depending on what information needed to develop business plans, funding sources, etc.



ROPE provided information on business start-up, financial management, marketing, and working with financiers. Under a branch of ROPE, presentation was made by the University of Alaska Kuskokwim Campus on utilizing websites such as eBay and PayPal to sell and receive payments. One-on-one consults were made available to attendees. Of this workshop other trainings were made available on website development and accounting programs.

- The Native Village of Kalskag Indian Environmental General Assistance Program (IGAP) director requested assistance in developing an emergency response plan for the community. Interior Rivers met with the director, and staff, and a plan of action was set. Community meetings were held with city and tribal governments, school officials, law enforcement, health clinic staff, to identify potential hazards whether natural or manmade. Once hazards and critical facilities were identified emergency plans were requested from the businesses, schools, City Office, phone and electric company that would be instrumental in the event of a disaster. Such plans will be included in the completed ERP.



Village Elder expresses local concerns

State of Alaska Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Division of Homeland Security was included to provide assistance with the proper development and implementation of the plan. Due to the lengthy process of putting together an ERP, the plan was not done to completion at FY end. The base has been set, data collection is the main focus.



Village Elders and IGAP Coordinator listen to the process presented by Homeland Security

Interior Rivers will continue to work with the Village of Lower Kalskag and Division of Homeland Security on finalizing a plan specifically for the community.

4. FY10 Identified Economic Development Needs and Action Opportunities

- A shortage of full-time, year-round jobs and local training opportunities has led to a high rate of unemployment and a high rate of dependence on public assistance. To meet this challenge effective education and trainings are needed.
- The Interior Rivers region has no transportation connections to the rest of the Alaska except by marine highway in the summer and air transportation year-round. Villages rely heavily on air transportation for travel within as well as to and from the region. A natural portage between the Yukon near Paimute across the river from Holy Cross and the Kuskokwim down river from Lower Kalskag would be ideal route for a barge canal or railway which would open the region to lower cost barge traffic for heavy freight.
- Villages are in need of adequate fire protection. Fire prevention/education programs should be implemented showing people how to store, maintain and use an extinguisher in event of a fire. In addition, an option is to assist communities in obtaining funding to purchase the Code Red.

5. FY10 Regional Coordinated Efforts Resulting in New Business Opportunities

As reported earlier under Section 3: Approximately 20 people from surrounding villages attended a 2-day resource meeting with personnel from AK SourceLink and University of Alaska Rural Outreach Program for Entrepreneurs (ROPE). Attendees had the opportunity to access AK SourceLink's website resources and to navigate the website depending on what information needed to develop business plans, funding sources, etc.

6. Highlighted Coordinated Regional Efforts

Once again, Interior Rivers RC&D Council and Mid-Yukon/Kuskokwim Soil and Water Conservation banded together to assist locals with various gardening supplies. Seeds, fertilizer, plant starts, and seed potatoes were provided to interested individuals. Bulk items were purchased then sold locally at a lower cost.

Under a separate project Interior Rivers RC&D Council made a bulk purchase of easy assembly greenhouse kits. The kits can be set up in any remote area, i.e. back yard, spring or fish camp, no tools needed. Not meant for mass production, they are ideal for individual families to have healthier, robust crops.

There has been an increase in local gardening/farming in the last few years. More in-depth planning and coordination will be conducted to focus on a regional farming business or supplier.

7. Current Board Members and Contact

Executive Committee: Wayne Morgan, President; Vice-President - VACANT; Cheryl Jerabek, Secretary/Treasurer.

Members: Robert Walker, Jerry Peterson, Dennis Thomas, Georgetown Tribal, Rachel Freireich, Eugene Paul, Ursula Graham, Theodore Gordon, Mary Peters, Arnold Hamilton, Pete Mellick, Nick Alexie, Herman Morgan, Cynthia Navarrette, Rachel Klein.

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