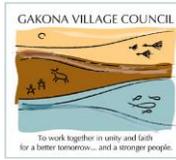


Successful DoD – Tribal Partnership



NATIVE VILLAGE OF GAKONA: AURORA RADIO RELAY SITE

The Native Village of Gakona (NVG) became a partner in the Department of Defense supported Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP) in FY 2008 with the signing of their first Cooperative Agreement (CA). The NVG has a land base of 61.3 square miles and is located 175 miles northeast of Anchorage, Alaska at the convergence of the Copper and Gakona Rivers. The United States Air Force operated the Aurora Radio Relay Site (RRS) from 1960 until 1983 and the communications station was a part of the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System of the White Alice Communication System. The Aurora RRS is located by the Copper River near the NVG and has a total land surface area of 73.71 square miles. The Aurora RRS was bought by AT&T Alascom, Inc., in 1983; Alascom, Inc. remains the owner of the surface and subsurface lands to the site. Ahtna, an ANCSA Regional Corporation, holds the title to affected surface and subsurface lands next to and surrounding the Aurora RRS.



Scrap metal debris Aurora RRS site 2001

With support from United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Alaska District, NVG developed a Strategic Project Implementation Plan (SPIP) which captures the Tribe's priorities regarding the remediation process and ensuing work at the RRS site. The military debris described in the SPIP included drums, containers, and wire. Tribal leaders believed that removal of the debris would improve public safety by preventing potential slip, trip and fall hazards to tribal members and potential roll-over of vehicles.

In addition, NVG leaders identified the RRS site as an environmental and cultural threat; they clarified that the area is an important location for subsistence hunting (moose, caribou) and food gathering and remains a main route of travel within the interior of Alaska between the Valdez Eagle and Valdez Fairbanks trails. During the site assessment process, community elders had also shared traditional ecological knowledge that fewer moose and caribou moved through the region than in the past, possibly because of the debris at the Aurora RSS site.

The FY 2010 NALEMP CA funded the cleanup of 28, 55-gallon drum tops, 5 grounding posts, 100 pieces of metal strapping, one Army truck tailgate, and one rusted metal stove, among other debris from 5.62 acres of Ahtna land adjacent to the RRS site. In addition, analysis of samples collected and tested confirmed earlier findings that neither soil nor groundwater on affected Ahtna land were contaminated by petroleum products.



Tribal staff member 2010

The overall main objectives of NVG's remediation efforts were to protect and enhance the health and safety of the people, animals and plants; return the land to a natural state; and develop the capacity of tribal staff via training on environmental cleanup processes and resource management.

These goals were accomplished. The removal and disposal of the debris has made it possible for tribal members to resume subsistence hunting and gathering activities in the area without risk of injury.