

A healthier, cleaner Chalkyitsik Village: GAP funds recycling, backhaul efforts



Chalkyitsik Village

Chalkyitsik, Alaska

Project Description

Protecting the environment is a high priority for Alaska Natives, most of whom fish, hunt, and gather as part of their traditional lifestyle. Located in northeast Alaska on the Draanjik River, Chalkyitsik means “fish hooking place.” The river has served as the home and fishing site for Gwich’in Athabascans for thousands of years.

Like many rural Alaska villages located off the road system, Chalkyitsik struggled with managing solid waste, since it is very expensive to ship waste out of the village by barge or plane. After attending environmental trainings and learning about the harmful health impacts of solid and hazardous waste, Chalkyitsik’s Environmental Planner started a recycling program in 2012 to protect the health of the people and their subsistence resources and to clean up the community.

Project Details

The tribe started small by recycling bottles, cans, appliances, and electronic waste. Today, they are recycling thousands of pounds of hazardous lead acid batteries, electronic waste like computers and televisions, fluorescent light bulbs, large appliances like dishwashers and freezers, abandoned vehicles, and other items. Using GAP funds, the tribe purchased a truck to haul recycling and trash to the recycling center for storage and then to the dock for barge pickup. The truck made it possible to

remove items from people’s yards like old snow machines, all-terrain vehicles, as well as refrigerators and freezers. Many items contained fluids such as Freon that had to be removed before the items could be safely shipped out of the village (backhauled).

Project partners have included Alaskans for Litter Prevention and Recycling, Everts Air Cargo, K&K Recycling, OfficeMax, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Total Reclaim, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and Yukon River Inter-Tribal Watershed Council.

Community Response

Both community members and visitors have commented on the positive transformation the village has undergone. Generators, appliances (including a walk-in freezer), transformers, and 200 propane cylinders have been removed. Since 2013, 60,000 pounds of waste have been backhauled.

Innovation

Creativity and ingenuity are needed for backhauling in rural Alaska, especially for communities that are off the road system. Chalkyitsik’s Environmental Planner has used a combination of techniques to ship materials out, including mailing small items; using air charters for larger, unusual, or bulky items; and shipping by barge when river and weather conditions permit. However, Chalkyitsik has been able to backhaul by barge only once in the past six years because

Project Time Period (FY2012– FY2015)

- **Tribal Contact:** Patricia Salmon, Environmental Planner
- **GAP Project Officer:** Sherry Davis, EPA Region 10
- **Media:** Solid & Hazardous Waste
- **GAP Funded Results:**
 - Outreach & Education
 - Program Development (Core Competencies)
 - Training



Award Winner

Chalkyitsik’s Environmental Planner Patricia Salmon accepts an award from the Alaska Tribal Conference on Environmental Management in November 2017 for improvements to the local environment made by the village’s Indian General Assistance Program.



Map of Tribal Boundaries

Chalkyitsik Village, population 77, is located on the Draanjik River about 50 miles east of Fort Yukon. Access to the community is by boat, plane, or snowmachine.

of low water in the Draanjik River. When the tribe's housing program charters a plane to deliver building materials, they also send some of the recyclables out on the return flight, occasionally for free.

Next Steps

In 2015, Chalkyitsik Village completed construction of a new recycling center using GAP funds. With the capacity developed through the GAP grant, the tribe is collaborating with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to use State of Alaska Capital Improvement Project funds, Indian Health Service funds, and GAP funds to build a state-permitted landfill. Bureau of Indian Affairs funds will be used to build an access road.

