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## Who We Are

Inspired by a shared passion for conservation, NRCS collaborates with farmers, ranchers, communities, and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private lands.

Working side-by-side with our customers, we identify natural resource concerns, such as wildlife habitat, water quality and fish passage, soil erosion, and lowland degradation. Together, we develop unique conservation plans for restoring and protecting resources.

Funds to implement these plans are made available from supplemental appropriations (EWP) and Farm Bill programs (EQIP, WHIP, CSP) that share the cost of conservation for the benefit of all.

NRCS in Alaska helps maintain nutritious local food, wildlife habitat for subsistence lifestyles, and a healthy ecosystem.



Bull Moose in Alaska

### If the Moose are Hungry Now, the Village will be Hungry Later

When the people in the village of Dillingham, Alaska noticed a decline in the local moose population, specifically poor calf survival, they knew they should take action. As a subsistence village, they rely on moose and salmon for traditional food.

Choggiung Limited, the Village corporation of Dillingham, contacted the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to see if help was available. NRCS investigated sites within the village's traditional hunting areas to determine the quality and quantity of moose habitat and develop alternatives for improvement. The sites revealed that moose had browsed the willows so heavily the trees were stripped bare as far up as the moose could reach, eight to ten feet!

Cows carrying calves were not finding enough nourishing food, so calves were born sickly and weak. Malnourished cows and calves result in high mortality and the moose population suffers. When the moose population suffers, people in the villages find it difficult to maintain their traditional subsistence lifestyle - they have a hard time keeping healthy food on the table. Obviously, the solution was to make better and more abundant willow browse available for the moose.

How do people improve hundreds of acres of willow in remote, roadless, wet, brushy tundra? The answer is manual labor and perseverance. The plan involved local people manually "tipping" tall willows over, forcing new growth (basal sprout) from partially severed trunks. The work had to be performed in midwinter with chainsaws, handsaws and brush whackers in areas accessible only by snow mobile. Winter work in western Alaska is as hard to come by as good moose browse so the regional village corporation forestry crew eagerly stepped up for the job.

The plan, tested over the course of a year and a half, proved successful and word spread to other villages. NRCS is now working with numerous new clients on additional moose habitat improvement projects. NRCS is proud to be involved in improving moose habitat, sustaining village subsistence food sources, and putting an otherwise unemployed crew to work in winter.

# Alaska Tribal Conservation Alliance

## Organizing New Tribal Conservation Districts

Ninety five percent of the 47 million acres of privately owned lands in Alaska are Native corporation lands. Tribal conservation districts can help provide the foundation for long-term conservation planning on these lands. However, with 229 individual federally recognized tribes, conservation planning can be challenging.

The Alaska Tribal Conservation Alliance, formed by four tribal conservation districts, at Nunivak Island, Asa'carsarmiut (Mountain Village), Kuigglugmiut (Kwethluck), and Tyonek, aims to keep conservation planning in the forefront. The Alliance, with assistance from NRCS, will enhance communication, share training, and provide guidance to newly developing tribal conservation districts.



Martin Andrew of Kuigglugmiut Tribal Conservation District describes drying fish to USDA Undersecretary Harris Sherman at a fish camp on the Kuskokwim River.

# Statewide Soil Map

## Mapping All Alaska's Soils for the First Time

Alaska's Soil Survey Team celebrated the completion of statewide soils mapping, a project that took nearly 3,000 staff hours starting in 2008. It is the first time resource managers can turn to a complete database depicting the soils of Alaska's vast and varied lands. This survey provides soil and landscape information on a scale of 1:500,000, while individual area surveys provide more detail on a smaller scale. Soil surveys not only include maps and physical and chemical descriptions of soils, but also provide resource planners with quantifiable data about the use and management of carbon storage. Federal agencies, state agencies, and Alaska Native corporations rely on soils maps for large-scale conservation planning and resource management. Mining, logging, land sales, and range development all depend on up-to-date soils maps.



Soil data is collected in Alaska's short, cool, field seasons for the statewide soil map.

# High Tunnels

## Extending the Season, Expanding Variety and Growing Locally

The cool days and short summers of Alaska make growing plants, like melons, peppers, and squash, nearly impossible without the assistance of a greenhouse or high tunnel. High tunnels are similar to greenhouses but are polyethylene covered structures where plants grow in the ground, instead of on raised benches, and the air heats passively from the sun, instead of from a heater. High tunnels can extend the growing season in Alaska from the typical 105 days up to 145 days by increasing soil and air temperatures and protecting plants from frost. The boost of heat and longer growing season makes growing more varieties and a greater quantity of vegetables possible.

More than 150 high tunnels have been contracted with NRCS in the past two years, providing affordable, local, fresh, nutritious food. A high tunnel's warmth greatly enhances microbial action, releasing nutrients from soil, mulch, and compost and allowing plants to "pick up" the nutrients.



High tunnels in Homer, Alaska can grow tomatoes, melons and even avocados.

# Conservation Technical

**Assistance (CTA)** *is simply about helping people help the land. NRCS has used CTA successfully for more than 75 years to reach out to American farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners and managers.*

*America's farmers and ranchers invest in conservation with help from CTA to care for the more than 70 percent of our land, water and other natural resources that are in their hands. In Fiscal year 2011, Alaska received \$3.6 million in CTA funds.*

*NRCS employees work with customers to identify natural resource concerns, inventory resources, develop conservation alternatives and help individual farmers, ranchers, Tribes, local governments and urban landowners with their conservation decisions. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding.*

## Environmental Improvement:

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

**(EQIP)**—promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible goals.

### **Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)**

—improves wildlife habitat on private agricultural, forest and Tribal lands.

## Conservation Easements:

### **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program**

**(FRPP)**—helps keep farm and ranch land in agriculture.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program**

**(WRP)**—restores wetlands and wetland habitat on marginal agricultural land

### **Grassland Reserve Program**

**(GRP)**—restores and protects grassland, rangeland and pastureland, and helps maintain viable ranching operations.

## Stewardship:

### **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**

—encourages long-term comprehensive conservation by maintaining and improving existing conservation measures.

## Watershed and Communities:

### **Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP)**

—undertakes emergency measures in watersheds where there are imminent threats to life and property resulting from fire, flood and other natural disasters.

In Alaska, subsistence activities qualify as agricultural activities for Farm Bill Programs.

# Native Land Policy in Alaska is Different from in the Lower 48 States

## Alaska Native Settlement Act and Land Ownership in Alaska

While Alaska is home to nearly half of all the federally recognized tribes in the US, (229 of the 566), there is only one American Indian / Alaska Native reservation in the state. Instead, Alaska Native groups own lands through village and regional corporations, as founded in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA Public law 92-203). The Act established regional and village corporations who have ownership of the land, unlike lower 48 reservation systems.

The Act, approved December 18, 1971, authorized Alaska Natives to select and receive title to 44 million acres of public land in Alaska and established a system of village and regional Native corporations to manage the lands.

The Alaska Native corporations, both regional and village, are private landowners. Whereas NRCS employees in the lower 48 often meet at a kitchen table with farmers, NRCS employees in Alaska also meet in a village hall with corporation board members. In the same manner as on a large farm or ranch, a large Native corporation may hire a land manager or environmental planner to oversee the conservation and management activities.

The village and regional corporations, as well as the tribes and tribal conservation districts, are key partners with NRCS in Alaska for putting conservation on the ground.

## Getting From Here to There

Alaska is big; bigger than Texas, California, and Montana combined. From the capitol city of Juneau to the Arctic hub, Barrow, is 1,100 miles, a little further than from Denver to Seattle.

More than 80 percent of communities in Alaska are not connected to a highway or road system, according to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Another way to think of it is, only about 10 percent of the state is accessible by road. To get to most places, airplane, boat, dog sled or snow mobile is the method of transportation.

NRCS works with the off-road villages to be sure our services fit the seasonal schedules of barges, ice roads, and bush planes so rural populations of all areas across our vast state benefit from conservation planning.



Relative size of Alaska to contiguous US

## 2011 Farm Bill Program Funding\*

NRCS Program	Dollars Obligated to Landowners*	Number of Contracts/Easements*
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	\$58,000	2
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	\$7,736,000	196
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	\$3,101,000	30
<b>Top Three EQIP Practices</b>	<b>Dollars Obligated to Landowners*</b>	<b>Occurrences</b>
Pest Management	\$1,392,400	536
Nutrient Management	\$656,000	480
Seasonal High Tunnel Systems	\$1,541,900	178

\*Data Source: Official 2011 Data for LAD Task 60-12. 3/15/2012