



### The Kuskokwim River and the village of McGrath

The Kuskokwim River is the longest free flowing river in the United States at 702 miles.

By way of the raven, Anchorage is 220 miles southeast and Fairbanks is 270 miles northeast of McGrath.

McGrath is the northernmost point barges can travel upriver, making it the area's hub for transportation and commerce.

The village of McGrath is accessible by river, airplane and, during the Iditarod, dog sled. No roads go to the town.

The per capita income in 2012 was \$26,337 and population in 2010 was 340.

In the winter, snow machines and dog sleds can travel a 50-mile trail to Nikolai or 20-mile trail to Takotna and the frozen river becomes an ice road to other villages. Traditionally, people do more visiting in the winter even though winter temperatures reach negative 60 degrees.

### Protecting a village from its lifeblood

The Kuskokwim River was washing away the levee that protects McGrath from flooding. At some places the levee was down to only a foot wide and it was sloughing into the river daily, putting the community at risk. The river plays a critical role in the community; McGrath relies on the Kuskokwim for transportation, barge shipments, subsistence fishing, and firewood but the lifeblood of the village was about to overrun it.

Through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program, NRCS assisted McGrath with reconstruction of the levee and armored the eroding riverbank with rock to protect the levee and other structures from future damage.

The nearest rock quarry was 13 miles outside of McGrath. While there was an existing road from McGrath to the quarry, it was not capable of bearing repeated loads of heavy construction traffic. So, rock riprap was produced at the quarry and hauled into town to the levee during winter months, when frozen ground conditions could support much heavier loads. Temperatures in McGrath during the winter months can dip to negative 60 degrees Fahrenheit and frequently are negative 30 to

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negative 40 degrees. The cold creates a solid road but difficult working conditions for man and machine.

After the spring thaw, the bank was re-shaped to a stable 2:1 slope and armored with the rock riprap that had been hauled during the winter. The flood levee was then reconstructed behind the armored riverbank.

The McGrath EWP is a success NRCS is proud of. The levee is now in good condition and the community is protected from future flooding.

### Unique Challenges

There were unique challenges throughout the entire construction period on this project. An archaeological discovery was made early in the construction period while preparing the construction staging area. Three sets of ancient human remains were discovered during excavation operations which halted the project for a short period while the local tribal authorities and the SHPO office could properly investigate and secure the find. A pair of peregrine falcons nested in the cliffs of the rock quarry. Rock production efforts were carefully planned and executed so as not to disturb the falcons .



The Kuskokwim River connects two distinctly different cultures, the Athabaskan Alaska Natives from the upper river and the Yupik Alaska Natives from the lower part of the river.

