



N R C S

NATURAL RESOURCES
CONSERVATION SERVICE

TRIBAL UPDATE

Alaska

Alaska is the largest state in the nation with 375 million acres of land. It's larger than Texas, Montana and California combined. Roughly **86% of Alaska is in public ownership** and **14% is private land**. Of the private lands, Alaska Native Tribes and Tribal entities own **44 million acres**, which is roughly the size of the state of North Dakota.

Alaska has more Tribes than any other state in the nation. There are 229 Federally-recognized Tribes, which is 40 percent of all recognized Tribes in the United States.

Unlike in the Lower 48 states where Tribal lands are managed on reservations, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 settled land claims in a way that is not based on the reservation system. Through ANCSA, the federal government transferred 44 million acres to be held in corporate ownership by Alaska Native shareholders. ANCSA divided

the state into 12 distinct regions and mandated the creation of 12 private, for-profit Alaska Native regional corporations and more than 200 private, for-profit Alaska Native village corporations. Alaska has only one reservation located in Southeast Alaska.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with Tribal governments, Tribal corporations, Tribal Conservation Districts, and other Tribal partners across the state to conserve and protect their natural resources. As the largest private landowners in the state, Alaska Natives play a critical role in implementing NRCS conservation programs on-the-ground. Alaska Native lands are a significant recipient of NRCS conservation investments on a total acre and dollar basis annually. This shared success is built on a foundation of locally-led partnerships and collaboration.





FY25 Contracts with Alaska Native Producers

EQIP Environmental Quality Incentives Program



8
CONTRACTS



2.3 million
ACRES

\$ 27.6 million
OBLIGATED

96%
OF FUNDING TO
ALASKA NATIVE
PRODUCERS

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the most frequently-used NRCS conservation program in Alaska. It provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers address natural resource concerns that impact soil, water, air, energy, plants and wildlife.

10 Years of EQIP in Alaska

Fiscal Year	Alaska EQIP Obligations	Funding to Alaska Native Producers	% of Total EQIP Funding to Alaska Native Producers	# of Contracts with Alaska Native Producers
2016	\$6.4 M	\$4.1 M	64%	20
2017	\$9.2 M	\$6.7 M	73%	21
2018	\$7.4 M	\$4.9 M	66%	14
2019	\$10.7 M	\$10.1 M	94%	16
2020	\$9.2 M	\$6.8 M	74%	20
2021	\$7.7 M	\$6.2 M	81%	12
2022	\$7.7 M	\$7.6 M	98%	14
2023	\$12.5 M	\$11.1 M	89%	11
2024	\$12.4 M	\$11.1 M	90%	15
2025	\$28.8 M	\$27.6	96%	8
TOTAL	\$112M	\$96.2M	86%	151

Conservation Practices with Tribal Producers



Trails and Walkways

Hardened trails allow for safe human access to subsistence areas while protecting soil from erosion, and protecting critical nesting habitat and other important wildlife habitats.



Aquatic Organism Passage

Removing or replacing inadequate culverts and installing bridges or large fish-friendly culverts can improve salmon access to spawning and rearing habitat.



Stream Habitat Improvement and Management

Placing natural materials such as woody debris can improve the ecological function of a stream and maintain adequate flows to sustain diverse habitats.



Seasonal High Tunnels

High tunnels or hoop houses provide a controlled growing environment that improves plant productivity and allows growers to produce a wider variety of crops that otherwise could not be grown outdoors in Alaska.



Tree and Shrub Establishment

Planting or seeding trees and shrubs promotes natural regeneration and can maintain or improve plant diversity, productivity, and health. Other benefits include improved water quality, reduced erosion, and improved wildlife habitat.



Forest Stand Improvement

Intentionally removing or modifying trees and forest vegetation to achieve a desired stand density and composition can improve timber quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and reduce wildfire risk.

Tribal Conservation Districts By Year Established

An important part of managing and conserving Alaska Native lands is working with **Tribal Conservation Districts (TCDs)**. TCDs combine local and traditional knowledge with technical resources to actively manage natural resources in a defined area. The goal of a TCD is to set local priorities for conservation and ensure sustainable use of natural resources for subsistence, economic opportunity, resource development, and cultural preservation. Once a TCD is established under Tribal law, it can enter into a mutual agreement with the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to carry out programs to accomplish conservation goals.

The rise of TCDs has cultivated meaningful change in the way USDA works with Alaska Natives. TCDs help NRCS understand the priority resource concerns of Alaska Native entities; and NRCS benefits from continued engagement with our Alaska Native partners. While there are benefits to forming a TCD, any Tribal entity may apply for and/or receive NRCS technical or financial assistance regardless of TCD participation.

In 2025, three new TCDs were formed in Alaska and submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture: Bering Sea Interior Commission, Native Village of Goodnews Bay, and Salamatof.

Anna Bateman, Salamatof Tribal Administrator (front) and Sonja Earsley, Salamatof Tribe Grants Manager (center) visit a potential culvert replacement site with NRCS Civil Engineer Jesse Hunter (left) and NRCS Soil Conservationist Kris Nichols.



1.	Tyonek	2005
2.	Asa'carsarmiut (Mountain Village)	2009
3.	Kuigglugmiut (Kwethluk)	2009
4.	Nunivak Island (Mekoryuk)	2011
5.	Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission	2014
6.	Akiacuarmiut (Akiachak)	2014
7.	Knik	2014
8.	Kuuvanmiut (Ambler)	2014
9.	Nuvendaltun (Nondalton)	2014
10.	Prince of Wales Island	2014
11.	T'ee Drin Jik (Venetie)	2014
12.	Tuyuryak (Togiak)	2014
13.	Yakutat	2015
14.	Eklutna	2016
15.	Ketchikan Indian Community	2018
16.	Nuiqsagmiut (Nuiqsut)	2018
17.	Southeast Alaska	2018
18.	Tanana	2018
19.	Ruby	2019
20.	Chugach Region	2021
21.	Keex' Kwaan (Kake)	2021
22.	Native Village of Eyak	2021
23.	Bering Sea Interior	Pending
24.	Native Village of Goodnews Bay	Pending
25.	Salamatof	Pending

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Spotlight

Improving Fish Passage and Salmon Habitat in Tyonek, Alaska

In 2024, the Tyonek Tribal Conservation District, the Tyonek Native Corporation and many partners (including NRCS) completed construction on the Lower Tyonek Fish Passage Restoration Project, a 10-year, multi-agency effort that replaced a 6 foot diameter culvert with a 45 foot, 10 inch diameter culvert, opening up 31 miles of salmon habitat in the watershed. This project quickly became known as the largest fish passage culvert in Alaska.

This project builds upon years of past work by Tyonek TCD to replace undersized culverts and restore stream access for salmon spawning and rearing habitat. Tyonek TCD continues to work with NRCS to complete more fish passage projects. A culvert replacement on Roberts Creek was completed in 2025 and more projects are planned for future years. Fish passage projects like these are critical for Alaska Native communities to improve salmon habitat which directly supports subsistence agriculture and food security.



Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission TCD signing ceremony in 2014.



Kuigglugmiut TCD signing ceremony in 2009.



Tyonek TCD signing ceremony in 2005.





Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Spotlight

Copper River Watershed Project supports salmon habitat and subsistence

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to address regional or watershed-scale natural resource concerns. By leveraging collective resources and collaborating on common goals, RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation.

RCPP funds can be used by partner organizations to provide assistance directly to landowners to implement conservation activities. Funding can also be directed to partners for a variety of technical assistance activities, including resource assessments, conservation practice surveys, and design, planning, and resource monitoring.

The 26,500-square-mile Copper River watershed supports five species of Alaska Pacific Salmon, among other diverse fisheries. These young salmonids need cold, clear water, food,

and refuge from predators before they migrate out to the ocean, and for spawning when they inevitably return.

Road construction, land clearing, and development impacts can all affect habitat quality and sever connectivity across the watershed.

To address these issues, the Copper River Watershed Project (CRWP) applied and was selected for RCPP funding in 2021 with an agreement allocating \$3.8 million in NRCS program dollars. The project primarily involves removing undersized culverts and replacing them with stream-smart solutions that allow fish and other aquatic species to safely pass; and planting trees and shrubs along streambanks to reduce erosion, enhance biodiversity and improve aquatic habitat.

The CRWP works closely with Chugach Alaska Corporation, The Eyak Corporation, Native Village of Eyak, Ahtna, Inc., and the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission to address impacts to critical spawning and rearing habitat for these important

subsistence species on Tribal lands. As part of the RCPP agreement, CRWP has been able to leverage additional resources from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. In their own words, "It takes a watershed to maintain the watershed!"

The current project is slated to continue through 2027, with plans to address at least seven more stream crossings throughout the watershed.



The **Emergency Watershed Program (EWP)** helps communities reduce imminent hazards to life and property threatened by excessive erosion and flooding caused by heavy rains, drought, earthquakes, windstorms and other natural disasters. All projects must be sponsored by a political subdivision of the State such as a city, borough or conservation district; or by a federally-recognized Tribe or Tribal entity. In Alaska, Tribal governments have been active sponsors for EWP projects. EWP projects in Alaska are diverse and have involved activities such as relocating homes that are threatened by erosion, stabilizing streambanks, removing debris, and repairing and armoring levees.



Alaska Native communities that sponsored EWP projects since 2014:

- Akiak
- Alakanuk
- Chevak
- Galena
- Hooper Bay
- Huslia
- Kipnuk
- Kwethluk
- Kwigillingok
- McGrath
- Mekoryuk
- Napakiak
- Nunapitchuk
- Port Heiden
- Saint Michael
- Tetlin
- Tuntutuliak

Kwigillingok, Alaska

NRCS Watershed Programs

The **Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program** provides technical and financial assistance to local governments and Tribes to plan and implement watershed-scale projects. These are long term, multi-year projects that address proactive solutions to issues that cannot be addressed with any other NRCS program. Projects can address flood prevention, watershed protection, public recreation, public fish and wildlife, agricultural water management, municipal and industrial water supply, and water quality management. NRCS provides engineering and technical assistance as well as planning and installation/construction assistance. This program can be used to assist rural villages with

managed retreat and/or village relocation efforts which are some of the most pressing needs in many threatened communities across Alaska.

Alaska Native communities sponsoring WFPO projects:

- Akiak
- Alakanuk
- Atka
- Atmautluak
- Fort Yukon
- Golovin
- Hooper Bay
- Kotlik
- Kwigillingok
- Levelock
- McGrath
- Napakiak
- Shishmaref
- Tuntutuliak
- Tununak
- Tyonek
- Unalakleet



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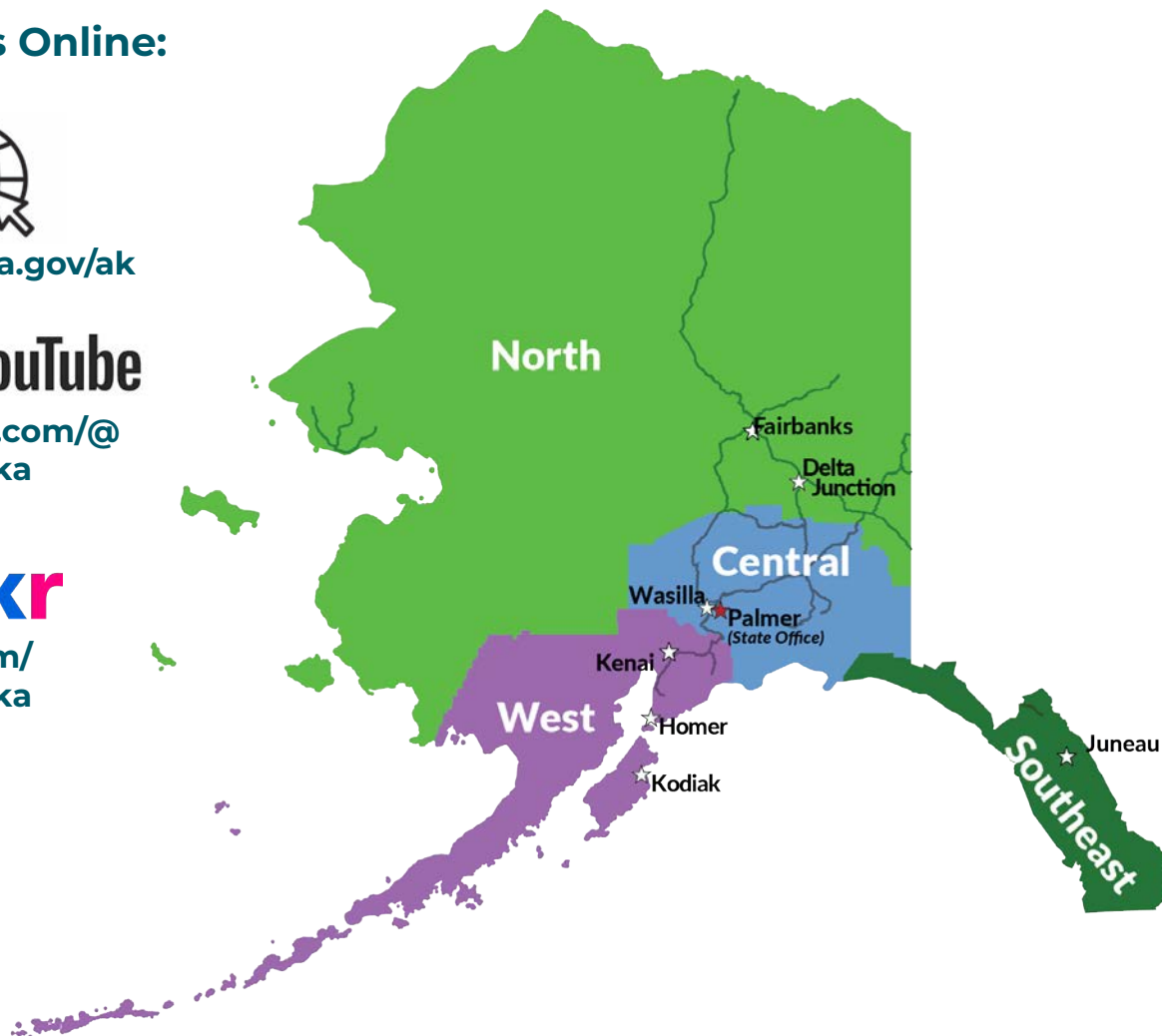
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