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## **DEC awarded \$160,000 grant for environmental justice work**

The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) announced today it has received a three-year-grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The \$160,000 award is funded through the EPA's State Environmental Justice Cooperative Agreement Program. The grant is one of five of its kind awarded nationwide in 2009.

Environmental justice is broadly defined as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies.

"DEC's mission is to protect human health and the environment. Environmental justice is about protecting people in the places where they live, work and raise families. With this grant, we are focusing on enhancing communications with rural areas on environmental topics. This is just one of several initiatives underway in the Parnell Administration to work together with rural communities to address challenges. Good communication is key to our mutual success," said DEC Commissioner Larry Hartig.

With this funding, DEC will partner with rural organizations to find new ways to work together on environmental and human health issues. The grant will also help to create an approach for integrating traditional knowledge into agency decisions. "The grant will give us a new opportunity to collaborate with experienced environmental justice staff from the EPA and to explore ways of enhancing our dialogue with rural Alaskans," said DEC Water Div. Director Lynn Kent.

"The project will engage rural residents in shaping a community involvement process to ensure that local knowledge and concerns are addressed early in the Department's environmental permitting process," according to Sandy Harbanuk, DEC project manager.

As part of DEC's initiative, at least 70 DEC staff will participate in training during October led by EPA's Region 10 Environmental Justice Regional Coordinator Running-Grass.

For members of the public in Juneau, DEC will host an initial discussion on environmental justice. Running-Grass will lead the talk at the downtown branch of the Public Library in the meeting room starting at noon on Friday, October 2. DEC will look for opportunities in the future to have similar public discussions elsewhere in Alaska.