

Yukon-Koyukuk Subregion Tribes Partner with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation in Pilot Program

The tribal governments of Galena, Ruby, Nulato, Koyukuk, Huslia, and Kaltag have partnered with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to identify ways to improve communications between rural Alaska residents and permit writers during a permitting process. In October 2009, DEC was awarded a \$160,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the State Environmental Justice Collaborative Agreement (SEJCA) program.

The grant funded a project to develop a model communications protocol, “tools” for coordination and communication between tribes and the state, and training for DEC staff and tribes to foster inclusion of local knowledge in wastewater discharge permitting.

In 2008, EPA began transferring authority for wastewater permitting to DEC’s Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) Program. DEC performs permitting and compliance and enforcement for wastewater discharges from domestic, seafood processing, log transfer, fish hatchery, and wastewater pretreatment facilities, and municipal and construction stormwater. Discharges from mining facilities were transferred in October 2010 and oil and gas facilities are scheduled to transfer at a later date.

Components of the document include a subsistence calendar of the region, descriptions of each village and things to know when visiting, early notification and communication in the permitting process and how the APDES process works.

DEC project staff and Yukon-Koyukuk Subregion tribal administrators held work group meetings last spring and summer in Galena and Fairbanks to develop ideas and procedures for outreach to tribes and ways to understand subsistence, cultural, traditional knowledge, and other local information during a permitting process. Work group participants included Pat Sweetsir (Ruby), Anne Esmailka (Kaltag), Paul Mountain (Nulato), Cindy Pilot (Koyukuk), March Runner (Louden), Eileen Jackson (Huslia) and DEC project staff Sandy Harbanuk (APDES Program) and Katharine Heumann (DEC Commissioner’s Office). Orville Huntington (Huslia) has also advised the project.

The Yukon-Koyukuk tribal administrators and DEC project staff will continue to work together to implement the protocol through training and toolkit development. For more information about the project, contact Theresa Svancara, DEC, APDES Program, (907) 465-5257, theresa.svancara@alaska.gov

