

**UNALAKLEET  
RESTORATION ADVISORY BOARD (RAB)  
Meeting Minutes  
December 7, 2005**



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**ATTENDEES:**

Ruth Blatchford, RAB Member, City of Unalakleet (City)  
Carol Charles, Community Co-Chair, Native Village of Unalakleet (NVU)  
Colin Craven, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC), Fairbanks  
Charles Degnan, Unalakleet Native Corporation (UNC)  
Frances Ann Degnan, RAB Member, City  
Patti Dill  
Todd Fickel, U.S. Air Force (Air Force) Co-Chair, 611<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron (611 CES)  
Linda Foley, Accu-Type Depositions  
Mary Freytag, NVU  
Michelle Harvey, RAB Member, Unalakleet Valley Electrical Cooperative (UVEC)  
Herbert Ivanoff, UNC  
Jalene Johnson, RAB Member, NVU  
Oscar Koutchak, RAB Member  
Henry Oyoumick, NVU Watershed  
Teri Paniptchuk, RAB Member, NVU  
Ronald Pflum, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) Co-Chair  
Jennifer Wehrmann, Jacobs Engineering (Jacobs)  
Steven J. Wilhelmi, Air Force, 611 CES

[Note: The meeting was originally scheduled for 6 December 2005, and that is the date used on the sign-in sheets.]

**CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 1:15 p.m. by Ms. Carol Charles. Attendees introduced themselves and stated their affiliations, if any.

**INTRODUCTION**

Mr. Steven Wilhelmi welcomed everyone and explained that this was the initial meeting of the Unalakleet RAB, and that the RAB Mission Statement/Charter that explains the rules under which the RAB will operate was ready for signature. He distributed some handouts containing a synopsis of the Air Force's Installation Restoration Program and the RAB process. He then invited attendees to take a set of playing cards that contain information on being good stewards of the environment.

Carol Charles, Unalakleet RAB community co-chair; Todd Fickel, Air Force military co-chair; and Ron Pflum, Army Corps of Engineers co-chair, then signed the RAB Mission Statement/Charter.

## **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Ms. Charles asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Hearing none, the meeting continued.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Air Force – Update of Summer 2005 and Future North River RRS Fieldwork**

Mr. Todd Fickel stated that the summer 2005 Air Force fieldwork season was fairly short, and consisted primarily of addressing items that were left because of insufficient funds in 2004. He then presented a summary of Air Force operations at North River Radio Relay Station (RRS) to date.

In September 2003, the Air Force was notified of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB)-contamination at the former North River RRS. Because it was late in the season and funds were limited, the Air Force was only able to remove 17 tons of PCB-contaminated soil. Plans were made during the winter of 2003 to return and continue the removal action.

In 2004, the Air Force worked from June until September, removing 600 tons of PCB-contaminated soil, then realized that there was not enough money or equipment available to finish the job, so plans were made to return in 2005. In September 2005, the Air Force returned to the site to address soil that had been stockpiled the previous year, and to excavate a few areas with PCB-contamination remaining from 2004. Another 100 tons of PCB-contaminated soil and plant material was removed, then fences were erected around and signs posted at areas where PCB contamination remained. The remaining PCB contamination will probably be addressed in 2007/08, when the Air Force will make a more concerted effort to remove all of the soil containing PCBs above the ADEC cleanup level.

Currently, Mr. Fickel is working on a programming document requesting money from the Air Force to investigate and confirm the work that has already been done. Additional soil and groundwater sampling will be conducted to investigate any additional PCB contamination that might have been missed, as well as any petroleum contamination. Funding for these activities may or may not be approved for 2007/2008, or it might be earlier – it is difficult to say at this time.

### **Corps – Review of Summer 2005 Unalakleet Air Force Station Fieldwork**

Ms. Jennifer Wehrmann presented a summary of the work conducted at Unalakleet by Jacobs for the Corps in 2005. Contaminated soil was removed from near the Communications Building as well as from other, more remote areas. Site characterizations were performed at 17 locations

near the former radar site, approximately 260 drums were removed from eight different areas, and 1,600 cubic yards of petroleum-contaminated soil was excavated and shipped off site. Jacobs is currently working on a report detailing the 2005 activities that will be provided to the Corps and ADEC.

Ms. Frances Degnan asked if the excavated soil had been replaced with clean fill. Ms. Wehrmann said that the 1,600 cubic yards of soil came from several different areas and was replaced as the soil was excavated. Ms. Degnan asked if the topography was restored to how it looked before. Ms. Wehrmann replied that one area would have to have fill added in spring 2006 to get it back the way it was. Ms. Degnan said her concern was with beach erosion, and it is very important to compact the soil used as fill and to return the area to its original state. Ms. Wehrmann said that this is the intent.

Mr. Henry Oyoumick welcomed Ms. Wehrmann saying he is glad that the issues regarding the cleanup are finally being addressed. He asked if there were eight sites total, or if the sites were broken down further, and if the sites were all in the Unalakleet area. Ms. Wehrmann replied there were eight sites within Unalakleet and 17 locations overall. Mr. Oyoumick said it would be helpful in the future if they used names that were familiar to people, in order to understand which sites the Corps was talking about. Ms. Wehrmann said the Corps had tried to do this when in a well known area.

Mr. Oyoumick asked if drum removal was the focus of the Corps work. Ms. Wehrmann replied that there were three objectives: drum removal, contaminated soil removal, and site characterization

Mr. Oyoumick asked who had analyzed the samples. Ms. Wehrmann replied the samples were sent to a laboratory in Sacramento, California.

Mr. Oscar Koutchak said he noticed a black membrane sticking up in one area, and asked if this was used to cover contaminated soil. Ms. Wehrmann replied that when groundwater is encountered during excavation of contaminated soil, a liner is typically placed in the hole before backfilling. This was the area that will be getting more fill in spring 2006.

Mr. Koutchak asked what happened to the big fuel storage tank at the White Alice Communications System (WACS) Site. Mr. Ronald Pflum said that tank was at the Air Force site, North River RRS. Mr. Fickel added that there were several fuel storage tanks at North River RRS, which is one of the things the Air Force will be investigating in the future.

Mr. Charles Degnan suggested the Corps use fill from an upland area to fill the remaining excavation in spring 2006, rather than just shifting around existing material. Ms. Wehrmann said that this was the Corps plan.

Mr. Oyoumick asked about some of the analytical results from previous sampling at the Communications Building. He said soil and surface water samples had been collected that contained the metal barium and asked if this was significant. Ms. Wehrmann asked if he remembered the concentration. Mr. Oyoumick said it was in his notes, but he did not have them.

His primary concern is that the fish people catch and eat not be contaminated. Mr. Oyoumick had sent a tomcod to a pathologist in Anchorage who identified a tumor, and he had seen another one like it recently. He asked if this could be the result of barium contamination. Mr. Colin Craven asked Ms. Wehrmann if the Corps analyzed for barium as part of the background investigation. Ms. Wehrmann said barium analysis had been conducted, but only for soil. Mr. Craven said ADEC could look at the data to see if there are elevated barium levels in any of the samples.

Mr. Degnan said there was a lot of transport and materials hauling going on in the area and asked if this could be responsible for transporting contaminants. Ms. Wehrmann said the Corps had collected samples from both disturbed and undisturbed areas for comparison, in order to be able to tell if something is not naturally occurring.

Ms. Degnan asked if any areas where the Corps had buried things over the years had been investigated. Ms. Wehrmann replied no. Ms. Degnan said that this is a concern because a lot of equipment was buried by the military after they were done with it. Ms. Wehrmann said that the RAB was a good opportunity to bring these issues to the attention of the Corps and Air Force. One way to learn about areas that need investigating is through information provided by residents. Ms. Degnan said that Mr. Elsworth Haugen would be a good person to get in touch with regarding historical activities in the area.

Mr. Koutchak said he remembered a big Army camp near the airport at the end of the short runway and thought a lot of debris was buried in that area. Ms. Wehrmann said maybe the Corps could provide a map for people to mark up where they know debris is buried.

Mr. Oyoumick asked if anyone would be addressing the erosion situation at the bridge over the river on the way to the WACS. He said that the cars used to stabilize the bank are starting to erode out of the bank. Mr. Fickel said that the Air Force removed two or three cars from that area during summer 2005, then regraded the area. He would provide some before and after photos of the work the Air Force did.

Mr. Pflum said that one of the main differences between the Air Force program and the Corps' Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) program is the way landfills are dealt with. The FUDS program has a policy stating that debris will not be removed from any landfill unless it is proven that there is a hazardous substance in the landfill. He said it is a strict policy, even though ADEC and others might not like it. Mr. Fickel said the Air Force has similar policy not to disturb landfills. Mr. Degnan asked if there was a difference between a landfill and buried equipment. Mr. Fickel said there is really no difference, because none of them were formally permitted landfills, so it is all pretty much the same.

Mr. Herbert Ivanoff said that sometimes it is probably better to leave things in place rather than to dig them up. Mr. Fickel agreed. Mr. Craven said ADEC has have been trying to work with the Department of Defense (DoD) to remove or sample landfills, especially in places where landfills are eroding, but the DoD is resistant to this. The DoD says there must be a demonstrated risk from PCBs or other chemicals before taking any action on a landfill. The real issue is likely related to cost, because there are many DoD landfills across the state, and it would

require an enormous amount of money to address them all. ADEC does not expect every landfill across the state to be removed, but would like to see a targeted approach that removes landfills that pose a hazard from physical debris or chemical waste. The difficulty is that samples can be taken all over a landfill, but still miss a PCB-filled transformer. Therefore, ADEC is still discussing the best way to address the landfill problem.

Mr. Pflum outlined what the Corps had planned for the near future. First, a final report on the work that has been done in the area will be completed, which will determine what future work will be needed. This will be determined in the feasibility study section of the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) report. The activities the Corps has conducted over the past few years were removal actions – the final action is called a remedial action, which is done before a site is closed. If there is no contamination remaining at a site above cleanup levels, the site could probably be closed; otherwise, the next project will be the remediation phase. This process typically takes several years. Once the RI/FS report is completed, the RAB will be able to review it.

## **OPEN COMMENTS**

Mr. Degnan asked if the military has accurate records of the landfills. Mr. Pflum said no. Mr. Degnan said that there were probably supply records showing what types of material were used at an installation that would indicate if something hazardous had been disposed of at the installation. He said the landfills are a danger to the people who live near them and an impediment to development. In undeveloped areas, it might not be a big deal, but if the military knows where a landfill is, they should take care of it.

Ms. Degnan said she would like to see a formal request from the community to investigate all of the areas where debris has been buried. She acknowledged that some of this has been done already, but would like to see all of the areas documented, and if they coincide with subsistence areas.

Mr. Craven said that the Corps has already done a lot of this work for the FUDS sites, but the Air Force still has some investigating to do, which will be appropriately documented.

Mr. Pflum said he was unaware of any specific landfills that needed to be addressed. Ms. Degnan said she could show him the areas where debris is sticking up along the shore. Mr. Pflum said if it was just buried debris, then FUDS funding would not cover it. The Corps is looking into getting funding for debris cleanup from the Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP), which can provide funds for this sort of thing. Mr. Fickel asked if NALEMP funds had been applied for. Mr. Pflum said they had and the option was being investigated. This program is typically run at a local level. A Native Group applies for funding via the Internet, then DoD sends out an investigator to determine if the project is eligible. If the project is eligible and approved, then a cooperative agreement is signed with the Native Tribe for them to accomplish the work. Art Ivanoff, acting for the Native Village of Unalakleet, initiated the NALEMP project to cleanup the landfill on the beach.

Mr. Fickel asked if the Technical Assistance for Project Planning (TAPP) grants were still being

used. Mr. Wilhelmi replied that they were, and the purpose of the TAPP Grant is to hire a person to interpret the technical documents for a community. The money (\$15,000) comes straight from the project funds for that community.

Mr. Wilhelmi said that part of establishing the RAB is to establish an administrative record in Unalakleet that contains all of the documents pertaining to the investigation and cleanup in the area. There is also an administrative record available on the Internet at [www.adminrec.com](http://www.adminrec.com). On the left side of the webpage, click on DoD, then click on PACAF, then click on Alaska, and then click on North River to view the Air Force documents on that site.

Mr. Oyoumick inquired about the area called Barrel Bluff. He asked if the barrels were right under the bluff, or away from the bluff. Ms. Wehrmann said that when the Corps visited the site, the barrels had already been removed. A few additional barrels were found along the river in the trees. Ms. Degnan stated that the barrels used to be stacked along the river, but would get jumbled up or carried away during periods of high water.

Mr. Pflum said the Corps had been looking for barrels over the last two or three summers and had removed every drum possible. There might be an isolated drum here or there, but the majority were removed in 2002, and the Corps is in the process of closing out the drum removal project.

Mr. Ivanoff said that last time a meeting like this was held, the high school kids were invited to come, which went over really well. It might be good to discuss some of these things with them because they ride 4-wheelers and snow machines all over the place and might have seen something that was missed. It would also be an educational experience for them.

Ms. Michelle Harvey said that one of her co-workers noticed a big metal wire or cable in the slough near a berry picking area, so someone might want to look into it. Ms. Wehrmann thanked her for the information.

Mr. Craven asked that anyone going up to the North River site take a look at the fence around the PCB-contaminated soil area and let Ms. Charles know if the fence needs any repair. She could then relay the information to the Air Force. It is important that the fence and the signs stay in place, so if they are not, please let the Air Force know about it.

## **SET DATE FOR NEXT MEETING**

Ms. Charles said that if there were no additional comments, a date and time should be set for the next meeting.

Mr. Wilhelmi stated that some of the RABs meet quarterly, while some meet every 2 months, depending on the level of activity. He said it would be good for the RAB to meet in the spring before the 2006 field season, then again in the fall to present the work that was done over the summer.

Ms. Degan said it might be beneficial to wait until summer, that way everyone could go out and look at the sites if they wanted to. Mr. Fickel added that this has been a useful exercise with some of the other RABS.

Mr. Wilhelmi suggested that the meeting date be kept open until closer to the summer. The current meeting had been scheduled for the evening of 6 December, but there were delays in leaving Anchorage so it was postponed. An evening meeting is preferable, so everyone can attend – especially the younger people, who are the future leaders of the community.

Mr. Craven said that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) also has some cleanup work scheduled in the area. He has requested to be the regulator for that project also, so if there are any questions or comments on the FAA sites, he could work with people on those issues.

An unidentified speaker recommended that anyone finding barrels could mark them with a GPS so the barrels could be found later. Mr. Pflum agreed that this was good idea.

Ms. Charles thanked everyone for coming.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:22 p.m.