

LOWER KUSKOKWIM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

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COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
& AREA PLAN, JUNE 2006

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SUMMARY / PREFACE

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council was designated an Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR) by the Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development in September 1991. It received its non-profit Corporate Charter in January 1992 and was designated a non-profit 501-c-3 tax-exempt corporation by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on January 7, 1993.

A revised application for assistance through the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program was submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in October of 1999. The principal incorporating sponsors

of the application were the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc.; Alaska Soil and Water Conservation District; Association of Village Council Presidents, Incorporated (AVCP), AVCP Regional Housing Authority; Bethel Chamber of Commerce; Cenaliulriit Coastal Resource Service Area (Coastal Zone Management); Coastal Villages Region Fund, Inc.; United Villages, Inc.; and the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation.

The application outlined a unique and flexible rural development program that was not heretofore available, but vital to the residents of the Lower Kuskokwim region. The goal of the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council is to foster a more stable and diversified economy, to assist in creating employment opportunities, improve local economic conditions, and act as a catalyst for guiding and coordinating the efforts of individuals and organizations concerned with sustainable economic and natural resources development in the region. Similarly, in our mission statement, the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council exists to promote economic development activities in Bethel and 26 surrounding villages, including local planning and assistance to secure funding for small business activities and regional infrastructure needs.

RC&D program authorization was granted by the Secretary of Agriculture in January of 2001. To assist the sponsors with implementation of the RC&D program, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is authorized by various legislative authorities to provide technical and financial assistance to accelerate the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources to improve the general level of economic activity, and to enhance the environment and standard of living in the rural communities and villages of the Lower Kuskokwim area.

This Area/CEDS Plan identifies strategies that will be implemented by the ARDOR or the RC&D Council as technical and financial assistance permits. The Area/CEDS Plan is an open-ended document that the Council will review periodically and update as priorities change or new challenges and opportunities are recognized.

I. THE COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) COMMITTEE

The Board of Directors of the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council (LKEDC) has been established as the CEDS committee for this strategic plan. Our eleven member board is representative of all major interests in our region, to ensure that all viewpoints are considered and to take advantage of local skills and resources, in the formulation and implementation of our program. A listing of the current board of directors follows this section.

2.

CEDS committee members

Fred Phillip, Chairman	Kwigillingok, AK	Kwik Inc.
Arthur Lake, Vice Chairman	Kwigillingok, AK	Native Village of Kwigillingok
Peter Julius	Goodnews Bay, AK	Small business owner
Alexie Jimmie	Toksook Bay, AK	Small business owner; Pres. United Villages Inc.
Max Angellan	Kwethluk, AK	Exec. Director, Kwethluk Tribal Resident Council
Ferdinand Pleasant	Quinhagak, AK	Native Village of Kwinhagak
Les Daenzer	Bethel, AK	Lower Kuskokwim School District Administrator
Richard Foster	Nome, AK	State Representative, Alaska Legislature
Mary Nelson	Bethel, AK	State Representative, Alaska Legislature
Lyman Hoffman	Bethel, AK	State Senator, Alaska Legislature

II. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AREA - WHERE ARE WE NOW?

The entire Kuskokwim River system covers approximately 52,000 square miles of southwest Alaska, or 11 percent of all the land area of Alaska. The river system originates on the northwest flank of the Alaska Range, where glacial streams merge to form the meandering, silt-laden Kuskokwim River which flows southwest between the high alluvial terraces. Fast, clear tributaries enter the river from the western Alaska Range. The river courses a broad valley, laden with tundra ponds and lakes, until finally emptying into the Bering Sea, at a point nearly 40 miles southwest of Bethel, Alaska.

The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D region encompasses the area from the boundary of the Lower Kuskokwim Regional Educational Attendance Area (defined by the villages of Newtok on Baird Inlet, Kasigluk, and Nunapitchuk on the Johnson River and Tuluksak on the Kuskokwim River) including the villages of Chevak and Hooper Bay to the north; the Kuskokwim River downriver of Tuluksak to the east; the Ahklun and Kilbuck Mountains to the south; and the Bering Sea to the west. There are 27 communities located in this portion of southwest Alaska. The population is over 15,000, of which approximately 6,000 live in Bethel, the regional center. No roads connect any of the communities to each other—mechanized access is by air, boat, or snow-machine only. Most communities are located along the Kuskokwim River or near the Bering Sea. The area also includes Nunivak and Nelson Islands. There are no major agricultural or industrial enterprises on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta due to poor soil conditions and the area's remoteness from major markets in the rest of the state. Local residents use this remote area primarily for subsistence hunting, fishing, and gathering purposes.

Physical Characteristics/Physiography

The Lower Kuskokwim EDC area is one of low elevation with very little relief. The terrain consists of a level to rolling delta plain along the lower reaches of the Kuskokwim River. In a few locations, isolated low hills protrude above the surrounding plain. The area is crossed with numerous low gradient streams, many of which are tributaries or former channels of the Yukon or Kuskokwim Rivers. Depressions and shallow basins on the plain are dotted with interconnecting stream channels, wetlands, and thousands of small to medium-sized lakes. Flood plain features include low escarpments, meander scars, oxbow lakes, sloughs, and multiple channels and islands. The coastline is broken by a number of large inlets and bays. Baird Inlet forms a large inland sea behind Nelson Island. Across the majority of the area, elevation ranges from sea level to about 300 feet (91 meters). However, the elevation at the summit of Towak Mountain at Cape Romanzof is 2,342 feet (710 meters).

3.

Geology and Soils

The Lower Kuskokwim EDC area was without glaciers during the Pleistocene epoch, except possibly along the extreme southeast edge where mountain glaciers from the Ahklun Mountains extended a small distance down onto the lowlands. Sediments across the vast majority of the area consists of fine textured, Holocene and Pleistocene deltaic deposits from the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers and loamy and sandy textured, Holocene fluvial deposits on flood plains and stream terraces. Scattered throughout the western portion of the area are a number of low basalt hills and associated cinder cones and volcanic craters. These features date to the Cretaceous and Tertiary period and are mantled by Holocene colluviums. Permafrost underlies nearly all areas.

The soils in the area are predominately poorly-drained gelisols, or soils underlain by permafrost. Parent materials can be either the sediments listed above or organic material developed in situ. Freeze/thaw action and the presence of permafrost overshadow the development of soils. In natural levees and sand dunes, permafrost is deep or absent, and the soils are well drained. Spring flooding along rivers and tidal inundations are common.

The major soil resource management concern is disturbance of the fragile permafrost soils. Disturbance of the insulating organic surface results in thawing of upper soil layers. This can result in ponding, soil subsidence, erosion, and disruption of surface drainage. All activities must consider the protection of the organic surface and the thermal balance of the soils.

Climate

The climate of the area is primarily maritime. However, in winter when the Bering Sea ice pack has formed, the

climate becomes more continental. Summers are short and variable with cloudy and rainy conditions common. Winters are long and cold. Windy conditions are common at any time of year. Fog and poor visibility is common, particularly in coastal areas during the winter. The average annual precipitation is 15 to 30 inches (381 to 762 millimeters). The average annual snowfall ranges from about 40 to 90 inches (102 to 229 centimeters). Temperatures may range from -50 to +84 degrees F (-45.6 to 28.9 degrees C), with the average annual temperature being 29 to 33 degrees F (-1.7 to 0.6 degrees C). The average frost-free period is about 80 to 135 days. Frosts may occur in any month, but June through August are generally frost-free.

Biological Resources

Lakes, ponds, and other surface water are present throughout the majority of the area. Vegetation near these bodies of water includes wet sedge meadows, sedge-shrub meadows, and sedge-moss meadows. On peat mounds and other low uplands are low and dwarf scrub dominated by ericaceous shrubs, tussock forming sedges, other hydrophytic plants, and mosses. Sites with better drainage and higher local relief support low ericaceous scrub with mosses, lichens, low willows, and forbs. Dense stands of grasses grow on beds of drained thaw lakes. In the southern and eastern portions of the area, spruce forests and woodland occur on well drained floodplains and better drained uplands. Both white and black spruce are common. Low ericaceous shrubs, willow, alder, and mosses are dominant in the under story.

Common area mammals include brown bear, black bear, wolf, caribou, and various furbearers. Walrus and seals are in some coastal areas. The majority of this area contains good quality waterfowl habitat and every year as many as 750,000 swans and geese use the lowlands as a staging and nesting area. Over 220 bird species use this area at various times throughout the year. Among the significant species nesting in the area are tundra swans, emperor geese, black brants, spectacled eiders, bristle thighed curlews, white wagtails, dovebies, and McKays buntings. Approximately 75 percent of Alaska's sandhill cranes breed in this region.

Socio-Economic Profile

The Lower Kuskokwim area is primarily inhabited by Yup'ik Eskimos, who occupied the river system over 500 years ago. It is supposed that their ancestors came from northeast Asia and by the year 3,000 BC had developed a maritime sea mammal economy.

4.

Traditionally, they were semi-nomadic and traveled widely between seasonal camps used for fishing, hunting, and trapping. When Alaska became a territory of the United States, various Christian religions were allowed to come into the region to establish schools and churches. They divided their work between various parts of the country and villages were formed where churches and trading posts were established.

Today, the per capita income for the region is \$15,379, compared to the statewide per capita income of \$23,437. While total personal income increased in the region by 85 percent over the previous decade, regional per capita income still ranked second lowest in the state. Census information found that 4,022 residents of the area, or 28 percent of the population, lived on incomes below the poverty level. This reflects a lack of economic opportunities in the villages of the region. Unemployment ranges between 10 and 20 percent in the summer and 30 to 70 percent in the winter, with village residents at the upper end of the ranges. Employment data suggest that over half of all wage and salary jobs in the region are located in the city of Bethel. About 40 percent of all wage and salary earners in the region are on government payrolls, with school related employment dominating. In the private sector, the delivery of goods and services sustains nearly all other jobs. Health care, social service providers, and a housing agency managed by the Alaska Native regional corporation are among the largest employers. The Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation, an Alaska Native-owned non-profit corporation, controls the regional hospital and is the largest private employer in the region and the twenty-fourth largest statewide.

Approximately 76 percent of the area's population lives along the Kuskokwim River. Each summer, about 15 ocean-going barges from Seattle and Anchorage carry building materials, fuel, bulk food, and other supplies to the deepwater port in Bethel. Much of this freight is transferred to small barges, for village deliveries.

The Kuskokwim River also provides food and income as a fishery. Traditionally, summer fish camps line the riverbank as king, chum, and silver salmon are harvested both for subsistence and commercial uses. Over 800

residents use their commercial permits in the fishery, adding valuable cash to a subsistence economy where job opportunities are scarce. In recent years, however, salmon prices have been erratic. Salmon runs failed in 1997 and 1998, requiring the Governor of Alaska to make economic disaster declarations, and the 1999 season did not show a recovery to previous catch levels.

Villagers in the region practice a subsistence lifestyle, due in part to the limited number of wage-paying jobs, most of which are seasonal. Most villages have few of the modern conveniences associated with an urban way of life. Limited access to cash and commercially produced products and a high degree of isolation requires small communities to balance the limited number of dollars with a more predominant subsistence economy.

The lack of jobs, either seasonal or year-round, coupled with the declining recognition of cultural values and ways has led to a loss of self-esteem among many residents. This has resulted in the increased use of alcohol and other substances, which has led to numbers of suicides and attempted suicides that are well above state and national per capita figures. There are also substantially higher rates of accidental deaths, accidents, domestic violence, and assaults within the region.

III. VISION STATEMENTS - WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council Vision Statement (ARDOR)

The vision for the Lower Kuskokwim EDC is to support a stable and diversified economy, with increased employment opportunities and improved local economic conditions that foster new development and growth.

5.

The official USDA-NRCS Vision for the RC&D Program is

- > People helping people help themselves to develop an enhanced quality of life through the RC&D program by providing social, environmental and economic benefits to communities and surrounding areas.
- > Serving communities of the United States, its territories, and Tribal Nations by providing local benefits vital to the health and well being of the community.
- > Communities rely on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as one of many valuable partners to build productive working relationships and conserve and develop natural resources.
- > Having every RC&D Council develop productive working relationships to
 - * balance natural resource conservation and development,
 - * analyze community needs,
 - * develop plans to meet these needs,
 - * coordinate the resources required to accomplish these plans, and
 - * share knowledge and experience with others in the same geographic area, in the State, with Tribal Nations, and across the United States.

IV. MISSION STATEMENTS

The official USDA-NRCS intent for the USDA Federal RC&D Program is to develop a cost effective Federal Government delivery system that

- > builds local working relationships for conservation and development of natural resources
- > and enhances the social, economic, and environmental conditions in the United States.

The official USDA-NRCS mission for RC&D Program is to make available the total resources of USDA and other public-private partnerships to

- > build relationships,
- > create financial leverage, and
- > increase the capability of communities to meet their regionally identified resource conservation and development needs.

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council Mission Statement (ARDOR)

The mission of the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council is to promote economic development activities in Bethel and 26 surrounding villages, providing local planning and assistance to secure funding for small business activities and to provide local infrastructure needs in our region.

V. OUR NEEDS, OPPORTUNITIES & OUR ACTION PLAN: HOW DO WE GET THERE

This section describes needs (i.e., problems and concerns) and opportunities facing the 27 communities in the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc., region. The information presented here has been gathered from a series of Village Needs Surveys and public meetings over the past several years, and updated with the most current information.

At its planning session finalizing and approving this Area Plan, the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc., reviewed and discussed this information in order to determine needs and opportunities that are common to all or most villages in the area, and therefore have significant implications for the Lower Kuskokwim region as a whole. Results of the Council's deliberations are summarized below organized under four elements as listed here.

6.

LKEDC REGIONAL STRATEGY GOALS:

- * **Fisheries Development**
- * **Tourism Development**
- * **Jobs Development**
- * **Promote/Coordinate LKEDC Services**

Promote Fisheries Resources and Development

Need/Problem/Concern

Five species of Pacific salmon indigenous to the Kuskokwim area are: Chinook, Coho, Chum, Sockeye, and Pink Salmon. Chum and Coho Salmon are historically the most abundant in the region. Commercial fishing traditionally accounts for most of the salmon harvest and is a significant source of income. Fish is also the primary food staple for most residents.

The Kuskokwim area is considered one of eight major saltwater fisheries in Alaska. Salmon management in this fishery has changed within the past few years, due to decreased fish returns and growing competitions from farmed salmon produced outside of Alaska and the United States. Salmon populations have been so low as to require closure or severe restrictions on fishing activities. In 1997 and 1998, the Governor of Alaska made disaster declarations for the Kuskokwim salmon fishery. Beginning with the 2002 season, however, the fishery has rebounded and fish returns continue to increase with each succeeding season.

Two important problems facing Alaska salmon are (1) interceptions and incidental catch in other fisheries, and (2) the degrading of spawning and rearing habitats. Because salmon are highly mobile, chum salmon harvested elsewhere in the state could negatively affect returns to the Kuskokwim waters. Low harvest levels prompted the formation of the Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group. The group is made up of fish and game staff, area processors, native elders, and subsistence and commercial fishermen. Their monitoring of fish resources is continuous and comprehensive.

Opportunity

The LKEDC helps foster programs such as the Kuskokwim Salmon Working Group to use sound fisheries management techniques and local knowledge of the fishery to increase the viability of fishery resources. Other

potential partners are the Coastal Villages Regional Fund's Community Development Quota (CDQ) program, whose main goal is to generate fisheries income that will create the foundation for a stable, growing economy. The focus is on the fisheries resource, human resources, and infrastructure development. The Council also promotes salmon habitat restoration and enhancement and advocates funding for site-specific restoration projects.

Other Potential Fisheries

Need/Problem/Concern

Although over fishing by "intercept fisheries" has depressed salmon stocks throughout the region, the potential to develop other seafood resources exists. Other fish species include: halibut, herring, crab, shrimp, northern pike, burbot, whitefish, grayling, and various salt water cods and fresh water trout.

7.

Opportunity

The Council helps identify additional potential fisheries by locating technical assistance to research possibilities and disseminating information to potential entrepreneurs that would have the best opportunity for success. The Council could also advocate for reduction of the intercept fishery and monitoring of fish farming.

Fisheries Quality Enhancement

Need/Problem/Concern

There has been an immediate need to enhance the quality of commercially-caught salmon in our region, allowing them to successfully compete in the marketplace, also allowing our fishermen to earn a living wage from the proceeds of our fishery.

Opportunity

LKEDC has provided a salmon quality enhancement program for the past eight summers that allows fishermen the use of insulated slush ice bags without charge to better care for their harvested catch and allows the processor to obtain a higher price for the catch when sold. With increasing numbers of fishermen re-entering the commercial fishery, there is a need to provide additional slush ice bags to these fishermen during future salmon seasons. As new fisheries become established in the region, particularly for halibut and herring, there is an ongoing need to preserve fish quality for these species, so that the highest quality is maintained and the product competes effectively in the marketplace.

Promote Tourism & Infrastructure Development

Tourism and the Visitor Industry

Need/Problem/Concern

SW Alaska, which includes the Aleutian Islands, Bristol Bay region, Kodiak Island and the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, together receive less than 4% of the state's visitors annually. The number of visitors to the region each year is limited by a combination of factors, including: the remoteness of the region from the rest of the state; the lack of accommodations available to the traveling public; and the lack of familiarity with our area by the travel industry. Cultural tourism and eco-tourism have interested some of our villages in promoting themselves as visitor destinations. Several local entrepreneurs have begun local businesses in sport fishing for salmon, river rafting on the tributaries of the Kuskokwim river, camping to view birds, reindeer and musk oxen, and visits to local fish camps. For several years LKEDC sponsored product development tours to the region for participation by Alaska travel representative and industry members to familiarize them with local accommodations and attractions available to visitors who travel here. Generating additional revenue for local residents, demonstrating cultural traditions and sharing of natural resources would help these communities preserve their heritage for future generations.

Opportunity

The LKEDC has partnered with the Bethel Chamber of Commerce since 1996 to promote the community and area

attractions and expanding the diversity and quality of its annual activities and by addressing ways for eco-tourism related businesses to improve their services and accommodations for the benefit of the entire region. We have also partnered with the City of Bethel to expand the marketing of our region's attractions and to encourage local air carriers to develop tour packages for visitors to access our region economically. We are working with the EDA-sponsored DART program (Developing Alaska's Rural Tourism) through the Alaska Dept of Commerce, Community and Economic Development, to further develop local tourism related businesses and facilities for the traveling public, and to train individuals to interact with visitors to our area.

8.

Birdwatching opportunities could further be developed with local entrepreneurs, in partnership with US Fish & Wildlife staff who are knowledgeable of rare birds visiting our region and their activities.

Other wildlife viewing for reindeer and musk oxen could also be promoted by local entrepreneurs, once the local infrastructure needs have been identified and developed in nearby communities.

Tourism, Spirit Camps and Cultural and Historic Resources
Need/Problem/Concern

Non-consumptive and cultural tourism is an untapped opportunity for our region. Spirit camps in pristine wilderness settings are a potential opportunity for communities situated along one of the rivers.

Opportunity

LKEDC could assist local tribal groups in developing camps by researching funding opportunities that support and promote awareness of Yup'ik and Cup'ik cultural values. Several subsistence activities could be incorporated into spirit or cultural camps to allow participants to experience traditional activities such as preparation of salmon, harvesting of berries and roots and other traditional activities first hand. Funding needs to be obtained to develop infrastructure and for hospitality training and identifying the potential customer base.

Promote Jobs Development throughout the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta region

Developing and expanding the local and regional retail, services industry and vocational training opportunities in the Y-K region.

Vocational Job Training
Need/Problem/Concern

There is a critical need to prepare residents for many seasonal and year-round jobs that do not require an academic education in our region. Some of these jobs require on-the-job training and some require sophisticated formal vocational training. Local schools and the Kuskokwim Campus, UAF should recognize this and seek to provide appropriate training curricula. This has begun, sponsored by a multi-agency group that supports the establishment of Yuut Elitnaurviat, The People's Learning Center, a vocational center now under construction in Bethel. The main purpose of Yuut Elitnaurviat will be to place more local residents in locally-available high wage jobs.

An example of this is the potential opportunity created by the Donlin Creek gold mine, to be located on the upper Kuskokwim river near the village of Crooked Creek. This project, while currently rated only as a "prospect", could provide major employment for a stable workforce of , over the life of the mine, a year period. At this writing, by the end of 2005 the mining company will have determined the feasibility of the project and plans would be made to submit their environmental assessment request, requiring at least a three year review. This project would be the largest ever for our region and would be a significant employer during its lifetime. Preparing local residents for these jobs would be the highest priority for Yuut Elitnaurviat, should this project go forward to fruition.

Opportunity

Multi-agency coordination to expand student access to career fair workshops and training opportunities through the Lower Kuskokwim School District, Kuskokwim Campus, UAF, Alaska Works Partnership and the Yuut Elitnaurviat programs, to prepare as many local residents interested in filling these jobs within the region.

An opportunity also exists in developing human resource capacity, both locally and throughout our region, to benefit

regional economic development through increased education and training of the local population.

9.

Promote/Coordinate LKEDC Services to all local residents

Communication and Cooperation Among Organizations Serving the Region

Need/Problem/Concern

Effective communication and cooperation among federal, state and local agencies and organizations that provide services to the region is lacking, resulting in poor delivery of services to local residents in such areas as job training, education, and infrastructure improvement projects.

The problem stems from several interrelated causes. Villagers in the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development region are served by a complex set of municipal and tribal governments and Native for-profit and non-profit corporations. Each is dedicated to select community development, social services and/or economic investment activities on behalf of different segments of the population. Because there is no borough (county equivalent) to help the villages coordinate responses to needs that they share in common, each village must deal on its own with a myriad of state and federal agencies as well as private sector organizations and firms. Since each village is small, individual residents carry a tremendous burden in trying to research, carry out and follow up on necessary actions. The repetition of this process in each village leads to duplicated effort and wasted time, energy and resources that the villages can ill afford. Again, because each village is small, no one village has the clout that all would have together to promote and help coordinate activities to address common needs.

Opportunity

The opportunity exists for the LKEDC to serve as a single regional entity from which to help coordinate the region-wide communications and planning needed for timely and effective response to problems common to all or most villages in the Lower Kuskokwim Area. This requires that the Council first establish a sound administrative basis for its operations as well as effective, on-going channels of communication. This will help build on and reinforce local residents' recognition of the value of working together to improve services and living standards, maximize the use of existing resources, and help leverage more resources and funding for local projects.

Regional Jobs and Training Programs

Need/Problem/Concern

A severe shortage of full-time, year-round jobs and local training opportunities has led to a high rate of unemployment and a high rate of dependence on public assistance. To meet this challenge, a more diverse private sector economy and effective education and training programs are needed. Effective response takes on added significance as state and federal government proceed over the next five years to implement major welfare reforms.

Opportunity

In conjunction with technical and financial assistance from the NRCS or the State of Alaska, the ARDOR could open up opportunities for assistance from the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development to carry out economic development activities and obtain resources from other state agencies. The combined leverage of the RC&D and the ARDOR, along with other regional organizations and educational and training facilities focused on economic development, should set the stage for the development of local jobs and a stronger, more diverse economy.

10.

Action Plan: How Do We Get There?

Regional Strategy Goal #1 - Fisheries Development

Objective - Maintain and expand the operations of the Salmon Quality Enhancement program for the lower Kuskokwim fishermen.

Objective - Improve fish quality handling techniques and implement in all fisheries districts and for all commercial fish species in the lower Kuskokwim region.

Objective - Increase the number of commercial fishermen using ice and slush bags to collect fish for sale to the processors in the lower Kuskokwim region.

Objective - All commercial fishermen will bleed their commercial catch prior to delivery for sale to the processors in the lower Kuskokwim region.

Targeted Results Based on Economic Indicators:

-In FY 2006 75% of commercial salmon fishermen will use ice contained in slush bags to harvest fish; 80% of fishers will bleed their catch before delivery to tender/processors.

-In FY 2007 80% of commercial salmon fishermen will use ice contained in slush bags to harvest fish; 85% of fishers will bleed their catch before delivery to tender/processors.

Regional Strategy Goal #2 - Tourism & Infrastructure Development

Objective - Tour products and package, including promotional brochures are developed to benefit the traveling public visiting our region.

Objective - New visitor facilities are completed within Yukon Kuskokwim regional communities, to meet visitor needs.

Objective - Establish and maintain a regional Visitor Information Center in Bethel for use by regional visitors.

Objective - Assess visitor needs for new facilities throughout the region, and that they represent the best use of limited resources for local development.

Targeted Results Based on Economic Indicators:

-In FY 2006 at least one new visitor facility is planned and designed for a local community, with sources of initial funding to be determined.

-In FY 2007 at least two new facilities planned and designed for local communities, with initial funding sources determined. Visitor Information Center in Bethel is established and operational during the summer season.

Regional Strategy Goal #3 - Jobs & Jobs Training Development

Objective - Promote local and regional business opportunities to local residents throughout the regional communities.

Objective - Provide access to jobs training programs for local residents, in response to local training needs.

Objective - Present regional workshops and training courses in response to identified local resident needs.

11.

Targeted Results Based on Economic Indicators:

- In FY 2006 at least 2 new business startups by local residents are initiated and maintained, in response to specified local needs.

- In FY 2007 at least 2 additional new business startups by local residents are initiated and maintained, in response to specified local needs.

Regional Strategy Goal #4 - Promote & Coordinate LKEDC Services to All Local Residents.

Objective - Provide for the sound management of the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council.

Objective - Promote relevant services to local residents of the Y-K Delta by the LKEDC.

Objective - Seek new funding for the LKEDC, to maintain and expand program operations.

Targeted Results Based on Economic Indicators:

-In FY 2006 maintain a regular schedule of inter-agency meetings to provide information sharing within the region; at least \$10,000 in new operating funds obtained.

- In FY 2007 maintain regularly scheduled inter-agency meetings to provide information sharing within the region; at least an additional \$10,000 in new operating funds obtained.

Evaluation Plan: How Are We Doing?

This CEDS update for the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council extends through Fiscal Years 2007 and 2008. Each of the goals and objectives will be evaluated by us no less than annually. The evaluation will discuss the accomplishments achieved during the year, problems encountered, strategies to resolve any problems encountered and a report generated summarizing the status of the goals and objectives. The CEDS will be updated bi-annually, and will incorporate evaluation and findings and, where required, an amended plan to reflect actual accomplishments and changed conditions. The Executive Director of the LKEDC will be responsible for the evaluation implementation.

12.

The following description of needs and opportunities is provided as defined for the *Lower Kuskokwim Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D), a program of the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service.*

This section describes needs and opportunities facing the 27 villages in the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council Inc. region. The information presented here has been gathered from a series of village needs surveys and public meetings over the past several years, and updated with the most current information.

At its planning session finalizing and approving this Area Plan, the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council Inc. reviewed and discussed this information in order to determine needs and opportunities that are common to all or most villages in the RC&D area, and therefore have significant implications for the Lower Kuskokwim region as a whole. Results of the Council's deliberations are summarized below, organized under the four elements

required by statute, as listed here.

- *Community Development element**
- *Land Conservation element**
- *Land Management element**
- *Water Management element**

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT (CD)

Fisheries Resources

Need/Problem/Concern

Five species of Pacific Salmon indigenous to the Kuskokwim area are: Chinook, Coho, Chum, Sockeye and Pink salmon. Chum and Coho salmon are historically the most abundant in the region. Commercial fishing traditionally accounts for most of the salmon harvest and is a significant source of income. Fish is also the primary food staple for most residents.

The Kuskokwim area is considered one of the eight major saltwater fisheries in Alaska. Salmon management in this fishery has changed within the past few years, due to decreased fish returns and growing competition from farmed salmon produced outside of Alaska and the United States. Salmon populations have been so low as to require closure or severe restrictions on fishing activities. In 1997 and 1998 the Governor of Alaska made disaster declarations for the Kuskokwim salmon industry.

Two important problems facing Alaska salmon are 1) interceptions and incidental catch on other fisheries , and 2) the degrading of spawning and rearing habitats. Because salmon are highly mobile, chum salmon harvested elsewhere in the state could negatively affect returns to the Kuskokwim waters. Low harvest levels prompted the formation of the Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group. The group is made up of fish and game staff, area processors, native elders and subsistence and commercial fishermen.

13.

Opportunity

The RC&D could help foster programs such as the Working Group to use sound fisheries management techniques and local knowledge of the fishery to increase the viability of the fisheries resources. Other potential partners could be the Coastal Villages Regional Fund's Community Development Quota (CDQ) program, whose main goal is to generate fisheries income that will create the foundation for a stable, growing economy. The focus would be on the fisheries resource, human resource and infrastructure development. The RC&D Council could also promote salmon habitat restoration and enhancement and seek funding for site-specific restoration projects.

Other Potential Fisheries

Need/Problem/Concern

Although over fishing by 'intercept fisheries' has depressed salmon stocks throughout the region, the potential to develop other seafood resources exists. Other fish species include: herring, halibut, crab, shrimp, northern pike, burbot, whitefish, grayling and various saltwater cods and fresh water trout.

Opportunity

The RC&D council could help identify additional potential fisheries by locating technical assistance to research possibilities and disseminating information to potential entrepreneurs that would have the best opportunity for success. The Council could also advocate for reduction of the intercept fishery and fish farming.

Reindeer

Need/Problem/Concern

Since the introduction of reindeer by Sheldon Jackson in the early 20th century, reindeer herding has played an important part in the history of the region's economy, particularly on Nunivak Island, located on the Bering Sea. A business has been formed at the village of Mekoryuk to provide for the butchering and sale of reindeer meat from a slaughterhouse located near the village. Nunawarmuit Reindeer and Seafood Products aims to enhance the economic base of rural Alaska by facilitating the efficient production, distribution and marketing of reindeer products and by improving herd management.

Opportunity

The RC&D could work with Nunawarmuit by facilitating the completion of range surveys and inventories and the adoption of proper range management practices. The RC&D council could also assist in developing innovative marketing strategies for reindeer-related products.

Musk Oxen

Need/Problem/Concern

Musk oxen were introduced to Nunivak Island from Greenland in 1935 and have established themselves over the past six decades on the island. They have been harvested by sports hunters on an annual basis, providing income to licensed local guides from the village of Mekoryuk. Their wool has also been gathered to be woven into scarves, touques, hats, headbands and other fine garments by weavers throughout Alaska who are members of the Musk Ox Cooperative.

14.

Opportunity

The RC&D could work with the Cooperative to help market these products and maintain the viability of the island herd.

Alaska Native Arts and Crafts

Need/Problem/Concern

Alaska Natives are the only people in the United States who are allowed to harvest marine mammals, including walrus, seals, whales, and polar bears for subsistence purposes. They are also legally allowed to use raw materials from marine mammals for arts and crafts purposes. Products range from ivory carvings, dolls, mask, grass baskets, dance fans, kayaks, and jewelry to clothing such as parkas, mukluks, fur mittens and hats and seal skin slippers. Prices paid for these products are often not determined by artistic skill, but by the artist's ability to negotiate with buyers and to travel to where the market exists. The artist's work receives limited exposure due to the remote location of area villages and the high cost of transportation from villages to urban markets. Prospective buyers often travel to villages in order to purchase handmade crafts and resell the items at retail outlets for significantly higher prices. This puts the local artist at a disadvantage for obtaining a fair price for their products.

Opportunity

The LKEDC could assist local artisans by conducting a feasibility study of forming a local arts and crafts cooperative that could assist them in offering their products to a wider variety of markets at prices commensurate with their skills and labor.

Regional Arts and Crafts Non-Profit Cooperative

Need/Problem/Concern

Minimum infrastructure currently exists to encourage and promote the collective development, manufacturing, and marketing of natural resource based works various indigenous arts and crafts and other products. Alaska Native artists and artisans have exclusive legal access to utilizing marine mammals in commercial arts and crafts production and marketing.

Opportunity

The area has many talented craft persons, artists, and cottage industry entrepreneurs who utilize locally collected natural resources to create their works and products. The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council could assist in the development of rural market cooperatives and cottage industries specializing in the use of available natural resources. Immediate opportunities exist to assist in promoting an Arts and Crafts Cooperative with non-profit status. This would help strengthen the Cooperative's operational viability and its capacity to effectively expand potential markets for local arts and crafts that are produced in the region. Explore the opportunities to use the Internet as a tool to expand marketing opportunity for local entrepreneurs.

Vocational Job Training

Need/Problem/Concern

There is a critical need to prepare residents for many seasonal and year around jobs that do not require an academic education. Some of these jobs require on-the-job training and some require sophisticated formal vocational training. The schools and the university should recognize this and seek to provide appropriate training curriculum. This is now being initiated by a multi-agency group that supports the establishment of Yuut Elitnaurviat, The People's Learning Center, a vocational center now under construction in Bethel.

15.

Opportunity

Opportunities exist to help coordinate with other organizations to expand students' access to career fair workshop/training opportunities being sponsored by the Kuskokwim Educational Foundation, the Lower Kuskokwim School District, the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska, the People's Learning Center and other organizations including trade union training programs such as Alaska Works Partnership.

The People's Learning Center (Yuut Elitnaurviat) is a new multi-million dollar, consortium operated, regional vocational/technical training center to be opened at Bethel by the end of 2005. The purpose of this new technical center is to provide technical training, in a local setting, to prepare people of the region to be "jobs ready."

Welfare to Work Opportunities

Need/Problem/Concern

Federal and state welfare reforms have imposed drastic changes including limitations on eligibility for welfare recipients. Some of the villages have gotten exemptions to these limitations because of their remoteness and lack of employment opportunities.

Opportunity

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council should assist communities in determining eligibility for qualifying for exemption to the welfare reform conditions. Other opportunities may also exist for the Council to help facilitate welfare-to-work opportunities in the region, increase the number and the rate of participation in job apprenticeship programs, and help promote establishment of a regional-serving technical training center. Additional background information is needed before the Council can determine how and in what areas it can lend the most effective assistance.

Pre-School Education Programs

Need/Problem/Concern

Pre-school education programs are very successful in preparing youngsters for school. Each community should have a Head Start or other program in place.

Opportunity

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council could work with the Traditional Council of each community to assist those who do not have a program to establish one. The Council could work with regional non-profits corporations such as AVCP to determine what level of involvement, if any, is appropriate for the Council to assume in helping to establish programs such as Head Start.

Recreation Opportunities for Children and Teens

Need/Problem/Concern

Over 40% of the region's population is less than 18 years old. There is a serious lack of recreational opportunities, including cultural activities, after-school and summer educational programs and sports to help the region's youth to develop skills and experience that lead to healthy and productive lives.

Opportunity

In addition to career fair training opportunities for youth that are addressed above, the opportunity exists to help promote other programs specifically targeted to serve young people in the region. One immediate opportunity may be to expand 4-H activities in the villages, benefited by the RC&D office in Bethel which allows for a stronger presence for USDA-NRCS programs throughout the region.

16.

Diversify Transportation Infrastructure.

Need/Problem/Concern

The Lower Kuskokwim Delta region has no transportation connections to the rest of Alaska except by air or, in the case of heavy freight, water during the short summer season.

There is no railroad into the area which would reduce the cost of incoming freight and open the opportunity to develop the mineral, timber and fishery resources of the region. A railroad would also provide an opportunity to develop regional tourism.

A barge canal between the Yukon and the Kuskokwim Rivers would expand opportunities for more efficient freight traffic on the two river systems. A canal would allow earlier ocean access by the Yukon River barges by allowing them to access ocean-going barges at Bethel. It would also dramatically shorten the travel distance between the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, and substantially reduce freight costs to villages in the region. Barge travel between the Yukon and Kuskokwim now requires a long transit to the mouth of the Yukon, an open ocean transit and up the Kuskokwim. Historically, several portage systems have been used between the two rivers, including a tram and rail system. Recently the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities did an engineering study and evaluation of the gravel haul road between the two rivers. A feasibility study for a barge canal between Paimute on the Yukon and Lower Kalskag on the Kuskokwim was completed by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 1923-24.

There are essentially no roads connecting the villages to other communities or to each other. Villages rely heavily on air transportation for travel within the region as well as to and from the region. Barges and airlines do offer substantially lower "back haul" freight rates from the hub villages to Anchorage and Fairbanks. Progressive improvement of local roads, ports, and airfields is a common need throughout the region.

Opportunity

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council can provide background information based on the earlier economic analyses to demonstrate the benefit-cost of railroad freight transportation and assist in following up on the Yukon-Kuskokwim canal studies done by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Local citizens need to be knowledgeable and conversant about options that make sense to them to provide input to the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in their Northern Region transportation planning.

Health Clinic Improvements

Need/Problem/Concern

Some villages lack water and sewer connections that allow for sanitary conditions to be maintained in the clinic. Some also lack adequate space and privacy measures to allow for confidentiality in providing health care. The Denali Commission has priority funding for new clinics in those communities that need and request clinic upgrades or a new clinic.

Opportunity

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council should consult with each member village to determine if they want assistance in conducting an inventory and evaluation of the village health clinic. The Regional Health Corporations generally take the lead in determining health clinic needs and should be consulted prior to any involvement by the Council.

17.

New Housing and Rehabilitation of Existing Housing

Need/Problem/Concern

Much of the local housing is overcrowded, in poor repair and prohibitively expensive to heat in the winter. There is a serious need to develop skilled tradesmen to build new housing and to maintain existing housing and public buildings. The Association of Village Council Presidents has a construction apprentice training program that allows village residents to work and develop skills. In the past federal programs have imposed draconian rules (e.g., require Davis Bacon wages, unreasonable and onerous apprentice programs) that have kept local residents from participating in construction projects. This needs to be changed. The recently implemented NAHASDA program allows tribes to take charge of their own Indian housing construction programs.

Opportunity

Energy efficiency is becoming more and more critical as the cost of heating fuel continues to increase. The Regional Housing Authorities and the Village Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA) authorities are responsible for developing new housing in the villages. RURALCAP is involved in weatherization and upgrade programs. In addition there are USDA-RD home improvement loans and grants available. The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council should work to ensure that local people are involved in all aspects of home construction and upgrade. Training programs need to be aggressively supported.

New or Improved Fuel Storage Capacity

Need/Problem/Concern

A lack of adequate bulk fuel storage creates both environmental hazards (from poorly maintained tank farms) and high fuel costs (from shortages caused by the lack of storage capacity). In some villages tank farms are centrally located in the village and present a potentially serious fire hazard in the event of a spill. There is also the danger of contamination of the potable water supply in the event of a spill.

Opportunity

The Denali Commission has priority funding for constructing new bulk fuel tank farms in those communities that need and request an upgrade or a new tank farm. The RC&D Council could offer assistance to communities to apply to the Denali Commission for planning assistance and grant funding.

Search and Rescue and Public Safety

Need/Problem/Concern

The Village Public Safety Officer (VPSO) program has been subject to very limited funding from the state. The Village Police Officer (VPO) program is funded by the community with even more limited funding. Villages do not

have search and rescue programs in place except for spontaneous response by resident volunteers when an emergency occurs. Volunteers must pay all costs, including fuel for aircraft, snow-machines, four-wheelers and outboard motors, out of pocket. Nor do communities have rescue equipment for use in moving injured persons.

Opportunity

The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council needs to consult with communities to determine what level of participation is appropriate for the Council to assist in developing a Search and Rescue and Public Safety program, to assist in developing training programs, and to locate on-going funding sources.

18.

Improved Wild-Fire and Structural-Fire Protection

Need/Problem/Concern

Many villages lack adequate facilities and equipment for fire protection, leading to large and expensive losses in the event of fires. Several systems including personal fire extinguishers in each building and home and a community foam fire fighting system and dry hydrants need to be evaluated and the most cost effective system developed. In addition to structural fires, wildfires are of concern in many villages.

Opportunity

The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council should work with each village (City Council and/or Traditional Council) to develop strategies and implement procedures to prepare for structural and wild fires.

Other Regional Needs, Problems and Concerns

Need/Problem/Concern

Other needs, problems and concerns and opportunities are recognized to exist and may be addressed by the RC&D Council once its initial objectives and activities have been successfully completed.

Summary: The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council Area Plan & CED strategy envisions the development, over time, of a solid economic base that will provide a healthy mix of subsistence and income-producing components and position the region's residents to be as self-sufficient as possible in addressing many of these needs. Continued efforts will be made to identify and maximize opportunities to utilize the region's vast natural resources. For example, the region is rich in fish and game that provide for substantial subsistence activities, as well as create a small tourism industry for sport fishing and hunting.

Capacity to better address problems and maximize opportunities related to the needs of the Lower Kuskokwim Region hinges in large part on the establishment and effective administration of a strong, coordinating body with region-wide representation and focus. Towards that end, and consistent with the input and priorities of the 27 villages whose interests it represents, the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc. has developed a vision statement, mission statement, goals and initial objectives to guide its activities.

LAND CONSERVATION ELEMENT (LC)

Recycling

Need/Problem/Concern

With small communities widely scattered throughout the region and no single hub community large enough to establish a volume collection site, the cost of developing a successful recycling program is prohibitive without some sort of subsidy – either reduced freight/processing rates or grants. Increased environmental awareness and concern has stimulated interest in some communities in promoting information and education programs concerning the development of community oriented recycling programs emphasizing the reduction, re-use, and recycling of waste including snow-machines, four-wheelers and other vehicles.

Opportunity

With support from the communities, the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council could collect data and information to demonstrate whether a recycling program would be cost-effective. Research the opportunities for on-going grants to

support recycling programs.

19.

River-Bank, Run-Off and Wind Erosion

Need/Problem/Concern

Throughout the region river/stream-bank and run-off erosion as well as wind erosion is causing damage to roads, cemeteries and other valuable community sites and infrastructure. It is clear from studying the topography of the region that the river systems have meandered dramatically over time. All effort to construct permanent settlements and structures must keep this in mind. It is virtually impossible to redirect a major river once it begins to meander or mitigate sea-shore erosion – at best it is extremely expensive. Erosion from heavy rain and spring runoff also occurs when overburden is disturbed or removed to build roads or any other purpose. This is especially severe along river or ocean shore line.

Opportunity:

Dealing with erosion can range all the way from planting grasses and shrubs to relocating a village. The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council should consult with each member community to determine whether they have an erosion problem, the extent and seriousness of the problem and develop a strategy for resolving the problem.

Stream Bank Erosion

Need/Problem/Concern

Erosion of river banks has long threatened many settlements. Four years ago a seawall construction project was completed in Bethel, at a cost of \$22.6 million. Erosion and destruction of important fish habitat is now occurring at an increased rate due to development of property along river systems within the region. Developments undertaken without sufficient or coordinated land use planning are contributing to numerous streambank related problems. Many private landowners do not understand the impact of their activities on streambanks, or the need to acquire permits when developing along streambanks. Information on proper rehabilitation methods is not available nor readily accessible to the general public.

Opportunity

The RC&D Council could be instrumental in identifying individuals and organizations that could assist in the compilation and transfer of information and technology relating to stream and river bank rehabilitation. The Council could also assist land owners in understanding permit requirements and applying for required permits, and could identify and direct sources of funding for establishment of demonstration of proper methods of streambank development and rehabilitation.

LAND MANAGEMENT ELEMENT (LM)

Natural Resource Reserves

Agricultural and Forest Resources

Need/Problem/Concern

Due to soil conditions and the presence of discontinuous permafrost through most of the region, there are limited opportunities for agricultural production. The presence of greenhouses has allowed limited gardening and production of hearty vegetables for personal consumption. Forest resources are also very limited, due to the permafrost conditions. Almost 100 percent of the land is covered with natural vegetation, except in the small areas of the community and village townsites. The region has a unique combination of alpine forest and treeless tundra ecosystems.

Opportunity

The RC&D Council could explore the opportunity to expand agricultural industries—greenhouse production—and assist in the establishment of innovative marketing strategies for agricultural products.

20.

Mineral Deposits/Gravel
Need/Problem/Concern

Minerals in the area that have been or are presently being mined include gold, cinnabar, silver, and platinum. Current mining activities are dependent on market demand and the current world prices for minerals. Gravel is also available in limited quantities and is important for the construction of roads, airports, and as pads for new housing. There are few sources of gravel and it is a significant cost to many proposed projects because of its scarcity.

Opportunity

The RC&D could encourage state and federal agencies to update geological and geophysical maps for the region. It could also facilitate mining feasibility studies of newly identified mineral resources for effective and environmentally sound development. The RC&D could seek soils and related resource information on additional gravel sites, and determine the cost effectiveness to transport it to worksites around the region.

Landfill Improvements Including Hazardous Waste Disposal

Need/Problem/Concern

Many communities lack safe and adequate landfills, and the improper disposal of both household and industrial waste creates the potential for environmental and health hazards. Hazardous wastes need to be isolated and kept in secure locations until they can be shipped to a permanent disposal site and properly disposed of.

Opportunity

Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council could provide assistance to communities, as requested, to evaluate the condition of land-fill and hazardous waste disposal sites. Once a deficiency evaluation is completed, the Council would be in a position to provide limited assistance in making grant applications to upgrade the sites.

WATER MANAGEMENT ELEMENT (WM)

Water Resources/Management

Need/Problem/Concern

A number of rivers in the region, including the Tuluksak, Kasigluk, Kiseralik, Gweek, Kwethluk, Eek, Johnson, Kanektok, Arolik, and Goodnews Rivers, flow into the Kuskokwim River or the nearby Yukon River. Nelson and Nunivak Islands are located along the Bearing Sea coastline and have five village communities. Most of the region is within the boundaries of the Clarence Rhode National Wildlife Refuge and lower river communities border the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge.

The primary sources of drinking water are ground water, ice taken from rivers in winter months, and rainwater collected during the summer seasons. Most villages have a watering point where treated water can be obtained and transported by containers to individual homes. Each village in the region is unique with regard to where residents obtain their potable water and how they dispose of their sewage. Pollution or contamination threatens all of the sources of drinking water. In the village of Quinhagak, for example, drinking water is obtained from the Kanetok River near the point where it flows into the Kuskokwim River. During the summer months, many sports fishermen camp along sandbars up river from the village and have disposed of their human waste in the river, contaminating the village drinking water supply and the river watershed. The village tribal council has responded with an ordinance requiring that sport fishermen haul out their human waste and take it to an approved disposal site. However, the State of Alaska does not fully recognize the tribal council's authority to police the river and to maintain water quality for local residents.

Rural villages also lack the most basic forms of public infrastructure, including piped water and indoor plumbing. Many of the homes in Bethel's surrounding villages do not have running water or plumbing. Many people in the region rely on public laundry and shower facilities as the main source for washing and drinking water. They use honey buckets to dispose of human waste in open pits or sewage lagoons located adjacent to villages. Although hauling water is second nature to many rural residents, it is an inconvenient and cumbersome process that increases the risk of contamination and contributes to unhealthy living conditions.

Opportunity

The RC&D Council will promote the installation of sewer and water systems in our villages, which will reduce contamination and the health risks associated with hauled water and sewage. The Council could also promote baseline water quality monitoring of local rivers and streams, to assist in the identification of point and non-point sources of pollution. The Council could also promote watershed planning efforts to develop local alternatives for the reduction of point and non-point sources of pollution and could encourage local village involvement and support of “water watch” programs and education related to maintaining water quality.

VI. AREA PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Introduction

The RC&D area plan focuses on effectively managing natural resources, developing individual and community capacity, expediting the development of public infrastructure, improving labor force qualifications and services, developing local industries, and sustaining the local culture and quality of life. Investments in these areas would increase economic productivity and competition, increase job opportunities and earnings among the local residents, and help reduce cost of living expenses. The RC&D Council will provide the necessary resources to:

- * Conserve and develop sustainable natural resources.
- * Expedite installation of basic infrastructure such as adequate housing, water and sewer service, reliable power, roads and landfills—necessities often taken for granted elsewhere in our nation.
- * Enhance quality of the workforce by strengthening education and training programs, childcare, and healthcare services.
- * Maintain quality of life by sharing traditional lifestyles with future generations.
- * Strengthen region’s economy through new business development and expansion and development of services for the visitor industry.

As a result of the above activities, the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council has developed the following six fields of interest and associated goals and objectives toward which to focus its efforts:

- * Basic Infrastructure
- * Water Resource/Management
- * Agricultural and Forest Resources
- * Fisheries Resources
- * Tourism and the Visitor Industry
- * Alaska Native arts and crafts

22.

In addition, goals and objectives have been developed for a Council leadership field of interest.

- * Community Development Element (CD),
- * Land Conservation Element (LC),
- * Land Management Element (LM),
- * Water Management Element (WM).

The six fields of interest and associated goals and objectives are presented in the context of the above four elements required as a minimum in an Area Plan.

Long Range (5-year) Goals and Objectives Related to the
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT (CD)

GOAL CD#1: Improve Area Residents Access to Adequate and Essential Facilities and Services by Providing Basic Infrastructure Needs

Objective CD#1-01

Seek funding opportunities to ensure access to adequate housing for residents of the Lower Kuskokwim Region.

Objective CD#1-02

Seek funding opportunities to ensure access to basic services such as water and sewer systems.

Objective CD#1-03

Promote the development of landfill sites that meet federal and state requirements and standards.

Objective CD#1-04

Assist rural communities and villages in seeking sources of funding to obtain basic fire protection and emergency medical equipment and facilities.

Objective CD#1-05

Facilitate local community support for the completion of community facility development and renovation projects.

GOAL CD#2: Promote the Development and Expansion of the Region's Tourism and Visitor Industries

Objective CD#2-01

Develop region-wide brochures and other informational related items that promote local attractions and services.

Objective CD#2-02

Assist rural villages and communities in developing and expanding eco-tourism related businesses and opportunities.

Objective CD#2-03

Assist in the development of local visitor and interpretive centers for rural communities and villages.

Objective CD#2-04

Assist in the planning, design, and development of recreational facilities and services that protect the environment and enhance the rural economy and quality of life.

GOAL CD#3: Promote the Development and Expansion of Alaskan Native Arts and Crafts

Objective CD#3-01

Assist artisans to locate and develop new markets for local arts and crafts.

Objective CD#3-02

Explore and promote the development of local and regional cooperatives to represent artisans and their products.

Objective CD#3-03

Promote entrepreneurship training for interested communities, villages, and individuals.

GOAL CD#4: Recognize the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council as a Local and Statewide Leader in Resource Conservation and Economic Development

Objective CD#4-01

Seek out training opportunities for RC&D Council members to strengthen district leadership capabilities.

Objective CD#4-02

Improve RC&D program delivery by networking with other RC&D Councils on appropriate projects and activities.

Objective CD#4-03

Actively pursue additional Council sponsorship.

Objective CD#4-04

Develop and implement an information campaign to inform local rural residents of RC&D Program opportunities.

Objective CD#4-05

Expand upon the financial resources available to support the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D program.

Objective CD#4-06

Increase the knowledge and expertise of Council members through attendance at regional and national association meetings.

Long Range (5-year) Goals and Objectives Related to the
LAND CONSERVATION ELEMENT (LC)

GOAL LC#1: Promote the Enhancement and Protection of the Area's Subsistence and Commercial Fisheries Resources

Objective LC#1-01

Identify and promote the commercial development of the region's alternative seafood resources.

Objective LC#1-02

Promote habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection strategies and projects.

Long Range (5-year) Goals and Objectives Related to the
LAND MANAGEMENT ELEMENT (LM)

GOAL LM#1: Promote the Growth and Development of the Region's Agricultural and Forest Resources

Objective LM#1-01

Explore the growth and expansion of agricultural enterprises through the development of greenhouse production and other alternative agricultural opportunities including value-added reindeer and musk oxen products.

Objective LM#1-02

Promote the development of innovative marketing strategies for agricultural production.

Objective LM#1-03

Explore opportunities to promote the development of a non-timber forest products industry.

Objective LM#1-04

Promote the growth and development of locally based agricultural enterprises by assisting with the formation of cooperatives and associations.

Long Range (5-year) Goals and Objectives Related to the
WATER MANAGEMENT ELEMENT (WM)

GOAL WM#1: Improve the Quality and Quantity of Surface and Groundwater Resources Through the Integration and Use of All Local, State, and Federal Programs

Objective WM#1-01

Coordinate activities for the planning and implementation of village water and sewer systems.

Objective WM#1-02

Promote efforts to protect surface and groundwater sources from point and non-point source pollution.

Objective WM#1-03

Coordinate activities to enhance and protect wetland areas.

Objective WM#1-04

Assist rural villages and communities in the development and implementation of baseline water quality monitoring programs and activities.

Objective WM#1-05

Promote area-wide and watershed planning efforts throughout the Lower Kuskokwim region.

Objective WM#1-06

Assist with the development of water quality related informational and educational activities for local land users and students.

Objective WM#1-07

Coordinate activities to promote measures to reduce and prevent stream bank erosion and flooding.

VII. STRATEGIES, PARTNERSHIPS and TIME-FRAME

This section of the RC&D Area Plan addresses the following points in the context of a five-year time horizon:

- * Strategies for addressing needs,
- * Current and potential partnerships with USDA and others,
- * Time-frame to accomplish the above.

Strategies for Addressing Needs

Strategies are the overarching planning structures that direct the activities and individual projects of the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council. Moreover, strategies are technical-resource and financial-resource dependent, as well as time dependent.

Each year an Annual Plan of Work is prepared in which the Council Board of Directors and others present strategies and action plans to accomplish the stated objectives contained within this Area Plan. The Area Plan is a dynamic planning document that is a statement of the needs to be addressed and goals and objectives required to meet them over a period of time up to five (5) years.

Clearly, action plans and activities will be recursive and dynamic in their implementation and completion. At the end of each fiscal year, the Annual Plan of Work must be evaluated to determine what progress was made in accomplishing RC&D objectives. Some objectives will have been completed, others will be in some stage of completion, while others may still be in the planning stages. The updated information resulting from this annual review of the Plan of Work will then be incorporated into the current fiscal year Annual Plan of Work, or deleted if no longer relevant.

USDA Partnerships

The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council has an on-going partnership with the non-profit regional service

corporation, the Association of Village Council Presidents, Inc. (AVCP), as well as with the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC), the Calista Corporation, the Bethel Chamber of Commerce and the Kuskokwim Campus of the University of Alaska. The Council also works with the People's Training Center, which recently began construction of their new facilities this summer (2004), as well as the NRCS Bethel Field office staff. Specifically, the Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council has received technical support from the USDA-NRCS District Conservationist and RC&D Coordinator who are both supported by the state-wide USDA-NRCS technical staffs.

Additionally, the Council works in partnership with the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development (DCCED) as the designated Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR) for the member villages of the ARDOR-RC&D Council. The Alaska DCCED partially funds the ARDOR with a small operating stipend each year.

The Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council will continue to develop partnerships with state and federal agencies and with private sector individuals and companies as the opportunities arise.

Time-Frames

The Area/CEDS Plan, also referred to as the Strategic Long Range Plan and, occasionally, the Resource Conservation and Sustainable Development Plan is intended to cover a period of up to five (5) years. The Area Plan is a dynamic document and subject to change or modification if social and/or economic conditions were to suddenly change significantly. Clearly, the plan is intended to serve as a five-year plan, but could be changed sooner if circumstances warrant.

The Lower-Kuskokwim region of interior Alaska does not have railroad or road connection to the Alaska road system. It is isolated and separated from the Alaska road and railroad systems of South-Central Alaska by high and rugged mountains, large watershed systems characterized by numerous lakes and swamp-land and large river systems. The rivers are navigable for approximately six months of the year depending on the season. In some years, the barging season may be cut even shorter in the event of a late spring break-up or early fall freeze-up.

Therefore, timing is critical in construction and in shipping construction and other equipment and material into or out of the region. The year-around mode of transportation and freight transport is by airplane. This is not only expensive, but in some cases it is impossible to ship bulky or heavy items by air. Therefore, if one misses an early spring (May) barge shipment, it is unfeasible to begin a construction project until the following year. The difficulty increases when grants are involved because so many grants have time lines that make it all but impossible to have construction material ready to meet barge spring sailing schedules. As a result, in many cases a construction project must be delayed for almost a year after the award is made.

In summary, these are some of the reasons that Lower Kuskokwim RC&D Council finds it more appropriate to include specific time-frame estimates in its Annual Plan of Work rather than in this five-year Area Plan.

IX. COMPLIANCE and AGREEMENT

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc. agrees that the RC&D Program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100-259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7 CFR-15, Subparts A and B) that provide that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial (or technical) assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof.

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc. agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with Federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and

responsibilities for non-procurement, suspension, and debarment, and State review.

The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc. hereby adopts this Area/CEDS Plan and agrees to use effectively the assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the State of Alaska or any other resource available to realize the goals and objectives outlined herein.

Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc.

By: _____
Fred Phillip, Chairperson,

Attest: _____
Peter Julius, Secretary

This action authorized at an official meeting of the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, Inc. on the
__15__ day of _____ June _____, 2006.