



The Native American Contractors Association (Sarah Lukin) and Small Business Administration (SBA), on October 21, 2009, traveled to a remote village in Alaska to see first-hand life in rural Alaska, learn about the issues and challenges facing Alaska Native people and the role Alaska Native Corporations, the SBA, and the 8(a) program serve. To get to the remote village of Kalskag we have to fly from Anchorage to the Village of Aniak and switch to a smaller plane to fly to Kalskag. Above, Clara Pratte (SBA) and John Klein (SBA) in a very small "puddle jumper" airplane, on our way from the "hub" village of Aniak (pop. 600) to the Yup'ik Village of Kalskag (pop. 230).



John Klein (SBA) and Maver Carey (President of The Kuskokwim Corporation, the Village Alaska Native Corporation serving Kalskag, and our guide) in the plane headed to Kalskag.



We went to the local school to eat lunch with the students. The kids were excited to see outsiders and kept asking, “did you really come all the way from Washington DC?” John Klein (SBA), Clara Pratte (SBA), and me (Sarah Lukin, NACA) are in the back.



This little boy kept coming up and talking to me. He was adorable so I had to take his pic.



Elder William and Clara. He asked to take his pic "with the pretty girls" (Clara and I). He was very sweet. Every day the Elders come to the school and eat lunch with the kids. They brought traditional Yup'ik food so we were able to eat kippered (half smoked/canned) silver salmon and Whitefish eggs in addition to the regular school lunch. Yummy!



1st - 2nd graders. They were working on computers when we joined them. We later met with the high school teachers. They explained that out of 11 seniors last year only 2 graduated. Teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and suicide are very real issues that our villages struggle to overcome.



1st - 3rd graders. They loved John and kept playing with him. They were learning Yup'ik and English and read the days of the week and months to John and Clara.



View of Kalskag and the Kuskokwim River.



This is one of the first homes built in the village by the BIA. Today only Elders live in these homes. The Alaska Village Council of Presidents (regional non-profit) recently completed several homes which included well water and sewage. Many homes in the area still do not enjoy running water and flushing toilets. Gas is \$6 a gallon and juice at the local store was \$13.75. This area of the state is the poorest, with many well below the US poverty line with few opportunities for employment and yet they pay the most for basic needs. The Kuskokwim Corporation (TKC) just entered into 8(a) a few years ago and is seeing some success. TKC hopes to continue to grow in 8(a) and government contracting so they can pay more in dividends to their 3,100 Native shareholders and provide more services to their people – like increased scholarships and job training.



Kalskag is located along the Kuskokwim River in the Bethel area of Alaska.



Me (Sarah Lukin, NACA) bundled up at the Kuskokwim river. Temperatures drop to -55 in the winter. The river serves as the primary means of transportation and subsistence for the Village of Kalskag. Boats are used on the river in the summer. Behind me you can see villagers putting their boats away for the winter. Ice is building up-river and soon the river will be frozen. Once frozen it becomes an ice road which villagers drive on with truck and snow machine.



The Kuskokwim Corp (TKC) represents 10 villages in the Kuskokwim area. They gave NACA (me) and the SBA a tour of their village. It gave us a chance to put Native 8(a) into perspective -- what it means for Alaska Native people and rural villages and the role of Native corporations in our villages. L to R: Clara Pratte (SBA), Dunia Morgan (Board member TKC), Maver Carey (President TKC), Leo Morgan (Chairman TKC), and John Klein (SBA).



It was well below freezing with the wind chill and yet this family had clothes hung out to dry. I asked our guide Leo Morgan if they would dry or if they had to hang out until spring. He laughed and explained, "of course they'll dry but they'll be a bit stiff when they are brought inside in an hour."



This area of the state is poorest and has few natural resources to draw from. Everything must be brought into the village by barge or small airplane. This is one of the last barges of the year bringing gravel, which is used for their roads and pads to build houses on in the tundra. Other barges bring much needed fuel and food.

Quyanaasinaq (thank you very much) to Maver Carey for putting this trip together. It is quite a logistical feat to get to remote rural Alaska villages. Her, Leo and Dunia were great guides – knowledgeable and honest about the challenges and opportunities their community and Native corporation face. I would love to return to Kalskag after TKC has been in the 8(a) program for several years to see how it has helped their community and people.

Quyanaa (thank you) to John and Clara for taking the time out of their very busy schedules to learn about the role of Native 8(a) and SBA and what all this can mean for a village just starting out in the 8(a) program.

This was truly an amazing trip; one I will not forget. The issues that our Alaska Native people have to overcome is sometimes daunting, and yet we are determined. Native 8(a) will not solve all the issues facing our villages, but it will help build economies in the most economically depressed areas of the United States. It will provide benefits to Native people through much needed dividends, scholarships, job training, cultural and social programs, and benefits to Elders. It will make a difference.

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