

Expanded Brownfields Program supports redevelopment in Alaska

Summer is construction season in Alaska, but before redevelopment projects move forward, site assessments must be done to determine whether there are hazardous substances or contaminants that could interfere with plans. If the site previously housed a business, such as a gas station or dry clean-

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ers, there may be residual contaminants. The types of contaminants, remediation process, and costs need to be assessed. Once these are known, the developer can decide how best to move forward.

Over the past few years, Cook Inlet Housing Authority (CIHA) has received funds from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Program to assist with site assessments in Anchorage's Spenard, Fairview, and Mountain View neighborhoods. Brownfields Program funds, along with other funds, assisted with the investigation and cleanup of property previously occupied by Olson's Tesoro Service Station, clearing the way for development of CIHA's retail/residential property in Spenard.

► Redevelopment projects

There are Brownfields projects — projects involving the reuse or redevelopment of land that may be hindered by contaminants — throughout Alaska. These include an assessment of the Keku Cannery in Kake which operated from the early 1900s to 1977. The Organized Village of Kake plans to turn the old cannery into a cultural center with a museum, restaurant, and market place. Funds are also going to clean up contaminants found on a school site in Ruby and an old library site in Talkeetna that residents would like to turn into a skate park (DEC, 2018b).

► Increased grant limits

This year, Congress authorized increased grant limits in the Brownfields Program and removed barriers to Alaska Native villages



Keku Cannery, Kake. Photo from Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

and Alaska Native corporations receiving grants under the program. The Brownfields Utilization, Investment, and Local Development (BUILD) Act of 2018 is part of the FY18 Omnibus Appropriations bill.

The Brownfields Program, like the Superfund Program, is under the EPA. While Superfund sites automatically receive federal

DEC's Brownfield Assessment and Cleanup program (DBAC). Higher amounts for assessment are awarded for large community or area-wide contamination.

► Kodiak, Anchorage and Mat-Su grants

Currently, Kodiak, Anchorage, and Mat-Su Borough have received area-wide grants for

Alaska Native villages and corporations that received a contaminated facility from the U.S. government under ANCSA are now eligible for grants.

funds, not all Brownfields sites receive federal funds. The EPA provides each region funds for Brownfields site assessment and cleanup and the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) administers funds for Alaska projects under a 128(a) grant from the EPA. Although Congress increased the limits on the amount each project may receive, funds are still limited. Priority is given to projects that have "solid reuse or redevelopment plans," projects that are working to secure funds from multiple sources, and projects that have strong community support (DEC, 2018a).

There are multiple types of Brownfields funding available in Alaska including: 128(a) grants, Competitive Assessment grants, Competitive Cleanup grants, Targeted Brownfields Assessments, or funds from

assessment of contaminated sites. The Municipality of Anchorage received a \$300,000 Brownfield assessment grant, Kodiak Island Borough received a \$600,000 grant, and Mat-Su Borough received a \$550,000 Brownfield grant (Municipality of Anchorage, 2017; Kodiak Island Borough, 2017; Matanuska-Susitna Borough, 2018).

The maximum amount for site remediation grants has increased from \$200,000 to \$500,000 this year. The limit may be waived by the administrator up to, but not to exceed \$650,000, according to Lisa Griswold, DEC Environmental Specialist. However, Griswold added, these funds have not been appropriated. No extra money has been given to the federal Brownfields Program. This rule change simply increased the amount for which each site is eligible.

► Eligibility expanded

Public entities, such as Native corporations, nonprofits, and local governments may apply for these grants or services. The EPA has allowed Alaska Native corporations and local governments to partner with tribal entities and others who may not be eligible for these grants on their own.

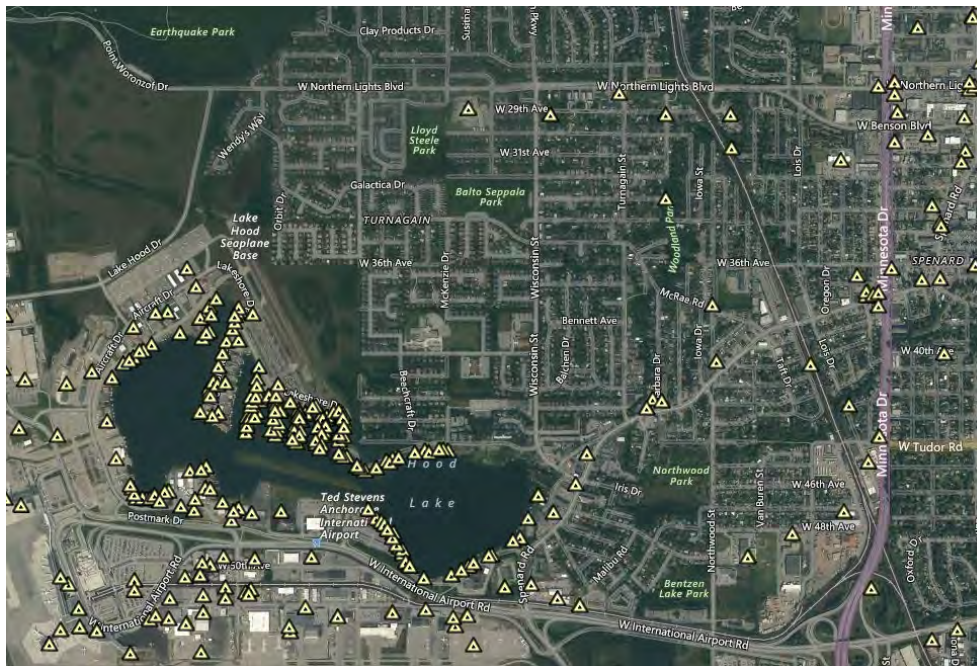
In addition, this year Congress cleared a path for Alaska Native villages and Alaska Native corporations or their successors that received a contaminated facility from the U.S. government under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) to be eligible for Brownfields grants. Prior to this year, Alaska Native villages and corporations had been considered “owner or operator” of the lands and liable for contamination and ineli-

Kodiak, Anchorage and Mat-Su Borough have received area-wide grants for assessment of contaminated sites.

gible for Brownfields grants.

Griswold continued to put the increased limits in perspective. While the limits are high, the actual funding pool is “quite small.” The largest project in any given year for DBACs is no more than \$100,000, she said, adding that communities could fill out multiple applications through the years to reach the uppermost limit.

Priority is given to sites that most endanger human health and the environment. DEC considers the overall cost of assessment or remediation in determining which sites will receive funding. “The funding can be thought of like a pie. It is theoretically possible to do one really large project, but that would mean no other projects could be done. Lower cost projects allow for more projects to be completed (thus extending DEC’s ability to assist communities),” Griswold said.



Brownfields around Lake Hood and Spenard neighborhood, Municipality of Anchorage. Image from Contaminated Sites Database searchable ArcGIS map, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation.

If you have questions about Brownfields in Alaska, Lisa Griswold can be reached at lisa.griswold@alaska.gov or (907) 269-2021.

► References

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