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Communities Served

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| Alakanuk | Nightmute |
| Ambler | Noatak |
| Andreafsky | Noorvik |
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| Brevig Mission | Nunapitchuk |
| Chevak | Old Harbor |
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| Emmonak | Quinhagak |
| Gambell | Russian Mission |
| Goodnews Bay | St. Mary's |
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| Holy Cross | Savoonga |
| Hooper Bay | Scammon Bay |
| Huslia | Selawik |
| Kaltag | Shageluk |
| Kasigluk | Shaktoolik |
| Kiana | Shishmaref |
| Kivalina | Shungnak |
| Kotlik | Stebbins |
| Koyuk | Teller |
| Lower Kalskag | Togiak |
| Marshall | Toksook Bay |
| Mekoryuk | Tununak |
| Minto | Upper Kalskag |
| Mt. Village | Wales |
| New Stuyahok | |



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Energy for Rural Alaskans: Framing the Issues

Commonwealth North is a nonprofit “think tank” established by two former Alaskan governors—Bill Egan and Walter Hickel—for the purpose of “illuminating Alaska’s issues.”

A new study group was recently launched and is co-chaired by Ethan Schutt (vice president of Cook Inlet Region Inc.) and me. Our first meeting was May 19 and we meet every week on Thursday at CIRI.

Here is what we are attempting to do:

Overview

Twenty percent of Alaska’s 710,000 population live in almost 300 communities spread across 500,000 square miles. While some communities are larger (Ketchikan, Kodiak, etc.) most are small and geographically dispersed. Hub communities (Barrow, Bethel, Kotzebue, Nome, Dillingham, etc.) are home to 2,500 to 5,000 people, and some 250 communities have populations of 50 to 1,100.

Most of Alaska’s rural population is significantly reliant on subsistence foods and transfer payments—Social Security, state and federal assistance, and native corporation dividends—for their sustenance. Per capita income is extremely low, while costs of goods and services are extremely high.

Low income and high costs appear to be driving many promising community members away to other areas—hubs, urban communities and outside destinations—in search of gainful employment and affordable bills.

Energy—electricity, heating fuel and gasoline—represents a significant component of rural Alaskans’ annual cash outlay, with the figure approaching or exceeding 40 percent, according to studies published by ISER and other respected Alaskan institutes.

While the state of Alaska does not have a well-defined “Energy Plan,” there have been recent efforts to develop one. Numerous “regional plans” are in various stages of development, but none appear to offer comprehensive relief to the high cost of energy without heavy reliance on significant “free” funding, in effect buying down the cost of energy to an affordable level.

Scope

The scope of this study is to develop an understanding of the current state of energy production, transportation and consumption in rural Alaska and to examine efforts under way to develop long-term, viable, cost-effective solutions to those challenges.

This study will attempt to inform Alaskans about energy challenges that exist outside the “Railbelt” and to develop recommendations on the most cost-effective solutions to provide for the long-term energy needs of rural Alaska.

Timeline

The goal will be to complete this study in time to release the report at the Alaska Rural Energy Conference in Juneau, on September 27-29.

You can find information about presentations made and other materials at www.commonwealthnorth.org.

Until next time,

Meera Kohler
President and CEO