

Huslia Comprehensive Community Development Plan



Prepared by:
Huslia Tribal Council
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HUSLIA COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Huslia, Alaska

Established July 1999

Huslia Tribal Council

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Introduction

Because of a need to bring about positive change within the village the Huslia Tribal Council applied for a grant through DCRA to have a VISTA volunteer develop a comprehensive community development plan for Huslia. From July of 1998 to July of 1999 the VISTA volunteer developed the plan.

The VISTA worker wrote a survey and surveyed a majority of the adult residents to determine community needs. From the results, community meetings, and past plans and priority lists, they devised this comprehensive plan.

**"We believe that the creation of a community development plan is the short-range solution to best establish our long-term goals."
Huslia Tribal Council**

Vision and Mission Statement

The main goal of our community is to ensure the survival of our community and the preservation of our traditional way of life. We vision our community as a desirable place to live where future members will want to come back to after schooling to work and raise families. To reach this goal we need to create a self sustaining economy and address issues in the areas of social, cultural, and infrastructure.

Community Profile

Currently, Huslia has a population of 280, of which 96 percent is Alaska Native. Our ancestors lived between the south fork of the Koyukuk River and the Kateel River. They had spring, summer, fall, and winter camps, and moved as the wild game migrated. In the summer many families would float on a raft to the Yukon to fish for salmon. The Koyukon often traded with the Kobuk River Eskimos. By 1843, Russian explorers had made contact with Athabascans approximately 50 miles down river from the current site. The Western Union Telegraph Company explored the River around 1867, and missionary activity increased after 1870. Cutoff Trading Post (also called Old Town) was established in the 1920s about 4 miles overland, or 16 river miles, from modern Huslia.

In 1949, the community moved to the present site because Cutoff flooded frequently and the ground was swampy. Huslia (originally spelled Huslee) was named after a local stream. Huslia had been used as a burial site since 1886, but by the time of the move, most of the old cemetery had been destroyed by erosion. In 1950, the first school was established, followed by a post office, airport and road construction in 1952. At this time, families began to live year-round at Huslia. In 1960, a health clinic was constructed, and in 1963, 29 individual hand-pumped water wells were installed. Running water and indoor plumbing arrived in 1974.

Geographical Location

The community of Huslia is located in the interior region of Alaska on the north bank of the Koyukuk River in the Koyukuk lowlands at approximately 65° 41' N Latitude, 156° 24' W Longitude. The town-site is situated approximately 70 miles north of Galena, and 260 miles west-northwest of Fairbanks. The area encompasses 16 sq. miles of land and 1 sq. miles of water.

Profile continued...

Government

Huslia was incorporated as a second-class city in 1969 and the Tribal Government was established in 1977. While the City of Huslia and the Tribal government are technically separate organizations, the small size and isolation of the community lead to a natural partnership. The City and Tribal Council cooperate fully in all efforts to improve the quality of life for residents.

Tribal Council:

The Huslia Tribal Council has been in existence since 1972 and has nearly 20 years experience in overseeing programs and services. Some of these are management of BIA self-governance funds, Indian Child Welfare Act grants, community based suicide prevention grants, summer youth employment programs, new directions and hazardous waste clean-up training. These programs benefit tribal members in many ways, including decreased unemployment, improved child welfare and an overall improvement in quality of life.

The council is made up of seven tribal members, each serving a three-year term. They are appointed in a democratic election, with staggered terms to minimize turnover. The officers of the council are made up of a First Chief, Second Chief and Secretary. The council meets the first Tuesday of each month. Tribal staff includes a tribal administrator, tribal family and youth specialist, community health aides, a village public safety officer, a home care provider, elder nutrition provider, and an environmental technician. The tribal staff administers child welfare services, tribal enrollment, direct employment, eye care, tribal work experience program, the elder nutrition program and others. The Tribal financial information is maintained in an automated spreadsheet application. All expenditures are accounted for with receipts. Financial transactions are entered promptly to ensure the budget is kept up to date and accurate. Financial reports are compiled monthly and quarterly and audits are done independently. The fiscal management system operates in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

Employment

Most tribal members rely on seasonal employment for their income, such as fire fighting, commercial fishing, construction and school district employment. Year-round employment is available through the city, tribe, airlines and private business ventures. The community unemployment rate is currently 67.5%. Tribal members depend on subsistence activity, members hunt, fish and gather for a wide array of foods.

Currently there are 42 permanent/semi-permanent jobs available in Huslia: fifteen through the school, fifteen through the Tribal government, six through the City government, one through the federal government (Postmaster), and five from private businesses.

Infrastructure

Most houses are of log construction and newly constructed frame HUD homes, and are heated with wood and fuel oil. All public buildings are heated with fuel oil. Huslia has a power distribution system and a community water system. Members use leach fields for liquid waste disposal and burn combustible waste in 55 gallon burn barrels and at the community waste disposal area.

Today the community of Huslia boasts of a renovated K - 12 school which 79 students attend, and a head start program with 25 participants. The community has a VPSO, a community counselor, and health clinic which is staffed by three community health aides and a community health representative. Huslia has three locally owned general merchandise stores, a hardware store, and a newly established bakery. There are a water plant/washeteria, three churches, a community hall, a baseball field, and a basketball court. There is also telephone and television access in each household. There is daily flight service to Huslia offered by several airlines; in the summer barge service is available via the Koyukuk River. Aside from winter trails, accessible only by snow-mobile, there are no roads to Huslia.

STRATEGIC PLAN

Economy

A major goal of our village is to create a self-sustaining economy, which involves making Huslia's a business instead of a transfer economy. From a community economic development workshop held in Huslia it was discovered that 90% of the money coming into Huslia is from transfer funds from state and federal entities. The issue with a transfer economy is it makes our village dependent on another entity and subject to year to year funding decisions in which we have no say in deciding. It is our belief that as long as we are grant and entitlement funded, with money being continually imported and immediately exported, that our economy will never be sustainable and sovereignty will not be actualized.

Objective One: Improve Athabasca Cultural Journeys.

Help the tourism business through creating stronger cultural ties. Tourism will benefit our community in a number of ways. First of all, it will bring more money and employment opportunities here. It is a way to educate outsiders about rural Alaskan life. Our young people will also have a chance for learning our culture and use what they learned for possible future employment as guides.

Leading Entity: Athabasca manager

Actions:

- Develop a business plan.
- Create a central location for selling local arts & crafts.
- Start or improve Bed & Breakfast services.
- Establish a web page, which would advertise and inform perspective visitors about Huslia.
- Increase the number of available storytellers and compile oral history, etc.
- Create a village tour.
- Have monthly committee meetings.
- Inform the community of tourism activity.

Performance Indicators:

- Manager's monthly reports.
- Increased number of tourists per year.
- Business profits.

Status: Working on the business plan. Scheduled to have two families this fall.

Objective Two: Help perspective business owners start small businesses.

From a comprehensive study done of the residents in 1998 and 1999 fifty-five people indicated an interest in starting a small business. These businesses would help bring money from outside the community and help keep the money circulating longer in Huslia. While small businesses create wealth-accumulation opportunities, they also readily operate within culturally established values and add to a sense of community.

Leading Entity: Tribal Council and TCC **perspective:** Economic Development Corporation

Strategy continued, Economy...

Actions:

- Be available to help by giving advice and connecting perspective business owners with specific people, programs, and/or loans.
- Have small business material available for people to browse at their leisure.
- Write a grant to have professional counselors from the minority business development center at TCC to come to Huslia and help individuals by giving professional advice, helping them write a business plan, and, if necessary, helping those ready fill out for a business loan.

Performance Indicators:

- Helping start at least two new businesses, which will be in business at least three years.

Status: Waiting for reply from grant submitted to EDA Fisheries disaster grant.

Quality of Life

Create a comprehensive community support system that promotes wellness, preserves our unique traditional cultural history, and decreases social risks.

Culture

The ultimate goal of the Huslia Tribal Council is to ensure the survival of our community and the preservation of our traditional way of life. Unfortunately, our traditional beliefs, practices, and language are decreasing in the face of mainstream American lifestyle. With the medical, technological and educational advances of the past six decades, and especially the last two decades, it has become increasingly difficult to practice and maintain a traditional lifestyle. While it is unreasonable to hope to completely return to the ways of the past, the traditional beliefs of our ancestors must never be forgotten.

Objective One: Safeguard subsistence lifestyle.

Students/youth will learn subsistence skills/lifestyle at a cultural camp.

Leading Entity: Tribal council, group/committee members, TFYS

Actions:

- Advertise and hold an initial meeting.
- Start a committee to support the project.
- Find funding for the cultural camp.
- Set up program.

Performance Indicators:

- Committee organized.
- Youth are able to demonstrate subsistence skills and knowledge of our traditional lifestyle.

Status: Hold an initial meeting to start a cultural committee and to brainstorm ideas for the camp.

Strategy continued, Quality of Life...

Objective Two: Teach the Native Language.

Our elders predict that the fourth generation of tribal members from them will not grow up with first-hand knowledge of our language. From a community survey done of 79% of the adult residents (122 of 156 available adults) surveyed between November of 1998 and June of 1999, the main cultural priority was to ensure the survival of our native language.

Leading entity: Tribal Council, community members, and Tanana Chiefs Conference.

Actions:

- Have a community meeting to brainstorm language learning activities.
- Establish a Cultural Education committee
- Teach the language for two months (July 19 to September 6, 1999) for all interested members from funding through TCC's Mentor Apprenticeship program. Teachers will be Lorna Vent and Gertie Esmailka.
- Explore having written ordinances.
- Continue having a native language class taught to high school students.
- Explore teaching the language to under age five, thus the native language would be also considered a first language instead of a second.

Performance Indicators:

- A Cultural Education committee is established.
- Residents, other than those who had Athabascan as a first language, are fluent in the language.
- Increased use of the native language from people of all ages.

Status: Gertie Esmailka and Lorna Vent are currently teaching the language class.

Objective Three: Document the histories, traditional knowledge, wisdom, and value of our elders and craft makers.

The Huslia Tribal Council would like the opportunity to actively protect and preserve our remaining cultural resources. The most important and fragile of these resources are our elders, many of whom are in their seventies and eighties, and one of our elders in 94 years old. Thus, the need to document their oral histories, traditional knowledge, wisdom, and values while the opportunity exists is immense.

Leading Entity: Tribal Council, perspective grant-writer and Cultural Preservation specialist

Actions:

- Submit a grant for a Cultural Preservation Specialist to document the collect and document the information.
- Establish the Cultural Preservation program office and personnel.
- Document the histories, traditional knowledge, wisdom and values of our elders and craft-makers.
- Compile the information into the cultural biographies of our elders and craft-makers.
- Devise and implement a system to properly protect the collected information.
- Disseminate the cultural biographies of our elders and craft-makers to village members.

Performance Indicators:

Strategy continued, Quality of life...

- Will have tangible documents in the form of a written compilation of historical biographies, an audio series and a video documentary for present and future generations use.
- Cultural Preservation Specialist will hold a presentation for the youth at the end of the project date.

Social

Status: The former Tribal grant-writer submitted a grant to the National Park Service in January of 1999 for the Cultural Preservation Specialist, but the grant was denied and the grant-writer has since resigned. Thus, the tribal council is now waiting for a new grant writer or some able authority to resubmit the grant.

From the community wellness survey and community meetings people indicated that they would like to see more community involvement and for a community socialization area for youth and adult alike to meet. Currently there is no such place for members socialize. We need to create a strong support system for youth and families to improve community cohesiveness and to decrease community problems, such as alcohol and drug abuse, domestic and child abuse, and suicide.

Objective one: More community gatherings

There is a low amount of social gatherings and activities available. To prevent unhealthy social behavior, such as alcohol and drug abuse, and to increase community cohesiveness a goal of ours is to have more community gatherings.

Leading entity: Initially: City and Tribal council,
Continuously: Community social committee, community members.

Actions:

- Establish a social wellness committee.
- Inform the community and gather volunteers.
- Find funding for programs.
- Have monthly meetings to discuss perspective activities.
- Work with younger children and those not yet involved.

Performance Indicators:

- More activities available for people of all ages.
- Increased number of people attending activities, measurable from sign in sheets.

Status: Need to establish a social wellness committee.

Objective two: Re-open the recreation center.

We have a recreation center, which was open to the public on a limited basis from funding through a suicide prevention grant, but the Tribal council has not applied for the grant since 1996, thus we have lost the social benefits and the building has not been used since.

Leading entity: City and Tribal council and community members.

Actions:

- Apply for funding to hire a suicide prevention worker and to pay for utilities for the building.
- Have a meeting to brainstorm ideas for ways to keep the recreation center open year round and self-

Strategy continued, Quality of Life...

Performance Indicators:

- Recreation Center is open and self-sustaining.

Status: Need to have a community meeting to discuss re-opening the recreation center.

Infrastructure

Objective One: Relocate the waste disposal area.

Relocate the waste disposal area to meet FAA approval in order to relocate the new airport cite.

Leading Entity: City and Village councils

Actions:

- Apply for funding with Village Safe Water.
- Write a master plan.
- City council, Koyitlotsina and the Village council work together on finding an acceptable cite.
- Apply for a State permit with the Department of Environmental Conservation.
- Hire temporary workers to build a new waste area and relocate the waste.

Performance Indicators:

- Waste disposal area relocated.

Status: City administrator is waiting until October, 1999 to apply for funding.

Objective Two: Relocate the airport.

Relocate the airport to provide room for expansion of our growing village and for our new water treatment plant and to protect members from accidents.

Leading Entity: City and Village councils and K'oyit'ots'ina corporation.

Actions:

- Relocate the waste disposal area.
- Get FAA approval.
- Select cite and find funding.
- Write a master plan.

Performance Indicators:

- FAA approval
- Airport relocated

Status: Waiting for waste disposal area to be relocated, but the project is currently up for bid for construction.

Objective Three: Create a new water plant and laundry-mat facility.

The current water facility is 25 years old. In 1998 24 new HUD homes were added to the water system. The water plant is not equipped to handle the current load. Our village is growing at a rate of 40 people every 10 years, and there is a shortage of houses to accommodate this growth. In 1999 alone there are five homes being built, which will need to be added to the water system. From a survey done of 122 of the 155 adult residents, 64

Strategy continued, Infrastructure...

people rated the water plant poor, 38 people rated it as good, 7 said unknown, and 2 considered it excellent. The water plant is too small, too old, and the water is rusty. In early spring and during heavy rains the walls in the laundry area leak, creating a large puddle on the floor. The bathroom sink doesn't work and even with daily cleaning there remains a moldy smell through-out the building.

Leading Entity: City and Village councils and Derek Garcia with Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium.

Actions:

- Write a master plan.
- Apply for funding.
- Find an acceptable cite.
- Build the water facility.

Performance Indicators:

- New water plant and laundry-mat is built.
- Water pressure and quality improves.

Status: Derek Garcia is working on the master plan.

Issues for Future Strategies:

1. New Health Clinic
2. Upgrade school and school water/sewer and boilers
3. Daycare Program
4. Renovate Community Building
5. Extend the Longlake Road
6. Resurface in town roads for dust abatement
7. Build storage for Tourism Project

Appendix

A. Community Wellness Survey Results

November 1998-June 1999

Number of Family members in the household surveyed?

# of people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
# of houses	23	15	13	15	7	2	3		1		1

Female	65 & Over	9	Education levels completed:	10	None
	51-64	6		10	Some 1-8
	35-50	28		1	Completed 1-8
	18-34	20		5	Some 8-12
	0-17	56		102	HS Graduate or GED
				16	Armed forces
				33	Some Higher Ed
				17	College Grad
				3	Other
Male	65 & Over	9	Current status:	10	Student
	51-64	13		48	Employed
	35-50	24		17	Unemployed
	18-34	27		27	Under-employed
	0-17	48		5	Not seeking work
			22	Retired	

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

What was it like in the past--good and bad?

Response from people:

65 & Over We lived in camps year round. Peaceful. We came together for Christmas and everybody was excited. There were no decorations, nothing too good, but we were excited about being together. Store would support the whole town. Not much teeth decay. Country was alive with animals--now we have to go for days for trapping. There were mainly rabbits, no moose or caribou. People worked together and shared. Washed clothes with a wash board. "Long ago was better. Easier living now, but before it was good to work" (18A). No drink, smoke, or drugs, just food.

"Babies use to die like nothing" (1). Lots of death from diseases, not from accidents and suicides. Hard to get planes here in 40s and 50s and it was hard to go to Tanana for medical care. Eisenhower was not good to us in the 40s and 50s. In the 60s kids started drinking and smoking. I had no family, only a mother, so I had to get married off early. People went hungry. At Cut-off there was no school and men worked away from families.

Wasn't much extra and kids had worn out, patched clothes. Kids worked. Women worked lots too; they made everything and got little from the store. We used all fur clothes--hair inside and out. Kids obeyed parents and didn't forget anything. We snared ptarmigan, made net & hooks (it wasn't hard to a make fishnet) got ice for water, washed diapers, and at nights we sewed and worked on skins, there wasn't much story telling. Fished on the Yukon in the summer and came up the Koyukuk in August for fall and winter camp. In January we went to upper cabins for beaver trapping. We followed the food--everybody had their own spot. Stayed in tent insulated with moss and heated with a yukon stove. No moose until in the 1930s. Had dog teams year round. "Use to trap in 40-50 below weather. My mom cut fish up to the time I was born. Last time we lived in spring camp was 1952. There was lots of chicken, ptarmigan and rabbit" (17B).

Before there was not much stuff to trade. We had good trapping and it was the only way to make a living. Have to pay for everything with money now, while there was no money before. \$20 now is equal to \$1 then. We were able to buy staples and we had lots of meat. Made enough money to pay credit and buy more supplies. In 1940s people started working for wages. Agree to food stamp now, land is too small. Money use to really stretch--30 gallons of gas lasted all summer. There were no bills and we paid with cash. We now have energy assistance and social security. In 1960 I started selling sewing--boots for \$30. "Had to work hard for my money, now money just comes in free" (56A&B).

51-64 "We are losing our culture. People say we have to hang on to our culture, but eventually we're going to lose it. Culture means nothing without our Athabaskan language. We never speak our language with our kids" (5B). People use to be out more camping. People were happier before, there was a spring in their step, they'd say hello, now people avoid one another. Snow mobiles came in '68 or '69. We worked for what we had and appreciate time to play--we didn't need booze to play. There was no