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Project to Increase Accessibility of Community Data Will Also Save Time and Money

State of Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs team wins international award for Geographic Information Systems (GIS) project that streamlines data

July 13, 2018 ANCHORAGE – A multi-year project modernizing the database system for processing information vital Alaska communities – including regional taxes, demographic data, climate change, and a wealth of other information – landed the Alaska Division of Community and Regional Affairs (DCRA) a prestigious [Special Achievement in GIS Award](#) at the 2018 Esri User Conference in San Diego, CA.

DCRA collects, verifies, and makes available community data to support local government development, community planning, local capacity building, maintenance of state and federal investments in rural infrastructure, and rural policy development. In early 2016, the division examined its existing database, current data collection needs, and demand for access from Alaskans—the needs of Alaska had outgrown the existing system. Historical data wasn't available online, only some data could be downloaded, and when it could be, it was only available in limited report form.

With a focus on providing timely and meaningful data to Alaskans, as well as streamlining and gaining efficiencies from what was a time-intensive process, DCRA started revamping everything from data collection to storage. In addition, they began developing interactive maps, new downloadable datasets, and adding historical information to better serve Alaskans. Their effort will culminate in the release of a new Community Database Online later this year; already, some features are available at DCCED.maps.arcgis.com.

“DCRA's community database gives Alaska SBDC [Small Business Development Center] advisors the insight and data they need to provide business assistance and trainings tailored to the specific economic and geographic realities in the more than 75 communities across Alaska that we serve every year,” said Jon Bittner, executive director of the Alaska Small Business Development Center. “It is an invaluable resource to anyone working in rural and remote communities across the state.”

The DCRA team—consisting of Katherine Eldemar, Melissa Taylor, Manjula Boyina, Grace Beaujean, Jade Bickmore, Ron Brown, Emma Hatcher, Marty McGee, George Plumley, Paul Strickler, and Lorence Williams—was one of just 175 chosen from more than 100,000 Esri clients worldwide, in recognition of their innovative use of

GIS to collect data, extrapolate it, make informed decisions, and effect change. Award winners are personally selected by Esri president and founder, Jack Dangermond.

"I am so proud of our team's ability to innovate and enhance our database making it more useful for policy and decision makers. It an extraordinary success for DCRA, the state, and Alaskans," said Katherine Eldemar, director of the Division of Community and Regional Affairs. "This award is an honor to receive and it and reflects the very positive can-do teamwork approach here at DCRA."

DCRA was also featured in the Summer 2017 edition of *ArcUser*, a high-profile GIS focused magazine with over half a million copies in print and circulation across the globe. Additionally, it was named the International Association of Assessing Officer's Member of the Month in June of 2018.

As mandated in Article 10, Section 14 of the Alaska Constitution, DCRA advises and assists local governments to maintain vital services through training, grant management, and technical and fiscal support. The division is housed within the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, which is tasked with promoting a healthy economy, supporting strong communities, and protecting consumers in Alaska. For information about the Division of Community and Regional Affairs, visit commerce.alaska.gov/web/dcra. For information about DCCED and its other agencies, visit commerce.alaska.gov.

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ATTACHED: photo including members of the award-wining DCRA team

(back row, left to right): George Plumley, Ron Brown, Paul Strickler, Lorence Williams

(front row, left to right): Manjula Boyina, Grace Beaujean, Jade Bickmore

photo from award ceremony (left to right): George Plumley, Jade Bickmore, Katherine Eldemar