



Director's Quarterly

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

Summer Edition

June 2015

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Northern Region Director David Miller has been with the department since 2013, serving as Maintenance and Operations Director until this spring. He has over 35 years of maintenance, operations and construction experience in the public and private sectors.



It is easy to lose perspective in the midst of the roller-coaster ride we have been on for the past few months. Who would have thought that all State of Alaska employees would receive layoff notices? In spite of all the background noise, Northern Region and DOT&PF as a whole continue to Keep Alaska Moving.

Design and Preconstruction are on track to successfully obligate over

\$282 million in projects by the end of September 2015. This season, Construction is working on \$350 million in projects, the highest dollar value amount of construction in this region's history. Maintenance and Operations is working through a budget decrease that greatly impacts them, yet they are still getting road maintenance done despite the challenges caused by last fall's heavy rain. Through all of this, the

entire department worked together to respond to the Dalton spring flood in an efficient and competent manner.

As we continue to navigate these difficult times, do not lose sight of all the good things we are accomplishing for the citizens and the State of Alaska. Have a safe July 4 holiday, and save the fireworks for New Year's!

— David

BUDGET CUTS

As part of Alaska's fiscal crisis, the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) faces a 16 percent cut to its budget. Below is an overview of what that means to Northern Region and what effect this will have on the services the department provides.

Question: Where are the cuts?

Answer: Most of our construction projects are funded with federal dollars, so this means state budget cuts mostly impact our Maintenance and Operations (M&O) section. This section is responsible for all facets of road and building maintenance, including but not limited to brush cutting, street sweeping, snow plowing, and carpentry, electrical and plumbing repairs to facilities. On a general level, the funding cuts will result in a reduction in the level of service provided and a slower response time.

The region's submitted FY16 operating budget of \$93,744,900 includes the loss of 23 positions total, 17 of which come out of the M&O section. The loss of funding and those positions will result in service level cuts across the board.

Q: When will I see the impacts of these cuts?

A: The impact to levels of service will be most noticeable during the winter, because funding for winter maintenance activities mostly comes from the state's General Fund. The majority of the M&O section's summer work is funded with federal dollars, so cutbacks aren't as visible now.



In Northern Region, the effects of this year's budget cuts will be most evident this winter.

The federal Preventive Maintenance (PM) program coupled with Deferred Maintenance (DM) funds help fuel the section's summer work. The PM program covers patching, striping and other roadway maintenance, while DM funds help with brush cutting. DM money also helps the department with airport maintenance, such as runway lighting and applying dust palliatives to runways, among other things.

The M&O section's winter work is funded mainly through the General Fund, so state budget cuts

will affect these activities more. Two-thirds of the region's M&O General Fund budget is spent from October-May. The budget cuts will reduce the level of service M&O staff can provide. This means that during the winter, residents can expect less sanding and plowing. The cuts also mean less overtime, which can cut into response during a major storm.

Q: What about future cuts?

A: Potential future cuts may result in the closures of entire maintenance camps. Such a move would drastically affect levels of service.

FOX SPRING

As the region's Maintenance and Operations section explores ways to reduce its costs, one option it is pursuing is transferring maintenance of Fox spring.

The department purchased the 2-acre parcel containing Fox spring in 1966 for \$4,700 as part of the Elliott Highway expansion. At that time, it was a free-flowing natural fresh water spring. The spring dried up in 1980, and since then, the department has repeatedly applied resources to keep the water flowing artificially. The spring has evolved into a complex and highly regulated public water system.

The water system costs the state about \$50,000 annually to maintain. This figure includes certifying and maintaining an employee's Department of Environmental Conservation operator certification, sampling and testing, electrical power, necessary repairs, winter steaming



The Fox spring water system costs the state \$50,000 annually to maintain.

and ice chipping, vandalism repair and litter pickup.

There have never been any operating funds for Fox spring. To keep the facility open, DOT&PF has repeatedly diverted funding intended for other buildings and roads.

Projected operational costs are prohibitively high because the well is going dry, so capital improvements will be required. Projections have the well going dry, possibly as early as this summer. The apparent solution is to drill a new, deeper well and upgrade systems, but there is no confidence a deeper well will provide the same

quality water. Any change in quality will likely require water treatment.

Our plan to transition the department away from maintaining Fox spring does not necessarily mean the spring will close. We are exploring options for keeping the facility open. Here are the steps required for that process. We currently are in the public comment period in step 2.

1) The DOT&PF Right-of-Way office provides notice of the department's intent to transfer maintenance of Fox spring. This notice was posted June 14 on the State of Alaska Online Public Notices website at <http://bit.ly/1BjPNvf> and in the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner. Copies of this notice also were put up at the Fox spring facility.

2) Once all parties have been notified, a 30-day public comment period follows. Comments can be emailed to kevin.smith@alaska.gov through July 15. We also are accepting comments during that time on our online open house at adotpf.mysidewalk.com.

3) The department would then contact public agencies to give them the opportunity to take over the property at no cost.

4) We would offer first right of refusal to adjoining property owners to purchase the property at fair market value, based on an appraisal.

5) We would then move to an open market sale.

6) If the property does not sell, then Fox spring could possibly close.

While we understand the importance of this spring to the community, we can no longer afford to maintain it. We ask for your support as we look at other options to keep it open.

To learn more about Fox spring, visit <http://dot.alaska.gov/nreg/foxspring/> or attend our upcoming public meeting, where we will give a background of the spring and provide an overview of the transition process. The meeting will be 4-6 p.m. July 6 at Noel Wien Library in Fairbanks.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

This month, after a nearly two-year effort, Northern Region closed on an Energy Efficiency Loan as part of its Facilities Energy Upgrades project.

This effort was spearheaded by Regional Building Maintenance Manager Steve Meierotto, with help from Northern Region staff, DOT&PF Statewide Public Facilities, DOT&PF Administrative Services Division, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, Alaska Office of Management and Budget, and the Alaska Attorney General’s Office.

The project aims to improve the energy efficiency of maintenance station buildings. The project includes upgraded building envelope, insulation, replacing inefficient and failing equipment. Deferred maintenance and capital difficult to obtain for these improvements, which made this loan necessary.

The \$3.5 million project includes energy retrofits at 17 facilities throughout Northern Region, primarily in Fairbanks, Tazlina district and St. Mary’s. The targeted improvements will reduce energy consumption significantly. These improvements will save the department more than \$240,000 annually in operating costs.

The project also will improve building infrastructure, improve employee morale and create operational efficiencies.

RAIN IMPACTS

The record-breaking rain last summer and fall had a significant impact on breakup this year. This spring, roads throughout the Interior and other areas in Northern Region saw a larger degree of soft spots and blowouts, which are areas where saturation of the subsurface combined with quick thawing cause the road to break up.

On the Steese Highway past Central, Miles 130-160 experienced damage from the water. The Elliott Highway was hit particularly hard from Fairbanks to Manley, which caused severe conditions in late spring. On the Dalton Highway, the most significant effect of last year’s rain was seen south of Deadhorse, where aufeis and flooding closed the road multiple times this spring.

One challenge with breakup after such a wet year is that staff can’t respond immediately. The water saturation creates muddy conditions. To let the road heal, we have to allow saturated spots to dry out before working on them.

Another issue with having so many areas damaged by the excess water is that we can’t just do large dig-outs for every spot. Reconstructing the road for each is cost prohibitive. Because of that, we need to patch throughout the summer and as budget allows.



Last year’s rainfall led to a messy breakup on many roads.

DENALI AWARDS



From left: Shad Parker, Johnny Frison, Tom Howarth, Bill Giltner, Robert Dunning, Dennis Bishop, Glen Marunde, Steve Potter and Steve Meierotto

In May, six individuals and teams from DOT&PF Northern Region received honors at the Governor’s Denali Peak Performance Awards. One individual and one team won their respective categories, while the other honorees received honorable mentions.

Below is a list of the recipients. We thank all of them for the incredible work they do for the state of Alaska.

- **Winner of the Exceptional Performance Award – Individual: William Giltner,** Maintenance Specialist Electrician. Nicknamed “The Machine,” Giltner is an unstoppable force when it comes to tough, extremely remote bush airport electrical repairs. In one year, Giltner nearly single-handedly reduced Northern Region’s backlog of remote airport lighting repairs.
- **Winner of the Crisis Responders Award – Team: Valdez Avalanche Fighters.** In January 2014, multiple major avalanches covered thousands of feet of the Richardson Highway in snow 40 to 100 feet deep and dammed up the Lowe River creating a lake more than a half-mile long and 30 feet deep. The team worked tirelessly in a dangerous environment, day and night to remove the snow and reopen the highway.

Team Valdez Avalanche Fighters includes Robert Edgett, Philip Price, James Sparks, Dillon Burnett, Jeffrey

Town, Clayton Kramer, Andrew Shidner, David Wiley, Jason Breivogel, Anthony Knutson, Benjamin Ables, Dwight Dietrich, Stuart Brown, Lonnie Fleming, Jake Remme, MoAnna Hollers, Robert Dunning, Mark Hanson, Darren Reese and Peter Carter.

The following employees and teams received honorable mentions:

- **Innovation in Cost-Saving – Individual: John Frison,** Fairbanks International Airport mechanic
- **Exceptional Performance – Individual: Shad Parker,** Design and Engineering Services driller
- **Exceptional Performance – Team Kantishna,** which included Tom Howarth, Donald Holum, Harold Mowery, Caleb Holum
- **Exceptional Performance – Team Tok District Patch Crew,** which included Norman Gallen, Glen Marunde, Mike James, Steve James, Ted Roach, Francis Carbon, Bob Brooks, John Olding, John Birke, Henry Brinkman, Mark Sakalaskas, Charlie Lamphear, Justin Reetz, Doug Pine, Robert Hanson, Darryl Ueeck, Nick Herman, Eric Child, Dave McCombs, Wade Harbison, Michael Coon, Cody Omta, Wade Heller, Chester McCain, Pete Weidner, Chris York, Cindy Gowins and Jeff Summar

DALTON HIGHWAY SPRING FLOODING



This spring, the department battled massive flooding on the Dalton Highway. Two separate events led to multiple closures of the road, south of Deadhorse.

The reopening of the highway June 5 marked a milestone for the department, which had been handling the Dalton flood response since the initial overflow problems in March.

The cost of this spring’s emergency response totaled \$15.5 million.

Throughout the two-and-a-half-month response effort, the department coordinated with industry representatives and stakeholders, including the Alaska Trucking Association, BP Alaska, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil, ENI Petroleum,

North Slope Borough, Lynden Transport, Carlisle, Peak Oilfield Services, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company and others.

The reopening does not mean an end to repairs and other work on the highway from Miles 392-414. While the initial emergency repairs have been finished, this summer’s planned construction project between Miles 397-414, which will raise the grade of the road 3-7 feet and install culverts. That project is being constructed by Brice with an initial contract cost of \$27 million; a supplemental agreement is still being finalized for work beyond the original contract. Other projects currently in design will address the road south of Mile 392.