

Noatak Experimenting in Energy Saving : Converting to wood fuel

Residents of Noatak, 55 miles north of Kotzebue, are beginning an experiment in energy saving.

With a \$225,000 grant to their Northwest Arctic School District from the Alaska Power Authority they are planning to heat a new elementary school with a wood-fired boiler.

If funding is sufficient, a similar system in an existing junior high will be converted to wood from more traditional fuel oil.

State officials suggest the project will create jobs and they note that reforestation where trees are to be cut is part of the program.

Overall goals are to demonstrate the feasibility of widespread conversion of fuel-oil fired systems to wood, to conserve fossil fuels, to reduce or stabilize the operating cost of the elementary school and to create local employment.

Residents of Noatak who harvest wood with chain saws and deliver it by snow machine and sled at the present time realize \$125 per cord, according to Bob Knolls of Mauneluk Association, the non-profit corporation in the region. That figure translates into fuel oil at \$1.13 per gallon.

Since fuel oil now costs \$2.00 a gallon in Noatak, the savings to the school district from using

a wood-fired system in the elementary school could be more than \$20,000 a year.

The creation of jobs is a priority of the project, also, since there is almost no employment in Noatak during late winter and early spring, the time of year when subsistence activities are at a lull.

Officials suggest the harvesting of 300 cords of wood, the amount necessary to maintain a wood-fired boiler during the school year, could create \$37,000 in labor-intensive business activity for Noatak.

Finally, the U.S. Forest Service in cooperation with the

Bureau of Indian Affairs and NANA Regional Corporation has given approval to the project, noting that replenishable cuts of adequate volume could be supported in the general area near the villages of Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk, Kiana, Selawik, and Noatak.