

Tanacross Decides to Move

The village of Tanacross, 11 miles north of Tok on the Tanana River, has decided to move.

Trapped by the Tanana River washing out the riverbank on one side of town and moving into an old river channel on the other side of town, the present village is cut off from the outside world during those times when the river is impassable.

Tanacross is separated from the Alaska Highway by the river. The village council decided three months ago to move the 27 homes of the village to a location on the highway side of the river. The move will lead to several important benefits to the village residents.

First, moving the village will provide better educational opportunities for village children. At present, the children of Tanacross attend school at a former BIA school, now operated by

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the State, west of the village.

High school students must cross the river to meet the bus which takes them to school in Tok.

During the breakup and freezeup of the river, the children cannot attend school. Also, accidents with the boats which carry village residents across the river have resulted in near tragedies.

Villagers fear a boat accident in the future might cost the lives of some of their children.

With the village located on the South side of the river, all of the village children could be bussed to school in Tok.

Those residents of Tanacross who hold jobs at the present time work in Tok. Moving the village will enable more residents to work in Tok, and perhaps enable the village to open a gas station or other roadside facility on the highway.

This would provide more jobs for the villagers, most of whom now live off the land. They would also have access to the large airport located on the highway side of the river.

Most of the buildings in Tanacross are in need of repair or rebuilding in the very near future. A move at this time, villagers assume, will enable all of the work to be done at once.

"Moving a village is not something which can be done overnight," explained Bureau of Indian Affairs Field Administrator Wally Craig, who will travel to Tanacross later this month to discuss the move with the village council.

"There are many factors which have to be considered," he said. "Land, water, sewage, education, transportation (both air and land), housing, economic opportunities, and power are all considerations which must be planned for."

Mr. Craig expected to use the experience the Bureau and other agencies had gained in Minto to plan the Tanacross

move.

Some time early in 1971, the village will probably invite representatives of the many federal and state agencies which would be involved in their move to Tanacross—to discuss the plans necessary to make the move a reality.

To start, the village will probably apply to the Alaska State Housing Authority (ASHA) and the BIA for housing funds.

The land the village expects to move to is presently claimed by the State, but has been under dispute by the village for many years. The village council of Tanacross has received assurance from the State that the land would either be turned over to the village or returned to the Bureau of Land Management for Tanacross to register as a townsite.

Other agencies have already been consulted for their aid in the village move.

Four active cases of tuberculosis among the 135 to 140 residents of the village are said to have resulted from the crowded conditions and inadequate sewage facilities.

The Public Health Service is considering funding a joint water and sewage project for the new village. The planned location for the new village of Tanacross includes some old sewage lines, which might be reopened if they are usable.

If the village moves, the State Operated School will be closed. Mr. Craig, who still retains title to the school building for the BIA, plans to turn the title for the old building over to the village of Tanacross. It would be available then, for use as a hunting lodge or other facility.

"This is an opportunity to show how state and federal agencies can work with a community in helping them to accomplish their aims," said Mr. Craig. "We hope it can be accomplished with more cooperation and more positively than it was in Minto."