

# DEC budget targets rural environment

**by Jennifer Gordon**  
Tundra Times reporter

The Department of Environmental Conservation may receive more than \$18 million from the state if the governor's Fiscal Year 1990 budget is accepted by the Legislature; \$2.8 million more than in FY '89.

The Division of Environmental

Quality's Rural Health and Environment project was given top priority in a funding request sent to the governor by DEC Commissioner Dennis Kelso. The governor has budgeted \$1 million for the project.

Larry Dietrick, director of the Division of Environmental Quality, said that the disparity between rural and ur-

ban is too big. He said DEC is trying to correct key public health problems in rural Alaska.

"The need here is real," Dietrick said of rural Alaska's environment. He said he is optimistic that the Legislature will allow the funding for rural cleanup to remain intact.

Dietrick said there are a lot of

legitimate reasons why Environmental Quality needs more funding. Hepatitis has been increasingly prevalent in rural Alaska. Safe water will be a top priority, he said, with sewage disposal, solid waste disposal and hazardous waste cleanup following accordingly.

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The request calls for field officers to be assigned in four areas of the state to handle rural sanitation problems. Three of the areas, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Chain and Kodiak Island, would each receive a full-time field officer and a part-time clerical person. The fourth area, Prince of Wales Island, would have a seasonal field officer based from the existing Ketchikan office.

In addition to the four new field officers, more than nine field officers and two clerical personnel would be added to the three regional offices to travel to rural villages to assist them with health, sanitation and environmental problems.

Glenn Miller, state manager of the Solid Waste program, said that effects from the extra budgeting in Rural Health and Environment could be seen as soon as July 1, when funding will

be given to DEC. He said it will probably be into the fall before the new field offices open. Miller said the Solid Waste program alone could receive as much as \$250,000.

Miller said the funding would enable field officers to concentrate on the areas that need help, instead of being divided between many jobs.

Ernie Piper, special assistant to Gov. Steve Cowper, said the governor has been very concerned with environmental quality in rural villages and realizes that action must be taken to solve these problems.

Piper said that even though many legislators may be upset with the governor's budget proposals, they know how strongly he supports environmental quality.

While the extra funding will be able to help a few rural areas, Piper said there is never enough funding for the problem. DEC is, however, trying to do more and more with what they have, he said.