

OVERVIEW OF THE 2013 RIVER WATCH



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What is River Watch?

Each year, the State of Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) and the National Weather Service (NWS) separately fund a joint program to provide advance and emergency notification of imminent snowmelt and ice jam flooding to 76 Alaska villages, boroughs, and tribal councils. This program is known as **River Watch**.

Why the River Watch Program Exists

- To reduce the impact to communities from ice jam flooding.
- To inform communities of threats and provide them with ways to protect themselves.
- Because significant flooding in major river systems is not new to Alaska. Since 1977, flooding caused by ice jams has occurred 24 times.
- And since 1978, the State of Alaska has spent over 98 million dollars in assistance due to ice jam flooding.

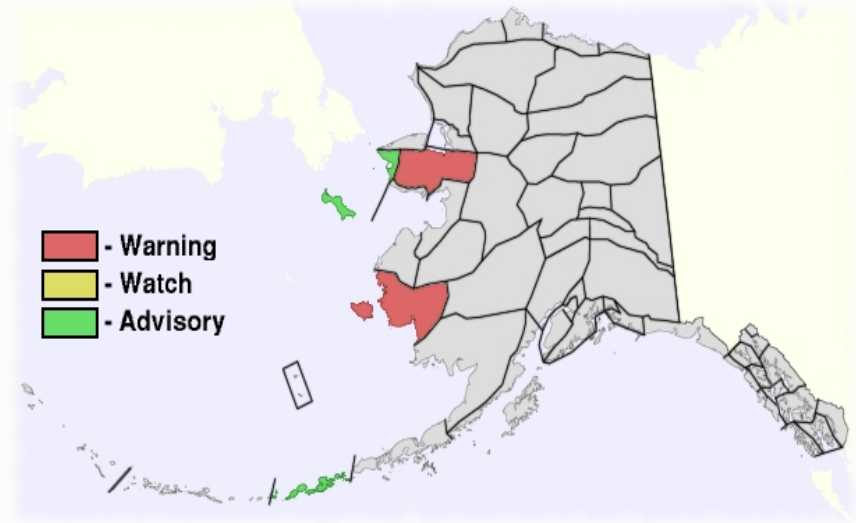
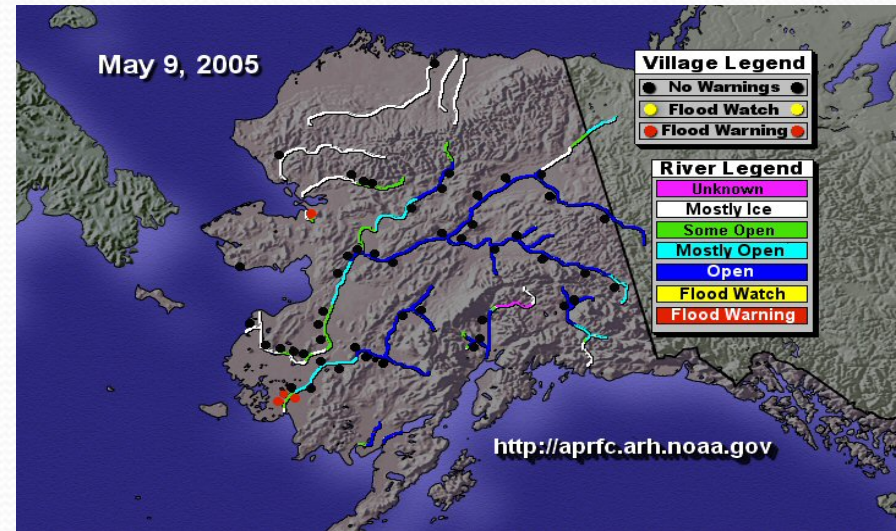
Field Observations

- The primary source of river stage and ice jam conditions is provided by village observers and local pilots.
- NWS contacts observers in several river villages for daily reports. These reports are also provided to DHS&EM for planning.



NWS Weather Projections

- Based on village reports, river stage gauge data, and climate modeling, the NWS issues regular projections.
- DHS&EM monitors two main projection: river ice conditions (top right) and statewide weather and flood information (bottom right).
- Portions of the State with significant weather are color-coded to assign the appropriate threat level.



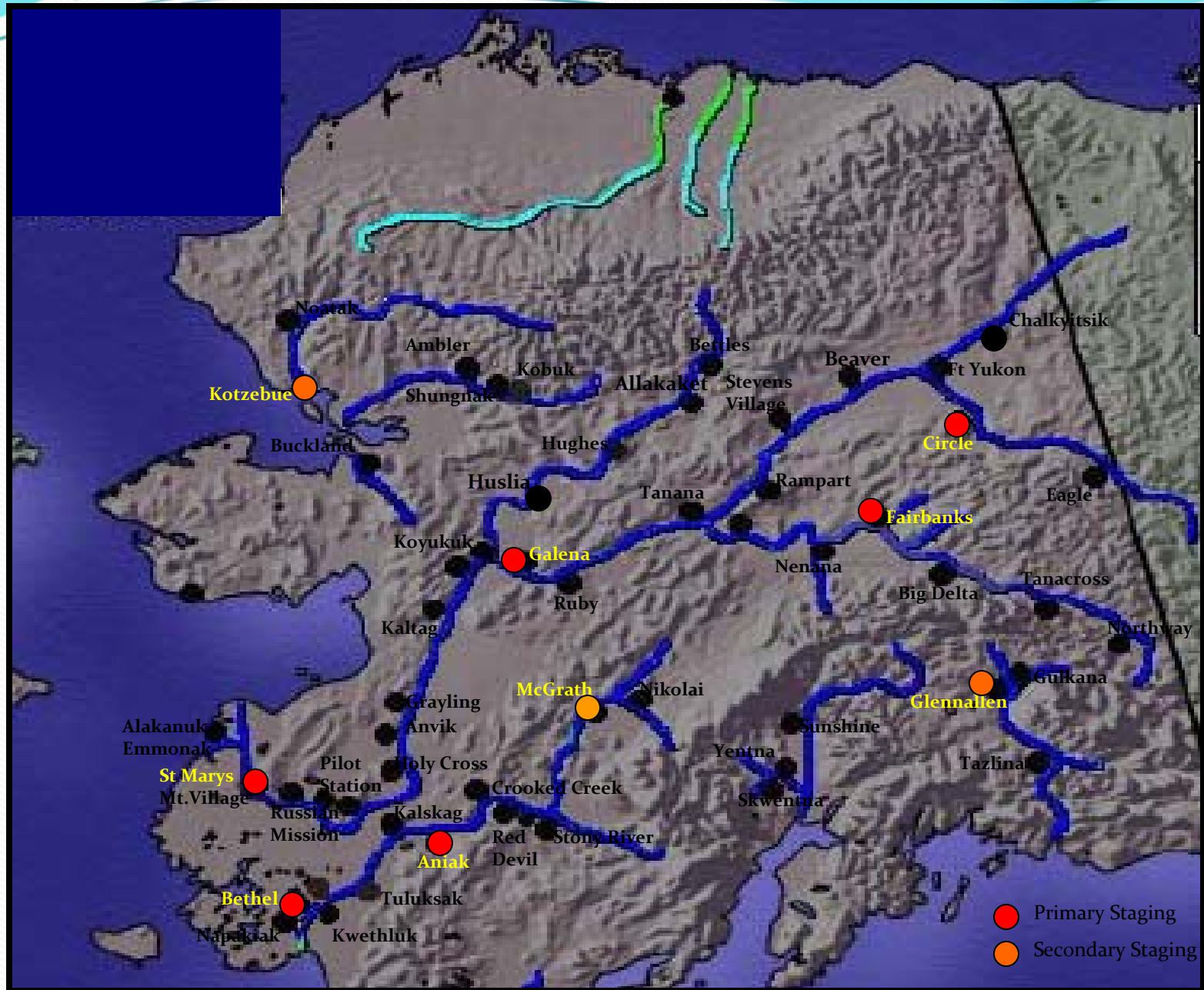
How Does the River Watch Field Program Begin?

- Once ice deterioration begins, personnel from DHS&EM and APRFC normally deploy to monitor the rivers, prepare communities, warn of impending flooding and advise community leaders on emergency management issues.
- Two field teams are normally deployed:
 - The Yukon River team is based initially out of Fort Yukon, Circle, or Fairbanks, and moves downriver to Galena then to St. Mary's as the river breaks up.
 - The Kuskokwim River team is based initially out of McGrath or Aniak, and ends up in Bethel if necessary.

Which Rivers are Flown?

- **ALWAYS - Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers.** These two river systems are normally flown to some degree each year because they together have the highest percentage (63%) and greatest likelihood for ice jam flooding, and because potentially dangerous conditions may develop and go unnoticed due to the vast uninhabited areas which separate the river communities).
- **SOMETIMES - Tanana, Koyokuk, Chena, and their tributaries.** These river systems are normally monitored from Anchorage and/or Fairbanks unless local observations or NWS projections identify a flood threat.

Staging Locations



Contact with the Local Community

- When not in the air, the teams visit communities to provide face-to-face contact, compare current river ice information with historical accounts, and advise local officials on ways to lessen future damages should flooding continue.
- Whenever a risk arises, warnings and other information are provided to the community via local marine-band radio or through public radio interviews.



Ice Jam Flooding on
Kuskokwim
River at Aniak





Kwethluk
May 2005



Eagle 2009

To Follow River Watch or Report an Observation

- Log on to:

<http://aprfc.arh.noaa.gov/>

Or

www.ready.alaska.gov

You can call the APRFC at 1-800-847-1739 to
report ice conditions

Any Questions about River Watch?

