A black and white photograph of a forest landscape. In the foreground, there are several tall, thin evergreen trees. In the middle ground, a calm lake reflects the sky. In the background, there are rolling mountains under a sky with scattered clouds. The overall scene is serene and natural.

# **Mentasta**

## **Comprehensive Plan**

*Prepared for:*  
**Native Village of Mentasta**  
**and**  
**Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium**

*Prepared by:*  
**ASCG Incorporated**

**April 2006**



**Table of Contents**

I. Vision..... 1  
II. Community Involvement & Participation Process..... 1  
II. Community Involvement & Participation Process..... 2  
III. Community Goals and Objectives ..... 4  
IV. Background..... 5  
    Location and Climate..... 5  
    History, Culture and Demographics ..... 6  
    Economy ..... 7  
    Soils and Topography ..... 7  
    Infrastructure..... 9  
V. Land Use ..... 13  
    Future Land Use Needs..... 13  
    Right-of-Way and Road Ownership ..... 13  
VI. Government ..... 17  
VII. Implementation..... 19  
    Development Project List ..... 19  
    Funding ..... 20

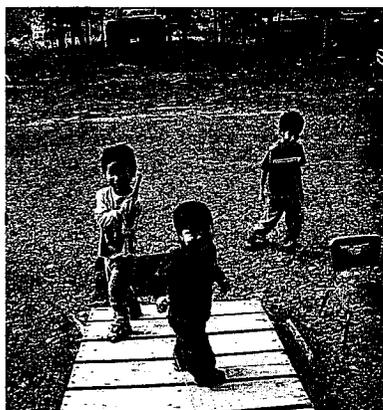
**Table of Figures**

Figure 1 Existing and Future Land Uses..... 15  
Figure 2 Land Ownership ..... 16

## **I. Vision**



*Katie John,  
Mentasta Elder and Visionary*



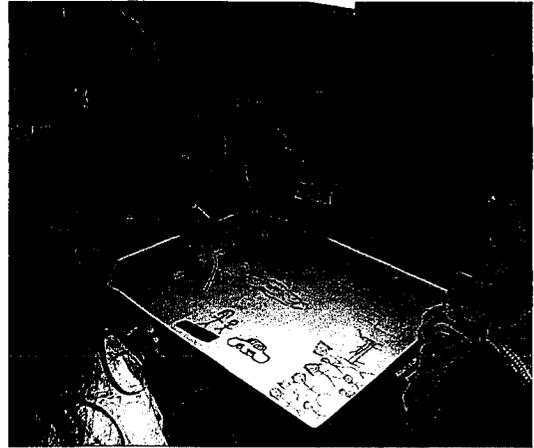
*Mentasta Children*

### **MENTASTA COMMUNITY VISION**

To preserve the Tribal sovereignty, common customs, subsistence rights, language and land of the Taa'tl'aa Deneay people through adaptability and self determination.

## II. Community Involvement & Participation Process

A public meetings was held in Mentasta and several other coordination meetings took place with the Tribal Administrator during the development of this plan. The Tribe held the first public meeting on August 22, 2005. Approximately 21 people attended. The planning process was described and participants were asked to draw the things they liked to do in Mentasta and to describe their favorite places to go. Next, the project list from the previous planning efforts was reviewed and updated. Those in attendance described the project priorities and drew their locations on maps provided.



*Residents of Mentasta at the public meeting*

At the public meeting the audience broke into three groups to respond to the following prompts.

*Name 5 of your favorite places to go.*

Slana River	Steam bath	Muskrat Camp
Bone Creek	Blueville	Mountain
Fish Creek	Poker House	Batzulneta's Culture
Mentasta Lake	Smoke House	Camp
Mentasta Office	Jack Creek	

*Name 5 favorite things to do.*

Moose Hunting	Playing baseball and	Gardening
Fishing	basketball	Cook outs
Berry picking	Steam house	Spear fishing
Mountain climbing	Boating	
Snow machine riding	Biking	

*Name 5 future high priority projects.*

- Housing/Sawmill (family growing Track D needs a road.)
- Tourism-Eco Building/Museum (way to acquire funds to pay for the other projects close to road).
- Mini Mall/Gas Station
- Fire Line (protection to survive fire around the village).
- Community Garden/Greenhouse (for the health of the community and big enough to provide for everyone - location at Lot 3).
- Single Family Units built near the apartments.

- Multipurpose Building (includes museum, gift shop, fitness room, gym, cultural Center).
- Elder Care Facility
- New Clinic with all of the following:

Mental Health Room	Dental
Classroom for Health & Mental	Education
Resource Room (computer, Lab, and TV)	Physical Therapy Room
2 exam rooms	Reception and waiting room
Men's & Women's Restrooms	Kitchen
File Room & Chart Room	

### **III. Community Goals and Objectives**

Based on input from community involvement and past planning efforts the following goals and objectives were developed to help guide the plan.

#### **For the purposes of this Community Plan:**

- A goal is defined as a broad statement of a desired result.
- An objective is more specific and easier to measure than a goal.

*Goal 1: To continue to promote a healthy community*

Objective 1.1. Educate our Tribal members about health issues.

Objective 1.2 Upgrade our present health care services and clinic.

*Goal 2: To meet all our current and future housing and infrastructure needs.*

Objective 2.1. Inventory our current and future housing and infrastructure needs.

Objective 2.2. Apply for funds to design and construct housing, a multipurpose center and other infrastructure as outlined in our community plan.

*Goal 3: To do all we can to preserve our culture.*

Objective 3.1. Educate our youth in our traditional ways.

*Goal 4: To become a self-sustaining community while continuing to practice our subsistence way of life.*

Objective 4.1. Explore alternative economic development projects.

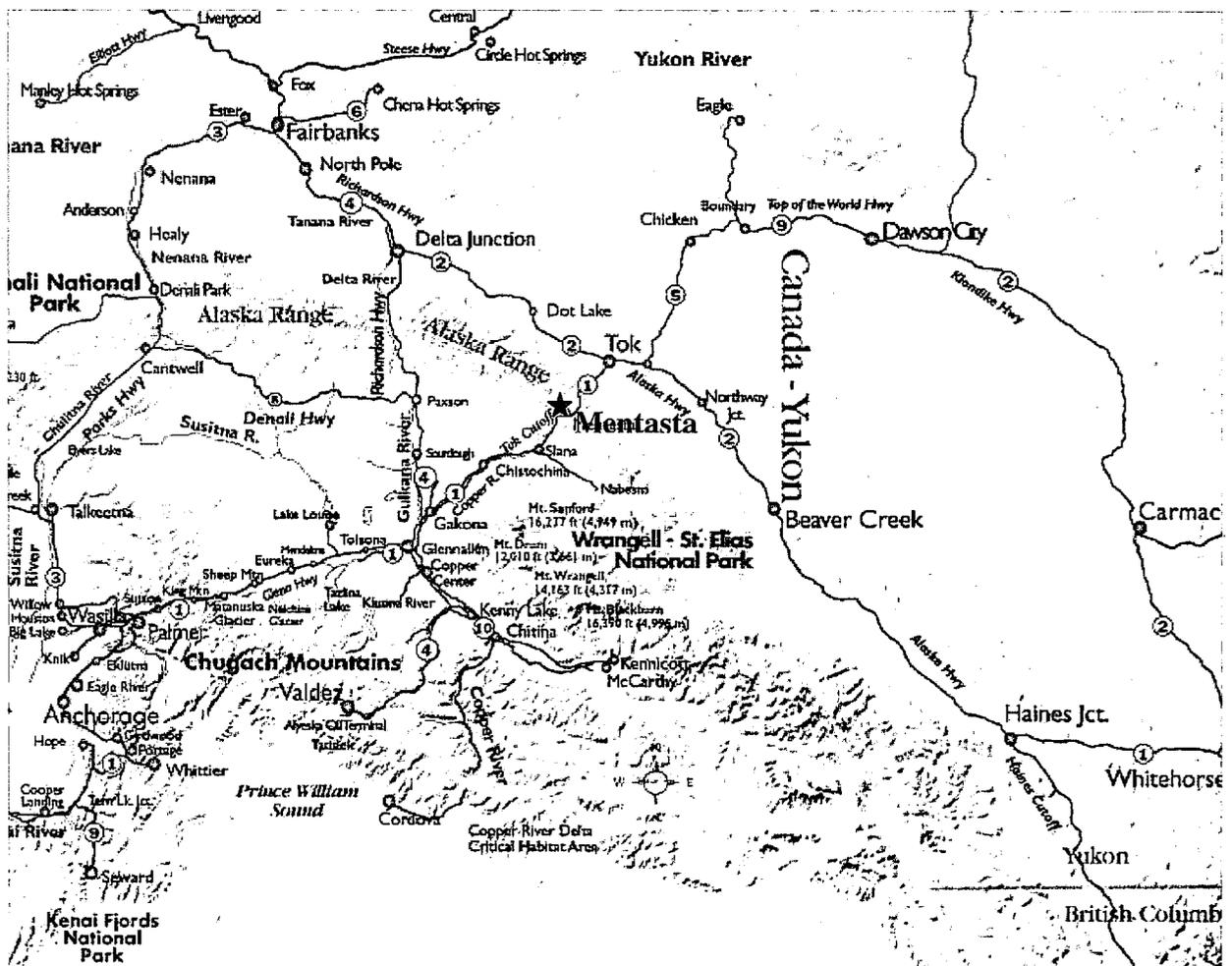
## IV. Background

### Location and Climate

The village of Mentasta is located near the west shore of Mentasta Lake, southwest of where the Tok Cutoff Highway leaves the Glenn Highway. The community lies at approximately 62 degrees 54 minutes North Latitude, 143 degrees 45 minutes West Longitude. (Sec. 07, T013N, R009E, Copper River Meridian.) Mentasta is located in the Chitina Recording District. The area encompasses 303.1 square miles of land and 2.0 square miles of water.

Mentasta has a year-round access road to the major regional and economic centers in the Interior and South Central Alaska. Fairbanks is approximately 256 miles to the northwest and Anchorage is 290 miles to the southwest.

Mentasta lies within the Continental Climatic Zone of Alaska. This zone is characterized by generally light surface winds, low precipitation, low cloudiness, long cold winters, and short warm summers.



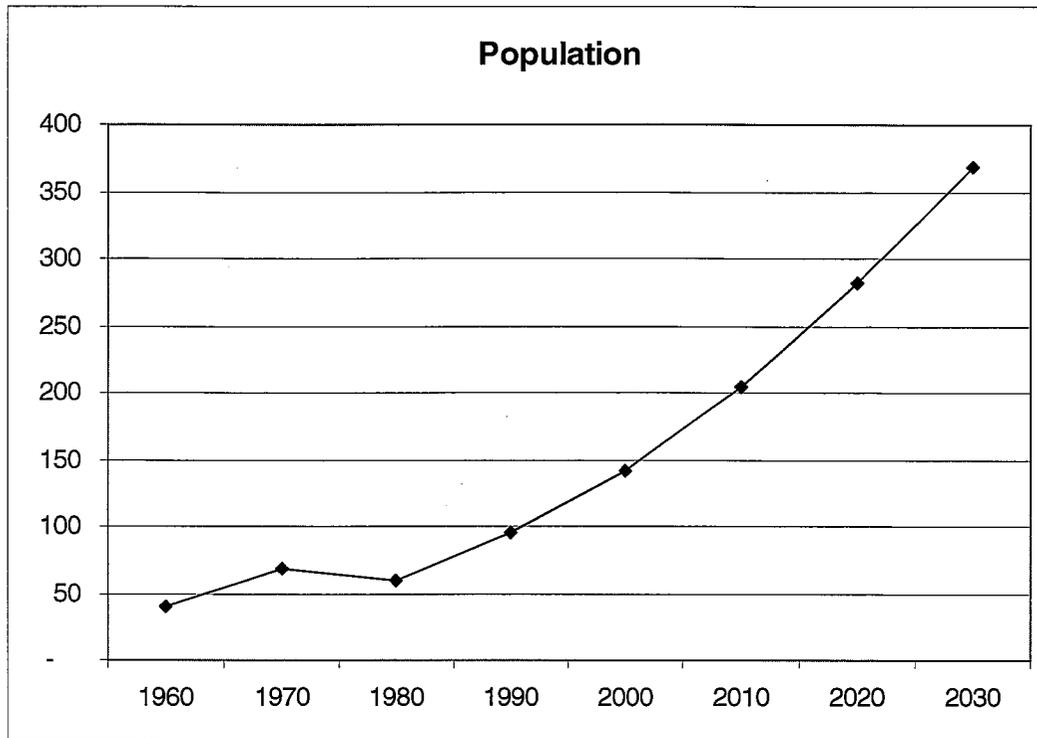
The following data were interpolated from the Environmental Atlas of Alaska and are applicable to the project area:

Mean Annual Precipitation, inches.....	16
Mean Annual Snowfall, inches.....	69
Mean Annual Temperature, degrees F .....	25
Thawing Index, degree days .....	3000
Design Thawing Index (1 year in 10), degree days.....	3400
Freezing Index, degree days .....	5000
Design Freezing Index (1 year in 10), degree days .....	6000
Temperature range .....	-57 to 93

### **History, Culture and Demographics**

The Mentasta area is reported to have been the best-known route of Native immigration across the Alaska Range. Early village settlements have been located at various sites around the lake. The families that presently reside in Mentasta come from Nabesna, Suslota, Slana and other villages within the area. The U.S. Army Signal Corps established a telegraph station at Mentasta Pass in 1902. A post office was established at the village in 1947, but was discontinued in 1951.

A federally-recognized tribe is located in the community – the Mentasta Village Council. The population of the community consists of 71.1 percent Alaska Native or part Native. The community is primarily Athabascan, and subsistence activities are important. During the 2000 U.S. Census, total housing units numbered 89, and vacant housing units numbered 35. Vacant housing units used only seasonally numbered 5. U.S. Census data for Year 2000 showed 36 residents as employed. The unemployment rate at that time was 28 percent, although 60.44 percent of all adults were not in the work force. The median household income was \$17,344, per capita income was \$11,274, and 35.66 percent of residents were living below the poverty level. The following chart shows the historic and projected population of Mentasta.



A population projection was performed using the growth rate from 1960 to 2000. The average growth rate for this period of time was 4 percent per year. Assuming this rate of growth continues, Mentasta can expect an approximate population of 282 by the year 2020 and 368 by 2030.

Despite easy access to other communities via the highway system, Mentasta remains a traditional community with residents living a subsistence lifestyle.

### **Economy**

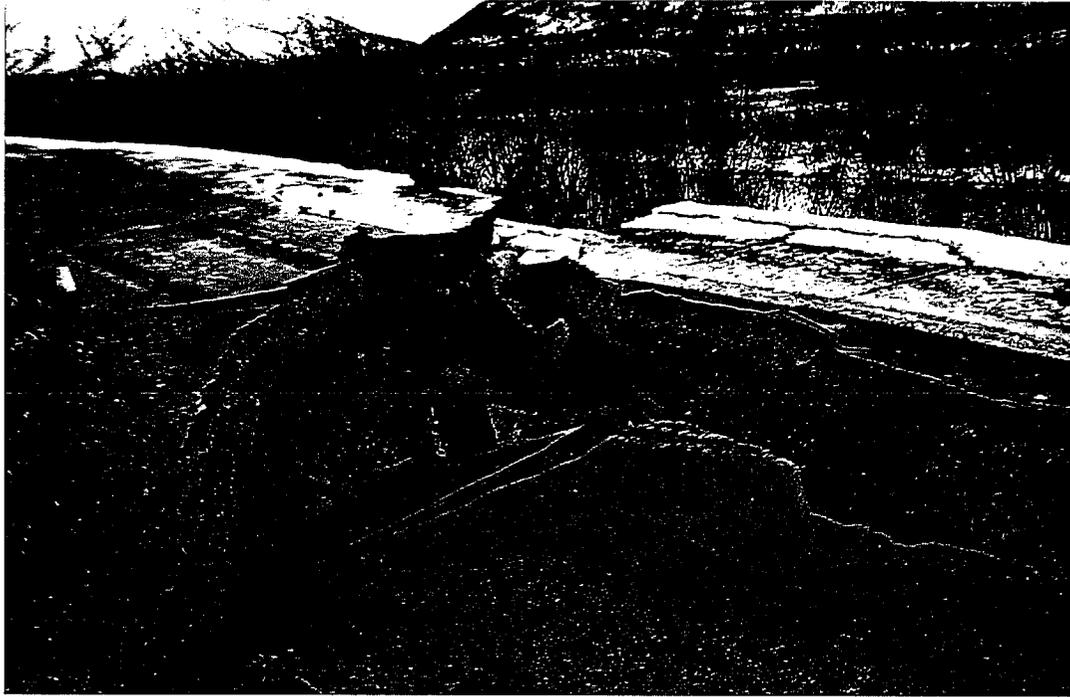
Subsistence hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering make up much of Mentasta's economy. Cash employment is limited and seasonal.

In 2003, the Copper Valley Economic Council and the Copper Valley Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council developed a Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan. The Copper Valley Economic Council is currently revising that plan.

### **Soils and Topography**

Mentasta lies in the broad, glacially carved Slana River valley. The valley floor contains many ground moraines and is dotted with numerous small lakes. Glacial moraines characteristically contain an unsorted mix of grain sizes ranging from fine silt to large boulders. Most of the village site is underlain by coarse sand and gravel which are not frost susceptible. Silt and peat deposits, however, are present near small lakes in the area, as well as along the shoreline of Mentasta Lake.

Mentasta lies within an area of discontinuous permafrost. The Village of Mentasta does not have documented flooding problems.



*2002 Earthquake damage on the Tok Cutoff Highway*

The village of Mentasta and Mentasta Lake lie directly above the Denali Fault, which ruptured on 3 November 2002, causing a magnitude 7.9 earthquake. The earthquake caused a tremendous displacement of water in the lake, known as a seiche, that broke up the ice cover and shoved large amounts of ice up on the shore.<sup>1</sup>

The community reported a suitable material site, owned by the Regional Corporation, which lies within 10 miles of the village. In addition, ground moraines consisting of silts and sandy gravel do exist in the region. The State owns borrow material along the Mentasta Spur Road and the Tok Cutoff Highway.

#### **Forest Ecosystem and Native Vegetation**

The Copper Valley is an extensively forested area. Forest types include aspen, white spruce, mixed white spruce-aspen and mixed white spruce-balsam poplar. There is a long history of frequent wild fires in the area. Between 1900 and 1950, an average of 120,000 acres burned annually, although this average has been reduced with improved fire protection measures.

Common berries are low bush cranberry, trailing raspberry, rosehips, low bush blueberry, crowberries and currants.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gi.alaska.edu/alison/mentasta.html>



*Mentasta Apartments*

## **Infrastructure**

*Housing.* Housing in Mentasta is mostly older log construction and a 14-unit apartment complex. The Copper River Native Association has organized a regional housing authority to channel Federal and State housing construction funds. The U.S. 2000 Census indicates the following housing structures for Mentasta.

### **Housing Characteristics:**

Total Housing Units:	51
Occupied Housing:	33
Vacant Housing:	18
Owner Occupied Housing:	24
Median Value Owned Homes:	\$63,800
Renter Occupied Housing:	9
Median Rent Paid:	\$128
Pop. in Owned Units:	56
Pop. in Rented Units:	40

*Source:* [http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF\\_BLOCK.cfm](http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_BLOCK.cfm)

*Community Facilities.* Non-residential structures in the community include the school, community hall, pump house, Code Red Building (fire equipment storage building), church, health clinic, post office and Tribal offices. There is also a baseball field and a cemetery. An elder center was built adjacent to the school but is primarily used as a child daycare center.



*Mentasta Code Red Building*

*Sanitation.* Residents obtain drinking water from individual wells. The school also has a well. The state has constructed individual septic tank systems for most homes; the school has its own system. Solid waste is presently hauled to a landfill approximately ten miles from the community. The State prefers to close the facility, but will probably not do so until an alternate site has been established.

Local hospitals or health clinics include Mentasta Lake Health Clinic (291-2320). Mentasta is classified as a highway village, it is found in EMS Region 1C in the Interior Region. Emergency Services have highway, air and lake access. Emergency service is provided by volunteers and a health aide. Auxiliary health care is provided by Mentasta Rescue Squad (291-2312/2320/883-5111).

*Education.* There are 35 students in the community. One school is located in the community, attended by students – kindergarten through twelve grade. The school is administered by the Alaska Gateway School District. The following are school related facilities as reported by the School District.

## School Facility List for Mentasta Lake

Facility	Facility Type	Gross Square Footage
<b><u>Mentasta School</u></b>	main school facility	11,040
<b><u>Boiler Shed</u></b>	school support facility	320
<b><u>Generator Shed</u></b>	school support facility	400

*Source: <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/Facilities/SchoolFacilityReport/SearchforSchoolFac.cfm>*



*Mentasta School*

*Energy.* The privately owned company, Alaska Power and Telephone Company, provides electricity to Mentasta. The school has its own generator. Mentasta is serviced by heating oil and propane providers in Tok. Most homes are heated with fuel oil and wood. Propane is generally used for cooking and heating water.

*Existing Transportation System.* The primary means of access to the community is via the Tok Cutoff Highway. Other forms of motorized surface transportation include all-terrain vehicles and snowmachines. Mentasta is connected to the Tok Cutoff to the Glenn Highway by a 6-mile spur road. There is an airport in Tok that can be used in case of emergencies.

All streets within the immediate community were constructed to Bureau of Indian Affairs and/or state standards with the exception of the eastern half of Second Street. The streets generally form a grid pattern. The roadway travel surfaces are typically between 10 to 20 feet wide and were constructed of gravel fill with a typical embankment of 3 feet. The roads

have rutting problems, especially during the spring breakup. Roadway drainage is accomplished by the use of both culverts and open channel ditches. The ditches are approximately 1 foot deep. After the 2002 earthquake, the state upgraded the 7.2 miles of the Mentasta access road.

Within the immediate community, trip generators are the school, landfill, medical facilities, subsistence activities, and the community hall. Roads are maintained by the state; however, many of the roadways are not maintained regularly.

## V. Land Use

**Existing Land Uses.** A mixed land use pattern has been traditionally acceptable to the community. Land uses currently include public, single-family residential, multi-family residential and vacant. The State Department of Community and Economic Development is currently working with the Copper River Housing Authority to update the community profile and mapping for the community. The following map indicates the current and future land uses.



*Copper Basin Regional Housing Authority Sign*

### **Future Land Use Needs**

Mentasta's future land use needs include single family housing, a community garden, an elder care facility, and a multipurpose center that may contain a fitness center, healthcare facility, fitness room and gym. Other future land uses suggested by the community include a cultural center, museum, gift shop, restaurant and mini-mall.

### **Right-of-Way and Land Ownership**

Mentasta has limited public land on which to expand. All land in the immediate vicinity of the community is owned by private individuals with the exception of two tracts. Both of these tracts are patented by the State of Alaska. The Village of Mentasta is a townsite (USS 4362) under the Bureau of Land Management. Additionally, public lands reserved for future use are held in trust by the State. These lands will be reconveyed to Mentasta when they become a municipal government.

Dedicated right-of-way corridors range in width between 40 and 65 feet with the majority being 60 feet. Existing roadways appear to generally lie within dedicated rights-of-way. The following is land status as reported by the State of Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development.

**Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)  
Land Status**

<b>ANCSA Land Entitlement:</b>	
Village Corporation:	<b>Ahtna, Incorporated</b>
12(a) Land Entitlement*:	69,120 acres
12(b) Land Entitlement**:	0 acres
<b>14(c)(3) Land Status:</b>	
14(c)(3) Status***:	In Process
14(c)(3) Comments:	Ahtna has expressed interest in completing reconveyance process
14(c)(3) Agreement Signed:	No
14(c)(3) Acres:	0.0
Map of Boundaries done:	No
Date Plat Filed:	
Plat Number:	
Recording District:	
Municipal Land Trust:	Yes
Authorized Village Entity Type:	Traditional

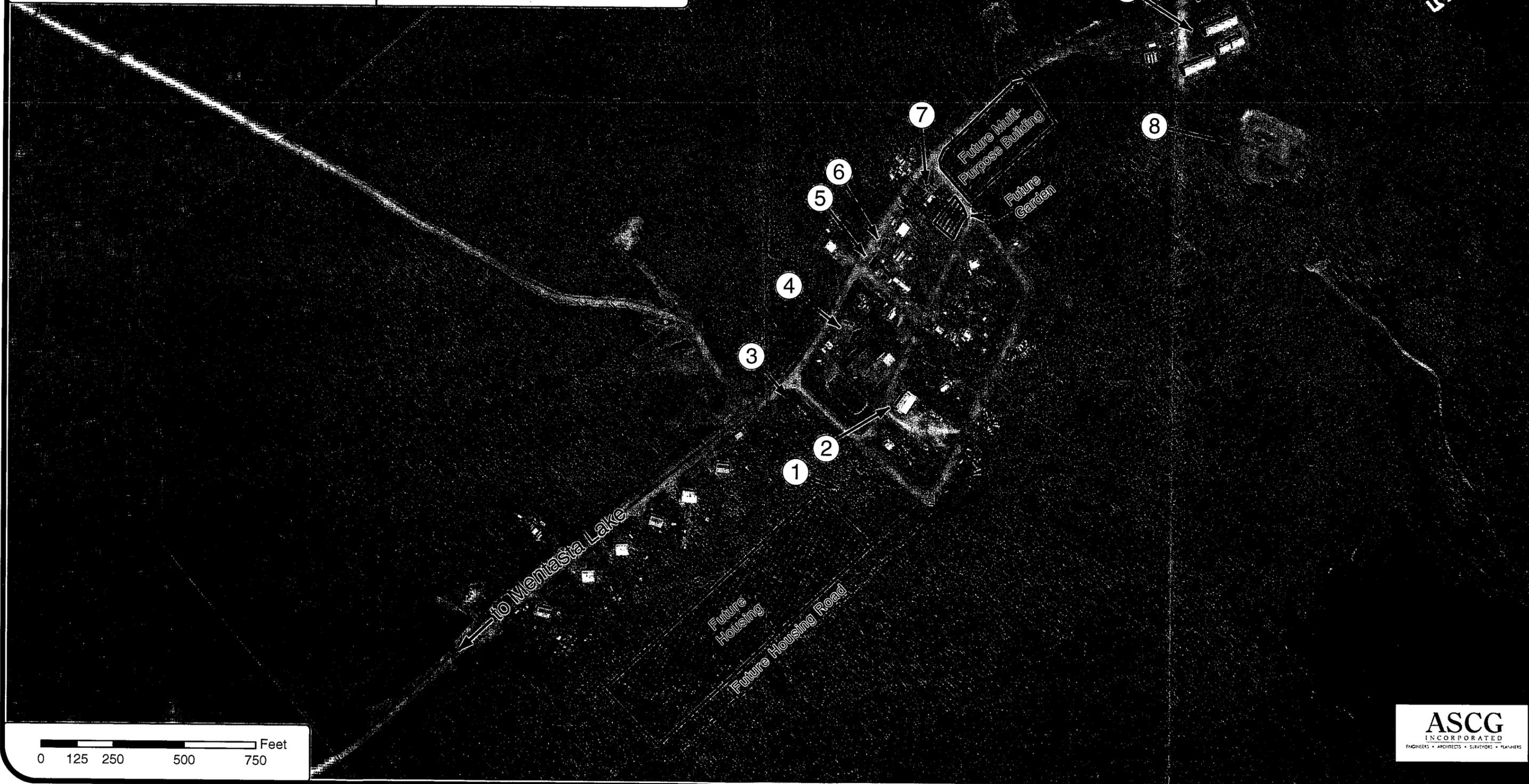
*Source: [http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF\\_BLOCK.cfm](http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/commdb/CF_BLOCK.cfm)*

# Mentasta Land Use Map

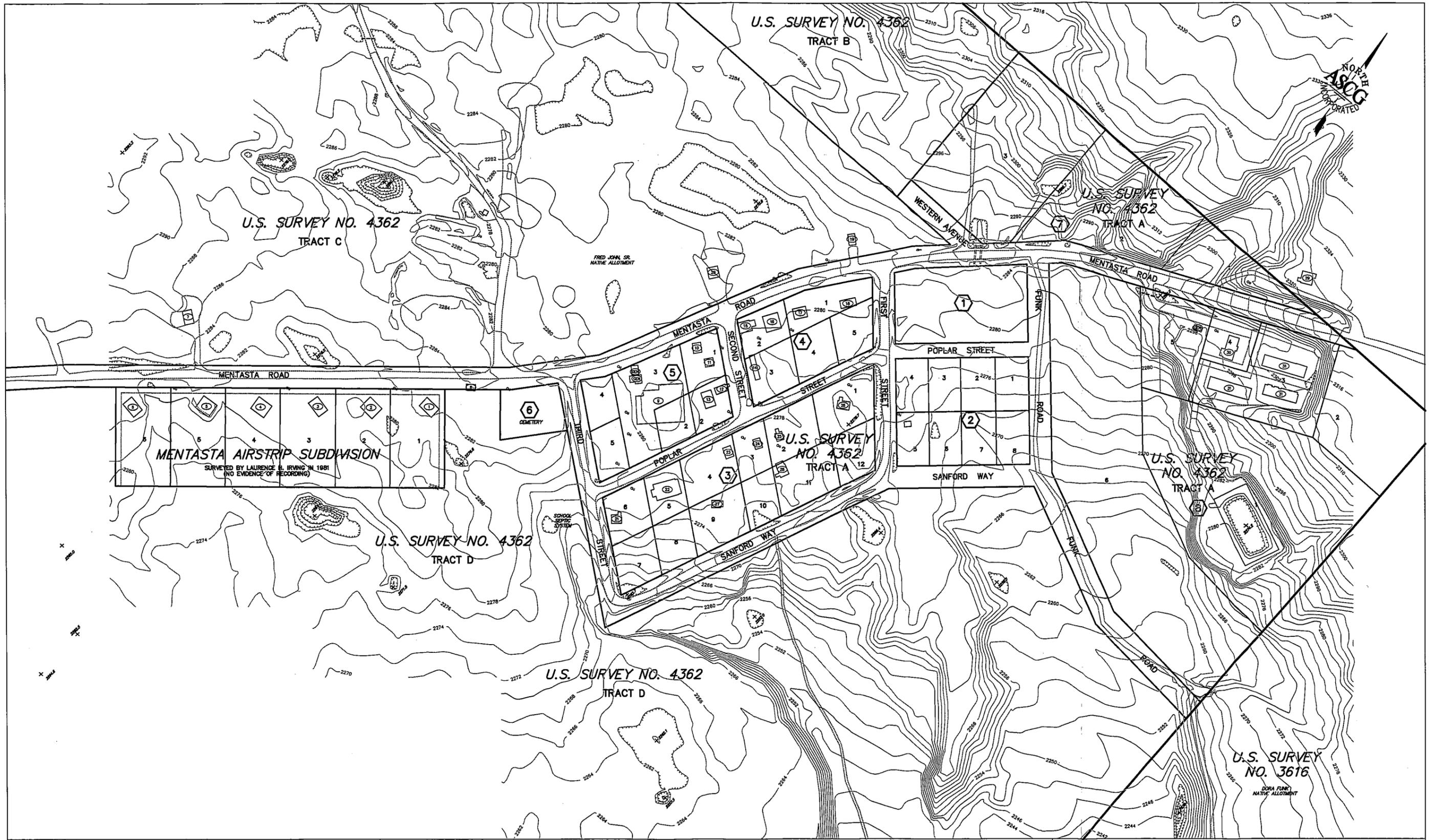
Figure 1

Source: 1996 Aerial Photo,  
2005 Aerial Photo (Lower Resolution)

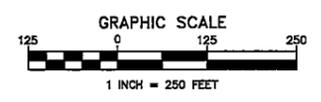
1. School Septic System
2. Community Center
3. Cemetery
4. School
5. Tribal Office & Post Office
6. Clinic Offices
7. Fire Equipment Storage Building
8. Sewage Lagoon
9. Apartments
10. Baseball Field



0 125 250 500 750 Feet



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**MENTASTA, AK**  
**Ownership Map**

**Figure 2**

Date: SEP 2005	Map Date: 1977
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## VI. Government

Mentasta is an unincorporated community located within the unorganized borough. Tribal government affairs are conducted by a traditional village council. The native community is also served by Ahtna, Incorporated and Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium.

As an unincorporated community, Mentasta has no formal authority under state law for planning, platting, and land use regulation. As applicable, capital projects are subject to federal and state regulations, village requirements, and private landowner approvals.



*Sign about Mentasta Lake Lands*

Mentasta has no authority under state law for property, sales, or other tax assessment and collection. The community no longer receives State Revenue Sharing Funds. Local and regional contacts are listed below.

### **Village Council** - Mentasta Traditional Council

P.O. Box 6019  
Mentasta, AK 99780  
Phone 907-291-2319  
Fax 907-291-2305  
E-mail [Kmartin@tribalnet.org](mailto:Kmartin@tribalnet.org)

### **Regional Organizations**

#### **School District** - Alaska Gateway Schools

P.O. Box 226  
Tok, AK 99780  
Phone 907-883-5151  
Fax 907-883-4356  
E-mail [cdoyle@tok.schoolaccess.net](mailto:cdoyle@tok.schoolaccess.net)

#### **Regional Native Corporation** - Ahtna, Incorporated

P.O. Box 649  
Glennallen, AK 99588  
Phone 907-822-3476  
Fax 907-822-3495  
E-mail [kmartin@ahtna-inc.com](mailto:kmartin@ahtna-inc.com)  
Web <http://www.ahtna-inc.com/>

**Regional Native Health Corporation - Mt. Sanford Tribal Consortium**

P.O. Box 357

Gakona, AK 99586

Phone 907-822-5399

Fax 907-822-5810

E-mail [ebeeter@mstc.org](mailto:ebeeter@mstc.org)

Web <http://www.mstc.org/>

**Native Housing Authority - Copper River Basin Regional Housing**

P.O. Box 89

Glennallen, AK 99588

Phone 907-822-3633

Fax 907-822-3662

E-mail [jdoty@crbrha.org](mailto:jdoty@crbrha.org)

Web <http://www.crbrha.org/>

## **VII. Implementation**

### **Project Consultation**

Consultation for the projects described in this comprehensive plan included input from the following entities:

- Native Village of Mentasta
- Mount Sanford Tribal Consortium
- Copper Valley Housing Authority
- Ahtna Native Corporation
- Copper Valley Economic Council

### **Development Project List**

The following lists future projects compiled through the consultation process:

#### *Health Clinic*

##### **Project Description:**

Develop an appropriately sized modern health clinic to be used by the constituents in a safe, secure and accessible facility built on public lands. The current location for this facility is in Block 1. The first step in this process will be to develop a feasibility study that examines the existing Mentasta Tribal Council facility for potential expansion a portion of which is currently leased out to IHS for the CHP program. The study will examine the rehabilitation option alternative as well as other optional sites.

##### **Project Justification:**

The health clinic needs more space and needs to modernize.

Estimated Costs: Feasibility Study = \$50,000

Design and Construction = \$1,000,000 (estimate to be refined after completion of Feasibility Study)

#### *Housing*

##### **Project Description:**

Design and construct up to 25 single family houses to meet the current housing needs to be built south of the Mentasta Airstrip Subdivision. This project would be phased with the initial project constructing five additional homes.

##### **Project Justification:**

The population of Mentasta is growing and the existing housing and houses and apartment complex are insufficient to meet the current needs.

Estimated Costs: \$5,000,000

#### *Housing Access Road*

##### **Project Description:**

Design and construct a road approximately 1,500 feet in length to access south of the Mentasta Airstrip Subdivision and adjacent to the proposed housing.

**Project Justification:**

The road is needed to access the proposed housing.

Estimated Costs: \$350,000

*Community Garden*

**Project Description:**

Install a community garden in Block 4, Lot 5.

**Project Justification:**

Most residents acquire fresh produce from Tok or Anchorage. Costs are high. A community garden would allow production of fresh produce for feeding local residents.

Estimated Costs: = \$10,000

*Community Playground*

**Project Description:**

Construct a community playground near the baseball field with equipment such as slides, crawl tubes, swings, seesaws, freestanding slide, activity panels, sand tables or spring riders, Park benches, picnic tables, litter receptacles and bike racks.

**Project Justification:**

Currently outdoor playground areas are limited. The site chosen is next to the baseball field and across from the apartment complex.

Estimated Costs: \$75,000

**Funding**

To make these projects a reality, continued coordination must take place and funding sought. It may also be necessary to phase the larger projects and to look for multiple funding sources. Lists of potential funding sources can be found on the web at <http://www.commerce.state.ak.us/dca/edrg/EDRG.htm>, and at [http://www.denali.gov/Community\\_Toolbox\\_List.cfm](http://www.denali.gov/Community_Toolbox_List.cfm).