



In the Loop – From Outages to Upgrades, Nelson Lagoon’s Year of Change

This past year has been a transformative one for Nelson Lagoon. After years of planning, delays, and determination, several infrastructure projects reached completion, marking an important turning point for the community. The Tribal President Angela Johnson reflected on the journey, the challenges, and what these improvements means for the future of the village she serves.

Johnson explained that they wrapped up several significant projects, including a new water lake dock, a fully updated powerhouse, improvements to the fuel farm, and the replacement of fire hydrants throughout the community. Each project brought essential upgrades that had been needed for years.

“All of the projects were difficult,” she said. “They’ve been in the process for a number of years. The lack of equipment, certified operators, and shipping conflicts contributed to most of the difficulties.” Despite the obstacles, the tribe pushed forward with help of organizations such as ANTHC and APICDA.

The motivation behind every project was simply the need for upgrades. “The water lake dock had been broken for years,” Johnson said, “once plans were in place, it had to be put on hold for another year because of the lack of equipment.”

Pictured below is the old broken water lake dock.



Getting supplies to Nelson Lagoon is never easy and causes delays in many projects.

The powerhouse upgrade was an urgent need; they had been relying on some of the oldest generators in Alaska. A major power outage in December 2022 left residents without power for eight days. Even though plans for a new powerhouse were already underway at that time with the Alaska Energy Authority, it took two more years before the new system was finally installed. “We are extremely happy to have it,” she said. The new powerhouse is dedicated to Nelson Lagoon’s late powerplant operator, John Nelson Sr.

The upgrades to the fuel farm were completed in tandem with the Rural Power System Upgrade project for the new powerhouse. Johnson said, “we needed new valves, new gas and diesel pumps, and other essentials.”

The fire hydrant project was another one that was delayed due to equipment and certified worker needs. The tribe was able to get local residents trained and certified through APICDA training grants. The connections built during the power outage issues allowed the upgrade to finally move forward and to completion this fall.

Although contractors were needed for most work, Johnson proudly noted that locals were able to help in the construction of the water lake dock and the fire hydrants upgrades.

The positive impacts of these improvements are already being felt. The water operator can now safely access the lake without needing to “walk the plank,” Johnson said. Everybody’s minds are at ease knowing that the fire hydrants work and are new. The powerplant operator no longer has to strain to keep the old generators running and the fuel farm is more efficient now because of the upgrades. Johnson said, “all around, these projects were imperative for the community and will have lasting positive impacts.”

Pictured to the right is the water operator, Darren Johnson, getting ready to walk the plank.

The work hasn’t stopped yet as Nelson Lagoon prepares for more projects ahead. In spring, there will be construction for the new sewer tanks and leech fields, and they are currently working on a new seawall design for the river side of the community. Johnson said both projects are being done with the help of ANTHC.



Finding funding isn’t always easy. Nelson Lagoon contributed \$1 million toward the Rural Power System Upgrade project by securing grant’s from APICDA’s Infrastructure Grant and the Community Development Grant programs. The fire hydrant project was also supported through

the Community Development Grant. “There were challenges along the way in getting funded to complete all the projects,” Johnson said, “we had to exclude the new distribution lines due to the lack of funding.”

When asked which project she is most proud of, Johnson said “I’d have to say all of them. These projects were already in progress before I was elected to the board, and I am happy that I was involved with seeing them to completion.” After being elected to the board and appointed tribal president, Johnson felt the weight of this responsibility heavy on her shoulders. “I am trusted with an important job for my community and tribal members. This progress means a lot to me.” Johnson expressed gratitude for the support she’s received along the way from the board, community, and organizations that helped bring these improvements to life.

Navigating these projects has been a major learning experience for Johnson, particularly being part of decision making and being the main point of contact for the projects. Looking ahead, she hopes to continue that momentum, “I’m looking forward to learning more and making a positive impact to our tribe in the future.”

One thing is certain, Nelson Lagoon is moving forward with resilience, cooperation, and a renewed sense of confidence, one project at a time.



Pictured above is the newly built Water Lake Dock and pictured below is the new Powerhouse.



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