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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Governor Walker Forms Working Group to Resolve a Decades Long Battle and Right a Wrong in Gulkana

*The State of Alaska, Ahtna, Inc. and Gulkana Village Council work to
return villagers' sacred burial grounds*

Glennallen, Alaska – Representatives from Governor Bill Walker's administration are meeting with Ahtna, Inc. and the Gulkana Village Council to explore a path forward to return the villagers' sacred lands that are currently in state possession. The working group formed after Governor Walker visited Gulkana in June and heard first-hand the story of a bisected village and decades of ancestral grave desecration that began when the U.S. government built a highway bridge over the Gulkana River in 1943. Village residents had to move to the other side of the river, away from the cemetery.

Ahtna Elder Roy Ewan estimates 100 family members are buried in the old Gulkana village cemetery. The 13 acres that the gravesites sit on were signed over to the State of Alaska in 1971 to support another realignment of the Richardson Highway. The area now includes a campground and a boat launch.

Steps are being taken to legally and expeditiously return sacred lands to the villagers while also respecting the many Alaskans who access the Gulkana River at this site for both business and pleasure. While conversations are in the early stages, progress is being made and the working group has embraced several goals:

- Complete legal and expeditious return of sacred lands
- Account for DOT&PF transportation mission needs associated with the existing bridge (maintenance and operational access and future bridge rehab scheduled for 2018)
- Ensure reasonable alternative public access to the Gulkana River (Ahtna has plans for a new boat launch facility)
- Collaborate on a public process for those impacted so they have opportunity to be heard and provide input
- Account for fiscal reality – both the state and Ahtna/Gulkana are working within tight fiscal constraints

"We have been working for over seventy years to receive title to our old Gulkana village site and for the first time progress is being made. Those buried there deserve a peaceful final resting place where their memory can be honored. We appreciate the Governor and his staff working with us to ensure these sacred lands are returned," said Ahtna, Inc.'s Chairman, Nick Jackson.

Everyone interested in this topic should stay tuned for public process announcements where opportunities for input will be offered and welcomed.

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