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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ahtna, Inc. and State of Alaska Reach Agreement on Klutina Lake and Historic Gulkana Village Site *Proposed settlement terms balance public access and private ownership rights*

Glennallen, Alaska – Ahtna, Incorporated (Ahtna) and the State of Alaska announced today that they have reached agreement on a proposed settlement regarding lands along Klutina Lake Road and near the Historic Gulkana Village off the Richardson Highway. The parties have worked for the past five months to settle on the details of a proposed agreement. The agreement would resolve a legal dispute that dates back to 2007 regarding property interests and use of Klutina Lake Road. The settlement would also resolve long-standing impacts to the Gulkana historic cemetery and townsite.

In 1943, prior to Statehood, the Federal Government bisected what was a thriving village on the Gulkana River in order to realign the highway and build a new bridge. Families were forced to resettle across the Gulkana River and the historic village cemetery has experienced decades of grave desecration. The federal trustee who granted the land to the state later admitted he had no record of having followed the law and obtaining the consent of the village before giving away its land. The Native Village of Gulkana, with the assistance of Ahtna and other compassionate organizations, has been working to clear up the title to land in the area ever since.

“We have been working for decades to resolve a very emotional decision that our elders still feel hurt over. We are very proud to have been able to assist Gulkana Village Council in regaining ownership of their people’s ancestral land and burial grounds that were taken from them without warning so many decades ago. We appreciate the Governor and his staff working with us on the return of these sacred lands,” said Ahtna Chairman Nicholas Jackson.

The settlement also resolves a long-running dispute with the state over land near the Klutina River and Lake. Klutina Lake Road is a narrow dirt path that follows the bluff of the Klutina River from the Richardson Highway to Klutina Lake, a distance of about 25 miles. It sits within a 60-foot-wide Federal 17(b) easement across Ahtna’s land. In 2007, the state cleared certain portions alongside the western part of Klutina Lake Road, removing Ahtna signs and a fee station in the process. Ahtna sued the state for exceeding the scope of the easement, both in terms of its width and the uses it permits. The state counterclaimed, asserting that an obscure 1866 law called Revised Statute 2477, which was repealed in 1976, entitled the state to a property interest in the road. The state asserted that some use in the early 20th century and some more in the 1960s gave the public greater rights on Ahtna’s land than over 11,000 years of use and occupancy by the Ahtna Athabascan people. The parties have been working to resolve this dispute since it was filed with little success until this year.

“We feel that a fair balance has been reached in the agreement that will enable Ahtna to protect and manage our private land while continuing to allow convenient public access for recreational opportunities. The settlement was done in a collaborative and cooperative spirit to benefit our shareholders, the general public, and the State of Alaska,” said Ahtna President Michelle Anderson.



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Some of the settlement terms Ahtna and the state have agreed to include:

- Relocation of public parking and other facilities at the Gulkana River boat launch to protect the historic townsite and cemetery
- Transfer of state-owned land in Gulkana to the Native Village of Gulkana and vacation of the Old Richardson Highway right-of-way in exchange for land on the other side of the highway that the state will use for a parking lot
- An easement from the state's new parking lot to support additional fee parking, camping, and river access on Ahtna land
- A 100-foot-wide state highway right-of-way along Klutina Lake Road
- Where the right-of-way intersects with state land under the Klutina River, fishing, daytime parking, and boating access (without a trailer) from the Klutina Lake Road right-of-way
- Three locations along Klutina Lake Road where the public can launch boats using trailers
- Camping and overnight parking for at least 50 public users per night in locations along the Klutina Lake Road right-of-way, including at Boys' Camp.
- A new 50-foot-wide state right-of-way to connect Klutina Lake Road to state land on Klutina Lake, replacing the existing trail along the Klutina Lake shore

Public area improvements planned for access to Gulkana River would include:

- A new parking area upstream of the Richardson Highway Bridge which is planned to be constructed between 2018 and 2020. The public will be able to continue using the existing access until the new one is built to minimize any disruption to river access.
- Secure fencing to protect the Gulkana Village grave site area with signage recognizing the cultural and historical significance of the area.
- Restroom facilities during the summer season at both the parking and boat landing areas.
- Highway safety signs and measures to protect pedestrians including a foot trail under the bridge to connect the parking area and boat landing.

Public Comment

The public will have several opportunities to provide written or oral comments before the state's August 30 deadline. Copies of the proposed settlement agreement, reference materials and public meeting dates and information can be found on the state's website at www.gov.alaska.gov/klutina-gulkana-settlement.

Ahtna Land Use Permits

Ahtna permits recreational use on Ahtna lands with permits available for purchase online at permits.ahtna-inc.com, in-person at the Ahtna Glennallen Corporate Headquarters, through the mail and by phone. Full details can be found at www.ahtna-inc.com.

About Ahtna, Inc.

Ahtna, Incorporated is one of 13 Alaska Native Regional Corporations formed under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, and is based out of Glennallen, Alaska. The company currently has nearly 2,000 shareholders, the majority of whom are of Ahtna Athabascan descent, and employs more than 1,400 people worldwide. A premiere Alaskan-owned business, Ahtna, Incorporated is guided by its vision statement: "Our Culture Unites Us; Our Land Sustains Us; Our People are Prosperous."

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