



Alaskans Travel to the Southwest

*A*t the bottom of the Grand Canyon sits a small Indian village. Helicopters ping pong between the village and the top of the canyon several hours a day to shuttle people. Some of the most beautiful spots in the Grand Canyon area are located on the Havasupai Indian Reservation, which is just south of the national park and at the end of a 10-mile hike that includes a 2,000 foot drop in elevation. There are only four ways to get there – by mule, helicopter, hiking or falling.

To many other people living in the Lower 48, this would seem like a strange way to live – cut off from the neighboring town.

To many in Alaska, its way of life.

Partially due to this, three Alaskans who have made a career out of providing public safety – Department of Public Safety Commissioner Joseph Masters, Alaska State Troopers Director Col. Keith Mallard and Village Public Safety Officer Program Commander Capt. Steve Arlow – felt a connection in Havasupai during a recent trip to Indian reservations in New Mexico and Arizona. The trip is part of an on-going effort by DPS and state officials to identify practices that could be used to better provide public safety in Alaska, especially in rural

In Search of Ideas To Fight Crime

villages. Also part of the self-improvement process, but separate from the trip to Indian Country, Masters and Mallard met with international law enforcement agencies at a conference in northern Canada last year. During these trips, they found the problems facing indigenous people in rural communities are all the same whether they're in the arctic or desert.

The similarities included poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, violent crimes such as felony assaults and homicides and a high rate of suicides.

“These issues haven't changed for decades. These issues seem to be the same all over the country,” Arlow said.

However, in the Southwest part of the country, they saw differences. Unlike villages in Alaska where houses are clustered together, houses were sometimes spread out over many miles. Roads connect the different communities on a reservation while many Alaskan villages are only connected by rivers. In addition, some reservations have state-of-the-art facilities funded by federal money – something else Alaska lacks in many of its communities both off and on the road system.



Journey to Indian Country

There are some differences Alaska is fortunate not having to deal with such as people and drug trafficking and the accompanying violence along the border.

“There are huge gang problems in a couple of the tribes along the border,” Mallard said.

How to fix those problems is the million dollar question that begs to be answered.

The outward search for answers started almost three years ago while Masters and then state Attorney General Dan Sullivan were discussing ways to improve service in rural Alaska. One item they identified was the gap in training and accountability for village and tribal police officer departments, which are usually single- or two-person departments. They produced a letter to U.S. Attorney General and Secretary of the Interior discussing the state’s belief that regardless of Indian Country status, the federal government has a responsibility to tribes in Alaska pertaining to law enforcement training and justice systems – a burden the state shoulders almost entirely by itself.

Part of the joint request was to open a dialogue with the U.S. Department of Interior, and specifically the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to see whether there were law enforcement and judicial practices being used on Native American reservations in the Lower 48 that would assist the village and tribal police departments in rural Alaska. According to the BIA website, it is the agency within the Interior Department that manages land held in trust for Native Americans and provides services, whether directly or through contracts, grants or compacts, for approximately 1.9 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. However, BIA’s presence in Alaska’s law enforcement and justice system is almost non-existent.

The following year, three BIA representatives visited villages in Western and Southeastern Alaska to see how public safety was delivered through Alaska State Troopers and Village Public Safety Officers in Alaska.

In return, BIA arranged the tour of Indian Country in Arizona and New Mexico. For 10 days at the end of April and beginning of May, the three Alaskans visited the Tohon O’odham Nation; Gila River Indian Community; Pascua Yaqui Tribe; and the Havasupai Indian Reservation in Arizona. While traveling in New Mexico, they visited the Isleta Pueblo near Albuquerque, the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation near Ruidoso, and the BIA’s Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Artesia, N.M. Masters and Mallard also accompanied U.S. Border Patrol on a helicopter patrol along the U.S. border with Mexico.

The idea was to see what was working for the law enforcement and justice systems on reservations that could be implemented in rural Alaska. Because reservations have been around longer than the Native regional and village corporations that were formed after the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, there were certain things, such as tribal courts, that were more developed than in Alaska.

“They have a much more robust and mature tribal courts system in most of the locations we visited,” Masters said. “But not all of them.”

The Mooney waterfall draws hikers from all over the world to the Havasupai Indian Reservation.



Hoonah Officers Anthony Wallace and Matthew Tokuoka are among the names on the Indian Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial at the academy in Artesia N.M. dedicated to "Those law enforcement officers who made the supreme sacrifice in Indian Country."



From left to right, Commissioner Joe Masters, Col. Keith Mallard and Capt. Steve Arlow visit the Old San Carlos monument erected on the original settlement of the San Carlos Apache in Arizona.

However, instead of the traditional court system with a judge and jury that was used even at the tribal level, Masters and Mallard would like to see more of a restorative justice type court system when addressing juvenile and lower level crimes. This would give the tribal courts a way to speed up the justice process and tailor the sentence to the individual and community. An example of this is sentencing a juvenile to do community service at a store they vandalized, giving the punishment more potency.

The trip also gave them a chance to see how the different tribes contract law enforcement services under BIA. Public Law 93-638, otherwise known as 638 contracting, gives tribal governments control over BIA-administered programs that cover areas such as health, housing, education, transportation and law enforcement. There is also an audit program for 638 contracting.

Another big difference in the way law enforcement is handled in Indian Country was having to deal with several different jurisdictions. There are 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska. The Alaska State Troopers is the primary law enforcement agency for all but one – Metlakatla on the federally-formed Annette Island Reservation in Southeast Alaska. To help deal with this, the more progressive departments were sending officers through different agency training to allow for dual-certification whether it's at the local, state or federal level. Some, such as the Mescalero reservation, are garnering cross-county certifications for officers. And officer needs to figure out relatively quickly which level of law applies when responding to a crime.

There are also non-Native Americans and members of other tribes living on the reservation, making it trickier to hold them accountable for some of the misdemeanor crimes under the tribe's jurisdiction. Some of the more severe crimes are punishable through the state and federal system, leaving the authority to deal with lower level crimes within the tribe. However, non-tribal members sometimes slip through the cracks because they don't fall under the reservations authority. Some tribes have agreements with other tribes to be able to address this issue.

Like anywhere else, the Alaskans saw the more prosperous reservations – mostly because of the money generated from casinos – were better equipped, trained and managed. They also saw multi-million dollar BIA facilities for a police force on a reservation with a population similar to Bethel.

There were also a lot of Native Americans working as officers at all different levels. Two top BIA officials that accompanied the Alaskans during their tour were also Native American. Most of the Native Americans, however, were working in areas outside their home reservation. One was especially far from home. An officer on the Mescalero Indian Reservation is a Tlingit from Southeast Alaska.

One thing they all recognized that Alaska State Troopers are doing in Alaska that was lacking in most of the areas they visited was community policing. This method of policing through developing and fostering relationship with village residents instead of strictly reacting to crimes is crucial to law enforcement in rural Alaska.

"Not that we do everything perfect, but when you look at how things are working down there versus how they're working here, it reinforces that we need to do more of what we're doing here," Masters

said. "We need to concentrate on the community policing aspects that we're doing in rural Alaska."

The three interacted with the reservation or pueblo residents every chance they could get because it's something they are used to doing in Alaska.

"We were trying to engage with the people – the tribal members and not just the people they had set up for us to meet," Mallard said. "(BIA officials) were wondering why they weren't connecting with the communities they serve. Well, because they're spending all their time in a car instead of getting out among the people."

It was especially evident in Supai, small community on the Havasupai Reservation that was patrolled more on foot or all-terrain vehicle, rather than a larger patrol vehicle, forcing officers to establish personal relationships with the residents. For this and many other reasons, Havasupai is the reservation the visiting Alaskans found most resembled rural communities in Alaska.

It was also one of the most challenging places.

Like Alaska, it's a place of great beauty. World famous waterfalls located nearby attract visitors from the outside.

"It's also the one community I thought that we had a better connection with the public," Mallard said. "It was kind of an interesting dynamic there."

That connection included signing autographs and posing for photos once residents found out they were being visited by Alaska State Troopers.

"At the bottom of the Grand Canyon, they watch the Alaska State Trooper show," Mallard said.

But it wasn't just in Havasupai the three were treated "like rock stars," he said.

"The show has gotten the word out about how special our agency is," Mallard said. "As far as Indian Country goes, they love us."

*- Story by Beth Ipsen
Alaska State Troopers Public Information Office*

Horses kick up dust as a young man leads pack horses loaded with items on the way to the Havasupai Indian Reservation.

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