

Alaska agency turns to crowdfunding for park project

August 30 2016, by Rachel D'oro

With Alaska's fiscal crisis drying up funding for a number of state projects, officials hope a crowdfunding campaign will raise \$50,000 toward shoring up a crumbling riverbank creeping toward century-old buildings at a state park.

Alaska is among a growing list of governments and civic organizations across the country going that route as traditional revenue sources shrink.

The riverbank project marks the state's debut in the increasingly popular practice of financing ventures through small payouts from large numbers of people.

In recent years, funding sites such as Citizinvestor and Spacehive have provided cash-generating platforms for those public entities, tweaking the formula of private pioneers such as Kickstarter and GoFundMe.

"On our (state) website, we have a place where you can donate, but it's the first time we've actually gone to crowdfunding," Alaska's northern area [park](#) superintendent Brooks Ludwig said. "This is new territory for us."

Alaskans blame the shortage of capital improvement funds on oil prices that plunged two years ago and have stayed low ever since.

But some projects can't wait for the industry to rebound. About 250 feet of the Tanana River needs to be stabilized at Big Delta State Historical

Park, where the problem is threatening a roadhouse and an old telegraph station once used as part of a military communications system built in the early 1900s.

The park, 90 miles southeast of Fairbanks, is located near a historic stopping point for travelers, traders and the military. The gem of Alaska's pioneer past remains a draw for tourists.

The improvement plan for Big Delta is relying on the "Fund Your Park" site run by the National Recreation and Park Association for its members, including Alaska.

"This is just another fundraising tool," said Michele White, who manages the "Fund Your Park" site. Since it was launched nearly two years ago, the service has been used for 50 projects across the country. Eleven of those projects—including the Alaska park—launched 30-day campaigns last week.

Some campaigns have fared far better than others.

Among the most successful involved the Texas city of Grand Prairie near Dallas. The goal was to raise \$25,000 for all-inclusive swings that can accommodate disabled people at a park currently under development. The city ended up raising nearly \$33,000 through the park crowdfunding site—a total that project manager Steve Plumer credited to a massive marketing campaign.

"It was awesome," he said of the experience. "I think it's a great opportunity."

Users of the funding site are encouraged to keep their goals realistic.

To that end, Ludwig said, Alaska parks officials decided to seek just a

fraction of the money needed for the riverbank work expected to cost \$319,000. Along with the \$50,000 sought through crowdfunding, park officials have \$100,000 in hand and want to raise the remaining \$169,000 by soliciting donations from businesses, foundations and other government agencies.

The Fairbanks-based Helen E. Snedden Foundation is contributing \$15,000 through the crowdfunding campaign.

Erosion of the river's banks has long been a concern, but this summer the bank has been gobbled up at a faster pace, prompting volunteers in July to move artifacts from the old cabin built in 1907 that was originally used as a telegraph office, according to Maureen Gardner, a longtime parks manager who recently retired.

"The water was getting so close," she said. "The bank was taken away so quickly. "

The cabin has since been moved about 50 more feet back from the river with the hope of returning it to the original site after the bank is stabilized, Ludwig said.

"Just for history's sake," he said.

More information: Online: [is.gd/zFGJbk](https://phys.org/news/2016-08-alaska-agency-crowdfunding.html)

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