



To Report a Missing or Overdue Person Call 911 or 907-545-HELP (4357)



A BSAR Member watches the sunset over an unmarked open hole steaming in the minus twenty air temperature 90 miles above Bethel

12.16.18 BSAR River Update:*

"Good Weather, Good People, and Good Work Getting Done"

Summary:

With more normal cold temperatures for the past 10 days Kuskokwim River conditions have been improving for safe Holiday travel. They are however improving slower than expected due to the recent heavy snowfall insulating the ice.

Through a combination of traditional methods and new technology BSAR members have been monitoring ice thicknesses in the Bethel area. **The increase in ice thickness is very slow.**

Tribal Transportation Departments and local SAR groups all along the River have been out in the cold working hard to mark open water and trails.

A small BSAR group did a River survey by snow machine on 12.15.18 to look at all of this good work and to assess Kuskokwim River conditions further up beyond the current network of established trails. This is what they observed:

- All known open water from Bethel to Akiak is marked
- Kuskokuak Slough was NOT observed—but Kwethluk SAR has been doing some open water marking
- Open water 9 miles above Bethel is still open
- Several of the marked open holes above Akiachak are still open
- Akiak SAR has marked a trail to Akiachak—markers are tall willows with WHITE reflectors
- No open water from Akiak to Tuluksak has been marked
- There are now two main established trails to Tuluksak. One is partially in the River then portages into Maciivik Slough and goes into Tuluksak by the back door near the airport. The other is the back trail (cross country) trail from Akiachak (SEE MAP)
- Tuluksak SAR has been marking open water at the mouth of the Tuluksak River
- In the cold temperatures all open water and over flow is actively steaming. In the vicinity of large open holes there are large foggy areas
- Above Tuluksak to Kalskag there is no established trail—only minor trails made by SAR groups assessing River conditions: there are several major open water areas and numerous smaller holes



A Few Examples of the Good Work Being Done All Along the River:



All along the River crews have been out working in the cold installing thousands of willow markers with BLUE reflectors around open water areas



This is the Kalskag/NVN crew working 12 miles below Lower Kalskag near Iftikum's fish camp



A well marked open hole steaming in the twilight

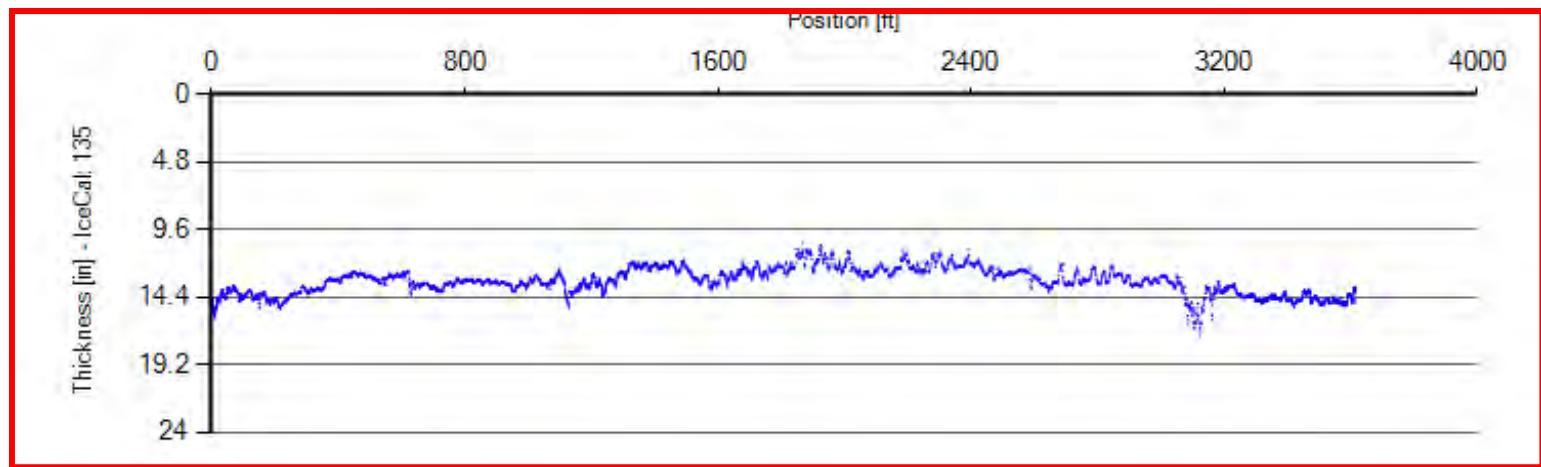


A large open hole can create fog that spreads for miles



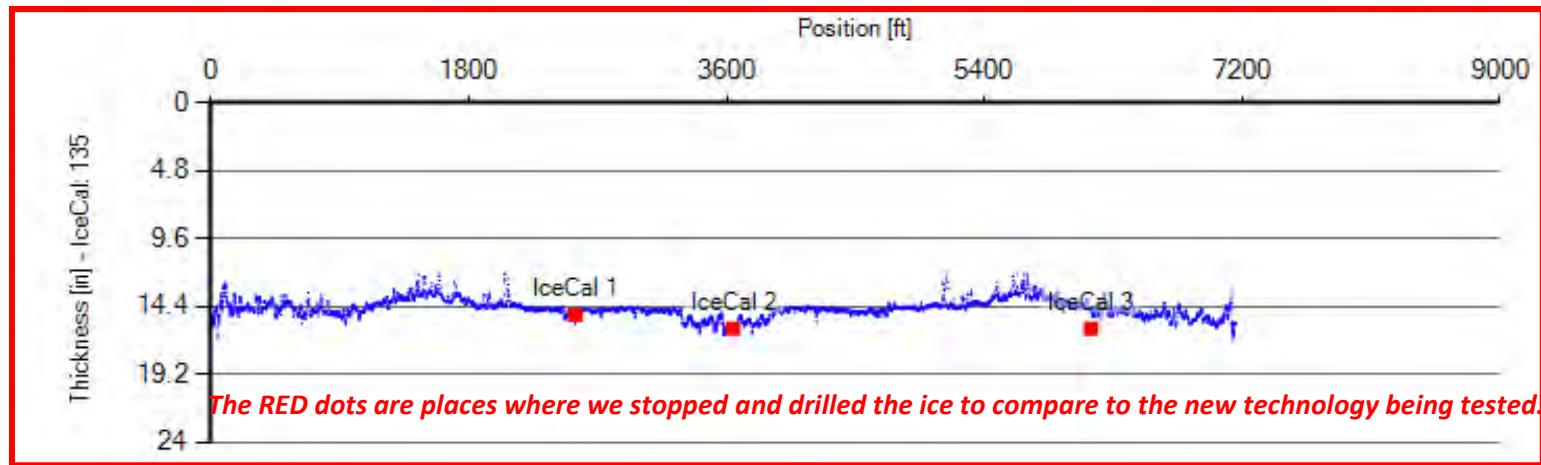


Using Traditional Knowledge and New Technology to Watch the Ice Very Slowly Growing:



Top Graph: Ice thickness in front of Bethel from Hospital Landing to Lomack Beach on 12.14.18. Look at the inches on the left side and the blue line. You can see that near the beach is thicker and the middle is thinner.

Bottom: Same track line on 12.16.18. Notice the increase. But the channel in front of Bethel has slower current. It freezes earlier and more quickly than the other main channels of the Kuskokwim.





Ice penetrating radar: this technology is already being used on Canada's ice roads and on Alaska's North Slope. This is the first time its being tested on the Kuskokwim River

Closing:

It's been a long haul but safe travel conditions are gradually happening in time for the busy holiday season. We thank People for their patience. We are especially thankful to all the tribal transportation departments and village search & rescue groups that have been out there working to keep winter travelers safe on the Kuskokwim.

A lot of good People doing a lot of good work....and there is still a lot more that needs to be done—especially from Akiak on up.

Thank you and Safe, Sober Travels from Bethel Search & Rescue

***Please Note: this report is for informational purposes only. It is not an advisory that it is safe to travel**

The ice stopped at Crooked Creek on December 12. Up river when the ice stops there is a rapid rise in water level. This boat got caught in it but was pulled out before it froze in. Photo courtesy of Tim Zaukar

