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State Prepares For Spring Time River Flooding

Media Invited to Embed with River Watch Teams

Camp Denali, Alaska - Each spring the River Watch program, a partnership between Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHS&EM) and the National Weather Service (NWS), conducts aerial observations of rivers prone to ice jams, provides flood warnings and alerts, and assists communities with emergency management and/or evacuations. The partnership, known as River Watch has existed for over thirty years.

This year, space is available for Alaskan media outlets to embed with the River Watch teams during observation flights. One media seat is potentially available per flight and will be given on a first come, first served basis.

The NWS anticipates break-up to begin the first week of May. Media organizations that wish to fly with a River Watch team will need to provide transportation to and from base communities and lodging. 2011 River Watch base communities will be Circle, Galena, St Mary's, Aniak, and Bethel.

"Governor Parnell places a strong emphasis on preparing communities for possible disasters and River Watch is an excellent example of a partnership that readies Alaskans for a known threat," said Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Katkus, Commissioner of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. "By monitoring river conditions and providing timely alerts, we give residents the opportunity to protect themselves, their homes and their communities."

The River Watch teams' schedule will be determined by river conditions and community needs. Media who wish to embed with River Watch will travel on the River Watch team schedule, which may include unexpected trips to communities that are experiencing flooding. Embedded media may be required to spend short periods in villages to allow community leaders the chance to inspect river conditions.

The State Emergency Coordination Center (SECC) will activate to monitor and support River Watch activities. If flooding becomes imminent, the staffed SECC will be able to quickly coordinate the state's response effort.

DHS&EM response staff has contacted each potentially affected river community to open lines of communication and provide each community with the *2011 Alaska Emergency Response Guide for Small Communities*. More information can be found on the DHS&EM website at www.ready.alaska.gov.

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