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**For Immediate Release:**

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**STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED FOR SWAN LAKE AREA**

**Kotzebue, Alaska – Feb. 16, 2024** – On Feb. 8, 2024, the City of Kotzebue and the Northwest Arctic Borough each declared a state of emergency related to the failure of the Swan Lake water main loop. A rupture in the 40-year-old main caused a drastic loss in pressure and flow causing 7,000 feet of the water main to freeze downstream. The disaster followed two weeks of freezing Arctic temperatures dropping at times to -50° below zero. Recent warmer weather resulted in a blockage on the water main loop impacting 190 homes, with 65 homes reporting no running water and 15 having no sewer; these numbers continue to climb.

The Native Village of Kotzebue has passed a resolution recognizing the imminent threat to public health, and approving unprecedented actions to limit the impact of the loss of available water that may result in human suffering and hardship, health risks, and severe economic distress.

It further recognizes the potential impact on health care, social services and other government services provided by the Tribe. The resolution authorizes and directs the Tribal administrator to take all necessary steps to obtain emergency assistance. This includes working with federal agencies such as FEMA, USDA, HUD, and IHS as well as local government entities to request all available technical and financial assistance to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of members of the NVOK.

This disaster has the Tribal Council reassessing priorities, and has resulted in the rapid creation of a new department for Emergency Response providing rapid relief and leadership in Qikiqtagruk.

“The Native Village of Kotzebue is proud of its Iñupiat heritage, which emphasizes the values of responsibility to Tribe and cooperation,” says Christina Hensley, Executive Director, Native Village of Kotzebue.

**“Our Iñupiaq culture prioritizes working together, sharing resources, and supporting one another to build a strong and resilient community. In light of the current situation, the Tribe is taking swift action to secure assistance that will benefit those in need, with a primary focus on the health and safety of our community members.”**

**The City of Kotzebue Public Works Department reported they have two 1.5 million gallon water storage tanks. They are gaining 1 foot of water per day. The water level as of 2-16-24 is 22.8 feet or 1,710,000 gallons of water.**

**Currently, the NVOK is in contact with the Salvation Army and the Red Cross. The Red Cross will be in Kotzebue Feb. 17 - 22, 2024, to install smoke alarms, provide CPR training, and conduct preparedness training for pre-kindergarten through 5th grade classrooms. The volunteer fire department is also assisting the NVOK deliver water to residents prioritizing deliveries to Elders and families with children.**

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