

ECOTRUST GIS PORTFOLIO: THE AFFR REDISTRICTING PLAN

What are the protections for minority views in our current political system? When Native peoples dependent upon a subsistence economy become increasingly marginalized by a growing urban population, the question is particularly acute. The technical assistance and analysis provided by the staff at Ecotrust's Juneau office allowed Alaskans for Fair Redistricting (AFFR), a coalition of Native organizations, individuals, and public interest groups, to put together a redistricting proposal that addressed this issue.

Following each federal census count, Alaska embarks on a task of epic proportions: to redraw the state's legislative district lines. Alaska constitutional law mandates that election districts for the state's 40 state representatives and 20 state senators be compact, contiguous, and contain a relatively integrated socio-economic area. When taking into account Alaska's enormous land area, stark changes in climate and geography, and sparsely scattered population, in addition to its ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic

differences, the difficulties of redrawing district lines to match population changes becomes clear.

The US Federal Voting Rights Law requires that minority voters – in this case Alaskan Natives – be provided equal opportunity to participate in the election process. To ensure that rural Alaskan Natives retain equal voter representation, AFFR submitted this map to the Alaska Redistricting Board, which is charged with creating a draft redistricting plan for submission to the federal government.

The Alaska Redistricting Board voted 3-2 on June 9, 2001 to adopt the redistricting plan put forward by AFFR and Ecotrust.

