



From Collection to End Market Demand: Recycling That Works in Rural Alaska

Haines, Alaska

Through the persistence of engaged residents and a grant from The Recycling Partnership, a remote community in Alaska is expanding recycling access, increasing community awareness, and building local end market demand for recovered materials.



What's Happening

Unlike most towns in the United States, Haines' recycling system isn't run by the city, it is powered by a nonprofit. Haines Friends of Recycling (HFR), is solely responsible for its drop-off recycling center with one part-time employee, along with a team of dedicated volunteers.

Together, they process about 250,000 pounds of recyclables (plastics, paper, and metal) each year for roughly 1,350 households and a surge of seasonal tourists.

Now, HFR is moving from rented property to a new facility closer to town, making recycling safer, easier, and more efficient year-round.

Far more than operating a drop-off center, HFR is processing, baling, and creating essential end market demand for its own material. The upgraded space will allow expansion of its "Scrap Box" reuse area and house a plastic up-cycling project that converts #2 and #5 plastics into "Grizzly Wood," which can be used for picnic tables, boardwalks, benches, etc. Once operational, HFR will expand to accept plastics from neighboring Southeast Alaska communities and even cruise ships, further growing its regional impact.

Funding from The Partnership will help purchase an electric forklift to streamline material handling, add clear signage to guide residents, and send a community mailer to boost participation.



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Why it Matters

Recycling access shouldn't depend on geography. Every community needs support in growing its recycling program, but in Haines, which lies nearly 100 miles north of Juneau and lies at the border of Glacier Bay National Park, every bit of help is needed. Though its population is small, the regular influx of seasonal tourists creates a large waste footprint. That demands effective recycling, clear communication, and end uses for the collected material. HFR is doing it all.



Given that almost a quarter of Americans live in rural areas, we can't move forward with building a better recycling system while leaving these communities behind. In Haines, where one small landfill is projected to reach capacity within a decade, recycling is an essential infrastructure. Without it, waste will have to be shipped to the Pacific Northwest, driving up both costs and emissions.



BECAUSE WE ARE IN A RAINFOREST, SITING A NEW LANDFILL IS UNTENABLE. RECYCLING IS A WONDERFUL WAY TO SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE AMOUNT GOING INTO THE LANDFILL AND THEREFORE INCREASES THE LONGEVITY OF THE LANDFILL.

Melissa Aronson
Hfr Chairperson

What's Next

Once the forklift is procured, the signage posted, and the outreach complete, Haines will track the access, participation, and recovered material tonnage to measure impact. The nonprofit is still fundraising to reach its \$1.3M Capital Fund Campaign goal to finish its new facility and expansion, which includes using #1 plastics and ground glass to make paving stones, since currently there is no way to recycle glass. Benches and planters at the new spot will be made of Grizzly Wood, among other plans to beautify through reuse.

For small and rural communities like Haines, every upgrade counts. This project demonstrates how targeted investments and local leadership can build durable, scalable recycling systems, even in remote regions.

Local Action, Lasting Change.

Community leadership, targeted support, and creative end markets transform what's possible.

LET'S SOLVE RECYCLING'S TOUGHEST CHALLENGES, TOGETHER.