

A Brief History of the Tok Shooters Association Shooting Range
By David G. Kelleyhouse

The Tok shooters Association began as the Tok Trap Club in 1976. I believe. At that time the trap range was located in Hartsell subdivision near the airport. The club's desire was to have a piece of property that could accommodate rifle and pistol shooting in addition to trap shooting.

At some time in the late 1970's or early 1980s the State of Alaska made land available near Mile 1323 Alaska Highway (present site) and the trap machine was moved there. There was a road job at that time and the gravel was taken from the pit. I believe John Terwilliger, an avid shooter at that time, had the road construction contract. When the road job was finished, heavy equipment was used to contour the gravel pit into a useable shooting range with gravel berm backstops for safety.

ADNR at that time was unwilling to lease the range to TSA, but was willing to draft a no cost lease to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. I was the Tok Area Biologist for the Division of Wildlife at the time and my supervisors in Fairbanks Region III office approved the agreement with ADNR. ADFG, in turn, made an agreement with TSA to develop, run and maintain the new range. This arrangement has lasted continuously for the past 40 years to the benefit of the residents of the Upper Tanana Valley.

Using donated steel and other materials, Glen Burnham, Jerry Lancaster, John Barker and others constructed a steel roof over the firing line and built steel bench rests and seats. Outhouses were built for both the rifle and trap ranges and a range master building was moved to the range near the firing line. Target frames and steel gongs and silhouettes were installed at 25, 50, 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 yards. A small bore and pistol range was built between the big bore and trap ranges. More recently a modern double outhouse was built and a steel Atco storage unit was installed.

The range is surrounded by state land. In the 1980's during planning for the Upper Tanana Basin Land Use Plan, no development ½ mile buffers were established to the West and East of the range and land down range to the Tanana River was designated as Wildlife Habitat and Recreation. Unfortunately, the most recent ADNR land use plan designates the range and adjacent lands for disposal. Lands downrange are designated for Wildlife Habitat and Forestry.

Over the past 40 years the shooting range has been well maintained by TSA members and is one of the cleanest fully functional ranges in Alaska. Many state and federal agencies have used the range for qualification and practice including ADFG, USFWS, Alaska State Troopers and BLM. It has provided for Hunter Safety and Alaska bow hunting qualification.

The TSA shooting range is an important asset in the Upper Tanana Valley and will only become more important in the future. With a 40 year history of responsible management, TSA has proved a competent entity to continue managing this range.