

# JOB TALK

## Recycling vegetation in Alaskan ski country

**Alyeska Resort, Sasaki Associates and Evergreen Landscaping do it the old-fashioned way: the hard way, but the right way.**

by Leslee Jaquette

■ When Alyeska Resort invested more than \$1 million in the largest vegetation recycling and replanting landscape project in the state, even the moose and deer perked up their antlers.

In an effort to use the resources at hand, management at Alaska's premier ski resort designed an aggressive, multidimensional plan.

Sasaki Associates, which designed the landscape, wanted to use mountain heather removed during trail work to fill in areas affected by the construction of a tram tower. A dramatic helicopter transplanting effort was the climax of that project.

To "marry" 27 acres of new terrain with other parcels, erosion difficulties and summer aesthetics, Alyeska's mountain project manager Bob McBride teamed up with Evergreen Landscaping of nearby Anchorage.

According to McBride, the contract called for Evergreen's 25 workers to harvest and transplant vegetation in a 24-hour period.

To decrease plant shock and give the plants time to stabilize before winter, mid-August was targeted.

Evergreen's workers handled the existing heather like sod, shrink-wrapping and flying 36,000 sq. ft. of it to 2,700 feet elevation within two hours. Four hundred-fifty yards of topsoil were also transported in giant hoppers by tram and then by helicopter, where it was all used as landscaping around the tram station and support tower.

Helicopter costs ran \$800 per hour for 20 hours, but McBride

maintains, "If you make the investment, you need to do it right."

Other landscape issues were handled with equal attention to ecological sensitivity.

More than 13,500 trees and plants were brought to a nursery in the new Alyeska Prince Hotel parking lot, to begin getting acclimatized to their new home, 240 feet above sea level. The 33 varieties included white spruce, Colorado green spruce and quaking aspen. A sophisticated watering system, supplemented by watering trucks, was needed to keep the plants alive through Alaska's driest summer on record.

The nursery had a complete plastic pipe irrigation system on a gravel base. Because some of the plants were fairly large, McBride's staff set up risers with overhead sprinklers to simulate nature.

An extensive drainage system also had to be built because of torrential rains that can result in up to one inch of water per hour. Starting in May, 1993, drains were added to individual trees and shrub beds bringing the total number of drains to about 8,000.

Careful consideration, too, was given to equipment that would minimize impact to surrounding vegetation. Using lightweight baby backhoes with rubber tires, McBride's team dug narrow trenches for the perforated pipe and gravel curtain. Architects felt the need, McBride says, to take every precaution to preserve neighboring 200-year-old trees while planting the new ones.

To further capitalize on hardy, native plant species, McBride also bought a 500-gallon hydroseeder to plant \$100-a-pound alpine bluejoint grass and wildflowers. "We must harvest our own seeds," McBride observes. "Besides, natural seed is the healthiest. The key is to know when to harvest the seed and how to store it."

—Leslee Jaquette is a freelance writer based in Washington State. She is a frequent contributor to LM.



Topsoil and Alaskan mountain heather were transported both by tram (left) and by helicopter (right) to the area around a new tram station and support towers where the vegetation was to be transplanted.

(Photos by Tom Evans of Evergreen Landscaping)