In 2010 a consortium of seven entities in the Bering Straits Region came together to purchase the Pilgrim Hot Springs site property and return it to local ownership. The owners are made up of tribal and non-profit organizations. The groups formed a partnership called Unaatuq (meaning “hot springs” in Inupiaq) which is managed by a board of directors with representatives from each organization. Bering Straits Native Corporation is the managing member.

During the summer of 2016, a variety of partners are working together to investigate the feasibility of agriculture on the site. As part of this project, we are planting a small test garden and building needed infrastructure that will be used in future on site agriculture.

Who We Are

It’s been a busy summer so far out at Pilgrim Hot Springs. Beginning in June, equipment was moved out to the site and many people have been working out there performing a variety of tasks.

In the middle of June, Tom Zimmer, Co-Founder of Calypso Farm in Fairbanks spent almost a week out at the Hot Springs to gather soil and water samples, investigate possible planting locations, locate signs of historical agricultural fields and better understand the soil and hydrologic conditions in the area. Tom and his wife Susan are a wealth of information, and their involvement with this project has been wonderful. (continued next page)
Latest News (continued)

Tom’s trip culminated in the tilling of approximately 1 acre, the majority of which was planted with Annual Rye and Winter Field Peas as a cover crop. In addition, 800 feet of bed were amended and made ready for a trial garden using a natural fertilizer. The combination of Annual Rye and Winter Field Peas were chosen because they should allow for good biomass growth, are cold hardy and the peas will fix nitrogen into the soil. The soil needs lots of work to increase tilth. It is very carbon rich with all the grass that was tilled in and this will take some time to break down. Once it does though, it should be some nice soil.

A variety of starts and seeds have been planted in the trial garden area which includes red and yellow onions, brussels sprouts, swiss chard, carrots, peas, squash, chinese cabbage, several varieties of lettuce, kohlrabi, dill, spinach, radish, beets, turnips, salad mix and sunflowers. A special thanks to community members who have donated starts and seeds! There is also a small potato field where 4 varieties of potatoes have been planted. This is the first year of a long term project and the trial garden is just that, to see what we may be able to grow down the line once the infrastructure and soils are built up. It is meant to inspire and will be kept small and simple. Siberian apples were also planted on the site. The varieties planted have been grown successfully in Fairbanks, and it will be interesting to see how they do in the interior of the Seward Peninsula.

Infrastructure Updates

In addition to the actual tilling and planting at the site, a lot of time has been spent building simple infrastructure to facilitate the long term goal of growing food.

- A fence has been installed around the planting field to keep moose and other critters away from the crops.
- A simple irrigation system is providing water to the cover crop from a slough on the property. The long term vision is to construct a drip irrigation system, but in the near term, there are advantages to maintaining a simple system that requires minimal maintenance.
- Work is currently underway to install a quality outhouse near the entrance to the hot springs. Please respect the site and use this when the need arises.
The temperature in the Infinity Pool has been pretty near perfect for soaking recently and we need your help to keep it this way. Please don’t adjust the piping or valve orientations as they are set to keep the pool temperature relatively stable. Visitors should always test the pool temperature prior to climbing in. If something is out of adjustment or needs attention, please contact project staff at (907) 443-8111 or email at: pilgrimproduce@beringstraits.com

A lot of time has been spent picking up trash and cleaning up the hot springs and the surrounding area. A trash receptacle has been placed next to the infinity soaking pool. Whenever possible please haul out whatever you haul in. If this isn’t possible, please make sure that trash items make it into the trash can. Project

**Infinity Pool**

While there is a variety of wildlife at the hot springs, the variety of insects is also staggering. Photo by Rob Bensin

**Additional Plans**

Later this summer a historic building assessment will take place to document the buildings on the site and identify buildings that could be eligible for preservation. In addition, a ground penetrating radar survey will be conducted to attempt to locate the mass grave that holds the victims of the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic so that the site can be given the protection and respect that it deserves. Results from these efforts will be reported as they happen.

The irrigation and mounded planting rows are shown in the test garden at Pilgrim Hot Springs. Photo by Alyssa Enriquez

Young fiddleheads abound in the spring and early summer at Pilgrim Hot Springs. Photo by Alyssa Enriquez
Visiting Permits and Hunting

If you plan on going out to the hot springs, please remember that a free permit can be obtained at the BSNC offices in the old federal building at 110 Front Street, Suite 300 as well as at the Aurora Inn and the Nome Visitors’ Center. These permits are valid for 1 year. In addition, we ask all visitors to stay on the grade when travelling along the Pilgrim road, as all surrounding lands belong to BSNC, Mary’s Igloo (MINC) and BLM. No access is allowed on MINC lands adjacent to the road except for MINC shareholders or others permitted by MINC. If you have any questions please contact BSNC’s Larry Pederson or Kevin Banke at (907) 443-5252 or Mary's Igloo Native Corporation at (907) 642-2308.

If you are interested in getting involved send an email to pilgrimproduce@beringstraits.com or call Rob Bensin at (907) 443-8111.
Public Service Announcement

Please help stop Vandalism at Pilgrim

Over the past few weeks there have been numerous instances of vandalism at Pilgrim Hot Springs. There are also individuals who are not obtaining a permit prior to visiting the springs. A reward of $500 is offered for any information leading to the apprehension and prosecution of individuals responsible for: removing plywood from buildings, having campfires on the premises and leaving trash scattered near the gate, and any other vandalism that can be reported.

If further vandalism occurs, Unaatuq, LLC will have no choice but to close access to the Pilgrim Hot Springs property. Accessing the hot springs without a valid permit will be considered trespass and will be reported to the Alaska State Troopers. For reporting vandalism and trespass at the Hot Springs please email pilgrimproduce@beringstraits.com.

The Infinity Earth Pool is heated with local geothermal waters and makes a great place to relax on a rainy day. Photo by Rob Bensin