

# JOINT TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE | MEETING 4

September 13, 2023, 2:30 — 4:00 p.m. via Zoom

## Meeting Objective

Review the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) process and schedule. Share an update on the PEL study, present information on the additional environmental field studies to support Level 2 Screening, how this fieldwork would be incorporated into Level 2 Screening and a potential future environmental process, and receive comments.

## Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- PEL Study Process and Schedule Update
- Additional Field Studies and Level 2 Screening
- Next Steps
- Discussion
- Wrap Up

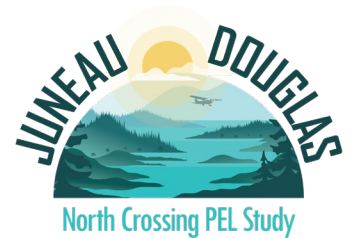
## Attendees — PEL Study Team

### Name

Greg Lockwood, Project Manager  
Marie Heidemann  
Alexandria Lawrence  
Christy Gentemann  
Jill Taylor  
Leslie Daugherty  
Steve Noble  
Renee Whitesell  
Sean Holland  
Theresa Dutchuk  
Emily Anderson  
Morgan McCammon  
Talli Vittetoe  
Mike Hall

### Organization

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
Department of Transportation and Public Facilities  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
DOWL  
Parametrix



## Attendees — Technical Advisory Committee Members

### Name

Patty Wahto  
Linda Shaw  
Kate Kanouse  
Roy Churchwell  
Sue Rodman  
Elyse Applegate  
Mason Auger  
Kaitlyn Raffier  
Betsy McCracken  
Adeyemi Alimi  
Tristan Fluharty  
Clint Scott

### Organization

Juneau Airport  
National Marine Fisheries Service  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources  
Alaska Department of Natural Resources  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation  
Tongass National Forest  
United States Coast Guard

## Attendees — Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members

### Name

Wade Bryson  
RJ Hill  
Stephanie Banua  
Ron Somerville  
Alex Wertheimer  
Dave Hanna  
Rance Brooks  
Winston Smith  
Brian Holst  
Adam Anderson  
Mike Stanley

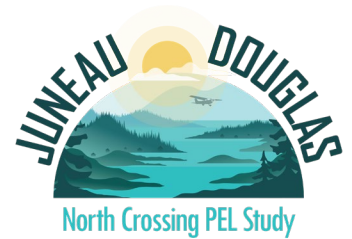
### Organization

City and Borough of Juneau Assembly  
Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska  
Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska  
Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group  
Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group  
Access Alaska  
Goldbelt, Inc.  
Juneau Audubon Society  
Juneau Economic Development Council  
Alaska Marine Lines  
North Douglas Neighborhood Association

## Summary

### Introduction

Greg Lockwood, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Project Manager, opened the meeting by welcoming committee members, sharing Zoom requests and functions, reviewing the agenda, introducing the study team, and establishing the meeting purpose. He emphasized the change in roles for the study team with Marie Heidemann acting as Project Planner and Greg Lockwood becoming the Project Manager.



## PEL Study Process and Schedule Update

Renee Whitesell, DOWL PEL Study Lead, presented a schedule update, highlighting the previous milestones, public meetings, and listening sessions. She noted the status of the Level 2 Screening and shared that the team will host Public Meeting #3 in spring 2024 to share the recommended alternatives following fieldwork and analysis. She reminded committee members of the Purpose and Need Statement and additional goals of the PEL Study.

Renee then provided a brief public involvement update, highlighting agency and small group meetings. She concluded by showing the alternatives to be carried forward to Level 2 Screening, noting the Mendenhall Peninsula, Sunny Point West, Sunny Point East, Vanderbilt, Twin Lakes, and Salmon Creek alternatives.

## Additional Field Studies and Level 2 Screening

Theresa Dutchuk, DOWL Environmental, presented an overview of the field studies proposed in support of the Level 2 Screening process, including wetland delineation, eel grass survey, intertidal habitat mapping, and migratory bird survey and upland bird habitat mapping. She stated that existing literature and technical and stakeholder feedback informed the work plans for these studies. She then presented an overview of each study.

### Wetland Delineation

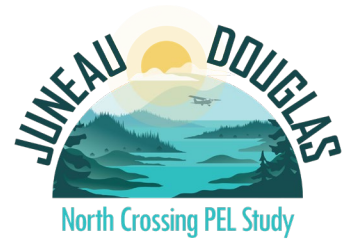
The goals of wetland delineation are to identify or confirm the boundary between wetlands and uplands and to assess wetland functions and values. Fieldwork will be completed before the growing season is complete. The team will collect data using the three-parameter approach, identifying hydrophytic vegetation, hydric soils, and wetland hydrology. Theresa showed an image of the wetlands overlaid with the alternative crossing locations and noted that some alternatives interact with wetlands more than others; however, each alternative will be evaluated with the same methods.

### Eelgrass Survey

The goal of the eelgrass survey is to map patches and beds of eelgrass to identify whether it is native or introduced within the footprints of the potential alternatives. Studies will be completed during low tide with maximum daylight hours using photo points and the Global Positioning System (GPS). This study will be conducted concurrently with the intertidal habitat mapping.

### Intertidal Habitat Mapping

The goals of intertidal habitat mapping are to develop a detailed base map of the area and to evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed alternatives in intertidal habitats. Theresa noted that, while there could be overlap between this study and the wetland mapping, the intertidal team will be mapping the mean high tide and seaward, and the wetland team will be mapping the mean high tide and landward. She showed participants a map of the wetland habitat types in the study area. This study will delineate boundaries of defined habitat types, and will observe and document relative tide level, submerged aquatic vegetation communities, plant species, sediment grain sizes, visible benthic infauna, wildlife use, and other habitat features.



## Migratory Bird Survey and Upland Bird Habitat Mapping

The goals of the migratory bird survey are to document bird habitats, bird species present, and bird use within the study area and evaluate the potential impacts of the proposed alternatives on birds and bird habitats. The survey will include the entire study area and will focus on the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (Refuge). Surveys will be conducted during the morning and evening. In addition to bird identification, the study will collect data to describe the characteristics of each land cover type, including plant species, stand structure, habitat quality, and land use.

Theresa noted that the workplans have been sent to jurisdictional agencies for review and requested advisory committee members send additional comments to the study team by Monday, September 18, 2023.

## Next Steps

Renee shared the map of the alternatives to be carried forward to Level 2 Screening and Detailed Alternative Development and reminded participants that the fieldwork will include all Level 2 Alternatives. She then provided an overview of the Level 2 Screening process, noting that the upcoming fieldwork is in response to the feedback from the advisory committees. She stated that Level 2 Screening will be the final screening before recommended alternatives, including:

- Estimating the constraints placed on the alternatives by various resources.
- Identifying if resources, and to what extent, will be potentially affected by an alternative.
- Evaluating the costs of each alternative, logistical considerations, and technical feasibility.
- Determining whether any of the alternatives would have substantially greater costs without having substantially greater benefits.

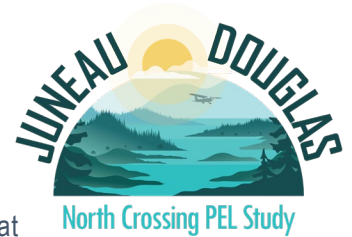
Renee invited participants to view the draft 2024–2027 Statewide Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) update. She noted a recent discretionary grant award directed to moving a project beyond the PEL study phase, including a RAISE Grant (\$16.5 million) received by the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ), with \$23.5 million total programmed funding. She added that the draft STIP could be viewed online, although the public comment period has ended.

Renee then presented an overview of the next steps in the PEL study process, highlighting the fieldwork beginning on Monday, September 18, 2023, applying the detailed alternative screening methodology, summarizing the results through winter 2024, determining the recommended alternatives, and drafting the PEL Study, with the final public open house in spring 2024. She continued with a timeline of events following the conclusion of the PEL study.

## Group Discussion

Following the study team presentation, Renee opened the meeting to group discussion.

One participant commented: It does not appear that you have considered the comments provided in the letter sent to you by the Wetlands Group, hence the credibility of your efforts is seriously compromised. Theresa responded that the study team received a letter from the Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group (MWSG) on September 6, 2023, that included comments and questions. She shared that the study team drafted



preliminary answers to those questions but planned to present the information to the advisory committees prior to responding to MWSSG, as several of the questions were answered by the information shared in the workplan presentation. She added that responses to the questions would be sent following the meeting.

One participant commented: “As a suggestion, another source of information on birds would be eBird entries. These would span multiple seasons and years to give a broader picture of species using the area.” Theresa noted the comment.

One participant commented: The workplans should be shared with the Technical and Stakeholder Advisory Committees to be able to provide comments. Three business days is an unreasonably short timeline for the agencies to review. Theresa responded that the study team looks forward to receiving feedback from the Advisory Committees on the workplans. She added that the focus for workplan review were the jurisdictional agencies as the regulatory subject matter experts, and the workplans were shared with agencies on September 8, 2023.

One participant asked: “How do you plan to quantify benefits in cost-benefit analysis? Have you established a cost-benefit threshold to determine alternatives as being acceptable? Will the alternative with the best cost-benefit ratio be the selected alternative?” Steve responded that, while he was not able to share the details of the cost-benefit analysis, there would be more information in the future. A cost-benefit threshold has not been established. He added that the recommended alternatives would not be based solely on the best cost-benefit ratio. He reminded participants the PEL study would not likely produce a single recommended alternative, but rather multiple alternatives that would be further investigated in the environmental documentation phase.

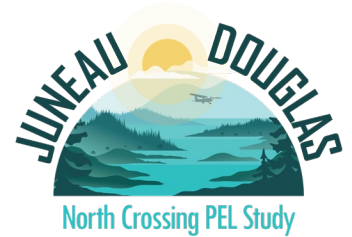
One participant asked: What level of investigation has been done regarding the possible collapse of Salmon Creek Dam and how it would affect the Salmon Creek alternative? Steve responded the study team has done their best to identify geophysical hazards for each alternative in relation to access and will add the Salmon Creek Dam to the list of items to consider. Leslie Daugherty, DOT&PF Chief Bridge Engineer, responded that flooding of all sources would be evaluated for bridge structures.

One participant noted in the chat that they look forward to seeing the workplans.

One participant requested that the study team keep the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) updated as the Area of Potential Effect (APE) is refined in the coming phases, stating that some alternatives could be eliminated if they effect historic properties. The participant asked for consideration as the study team develops the scope and schedule.

One participant from the Juneau Audubon Society asked where the study team had decided the scope, period, and type of surveys would provide the information needed to make decisions. Theresa responded that the fieldwork over the coming weeks will be an additional resource but will not replace existing documentation. She commented the study team has discussed additional times of the year where surveys would be beneficial. Theresa invited members of the bird survey team to discuss the bird survey sources. Mike Hall, Parametrix, commented that eBird is a source the team can use to look at trends and geographic distribution. He added the data collected will supplement larger data sources, including data from the Audubon Society.

One participant asked what the CBJ Assembly could do facilitate this process over the winter and whether it would be beneficial to host additional listening sessions. Steve responded the CBJ Assembly has been helpful keeping the conversation moving and expressed appreciation. He added the study team is in the initial stages of fieldwork and waiting on additional funding, but there could be additional opportunities in the coming months



to host listening sessions for new information to be discussed. Greg agreed with Steve and thanked the CBJ Assembly for their involvement.

One participant from the MWSG commented the workplans have given him more concern than the rest of the study process thus far. He noted that MWSG has many technical experts who have published materials that have been provided to the study team, approximately 800 pages, which cover the same areas as the upcoming fieldwork. He added that much of the wildlife and vegetation does not emerge until spring, and that a study as brief as two weeks would not be comprehensive. Additionally, he requested where mitigation areas would be, noting the Sunny Point area has become increasingly important to geese. Theresa responded that mitigation details will be determined later during the potential National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) phase. She added there is a need for current data and evaluation, as habitats change over time. The participant suggested that without a full-year study, the study team would be moving forward with recommended alternatives without complete data. Theresa responded the study team has a robust set of data currently and will be using the fieldwork to supplement that. Renee added the purpose of the PEL study process is to begin early environmental analysis to support the planning effort and the NEPA phase.

One participant asked if Douglas Island is moving farther from Juneau, as he has noticed increased construction on the Douglas Bridge. Greg commented that he is unaware of anything outside of normal maintenance for the bridge. Leslie commented the joints on the Douglas Bridge have been problematic for some time. The needed maintenance is related to concrete expansion and contraction, which happens over time rather than settling.

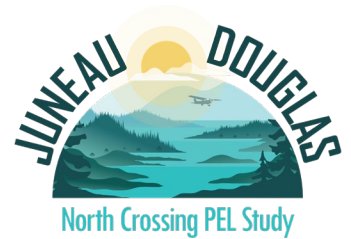
One participant commented: The Juneau Airport (JNU) keeps logs on bird activity as required by the Wildlife Hazard Management Program. JNU hires United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services for this work and tracking. It is a useful source of information and available online. Theresa thanked the participant for the comment.

One participant from the MWSG commented they have raised the concern that several of the alternatives are perpendicular to tidal flows, noting that limiting the studies to the alternatives' footprints will not give the study team an adequate perspective on how the various alternatives impact hydrology. The participant asked if the intent for these surveys was to reflect upon the broader impacts of the alternatives or if that was being done by the existing information on hydrology. Theresa responded these studies are not intended to provide an overall evaluation of hydrology, and a more detailed hydrology study would come later. The participant added the MWSG has repeatedly noted that any sort of causeway or fill would have the most significant impact on the wetlands and hydrology and asked if the study team was still considering those at this point in the study. Steve and Greg responded the study team is too early in the process to have completed preliminary engineering on a crossing structure.

One participant requested an additional study to consider recreational use in the wetlands, including hunting, birding, and walking. He added that bird flight patterns should also be considered so that birds are not redirected into airport space. Theresa made note of these comments.

One participant from Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) commented: I am the Statewide Lands and Refuge Coordinator. I would like to point out that some alternatives may eliminate the option to hunt waterfowl in the Refuge. Renee thanked the participant for the comment.

One participant commented: The STIP indicated that this project is in the design phase. The study team have also appeared to shift focus to design and analysis. Steve is suggesting that it is still in the early stages of planning one year and nine months into the PEL study. Can you please clarify? Renee responded that this PEL Study is part of the planning phase with the intention of moving forward into the preliminary design phase.



Marie stated that DOT&PF and CBJ have noted that confusion in the STIP and have requested changes to language to reflect that the planning process is still underway.

One participant commented that if the Salmon Creek alternative progressed through screening, the barge landing would need to be moved.

One participant commented: “Should a catastrophic dam collapse occur the Salmon Creek crossing would be rendered useless.”

One participant asked the study team if they have considered an overpass over the highway and Egan Drive, directly to the hospital for the Salmon Creek alternative. Steve responded this suggestion could be one of many solutions for this alternative and requested a rough sketch of the idea.

## Conclusion

Renee closed the meeting by reviewing key study team contacts, email address, and website, and thanked participants for their involvement in the study process.

## Action Items

### Study Team:

- Post meeting materials to the study website.
- Send work plans to committee members.
- Submit answers to the recent letter from the Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group.
- Call the participant regarding the possible collapse of the Salmon Creek Dam.

### Committee Members:

- Provide additional feedback by September 18, 2023.