

JOINT TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE | MEETING 7

Tuesday, March 4, 2025, 4:00 – 6:00 p.m. via Zoom

Zoom, Meeting ID: 824 6196 8544, Passcode: 208666

Meeting Objective

Present the results of the Level 2 Screening and receive comments.

Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Schedule Update
- Level 2 Screening – Final
- Discussion
- Wrap-up and Next Steps

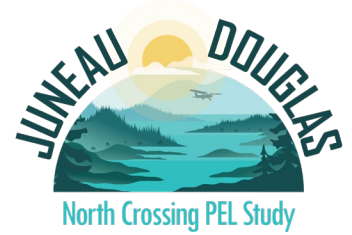
Attendees — PEL Study Team

Name

Greg Lockwood, Project Manager
Chris Goins, Southcoast Region Director
Jill Melcher, Planning
Christy Gentemann, Environmental
Doug Kolwaite, Statewide Environmental Office
Nina Keller, Statewide Environmental Office
Benjamin Storey, Environmental
Alexandria Lawrence, Transportation Planner
Bridget LaPenter, Project Manager
Denise Koch, Director of Engineering and Public Works
Steve Noble, Project Manager
Renee Whitesell, PEL Study Lead
Tim Jameson, GIS
Theresa Dutchuk, Environmental
Jovie Garcia, Public Involvement
Talli Vittetoe, Public Involvement

Organization

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
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Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities
City and Borough of Juneau Engineering and Public Works
City and Borough of Juneau Engineering and Public Works
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Attendees — Technical & Stakeholder Advisory Committee Members

Name

Christine Woll
Dave Hanna
Cody Hargreaves
Sue Rodman
Kate Kanouse
Roy Churchwell
Mason Auger
Teri Tibbett
Royal Hill
Paul Kelly
Craig Dahl
Winston Smith
Brian Holst
Brenda Wright
Ron Somerville
Dave Gann
Linda Shaw
Michael Stanley
Cole Osowski
Margaret Custer
Clint Scott
Sarah Markegard

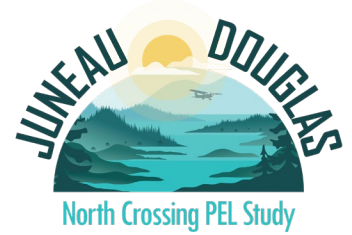
Organization

City and Borough of Juneau Assembly
Access Alaska
Alaska Airlines
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Mining, Land, and Water
Bonnie Brae Neighborhood Association and Douglas Advisory Board
Central Council Tlingit and Haida
City and Borough of Juneau Assembly
Great Juneau Chamber of Commerce
Juneau Audubon Society
Juneau Economic Development Council
Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group
Mendenhall Wetlands Study Group
National Marine Fisheries Service
National Marine Fisheries Service
North Douglas Neighborhood Association
Senator Khiel's office
Southeast Alaska Land Trust
US Coast Guard
US Fish and Wildlife Service

Presentation Summary

Welcome and Introductions

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 then turned the time over to Chris Goins, DOT&PF Southcoast Region Director. Chris used a spaghetti bowl analogy to explain the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) process and the crowd-sourced alternatives, noting that the displayed alternatives were being refined for potential progression to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Chris emphasized that the PEL process would include multiple alternatives, which would be examined in greater detail in subsequent phases.



Schedule Update

Renee Whitesell, DOWL PEL Study Lead, presented the project schedule, emphasizing previous Advisory Committee and Public Meetings. She thanked participants for their support and feedback throughout the PEL process. Renee explained that the purpose of this Advisory Committee Meeting was to review the results of the Level 2 Screening and incorporate feedback into the Draft PEL Study, which would be provided for public review and comment.

Screening Process

Renee provided an overview of the screening process. She explained that the Level 1 Screening assessed how well each alternative met the project's purpose and need and reminded participants that the process was designed to incorporate new information as it became available.

The Level 2 Screening quantitatively evaluated each alternative based on several criteria: how well it satisfied the project's purpose and need, alignment with adopted planning documents, technical feasibility and constructability, financial feasibility, reasonableness under NEPA, practicability under the Clean Water Act (CWA), and prudence and feasibility under Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966.

She shared an overview of the scoring timeline, noting the alternatives screening process that was presented to Advisory Committees, followed by a comment period. Level 1 Screening was then introduced, reviewed, and revised based on feedback. A decision was made to collect additional data during the PEL phase. Draft Level 2 Screening results were later shared with Advisory Committees, followed by a review period. However, Level 2 screening was paused to address questions related to the Salmon Creek Dam. The revised Level 2 Screening was then completed and submitted to agencies and Advisory Committees.

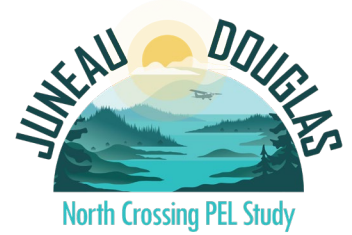
Renee turned the time over to Theresa Dutchuk, DOWL Environmental Specialist, to present the results of Level 2 Screening.

Revised Level 2 Screening

Theresa reviewed the results of the Level 2 Screening and key findings. Before beginning, she reminded participants that additional analyses would take place during the NEPA process. The screening reflected planning-level environmental analysis, which was limited to desktop analyses and limited fieldwork verifications.

The Level 2 Screening included assumptions about certain resources, such as Section 4(f) and protected lands. Since these topics are not procedurally addressed until NEPA and permitting officially commenced, assumptions were made for this planning-level evaluation.

Theresa shared that feedback was received through comments, small group meetings, and review rounds with the project team. This feedback was used to revise the draft Level 2 Screening to its final version. The most common comment emphasized the importance of the resources within the boundaries of the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (MWSGR). As a result, the score of impacts within the refuge boundaries — whether wetlands, bird habitat, intertidal zone, or the addition of impervious surfaces — were weighted



accordingly. She noted that Hendrickson Point was included as a potential 4(f) resource, however, this will need to be verified once the NEPA process begins.

Screening updates were made based on feedback, including adding Hendrickson Point to the protected lands category and refining how residential and commercial impacts were counted by removing overlapping areas. The Essential Fish Habitat category was removed, with intertidal areas and anadromous streams now classified as Essential Fish Habitat. Construction and maintenance cost estimates were added, and 5-mile Beach was excluded as a community gathering place. Right-of-way (ROW) needs were updated to include a 200-foot corridor, and anadromous streams were confirmed using the latest Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) 2024 data.

Theresa then shared the revised scoring for each alternative, explaining that the scores for Mendenhall Peninsula and Salmon Creek increased due to the weight placed on impacts to resources located within the MWSGR. The scores for Salmon Creek and Mendenhall Peninsula reflected the impacts associated with the alternatives being outside, or partially outside, the refuge. Conversely, the scores for Sunny Point West, Sunny Point East, Vanderbilt, and Twin Lakes alternatives decreased.

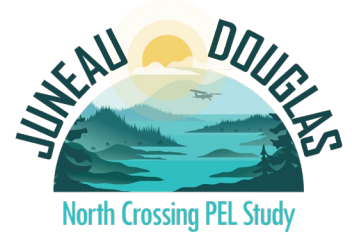
Another key observation she discussed from the memo was that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request was still outstanding to assess the risk of a dam breach event, which would be addressed during NEPA. An observation from the screening memo indicated that additional consultation would be needed with the United States Coast Guard (USCG) regarding clearance requirements for the bridges with respect to navigability. All bridge alternatives were below the elevation of the existing structure and would require further analysis during NEPA. While all alternatives could be adapted to higher bridge elevations, the impacts would likewise increase.

She shared that all the alternatives were evaluated with worst-case assumptions, such as considering maximum ROW and considering indirect impacts as direct impacts. These impacts will be refined more precisely during the NEPA phase with more detailed analyses than was appropriate for this planning-level PEL study. Another finding she discussed was that the Mendenhall Peninsula alternative was determined not feasible based on cost. At two to four times the cost of other alternatives, its value did not support the need as well as other options. All other alternatives were recommended for NEPA. The relative scoring did not reveal any significant outliers based on scoring alone that would justify the dismissal of an alternative.

She then explained that during a NEPA analysis, alternatives would be reviewed with a blank slate. There are no preferences or preferred alternatives based on the PEL study; rather, it provides a recommendation of which alternatives should move forward to a NEPA review. The scores shown would not follow an alternative through to NEPA but reflect screening for significant outliers. Theresa handed the presentation back to Renee.

What's Next?

Renee showed an overview of the Advisory Committee Meetings throughout the project with an overview of the purpose and objectives of each meeting. She shared that the next steps in the process were the Draft PEL Study, final Public Open House and comment period, and the Final PEL Study. She shared that all comments received from the meeting will be documented and addressed with feedback in the Draft PEL Study report. The report will also include documentation of all comments gathered throughout the entire PEL study process.



She also shared an update that City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) had sent a letter to DOT&PF stating that the statute that created the Mendenhall Refuge grants CBJ a preferential right for a transportation corridor within the Refuge. This will also be documented and responded to in the Draft PEL Study report. The letter is attached to these minutes for reference.

Group Discussion

The group discussion began by reviewing questions that had been typed in the chat. Renee then invited participants to ask questions and encouraged them to use the hand raise function.

- Q: Margaret Custer asked a question regarding the recent Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) order to amend the Salmon Creek Hydroelectric Project license to permit the installation of a new penstock. She noted that the order did not reflect any awareness of the safety concerns suggested by DOWL during the PEL process, despite the detailed information provided in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and other analyses performed for the license amendment. This suggested that FERC was either unaware of DOWL's concerns about catastrophic flood risk or did not consider them serious. Margaret inquired about the information DOWL submitted to FERC as part of the FOIA request.

A: Steve Noble, DOWL Project Manager, responded that FERC has a very rigid process for obtaining information regarding existing facilities, noting that the project team has not been able to have a conversation with FERC. The team has submitted a request for information but has no update on when they will receive it. Greg affirmed that there is a risk, but that the team is unable to gauge at this time how big the risk is. Chris asked if Steve could clarify the classification of the dam. Steve responded that the dam has historical significance from an engineering perspective and is a concrete arch dam that was constructed in the early 1900s. It is classified as a high hazard dam due to the residences and businesses that are located in the failure zone, and not something inherent to the design. It also has a maximum pool elevation that was implemented in the 1980s, since the dam does not meet seismic standards if the reservoir exceeds that elevation. Other information regarding the dam classification will need to be addressed when the team receives the risk assessment from FERC.

- Q: Ron Somerville stated that any selection must minimize Section 4(f) impacts and expressed doubt about alternative selection avoiding the Refuge. He noted that the crossing options have differing impacts but was unclear on how these alternatives had been assessed. Ron also asked if it had been decided who would be conducting the NEPA analysis.

A: Theresa responded that Ron's observations were consistent with the Section 4(f) process but noted that the project team had not been able to conduct a robust evaluation for this PEL study, as these evaluations are better initiated during the NEPA process. She explained that the full evaluation would occur under the NEPA analysis. Steve added that the project team's contract would end upon the completion of the PEL study. DOT&PF and CBJ would determine whether a consultant would be part of the NEPA phase, and DOWL would need to compete for that contract like any other firm.

- Q: Michael Stanley asked if the CBJ letter would be posted on the Juneau Douglas North Crossing website.

A: Steve responded that it was the project team's intent to make the CBJ letter available as part of the summary from this Advisory Committee meeting.

- Q: Winston Smith asked for more details about the added information regarding the preferential selection of a crossing within the state conservation area. He requested specifics on when this occurred and the circumstances that would permit the selection of an alternative if there was an option to avoid the conservation area entirely.

A: Renee noted that the CBJ letter had only been received a few days earlier and that the team was still seeking to understand its contents. Denise Koch, CBJ Director of Engineering and Public Works, acknowledged that many of the alternatives passed through the wetlands and emphasized the importance of incorporating what CBJ had learned from reviewing minutes, hearings, and the statute from 1976. She shared that when the Refuge was created, it was contemplated that CBJ could have a transportation corridor through it. Denise noted that this project was important for CBJ, and that they are enthusiastic partners with DOT&PF. She mentioned that the second crossing had been the number one priority on the CBJ Assembly project list for many years.

- Q: Winston Smith asked for additional clarification on when the statute occurred.

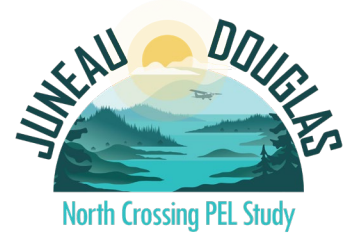
A: Denise responded that the statute occurred in 1976. She added that the statute did not require the selected alternative to go through the Refuge, but provided that as an option. She confirmed that the CBJ letter would be posted for review.

- Q: Margaret clarified that the Alaska Electric Light and Power (AEL&P) worst-case scenario described the risk to existing infrastructure, specifically Egan Drive, rather than to a bridge, following operations of excess water levels in violation of their license and an 8.0 earthquake in Chatham Strait. She noted that such a scenario would cause catastrophic damage across the community, with temporal flooding along the roadway being the least of the concerns. Margaret questioned why FERC had not adjusted the water level allowed in the dam's operating permit or mentioned safety concerns, suggesting that raising this issue in a PEL study unrelated to the Salmon Creek Dam lacked credibility. She emphasized that FERC should be responsible for evaluating the safety of the project, not DOWL. Margaret also questioned the success of the PEL study in reducing the number of alternatives considered by an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), noting that the results in March 2025 were essentially the same as in 2023 with minor differences. She expressed concern that the PEL Study was supposed to narrow down the alternatives to an ideal panel of two or three for NEPA review, yet six alternatives, several with objectively negative values, were advancing into an EIS.

A: Steve responded that he did not have any new information regarding the question on FERC, as he had not seen their risk analysis. He anticipated that the risk analysis would be available by the time the NEPA document began, and that FERC would provide comments and express concerns. Steve shared that the goal was to narrow down the alternatives. He explained that the PEL process is meant to streamline the NEPA process, but the team did not feel there was a sufficient gap between the alternatives to eliminate many of them. Theresa added that NEPA requires the evaluation of all alternatives that are reasonable, feasible, and meet the project's purpose and need. She noted that the PEL study allows for additional analysis to identify outliers prior to moving into NEPA, but the disparity between the scores did not produce a clear outlier other than the Mendenhall Peninsula alternative, which is being dismissed.

- Q: Roy Churchwell asked why the Sunny Point East and West alternatives, which were scored well below the others, were not being considered for elimination.

A: Renee responded that Theresa's prior response addressed this question as well.



- Q: Sue Rodman shared language from the from the MWSGR management plan: *“The City and Borough of Juneau may acquire land for a public transportation corridor, including a water corridor, only after the following have been demonstrated: 1) that there is a significant public need for the corridor which cannot reasonably be met off-refuge; 2) that the use of the refuge lands are avoided or minimized to the maximum extent feasible including use of subsurface or elevated, no-fill corridor options where feasible; 3) that public access to the refuge is maintained; and 4) that all unavoidable impacts to the refuge and to refuge resources are fully mitigated through restoration, replacement and/or other compensation. It is not the intent of this policy to prevent the maintenance of the Gastineau navigational channel. New private, exclusive use transportation corridors will not be authorized within the refuge.”* Sue stated that she provided this language to help answer Winston’s previous questions.

A: Renee reminded participants that the CBJ letter was received on Friday. Denise added that CBJ plans to work closely with ADF&G to accomplish any transportation corridor.

- Q: Dave Hanna observed that those who had been monitoring the wetlands noticed a rapid transformation and a significant loss of wetlands. He suggested that a project of this scale could help mitigate wetland loss, providing the necessary funds and processes to address the issue effectively.

A: Renee thanked him for his comments.

- Q: Linda Shaw inquired about who would be conducting the NEPA analysis and suggested that the lead action agency should have a NEPA policy available for sharing.

A: Christy Gentemann, DOT&PF Environmental Specialist, responded that Federal Highways Administration and DOT&PF would be the lead agencies for the NEPA policy. She also mentioned that the Environmental Procedures Manual¹ outlines DOT&PF’s environmental processes and shared this document in the meeting chat.

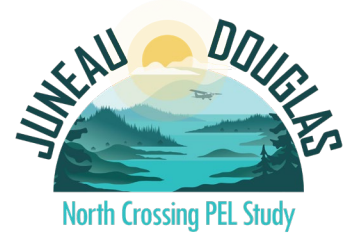
- Q: Margaret noted that CBJ had previously requested a corridor based on studies for a second crossing but failed to meet the criteria with ADF&G for selecting a transportation corridor through the Refuge. She mentioned that CBJ’s counsel had provided a memo to the assembly in 2010, explaining why this would not be successful at that time or in the future, given the existence of off-Refuge alternatives that could meet any possible purpose and need. She questioned how the new CBJ letter determined that they had met the criteria for a crossing through the Refuge in 2025 under the same statute that existed in 2010.

A: Denise responded that further investigation had been conducted, including reviewing the minutes from the creation of the refuge, as well as additional research by CBJ’s legal team. She reiterated that the letter does not mandate that the alignment must be within the Refuge, but that it is a possibility. She mentioned that the Alaska Constitution supports a transportation corridor through the Refuge.

- Q: Margaret stated that the land trust, recognized as the expert on wetlands in Juneau, had recently completed a comprehensive functional assessment² of 5,252 acres, including the PEL study area. She emphasized that the tidal wetlands are stable and highlighted that Clean Water Act CWA mitigation is not

¹ Environmental Procedures Manual: <https://dot.alaska.gov/stwddes/desenviron/resources/enviromanual.shtml>

² Southeast Alaska Land Trust Mendenhall Wetlands Functional Assessment Report: <https://www.southeastalaskalandtrust.org/lands-we-steward/juneau/mendhenhall-wetlands/>



permitted on freshwater streams for tidal and intertidal impacts. She asserted that any suggestion that a second crossing would positively affect wetlands is not supported by facts or regulations.

A: Renee thanked Margaret for her comment.

- Q: Linda followed up on Margaret's comment by explaining that the primary mechanism for mitigating wetland loss has been preservation, as creating new wetlands of similar type and location has not been feasible. She noted that several of the proposed alternatives would impact these preserved wetlands, which is unprecedented for the mitigation of a previous project. Linda emphasized that this would add to cumulative impacts, which should be considered in a NEPA review.

A: Theresa thanked Linda for her comment.

- Q: Ron asked for clarification on the timeline regarding the completion of the PEL process.

A: Renee announced that this was the final meeting for the Advisory Committee. She explained that the next step for the team was to compile everything into the PEL study report, incorporating notes from this Advisory Committee Meeting. Renee stated that the intention was to submit the study report to DOT&PF for their review, followed by a review from the Statewide Environmental Office. She mentioned that the report would then be made available to the public alongside the final Public Open House, which would initiate a final thirty-day comment period. She reiterated that all comments would be documented and responded to.

- Q: Margaret asked when the Technical Advisory Committee members would receive responses to their comments submitted in April 2024. She noted that they had not yet received any response to the 57 pages of detailed questions, comments, and analysis they had provided a year ago.

A: Theresa responded that they have been logging comments for the duration of the process. Renee added that many of the comments are reflected in the revised screening process.

Wrap Up and Next Steps

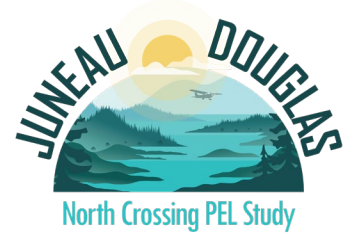
Renee closed the meeting by reviewing study team contacts, email address, and website, and thanked participants for their involvement in the process.

Steve thanked the Advisory Team Committee for their meaningful contributions.

Action Items

Study Team:

- Post meeting materials and meeting recording to the study website.
- Update the Advisory Committees on the CBJ letter.



Committee Members:

- Provide additional feedback.
- Participate in the final Public Open House.