Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas (CACFA)

Official Meeting Minutes
May 29, 2026 – Fairbanks, Alaska

Meeting Information

Date: May 29, 2026
Location: Fairbanks, Alaska (with virtual participation)
Time: 9:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Attendance

Present: Charlie Lean (Chair), Susan Smith, Sen. Cathy Giessel, Teresa Hanson, Alice Smith (V), Will Koehler (V), Randy Zarnke, Rep. Andy Josephson (V)

Excused: Dave Brown, Nate Turner, Frank Wood III

Quorum: Quorum established with seven members present.

Staff: Kim Griffith

Guests/Presenters: Sara Taylor, Dick Bishop, Mary Bishop, John Hilsinger, Pete Buist, Tina Cunning, Ray Kreig (V), Angela Ludwick, Kevin Pendergast, Joshua Scott

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Call to Order

Chair Charlie Lean called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m.

Motions and Votes

Approval of Agenda

Motion: Sen. Cathy Giessel moved to approve the agenda.

Second: Randy Zarnke

Discussion:

- Correction made for Alice Smith's name.

Vote: Passed unanimously.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion: Randy Zarnke moved to approve the October 25 and February 26 meeting minutes.

Second: Charlie Lean

Discussion:

- Clarification that the ethics declaration referenced on page four was presented as a suggestion only.

Vote: Passed unanimously.

Budget Report

Presented by: Susan Smith and Kim Griffith

FY26 Budget Summary

- Original allocation: $201,500
  - Personnel: $145,000
  - Travel: $10,000
  - Services: $15,000
  - RSA with Department of Law: $30,000
  - Commodities: $1,500
- Revised budget following Executive Director hire and salary revision: $221,004

CACFA Budget Adjustments

The Commission adjusted budget allocations to better reflect operational needs:

- Personnel: approximately $60,874
- Travel: $60,000
- Services: $44,000
- Department of Law: $30,000
- Commodities: $6,500

A budget shift of approximately $21,000 was approved:

- $5,000 added to travel

- $10,000 added to lease expenses
- $6,300 added to commodities

Budget Status

- Approximately $40,000 expended
- Approximately $182,000 remaining
- Fiscal Year 2026 ends June 30, 2026

Discussion

- DNR continues to report the original budget structure and has not incorporated CACFA's revised allocations.
- Executive Director Griffith successfully negotiated fund transfers to support travel and office startup expenses.
- Lease for the Anchorage Legislative Information Office becomes effective June 1, 2026.
- The FY27 budget was submitted by DNR without CACFA input and will require revision in FY28 to adequately support commission operations beyond the Executive Director position.

Chair Report

Presented by: Charlie Lean

Priorities and Planning

Chair Lean reviewed priorities established following the February meeting:

- Hire Executive Director
- Establish CACFA Office
- Gain greater control over the Commission budget.
- Hold regular in-person meetings.

Additional updates included:

- Recruitment delays resulting from the State hiring freeze in early 2026, led to delays in hiring and resulted in postponed Spring 2026 meeting.
- Preliminary 2027 meeting planning, including meetings in Anchorage and Juneau, with a potential Fairbanks meeting subject to available funding.
- Upcoming ANILCA-related issues, including:
    - Cabin policy
    - Federal Park concessions
    - Public access concerns
    - Tongass Roadless Rule

- Development of FY27 goals and measurable accomplishments, including budget management, historic file redactions, and website restoration.

Executive Director Report

Presented by: Kim Griffith

Executive Director Griffith provided a brief professional background as a fourth-generation Alaskan with experience in mining, state regulation, and public outreach.

Current Priorities

- Secure office space at the Anchorage LIO and complete office setup before June 30, 2026.
- Manage FY26 and FY27 budgets and develop FY28 budget recommendations to better reflect Commission needs.
- Restore and update the CACFA website.
- Coordinate logistics for the October 2026 meeting.
- Continue the historic records redaction project.

Cabin Policy Discussion

Facilitated by: Randy Zarnke

Presenters

- Randy Zarnke, Alaska Trappers Association
- Tina Cunning (historical context)
- Kevin Pendergast, BLM State Director

Discussion

Participants discussed longstanding barriers to obtaining trapping cabin permits on federal lands.

Key concerns included:

- Historic requirements that trappers derive at least 25 percent of income from fur sales.
- Excessive bonding requirements and permit costs.
- Lack of a consistent permitting process.

The Alaska Trappers Association developed draft guidelines in 2024 intended to align with state trapping cabin regulations and ANILCA Section 1303.

BLM Response

BLM State Director Kevin Pendergast:

- Confirmed there is no legal prohibition against issuing trapping cabin permits.
- Identified administrative processes and staffing limitations as the primary barriers.
- Committed to pursuing practical solutions focused on outcomes.
- Indicated staff would explore streamlined approaches, including:
    - Programmatic environmental assessments
    - Categorical exclusions where appropriate
- Recognized the need to minimize bonding and cost-recovery requirements.
- Expressed support for continued coordination with Wrangell-St. Elias and Interior BLM offices.

Outcome

The Commission agreed to establish a Cabin Policy Subcommittee.

- Chair: Randy Zarnke
- Support: Charlie Lean

The subcommittee is expected to provide interim recommendations at the October 2026 meeting.

Agency Presentation

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

Presenter: Joshua Scott, Acting Superintendent

Highlights

- Emphasized partnership with Alaska residents, efficient spending, field-based decision making, and science-driven management.
- Reported visitor attendance exceeding 100,000 in 2025.
- Discussed evaluation of staffing levels between Kennecott and Copper Center.
- Supported reopening historic public-use cabins and restoring trails.
- Discussed wildlife and environmental trends, including:
    - Sheep populations have been declining approximately 75 percent since 1985.
    - Glacier retreat has been estimated at approximately 13 percent since 1985.

- Committed to improved collaboration with horse permit holders and in holders, particularly in the Nabesna and Chisana areas.
- Confirmed a shift away from previously restrictive management approaches toward practical trail maintenance and public safety improvements.

Historical Perspective

Stan Leaphart, Former Executive Director

Mr. Leaphart provided historical context regarding the Commission's formation and mission.

Topics discussed included:

- Creation of CACFA in 1981 under Senator Bettye Fahrenkamp.
- Early coordination with the Alaska Land Use Council.
- Historical public meetings concerning cabin regulations and fish and wildlife management plans.
- The continuing importance of public representation in federal land management decisions.

Public Comments

Tina Cunning

Outlined concerns regarding federal commercial service permitting regulations and requested CACFA consider a petition for rulemaking to exempt Alaska from the federal "least impact" criteria.

Noted that:

- The National Park Service ROW regulations did not include an Alaska exemption.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service included such an exemption.

Recommended inviting NPS Regional Director Don Striker to discuss the issue.

Sara Taylor

Suggested review of ANILCA Title XI transportation and access provisions and encouraged planning efforts related to the 50th anniversary of ANILCA in 2030.

Commissioner Comments

Alice Smith

Discussed the proposed Tongass Forest Plan Revision and expressed concern that the draft plan places greater emphasis on industrial tourism than community recreation opportunities.

State and industry comments will be shared with commissioners for review.

Administrative Planning and Outreach Discussion

Discussion focused on public engagement and organizational improvements.

Website and Records

- Restore a single CACFA web portal.
- Continue archiving and preserving historic Commission documents.

Communications

- Explore development of a quarterly newsletter.
- Consider a social media presence, subject to State approval.

Outreach Partnerships

- Establish educational partnerships with organizations such as:
    - Alaska Miners Association (AMA)
    - Resource Development Council (RDC)

The goal is to increase public awareness of CACFA and federal land issues affecting Alaskans.

Action Items

1. Finalize FY26 budget encumbrances and submit FY27–FY28 adjustment recommendations.
   Responsible: Susan Smith and Kim Griffith
2. Establish the Cabin Policy Committee and coordinate discussions with BLM.
   Responsible: Charlie Lean and Randy Zarnke
3. Recover ownership and administration of the CACFA website and archive materials.
   Responsible: Kim Griffith

4. Develop a public education and newsletter proposal.
   Responsible: Communications Committee
5. Coordinate with the National Park Service Regional Office regarding an October update on Wrangell-St. Elias trails and cabin issues.
   Responsible: Charlie Lean and Kim Griffith

Next Meeting

Tentative Date: October 2026

Location: Anchorage Legislative Information Office (LIO)

Proposed Agenda

- Committee reports
- Federal agency updates
- FY27 financial review
- Outreach and communications progress

Adjournment

There being no further business before the Commission, Chair Charlie Lean adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:30 p.m.