
STATE OF ALASKA
CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION
ON FEDERAL AREAS

2025 ANNUAL REPORT



Submitted to: Governor Mike Dunleavy

Senate President Gary Stevens

Speaker of the House Bryce Edgmon

February 14, 2026

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE

As required by AS 41.37.220 and submitted on February 14, 2026, by the

CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FEDERAL AREAS (CACFA)

The Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas (CACFA) was reauthorized by the Alaska Legislature in 2024. CACFA's duties encompass identifying and seeking resolution to federal actions that unnecessarily impact Alaskans' economic, social, and traditional rights established in federal laws, particularly the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA). CACFA is composed of six volunteer Alaska residents appointed by the Governor and six appointed by the Legislature. All 12 appointments to serve as commissioners were completed in October 2025, but administrative hurdles prevented CACFA from conducting its duties during the remaining two months of 2025. This report concludes with:

- (1) Recommendations for executive branch actions to remove inefficiencies, reduce costs, and improve administrative support for CACFA to fulfil its independent statutory responsibilities, consistent with Governor's Administrative Order No. 358 and its enabling legislation; and
- (2) The 2026 priorities adopted at its February 13-14, 2026, meeting to begin restoring rights of Alaska's residents under ANILCA and other federal land laws.

BACKGROUND

In 1981, the Alaska legislature and Governor established the commission as a citizen forum to help Alaskans meet the social and economic promises Congress adopted in ANILCA and other federal laws. CACFA is an independent commission of volunteers across Alaska appointed by the Governor and the legislature to prevent changing politics from interfering with CACFA's defense of individual Alaskans' hard-won rights in ANILCA. For decades, CACFA helped individual Alaskans work through federal requirements – such as commercial permits for air taxis, sled dog tours, and hunting guides; access to inholdings and mining; and cabins needed for subsistence, trapping, and other traditional uses. **Without CACFA there is no one to help Alaskans navigate federal red tape or appeal federal decisions on behalf of Alaskans.**

CACFA is an advisory commission with no authority to issue regulations. Commission duties are in Alaska Statute (AS) 41.37.220:

- (a) The commission shall consider, research, and hold hearings on the consistency with federal law and congressional intent on management, operation, planning, development, and additions to federal management areas in the state.
- (b) The commission shall consider, research, and hold hearings on the effect of federal regulations and federal management decisions on the people of the state.
- (c) The commission may, after consideration of the public policy concerns under (a) and (b) of this section, make a recommendation on the concerns identified under (a) and (b) of this section to an agency of the state or to the agency of the United States that manages federal land in the state.

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- (d) The commission shall consider the views, research, and reports of advisory groups established by it under AS 41.37.230 as well as the views, research, and reports of individuals and other groups in the state.
- (e) The commission shall establish internal procedures for the management of the responsibilities granted to it under this chapter.
- (f) The commission shall report annually to the governor and the legislature within the first 10 days of a regular legislative session. (Emphasis added)

The Commission is authorized to establish advisory groups. Members of an advisory group must be broadly representative of individuals involved in activities affected by the establishment or management of units of federal land within the state. Although CACFA's role is advisory, it is authorized by AS 41.37.240 to request the attorney general to file suit against a federal official or agency if the Commission determines the federal agency is "*acting in violation of an Act of Congress, congressional intent, or the best interests of the State of Alaska.*"

CACFA is authorized to employ staff and contract for services related to matters within its authority. Staff are hired by and report to the Commission and are responsible for providing updates and analysis of federal actions, as well as administrative activities, such as booking travel, updating CACFA's website, and public noticing of the three annual meetings required by CACFA bylaws. CACFA hires an Executive Director (ED) and has hired additional staff and interns as funding is available to carry out assignments on behalf of the commission. CACFA continues to perform its duties regardless of the absence of an ED as it did during the period in 2014 between the first and second ED. The ED, among other responsibilities, provides responses approved by CACFA to public inquiries and monitors the Federal Register to identify changes, impacts, and recommend actions related to management of federal lands in Alaska.

CACFA holds public meetings, providing an opportunity for Alaskans to testify and for federal agencies to explain decisions. CACFA amended its bylaws in 2016 to incorporate specific public notice requirements in response to the following two recommendations for public notice procedures by the Legislative Performance Audit (CAN 10-30079-15), May 14, 2015:

- The commission's executive director should strengthen procedures to ensure public notice requirements are met.
- The commission's executive director should implement procedures to ensure commission meeting minutes are recorded and transmitted.

CACFA also kept Alaskans informed of emerging issues through the quarterly "Alaska Land Updates" newsletter, emailed to over 500 subscribers and archived on the CACFA website. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Commissioner's Office hosts CACFA's website containing a large public archive of CACFA correspondence, activities, meetings, and statutorily-required Annual Reports. DNR's Commissioner's Office historically provided administrative support at no cost, such as procurement, travel, and fiscal services. In 2024 the legislature confirmed this arrangement and explicitly limited DNR to only provide administrative support.

Despite significant actions on behalf of Alaskans during two decades of ANILCA implementation, CACFA was defunded in 1999 by the administration. House Bill 87 reestablished and funded CACFA in 2007, and CACFA fully resumed operations in July 2008. After ten more years of effective actions on behalf of Alaskans, CACFA was again defunded by the administration in 2016 and sunset June 30, 2021.¹ On April 8, 2020, the Alaska State Legislature Division of Legislative Audit released “**A Sunset Review of the Department of Natural Resources, Citizens’ Advisory Commission on Federal Areas (CACFA)**” Audit Control Number 10-20121-20et, noting the 2015 recommendations to adopt public notice and meeting procedures were resolved, and:

REPORT CONCLUSIONS

*The audit concluded that, from the date of the prior audit in February 2015 through the time CACFA was defunded in June 2017, the commission operated effectively and did not significantly duplicate the efforts of other entities. During this period, the commission actively monitored the effects of federal regulation and management decisions in accordance with statutory duties. **The audit also concluded that there is a continuing public need for the commission.*** [Emphasis added]

CURRENT STATUS

Legislation: The Legislature reauthorized CACFA in 2024 with a 2031 expiration, provided a fiscal note, and adopted the following amendments to CACFA’s enabling legislation:

- AS 41.37.160 was amended to **limit the relationship of CACFA to the Department of Natural Resources:** *“The Citizens Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska is established in the department **for administrative purposes only.**”*
- AS 41.37.170(b) was amended to assure a geographic balance among the members to represent each judicial district, with not more than three members being from any one of the four judicial districts.
- AS 41.37.180 Qualifications of members was amended so at least one member must be enrolled in and represent a federally recognized tribe. At least one other member must be a shareholder of and represent a corporation organized under ANCSA.
- A new subsection was added to AS 41.37.220 prohibiting the commission from any work “relating to public use on private land, including a highway with an easement onto private land or onto public land reserved for private use.”
- A new section directed staggered term limits for the initial members appointed by the Governor, but those have not yet been assigned.

¹ CACFA’s FY 16 Operating Expenditures total \$261, 854 of a General Funding Appropriation total of \$272.900 (Personal Services \$148,051; Travel \$34,545; Services \$77,119; Commodities \$2,080; Capital Outlay \$59). On June 29, 2016, CACFA’s budget was zeroed-out by line-item veto and the appropriations returned to the general fund.

DNR’s administrative role in support of CACFA: In addition to statutorily limiting DNR’s role to only provide administrative support to CACFA, the 2024 reauthorizing legislation provided a position for the CACFA ED to be administratively

“housed in [DNR] Office of Project Management and Permitting (OPMP) . . . [The ED] reports to the commission, would coordinate commission feedback, and respond to citizen inquiries and concerns about actions on federal lands.”

As such, the legislature attached funds appropriated for CACFA to DNR OPMP to be maintained by, but not subject to approval of DNR. All travel of members and staff must comply with the State Administrative Manual and DNR travel policies. In-state travel of members and staff require prior authorization of the Chair or Commission *“except travel of the members and [ED] and staff to meetings of the Commission and its committees shall not require authorization.”*

Under the Bylaws, the ED prepares a proposed budget for CACFA’s approval each year and consults with DNR in preparing DNR’s budget for submission to the Legislature for subsequent fiscal years. If no ED is employed, this remains a CACFA responsibility. **Any expenditure must be for a purpose “authorized by the Commission,” and payment is issued only after the ED or Chair certifies the expenditure.** The Fiscal Note Analysis HCS CSSB 34(FIN) adopted for fiscal years 2025-2030 recognizes an anticipated *“\$10.0K in annual travel expenses to hold public meetings”* and identifies possible contractual costs for expenses for the ED, among other authorized expenses. In FY 2026 the Fiscal Note authorizes up to \$30.0K for CACFA-requested legal services through an RSA with Department of Law.

Current Roster:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Appointed by</u>	<u>Date Appointed</u>	<u>Expiration²</u>	<u>Judicial District</u>
Dave Brown	Wrangell	Governor	October 13, 2025	TBD	1 st
Senator Cathy Giessel	Anchorage	Senate	February 19, 2025	TBD	NA
Teresa Hanson	Fairbanks	Governor	July 9, 2025	TBD	4 th
Rep Andy Josephson	Anchorage	House	February 28, 2025	TBD	NA
Elizabeth Jerue*	Fairbanks	Governor	October 13, 2025	TBD	4 th
William Koehler	Delta	Senate	July 2, 2025	TBD	4 th
Charlie Lean	Nome	House	March 12, 2025	TBD	2 nd
Alice Johnson Smith	Juneau	Governor	August 25, 2025	TBD	1 st
Susan Smith	Chokosna	Senate	July 2, 2025	TBD	3 rd
Nathan Turner	Nowitna R.	Governor	August 25, 2025	TBD	3 rd
Frank Woods III*	Dillingham	House	September 23, 2025	TBD	3 rd
Randall Zarnke	Fairbanks	Governor	August 22, 2025	TBD	4 th

*Jerue fills designated ANCSA Corporation shareholder seat; Woods fills designated tribal seat

² The 2024 reauthorization requires staggered terms, which CACFA will recommend at a future meeting. Otherwise July 1, 2028, is the default expiration, per the Boards and Commissions website

2025-2026 Steps to Reactivate CACFA: The last elected chair of CACFA (Charlie Lean) had served on the Executive Committee since 2008 and continued to fulfil functions of the Chair during the 2016-2021 funding hiatus, such as signing off completion of contracted projects and responding to public inquiries for help on federal land management issues. After CACFA sunset, the Chair assisted at the request of legislators and staff for nearly four more years by providing information and testimony in support of reauthorizing legislation. Legislators and volunteers instrumental in the 2024 reauthorization pressed the Chair to apply to continue on CACFA in order to provide his expertise in hiring its ED and training new members in CACFA's operations.

October 2025: On October 13, 2025, the last of the 12 commissioners was appointed, of which four were carryovers from before CACFA sunset in 2021, including its Chair. Upon completion of the appointments, the Chair communicated with re-appointed members, the former ED, and key individual volunteers active in CACFA's reauthorization to initiate a startup meeting and the hiring process for a new ED. It was determined the most timely and cost-effective process to reconvene CACFA was to contract the former ED, Sara Taylor, available due to federal furlough.

On October 28 the CACFA Chair submitted a sole source contract to DNR Office of Project Management and Permitting (OPMP) - designated by the OPMP-authored Fiscal Note to provide administrative support. The contract with former CACFA ED would expedite (in 1-3 weeks) consultation with the appointed commissioners, advertise for a new ED, locate CACFA files, and process necessary application for travel authorization for CACFA to conduct its first organizational meeting. The proposed contract duties also included setting up training on applicable federal and state laws and to elect officers, adopt a budget, and hire a new ED. With administrative assistance from DNR as needed to process state forms, the former ED would post 30-day public notice consistent with CACFA's bylaws and hold its organizational meeting in-person in December 2025, prior to session when legislative members have tight schedules.

OPMP did not process the proposed contract, did not take or return the Chair's phone calls, and did not respond to the Chair's emails.³ OPMP also did not consult with reappointed CACFA members, with the former ED, or with legislative staff and other individuals with CACFA expertise involved in its reauthorization. In contrast to DNR's statutorily-limited authority and despite lacking familiarity with CACFA, its bylaws, former meeting processes, and products, OPMP assumed responsibility for overseeing CACFA operations. Without CACFA concurrence and despite the bylaws' requirements for public notice adopted to resolve Legislative audits, OPMP requested legal advice from Department of Law (DOL) on public meeting requirements. DOL, also unfamiliar with CACFA, dismissed the bylaws and audit settlement in providing advice to OPMP and CACFA. OPMP met with DOL the week of October 31 seeking approval for a waiver to the Governor's hiring freeze so CACFA could recruit and hire the ED. OPMP did not seek CACFA consultation, much less CACFA concurrence, resulting in delays and interference

³ To date, DNR has provided no response to CACFA's proposed contract. OPMP finally called the Chair in November to ask why he thought he had authority to act as Chair of the Commission in its effort to reorganize.

with CACFA's efforts to reestablish its operations in a timely manner, plus charged unnecessary and unapproved charges to CACFA's budget.

November 2025: November 10 to 17, OPMP emailed commissioners regarding: set a date for an organizational meeting, DNR's consultations with DOL on public meeting notice requirements, and CACFA's requested waiver to the Governor's hiring freeze in Administrative Order No. 358. CACFA voiced objections to OPMP asserting control of setting a meeting and drafting the agenda, and on November 17 the CACFA Chair wrote OPMP that the virtual, short-noticed meeting did not meet CACFA's needs. OPMP responded the meeting will be virtual due to "budget constraints." Thus, OPMP spent time (charged CACFA's budget for personnel time) in actions not requested by CACFA, including meeting preparations, consultation with DOL on deviating from CACFA's requested public notice period, which is required by CACFA's bylaws.

On November 26, OPMP held a virtual organizational meeting with only 9 days public notice⁴ despite CACFA's objections. OPMP drafted the agenda and involved Department of Law, insisting the Chair use a script drafted by DOL. At OPMP's insistence, CACFA conducted an election of temporary officers at which members unanimously re-elected the existing Chair and a Vice-chair. A subcommittee was established and a meeting set for December 12 to review the ED position description. CACFA continued to press to hold an in-person organizational meeting, which OPMP continued to assert would exceed the \$10.0k for travel in the Fiscal Note and would need a "travel waiver" of the Governor's travel freeze in AO 358.⁵

December 2025: On December 11, 2025, volunteers active in CACFA's reauthorization, who were dismayed by the delays and DNR staff overreach, met with and requested the DNR Commissioner direct OPMP provide only administrative assistance CACFA requests and not the conduct of meetings except to process payment for CACFA-approved expenditures. The Commissioner was also asked to designate two lower level administrative staff, less expensive than the head of OPMP to provide assistance in procedures required to pay expenditures and to meet administrative requirements for hiring the ED. No changes within DNR were apparent.

On December 19, OPMP held a second virtual meeting of CACFA during which CACFA approved revisions to the ED job and requested DNR to post it. CACFA requested OPMP find staff in DNR outside of OPMP to handle the application process. OPMP put bylaws on the agenda for adoption; instead, CACFA confirmed adherence to the 2016 bylaws and, despite OPMP protests, unanimously approved holding an in-person organizational meeting February 13-14, 2026, in Anchorage with 30-days public notice. CACFA advised OPMP was not needed to look for venues or organize the meeting. CACFA established a subcommittee to prepare a budget for adoption at the February meeting. OPMP again asserted a travel waiver was needed and

⁴ Open Meetings Act requires minimum 10 days.

⁵ OPMP first notified CACFA on November 19 a waiver of the Governor's freeze was needed for travel. Despite CACFA's repeated status inquiries, OPMP did not submit a travel waiver application until January 9, 2026. The Commissioner approved the waiver the same day. OPMP provided the waiver to CACFA on January 23.

expenses must not exceed \$10k (mischaracterizing the Fiscal Note as the “budget” despite a half-year salary unspent due to no ED salary). As of this Report, the recordings of the November 26 and December 19 meetings are not posted on the CACFA website as required by the bylaws, and DNR continues using a new CACFA website instead of activating the original.

January 2026: In response to CACFA’s request to provide DNR’s charges to CACFA’s funds, on January 6 OPMP emailed: “*the expenses so far are \$6,234.53 for OPMP staff to do the work indicated*” followed by a brief list. In a January 7 response, CACFA requested OPMP provide actual cost transaction records – only then did OPMP supply spreadsheets. Most DNR expenses were for personnel work that was neither requested nor approved by CACFA and was incurred by senior staff at OPMP’s behest due to unfamiliarity with CACFA legislation, operations, and bylaws. OPMP justified the unauthorized charges to CACFA’s budget in a follow-up January 7, 2026, email by repeatedly asserting “***OPMP is performing the Executive Director tasks***” despite the Legislature statutorily limited DNR to providing “administrative support.” These are not equivalent functions. The ED does not direct CACFA operations – the ED works for and at the direction of CACFA. OPMP was not authorized to serve as CACFA’s Executive Director.

February 2026: CACFA held its first official organizational meeting on February 13-14, 2026, in person in Anchorage. Based on OPMP’s spreadsheets through January, the CACFA budget committee presented a report and CACFA adopted a budget for 2026, established a schedule of meetings, and set work priorities for the remainder of 2026. The Commission was not operating at the time the FY27 DNR budget was prepared, so any issues in CACFA’s funds will be addressed at subsequent meetings for any necessary follow-up. CACFA discussed options to resolve issues with DNR, consistent with Administrative Order No. 358’s purposes to control spending, focus operations on core services, and streamline processes. CACFA adopted:

Recommendations for Resolution with the DNR Commissioner on “administrative support”:

1. Restore CACFA’s attachment for administrative support to DNR Commissioner’s Office
2. Charge OPMP’s service expenses to “Services” category of the Fiscal Note instead of ED personnel line; direct DNR expenses will only be charged to CACFA with CACFA approval
3. Recognize the official FY26 Budget adopted by CACFA, includes reallocation of surplus salary funds to travel and other expenses necessary for onboarding the ED
4. Encumber remaining personnel surplus for training, materials, travel and related subject matter expert expenses for ED and CACFA.
5. Consult with CACFA prior to authorizing expenses charged to the RSA with DOL and agree DNR will not approve future RSA’s with DOL without CACFA approval.⁶
6. Assign staff to consolidate CACFA websites and timely post as CACFA requests or authorize CACFA to manage its own website.

These actions are necessary to remove administrative and financial impediments to CACFA’s abilities to fulfil its statutory responsibilities on behalf of Alaska’s residents.

⁶ CACFA will provide Dept of Law with priorities for FY26 RSA; e.g. review of CACFA documents digitized for posting

CONCLUSION

COMMISSION PRIORITIES FOR REMAINDER OF 2026:

- **CACFA will meet in Fairbanks in person approximately late April** and will hold a third statutorily-required annual meeting in Juneau or Anchorage before year end. Both meetings will include public participation to illuminate citizen issues with permitting and statutorily-protected uses on federal lands.
- **CACFA will prioritize implementation of ANILCA's provisions for cabins and temporary facilities.** Initial emphasis will be to consult with BLM and provide solutions to long-term cabin permitting issues, conduct a hearing of affected public, and seek follow-up with all four federal land management agencies to consistently apply ANILCA's applicable provisions designed to protect Alaskans' traditional activities on federal lands.

This Commission will bring the Alaskan citizen perspective to defending our Statehood rights and responsibilities, as well to protect Alaskans' rights to conduct traditional activities and access on federal lands as enacted in ANILCA and other federal laws. Working alongside Federal and State agencies and our elected officials, the Commission will utilize its expertise and experience for the benefit of Alaska.

During 2026, the Commission will reinstate its outreach efforts to individuals, user groups, and organizations. We will adopt procedures to provide the public with information and updates on federal land management issues and activities. Once an Executive Director is fully trained, monthly distribution of an electronic newsletter will resume via e-mail and be made available on the Commission website. The Commission plans to develop multiple pamphlets, brochures, videos, and a social media presence as educational tools and venues for the public regarding federal laws, management actions, and steps CACFA takes to resolve issues.

The Commission will establish subcommittees to learn public issues with federal management decisions and to research and develop constructive strategies to address longstanding and evolving issues which prevent Alaskans from realizing the promise of ANILCA and the Statehood Compact.

The Commission will continue to develop and expand its working relationships with federal agencies and will work diligently to keep those relationships productive. The primary focus will be on finding ways to resolve conflicts in a positive and collaborative manner. At the same time, the Commission will closely monitor changes in policy and management that affect Alaskans' rights and guarantees under ANILCA and other federal statutes to assess whether priorities need adjusting during 2026 to protect Alaskans' rights.