

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

Hybrid Electronic Microsoft Teams, 5:00 pm
BP Energy Center

Agenda for February 9, 2026,

Regular meeting #2

1. Call to Order: At 5:02pm

2. Roll Call:

a. Present: Kyle Shedd (online), Bill Britt, Robin Dublin, Tyndall Ellis, Rob Clark, Clark Saunders (online), Alison Smith, Mark Miner, Gus Gustafson, Joe Hackenmueller

b. Excused: Sarah Brey, Kristin Vantrease, Irene Turletes, Gabbie Jordon

c. Absent: none

d. Staff: Justin Dipaola-Allen, Ella Fitzwater

e. Other: Casey Durand, Bill Sherwonit, Pat Smith (HDR), Chris Hughes (HDR), Patrick Whitesell (DOT contractor), Nancy Pease (online), Judy Caminer (online), Shaun Sexton (online)

3. Changes to Agenda & Approval: Bill moved and Alison seconded to approve agenda as is. Approved

4. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:

Kyle moved and Bill seconded to approve with the addition of public comments received via email from Bill Sheronit, Nancy Pease, Tom Meecham. See Appendix A for email comments received.

5. Public Comments:

Public comments were provided by Casey Durand, Bill Sherwonit, Pat Smith, Chris Hughes, Patrick Whitesell, Nancy Pease (online), Judy Caminer (online). Written comments via email were provided by Bill Sheronit, Nancy Pease, Tom Meecham via email.

6. Old Business:

a. Seward Highway Draft EA: CAB written comments letter and suggested edits reviewed and discussed. Pat Smith, Chris Hughes, Patrick Whitesell provided design-specific info during discussion. Tyndall will finalize revisions per discussion, asking for additional analysis on the following items and will submit the letter before the February 29 deadline.

i. Clarification on Potter Section House

ii. DOT's maintenance responsibilities

iii. The Alaska Railroad's maintenance responsibilities

iv. Limits to impacts on recreational activity during construction, especially re: peak recreation access and activity points

v. DOT to evaluate alternatives to impacts on mountainous areas of the park to evaluate specific segments of the project to better balance recreation and transportation needs

Public Comment Period: Dec 29-Feb29. Motion for Tyndall to revise as discussed and submit prior to deadline and provide final copy to the Board upon submission was moved by Bill, seconded by Alison. Following discussion, vote passed unanimously.

7. New Business:

- a. **Board Elections** (Tyndall will update the roles sheet to represent the following:
 1. Chair: Irene
 2. Vice Chair: Tyndall
 3. Admin Officer: Gabbie
 4. Vice Admin: Kyle
 5. Committee Selections
 - i. Access (Bill):
 - ii. Budget (Tyndall):
 - iii. Nomination (Gus):
 - iv. Seward Highway Design (Alison):
 - v. Trails (Gabbie):
 - vi. Chugach Park Fund (Kyle):
 - vii. Outreach (Robin)

8. CSP Staff Report: Justin Dipaola-Allen, Ella Fitzwater

- a. Justin Dipaola-Allen
 1. Attended CASA Committee meeting as part of municipal steering committee, with Bill. Discussed items including the weight of weight more road projects versus more trail head project versus trails.
 2. Met with MOA about the proposed Basher Trailhead parking improvements. A public stakeholder meeting will be held at Russian Jack Chalet this Wednesday from 6:00PM-7:00PM. The plan is calling for a 60-space parking lot. There will be a municipal bond to cover the \$1.5M
 3. Met with the MOA to discuss adding Beluga Point to the National Register of Historical Places because of its historical significance to Alutiiq (Sugpiaq) and more recent Dena'ina.
 4. Met with AKDOT to discuss 6F mitigation along the Seward Highway.
 5. Met with Corey Stantorf at ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation to review upcoming Alaska Board of Game wildlife proposals.
 6. Will invite Alaska Trails and Happy Trails to the next CAB meeting. They have Indian Valley Trail; Crow Pass Chutes & Ladders re-route improvements planned for this summer.
- b. Ella Fitzwater
 1. Alaska Trails 2026 season
 2. Bird Valley and Eklutna Lake closed to snow machines due to deteriorating conditions.
 3. Ptarmigan parking lot has been cleared
 4. Sanding and plowing throughout the park are updated each Friday
 5. Updating camp host policies. Process for McHugh and Eagle River is now occurring.
 6. New specialist position is open due to an approved hiring freeze waiver.
 7. DNR's new commissioner is now in designee status
- c. Justin Dipaola-Allen (Law Report)

1. Ranger Kellen Ford is leaving DNR to work for Anchorage Fire Department. He will be missed, especially for his balance between enforcement and education and knowledge and experience. We are currently working with reduced ranger capacity.
2. Successful Flattop Mountain rescue on 1/22/2026
3. Rangers and ADF&G are involved in drone training that may increase future capacity
4. Ongoing assessment of lake ice conditions
5. Addressed an illegal trapping complaint in Bird Valley.
6. A salary and class study was conducted. Justin will share with the CAB

9. Committee Reports:

- a. Access (Bill):
 1. CASA Bonds
 2. 35% design available for public comment for Basher Trail Parking Lot
 3. Anchorage Park Foundation for bond signs
- b. Budget (Tyndall):
 1. Funds in budget to maintain staff
 2. All other line items are flat
- c. Nomination (Gus):
 1. One application forthcoming for CAB review for the one opening on the CAB
- d. Seward Highway Design (Alison):
 1. Discussed in detail earlier in the meeting. No additional report.
- e. Trails (Gabrielle):
 1. Update in March
 2. Robin to join committee
- f. Chugach Park Fund (Kyle):
 1. Upcoming fundraiser for Williwaw and Near Point trail improvements
- g. Outreach (Rob):
 1. Partnering opportunities needs to expand

10. Adjournment: 7:13PM Gus/Bill

Appendix A
Emailed Comments from the Public Addressing Seward Highway Draft EA

Tom Meecham
February 5, 2026

Bill,

Regarding the CSP "replacement land" issue, one fact that has not been discussed (to my knowledge) in the ADOT materials is that any removal of land from inside the legislated boundaries of CSP (whether compensated by "replacement land" or not) will require legislative approval, before such a land can be legally removed from the Park.

The fact that the Legislature will have to be involved in this process means that this will be another avenue by which the citizens' and CSP users' opinions can be expressed, with the hope that the Park can be protected.

Tom.

Nancy Pease
February 5, 2026
Hello, all

I've been trying to convey to the recreation community and friends of Chugach State Park that the four-lane design is not a necessary sacrifice of parkland for safety because the design does not focus on safety and is way overscale.

BikeAnchorage has summed up the safety and capacity fallacies. See attachment.

I'll now try to follow up with a critique (to share with the CAB) that focuses more on the impacts to parkland, in contradiction of the USDOT 4(f) requirement to avoid, mitigate, and minimize any such impacts.

February 4, 2026

Bill, it's more than hearsay. The EA states in Section 3.3.13.3 (page 66):

"DOTPF proposes to place a recreational encumbrance over the appropriate extent of a 103.1-acre parcel above Stuckagain Heights neighborhood adjacent to Chugach State Park (04101111000).

Relevant ADNR personnel have indicated that this parcel would also meet or exceed the recreational utility of the lands proposed for transportation use".

This proposed replacement acreage sounds like a potential parking lot, in neighborhood with three parking lots near Chugach State Park trailheads already (although two of them are small).

This replacement parcel would provide no direct active recreation value, nor coastal value, nor scenic value, nor wildlife value, nor rock-climbing or water sports value, all of which are being sacrificed along Turnagain Arm. A parking lot miles away from Turnagain Arm is not compensation for these losses.

The EA is 1,200 pages, but I've finally read a lot of it. By Friday, I'll send the CAB chair a list of concerns about damages to Chugach State and DOTPF's failure to minimize or mitigate impacts to parkland as required by US DOT law (Section 4f). I'll share that with the Chugach State Park CAB by Friday, ahead of their meeting.

The big picture is important to keep in mind: this is not an either/or choice between highway safety and recreation. The proposed four-lane vertically divided highway does not offer significantly greater safety than a much more compact and affordable 2- or 3-lane design. I'll share some findings from the EA on that, too.

Thank you for your opinion piece in the ADN.

Nancy Pease

Bill Sherwonit
February 5, 2025

Fellow CAB members –

Since I was absent last month, I don't know whether the CAB has formally commented on the EA. I've read nearly all of the EA. I provided my own private citizen comments (no reference to the CAB for obvious reasons) in early January before leaving the state. I've attached a copy of what I submitted to the web site comment portal, FYI. I'm limiting this distribution to the CAB.

As you can see, I agree with many of Bill's comments. I do worry about wading into this discussion at our next meeting with our limited time and numerous absences, so am unlikely to belabor this issue. I do think it is worth our consideration, however. As far as I can see, the park isn't getting a fair deal. I would love for someone to tell me why I am wrong in this.

Bill

The following is a copy of Bill's formal comments submitted with the above email

The project area is likely the portion of the Seward Highway most heavily used for recreation by Alaska residents and tourists, simply because it is the closest to Alaska's largest population center. Impacts to recreation are likely to largest impacts resulting from the project, and impacts to Chugach State Park are likely the largest of the recreation impacts. The portion of CSP being impacted is, as noted, among the most heavily used.

These impacts are more substantial than represented in the EA. The last sentence in section 3.3.12.2 is an example of minimizing these impacts. The percentage of park area impacted is less meaningful than the percentage of recreational use that occurs in the area. The former is noted here. The latter is not mentioned. The use of the word "sliver" to describe the impacted area in Appendix S, Section 3.2.1 is another example. Subjective minimization such as this should be removed from the document.

Specific comments:

Section 3.3.1.2: The existing fencing between the highway and the railroad (Appendix N, Figure 4.1) is an eyesore. During development of the fencing plan described on page 38, bullet 4, a better design should be developed that does not impact the aesthetics of the highway. Existing fencing should be replaced during construction with the better designed fencing.

Section 3.3.11.2, Construction Impacts: CSP is underfunded and under-staffed. Ongoing operation of the park is already challenging. Working with ADOT to optimize the project design and communicating with the public will either add to an already heavy workload or result in a sub-optimal design or sub-optimal communication. The gap between park staff capacity and project demands is unlikely to be addressed by the legislature. A solution should be provided in this EA.

Section 3.3.12.4, CSP: Portions of the existing multi-use trail need repair. Repair of those portions should be included in the project budget. The source of funding to maintain the new trail and the legacy trail in the future should be described.

Section 3.3.12.4, CSP: CSP has suffered from underfunding for years. The source of funding for ongoing maintenance of the paths, signs, parking, trailheads, and overlooks should be identified.

Section 3.3.13: Will there be a comment period for the Section 6(f) EA, since it cannot be reviewed during this comment period?

Section 3.3.13.3: Impacts to CSP are variously described as 200 acres (Table 3-8), 222 acres (Section 3.3.12.2), and 132 acres (Section 3.3.13.3). Regardless of which estimate is correct, the areas impacted are among the most accessible and heavily used portions of the park.

ADOT is proposing to offset the impacted area with less land in a less accessible area. This compensation land is unlikely to ever receive the use that the impacted land receives now. This is a bad deal for the park and for those seeking to recreate near Anchorage and should be revisited to better compensate for the significant impacts to the park and to recreation.

Table 4-1: Are the Future Actions shown under Parks and Recreation part of this project? If so, why are they not under Proposed Action? If not, when will they occur and who will fund them?

Email from Bill Sherwonit

February 4, 2026

Greetings to all the CSP advisory board members (and others),

Because Monday's meeting will be your last opportunity as a group to discuss the DOT's Seward Highway draft EA, I am hoping for a robust discussion of its likely impacts on the park within the highway corridor.

I'm not sure how many of you have begun digging into the EA, which is a large and dense body of work. In hopes of "priming" (instigating?) a spirited discussion (which might happen anyway), I am including the link to a commentary of mine that was published on the ADN's website this week, under the headline "Proposed 'Safer' Seward Highway Project is an awful idea."

I don't expect everyone will agree with all my points and some may have very different perspectives, though I hope there is agreement on at least some. I also hope that the CAB will "speak" on behalf of the park and its values in addressing the draft EA. I'll state here that I'm disappointed by the Division of Parks' collaboration with DOT, as a stakeholder in this proposed project. I don't fault Justin at all for a

variety of reasons, including his late entry into this issue (and the fact, I'm pretty darn certain, that the division's "feedback" came from above).

One thing that hasn't made it into the draft EA so far is a proposed "exchange" of land; it's my understanding that in "payment" for the DOT's "taking" of park land in the proposed four-lane super highway, the state would receive acreage near the Stuckagain Heights neighborhood, to be then converted into a parking lot/trailhead/access point into an entirely different part of the park. This too is a bad idea as far as I (and several other park advocates) am concerned and I hope the Division of Parks changes its position on this. Maybe this can be part of the discussion. Below is the link to my piece. See you folks Monday.

Bill Sherwonit

<https://www.adn.com/opinions/2026/02/02/opinion-proposed-safer-seward-highway-project-is-an-awful-idea/>