



Safer Seward Highway Project  
Seward Highway MP 98.5 to 118,  
Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek  
Project No.: Z566310000/0A31034

# Environmental Assessment

*Appendix P. Human Environment  
Technical Report*

DRAFT

December 2025

Prepared for:

*Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities*

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## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

ACS	American Community Survey
ACWR	Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge
ACWRMP	<i>Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge Management Plan</i>
ADEC	Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
ADF&G	Alaska Department of Fish & Game
ADNR	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
ARRC	Alaska Railroad Corporation
AS	Alaska Statute
ATA	Alaska Trucking Association
AWWU	Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility
CERCLIS	Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System
CPP	<i>Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan</i>
CSP	Chugach State Park
CSPMP	<i>Chugach State Park Management Plan</i>
EA	Environmental Assessment
DOT&PF	Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
DPOR	Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
ID	Identification Number
LUST	leaking underground storage tank
MHLB	Municipal Heritage Land Bank
MOA	Municipality of Anchorage
MP	Milepost
NSBP	National Forest Scenic Byways Program
Project	Seward Highway Milepost 98.5 to 118, Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek Project, or Safer Seward Highway Project
RCRA	Resource Conservation and Recovery Act
ROW	Right-of-way
TMU	Turnagain Mixed Use
TSD	treatment, storage, and disposal
Unit	Game Management Unit
UST	underground storage tank

# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this technical report is to identify existing human resources within the study area of the Seward Highway Milepost (MP) 98.5 to 118, Bird Flats to Rabbit Creek Project, or Safer Seward Highway Project (Project). The social aspects of the environment discussed in this technical report include subsistence and traditional use (Section 1.1); land ownership, management, and use (Section 1.2); socioeconomics and communities (Section 1.3); economics and tourism (Section 1.4); and hazardous materials and waste (Section 1.5). This report provides an overview of the regulatory context for the resources, as well as the methods used to identify the existing resources.

This report does not cover visual and aesthetic, archaeological and historic, Section 4(f), or Section 6(f) resources. Instead, these resources are covered in their individual reports, included as appendices to the Environmental Assessment (EA). Refer to the EA for details on transportation, parks and recreation, and public services and utilities.

## 1.1 Subsistence and Traditional Use

Subsistence is defined by state and federal laws as the “customary and traditional uses” of wild resources. This applies to food, cloth making, fuel, transportation, construction, arts and crafts, and trade. These practices vary, and are an essential economic and cultural activity for rural Alaska communities (ADF&G 2018).

Subsistence harvesting is regulated by either the state or federal government, depending on the area, under a “dual management system.” The federal government regulates subsistence practices on federal public lands and federally reserved waters in Alaska, prioritizing rural Alaska subsistence uses (16 U.S. Code 3112). It is the state’s responsibility to regulate subsistence practices on all Alaska lands and waters, including municipal/borough and private lands. The Alaska Board of Fisheries and Alaska Board of Game manages state subsistence fisheries and hunts. Under state subsistence regulations, all Alaska residents, regardless of rural status, may practice subsistence if the lands have been approved for such uses (Alaska Statutes [AS] 16.05.251 and 16.05.255; ADF&G 2018).

The Alaska Joint Board of Fisheries and Game has determined that the areas around Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, the Kenai Peninsula, Fairbanks, Juneau, Ketchikan, and Valdez are non-subsistence areas. This includes the Seward Highway and proposed Project area. The Joint Board defines non-subsistence areas based on social and economic structure, economic stability, employment, cash income, costs of goods and services, and seasonality of the economy; the area residents’ participation in harvests, harvest levels, and extent of sharing; the variety of species used; values associated with the harvests; and harvest areas (ADF&G n.d.-a).

While within a non-subsistence area, the Project area falls within Game Management Unit (Unit) 14C for federal and state harvests. It is open to personal use and sport fishing, and sport hunting under Unit 14C regulations (ADF&G 2024).

The Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration may permit educational, community, and ceremonial harvests for beluga (historical), moose, and eulachon (also known as hooligan or candlefish) within Turnagain Arm and the Cook Inlet area. However, Cook Inlet beluga whale hunting has been suspended since 2007, and this species has been listed as an endangered species since 2008, with critical habitat identified in 2011 (see EA Section 3.2.6 Threatened and Endangered Species).

Eulachon fishing is open to anyone that is an Alaska resident and has obtained a fishing license from ADF&G. This species is harvested between the beginning of May to the end of June using gillnets or dipnets (ADF&G n.d.-b). Eulachon are anadromous, but are most popularly harvested at the mouth of Twentymile River in Turnagain Arm, which is at MP 80.7 approximately 18 miles south of the Project area.

ADF&G grants permits for community and ceremonial moose harvests. Communities may apply for a community harvest application on ADF&G’s website. These harvests are permitted through communal use of big game for customary and traditional Alaska Native funerary or mortuary religious ceremonies (ADF&G n.d.-c).

Various species of berries and plants such as low-bush blueberries, high-bush blueberries, lingonberries, raspberries, cloudberries, crowberries, high-bush cranberries, red currants, black currants, and watermelon berries are harvested along Turnagain Arm (Hupp et al. 2015). Although these plants are a traditional part of the Alaska Native diet, and a popular harvest by Native and non-Native peoples, wild plant harvests are not regulated by ADF&G, and data on these practices are not collected.

Alaska Native populations have cultural, social, and spiritual identities and needs that are inextricably linked to subsistence. The communities located closest to the Proposed Action are: Tyonek (Jones et al. 2015), Beluga (Stanek et al. 2007), Alexander/Susitna (Holen et al. 2014), and Skwentna (Holen et al. 2014) (see Figure 1-1). These communities are more than 40 air miles outside the Project area on the western side of Cook Inlet, and residents are not known to travel to the Project area to harvest resources.

**Figure 1-1. Communities nearest the Project area with residents harvesting subsistence resources.**



## 1.2 Land Ownership, Management, and Use

This section discusses land ownership, management, and use within the project area. Numerous entities have authority over the land and water within the Project area, each developing detailed plans and objectives for the management of land use and transportation. The following plans were reviewed to assess these objectives. Table 1-1 summarizes land use plans for the Project area.

**Table 1-1. Assessed land use planning documents.**

Agency/municipality	Adopted plans	Summary
Municipality of Anchorage	<i>Anchorage 2020 – Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan</i> (2001)	Guides development of the Anchorage Bowl with land use policies and action strategies
Municipality of Anchorage	<i>Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan</i> (2017)	Builds off the <i>Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan</i> by incorporating additional analyses and neighborhood, district, and public facility plans
Municipality of Anchorage	<i>Hillside District Plan</i> (2010)	Identifies goals, objectives, and land use plans for the Hillside District
Municipality of Anchorage	Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan (2009)	Identifies community goals and land uses, issues, and recommendations to guide future growth
ADNR, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation	<i>Chugach State Park Management Plan</i> (2016)	Presents land use planning and goals for effective management based on analyses of existing and anticipated trends
DOT&PF (prepared by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Rural Heritage and Heritage Tourism Programs)	<i>Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan</i> (1998)	Developed as a requirement of the National Scenic Byways Program to aid the DOT&PF in managing the Seward Highway to both accommodate growth and maintain All-American Road designation
ADF&G, Divisions of Habitat and Wildlife Conservation	<i>Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge Management Plan</i> (1991)	Provides long-range guidance to agencies responsible for managing the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge

Notes: ADNR = Alaska Department of Natural Resources; DOT&PF = Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

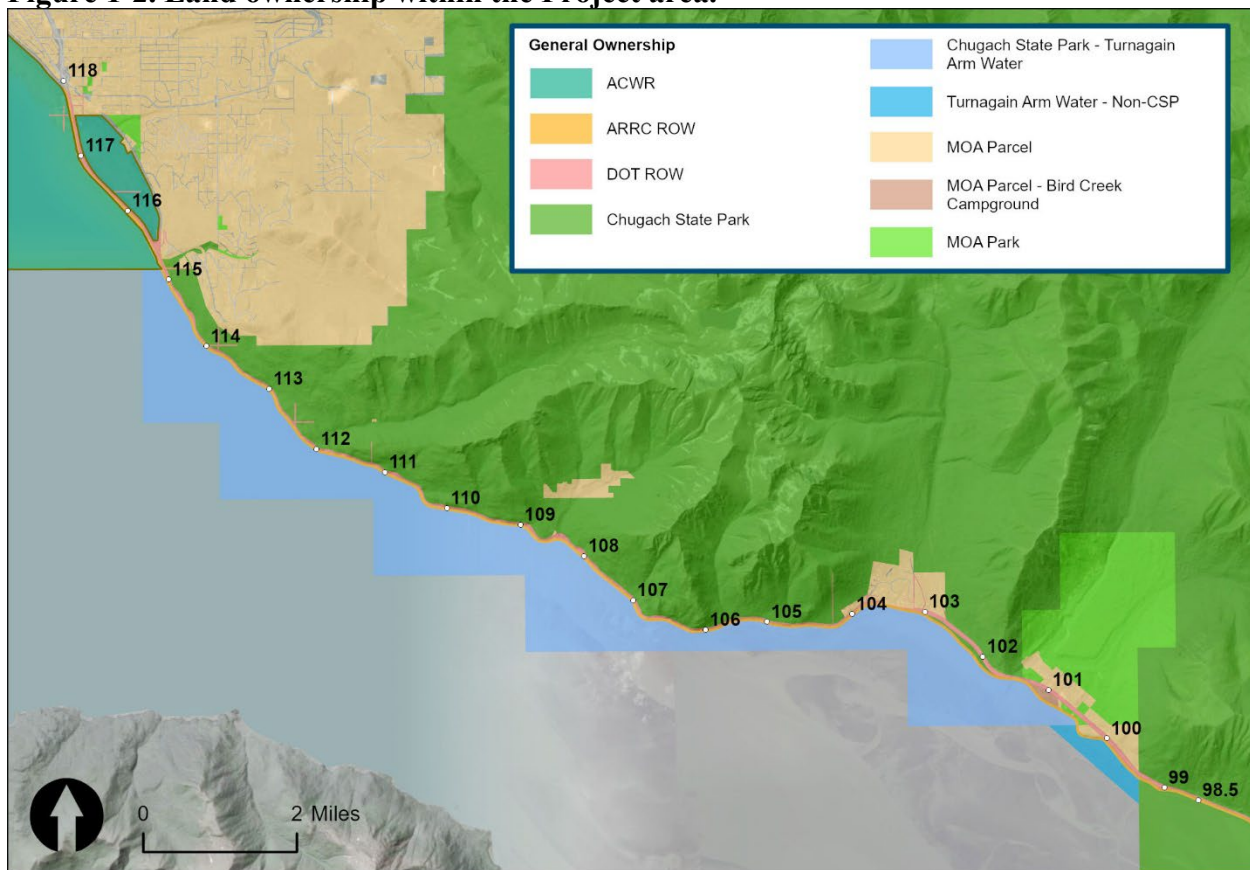
### 1.2.1 Land Ownership

Approximately 78 percent of the land within 0.5 mile of the Seward Highway within the Project area is owned/managed by the State of Alaska as the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge (ACWR), Chugach State Park (CSP), and Turnagain Arm waters of CSP, with an additional 4 percent being Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT&PF) right-of-way (ROW) and 4 percent being Alaska Railroad Corporation (ARRC) ROW (Table 1-2; Figure 1-2). The remaining land is owned by the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), is privately owned, or constitutes Turnagain Arm waters not part of CSP.

**Table 1-2. Land ownership within 0.5 mile of the Seward Highway.**

Ownership	Acreage	Percent of land within Project area
ARRC ROW	476	4
DOT&PF ROW	466	4
State of Alaska	9,889	78
ACWR	1,353	11
CSP	4,441	35
CSP – Turnagain Arm Water	4,042	32
Vacant	31	0
Bird Creek Campground	23	0
MOA	1,633	13
MOA Parcel	276	2
MOA Parcel – Private	982	8
MOA Park	375	3
Turnagain Arm Water – Non-CSP	209	2
Bureau of Land Management	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,674</b>	<b>100</b>

**Figure 1-2. Land ownership within the Project area.**



### **1.2.1.1 ALASKA RAILROAD CORPORATION AND ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC FACILITIES RIGHTS-OF-WAY**

ARRC has a mainline track that spans 470 miles from Seward to Fairbanks. The track is positioned between the Seward Highway and Turnagain Arm waters within a 200-foot-wide ROW centered on the railroad track centerline. The ARRC ROW is adjacent to and typically overlaps with DOT&PF's 300-foot-wide ROW around the centerline of the Seward Highway. Due to the overlap, ARRC issued a Blanket Permit to DOT&PF for highway use and maintenance in 1989. In 2001, the permit was extended until 2036 through a Memorandum of Agreement involving DOT&PF, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR), and ARRC (DOT&PF/ARRC/ADNR 2001). The Memorandum of Agreement recognizes that highway and railway realignment may be necessary for improved traffic and safety, indicates corridor design updates should support CSP objectives, and acknowledges that changes in land ownership and management may be necessary for realignment.

### **1.2.1.2 STATE OF ALASKA**

CSP, which covers the vast majority of the land between MPs 115.5 and 98.5 adjacent to the Seward Highway, is owned by the State of Alaska. The state also has ownership and management control over all tidelands below Turnagain Arm's ordinary high watermark. The state owns the ACWR, including Potter Marsh, which is located between approximately MPs 115 and 118 adjacent to the Seward Highway.

### **1.2.1.3 MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE**

MOA-owned/managed land is a mix of parks as well as vacant and occupied parcels. The Anchorage Bowl is the most urbanized area of the MOA; the Anchorage Bowl represents the area of the MOA that is bordered to the west by the waters of Knik Arm and Turnagain Arm and to the east by the Chugach Mountains. Anchorage Bowl parcels within the study area are mainly privately owned, developed and undeveloped land as well as some vacant land in MOA ownership.

East of the Anchorage Bowl boundary, starting at approximately Seward Highway MP 112, is the Turnagain Arm area. While the Turnagain Arm area predominately consists of the state-owned CSP, three MOA communities exist within the Project area: Rainbow, Indian, and Bird. Nearly all land within the communities of Indian and Bird is privately owned. The MOA owns the Bird Creek Regional Park that surrounds that community. Rainbow consists of only one residential development in which a group of private landowners share the plots of land.

## **1.2.2 Land Management**

### **1.2.2.1 SEWARD HIGHWAY**

According to the 2001 Memorandum of Agreement, DOT&PF is the lead agency responsible for accomplishing necessary realignment/relocation for the Seward Highway, including leading the design, scheduling, budgeting, construction, and maintenance of highway realignment and relocation.

The *Seward Highway Corridor Partnership Plan* (CPP; DOT&PF 1998) was developed for DOT&PF as a requirement of the National Forest Scenic Byways Program (NSBP). The CPP is meant to aid DOT&PF in managing the highway in a way that accommodates growth and development while preserving the physical, recreational, and scenic attributes that earned the Seward Highway its NSBP All-American Road designation. The CPP provides three

management strategies to guide overall development in maintaining this designation: protect the existing aesthetics of the corridor while providing a safe driving environment; responsibly manage the growing tourism industry without causing negative long-term impacts to the highway; and encourage only sustainable, well-planned development that supports the tranquil, scenic character of the roadway.

### **1.2.2.2 CHUGACH STATE PARK**

The ADNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) is authorized to manage CSP, as defined in AS 41.21.122, including control, development, and maintenance. However, DOT&PF is tasked with repairing and maintaining all existing public roads within CSP. ADNR is responsible for overseeing highway access and roadside structures within CSP. The *Chugach State Park Management Plan* (CSPMP; ADNR 2016) outlines a management strategy focused on coordinating transportation matters and integrated facilities between ADNR and DOT&PF. According to the CSPMP, the primary goals for managing the land are to offer recreational opportunities and facilities, protect and preserve natural resources and unique features of CSP, and expand secure public access. Detailed information about CSP's management intent can be found in EA Section 3.3.11 Parks and Recreation.

### **1.2.2.3 ACWR**

ADF&G and ADNR manage the ACWR under the *Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge Management Plan* (ACWRMP; ADF&G 1991), as defined by AS 16.20.031. The primary goals of the ACWRMP are to support fish, wildlife, and their habitat and to provide public use of the area without creating adverse effects to fish, wildlife, and their habitat. Management of the area is discussed further in EA Section 3.3.11 Parks and Recreation.

### **1.2.2.4 MUNICIPAL HERITAGE LAND BANK**

The Municipal Heritage Land Bank (MHLB) is responsible for managing any uncommitted municipal land on behalf of the MOA. The MHLB holds the title to groups of small lots within the communities of Indian and Bird, as well as a 91-acre Special Study Area in Indian and a 155-acre Special Study Area in Bird.

### **1.2.2.5 BIRD CREEK PARK AND INDIAN BASEBALL FIELD**

ADNR-DPOR has an agreement with ARRC to manage the Indian Trailhead and Community Ballfield located at approximately MP 103 that overlaps with ARRC ROW. ADNR-DPOR also has an agreement with MOA to manage the MOA-owned Bird Creek Regional Park.

## **1.2.3 Existing Land Use**

### **1.2.3.1 RECREATION LANDS**

According to the CSPMP (ADNR 2016), CSP land is designated primarily as open space and parkland for public recreation; this includes Bird Creek Regional Park and Indian Trailhead managed by ADNR-DPOR.

The CSPMP (ADNR 2016) notes that land use designations are supplied from the statute that established CSP (AS 41.21.121). The higher-traffic areas of CSP directly adjacent to the highway are designated as Recreational Development Zones, while the lower-traffic areas farther from the highway are Natural Environment Zones. The Project area is generally consistent with the area covered by the Recreational Development Zone.

The CSPMP (ADNR 2016) notes that management intent for land use is supplied from AS 41.21.121 that established CSP. The statute states that the peripheral areas of CSP would be managed for recreational use and the central area for scenic use.

Two of the CSPMP planning units are within the Project area: the Hillside Planning Unit and the Turnagain Arm Planning Unit. The land within these units immediately adjacent to the Seward Highway is identified as a Recreation Development Zone. Land within the planning units that is farther from the highway, outside the Recreation Development Zone, is identified as a Natural Environment Zone.

A Recreation Development Zone is managed as an area that can absorb heavy human use as well as provide park access and facilities, such as parking areas and trailheads. A Natural Environment Zone has lower levels of development and more scattered recreation, such as public use cabins and back country shelters. Based on a review of a map provided in the CSPMP (ADNR 2016) that shows the general location of the two zones, the study area is generally consistent with the area covered by the Recreational Development Zone. There appears to be a slight overlap with the Natural Environment Zone on the water side of the highway near MP 106.5 (Windy Corner).

### **1.2.3.2 TURNAGAIN ARM – RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL LANDS**

East of approximately MP 112 is the Turnagain Arm area, which consists of the communities of Bird, Indian, and Rainbow. According to the *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009), land use within the communities of Indian and Bird is mainly residential, with small amounts of commercial development such as convenience-type stores, gas stations, and restaurants adjacent to the Seward Highway corridor.

Indian includes a mix of large-lot rural residential developments, combined with various commercial establishments along the Seward Highway and extending up the valley. These commercial establishments include a small, commercial, plant nursery and large-scale, meat-processing facility. On the eastern side of the valley, there is a series of older homestead residences, some of which feature renter cabins and two-family developments.

Much like Indian, Bird is characterized by predominantly larger lot, rural residential development. Commercial establishments are dispersed along the Seward Highway together with an automobile maintenance facility and a telecommunications facility. There are a few “cottage-type” commercial businesses located within the residential vicinity and a sawmill that operates within the residential lots as a permitted use.

Rainbow offers no existing vacant lots and consists of only one residential development in which a group of landowners share the plots of land.

### **1.2.3.3 ANCHORAGE BOWL – RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL LANDS**

The Anchorage Bowl’s Rabbit Creek neighborhood is located on the northern end of the Project area near the Seward Highway MPs 118 to 112. According to the *Hillside District Plan* (MOA 2010), the neighborhood consists of primarily single-family residential and vacant land uses, with some park and open space scattered throughout the area. Most of the area is zoned as a mix of rural residential, single-family residential, and multi-family residential districts.

## **1.2.4 Future Land Use**

The assessed land use plans expect land uses along the corridor to remain similar to current conditions but encourages a mix of commercial and residential development along the Seward

Highway frontage, especially to support tourism services. MOA-owned/managed land within the Anchorage Bowl that is not located along the Seward Highway is expected to remain limited and low-intensity residential space. Areas designated as Recreation Development Zones in CSP are expected to be developed for improved park access and facilities in coordination with highway improvements. The *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009) also discusses the development of safe access to recreational amenities and private lots. The CPP (DOT&PF 1998), CSPMP (ADNR 2016), and *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009) stress the importance of maintaining the scenic nature of the Seward Highway to support quality of life for residents and to continue to attract tourists.

#### **1.2.4.1 RECREATION LANDS**

For the Turnagain Arm Planning Unit, the CSPMP (ADBR 2016) notes that any updates to the Seward Highway transportation corridor must augment existing visual experiences; safely accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians; and discourage parking on highway shoulders through redesign and minimal signage. ADNR intends to acquire 2,200 acres of land that comprises Bird Creek Regional Park within this unit, which is owned by MOA but operated by ADNR-DPOR. Within the Hillside Unit within the Project area, ADNR's objective was to establish the Potter Creek Valley Trailhead, which is located at approximately MP 115. For a more detailed description of recreational land use under the CSPMP (ADNR 2016), see EA Section 3.3.11 Parks and Recreation.

#### **1.2.4.2 TURNAGAIN ARM – RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL LANDS**

The *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009) indicates regional population growth and residential land development would accommodate approximately 149 new residents and 75 new housing units. The plan stresses that future land use decisions must support tourism-related services, while protecting the rural lifestyle of the region and scenic nature of the Seward Highway and its All-American Road designation. The plan intends for the Rainbow and McHugh Creek sites to remain low-density residential development.

Indian will similarly retain primarily low-density residential development. The majority of vacant frontage lots with direct highway access are designated as Turnagain Mixed Use (TMU), which offers mixed-use development opportunities but is recommended to support tourism-related services and activities, such as shops or temporary housing for seasonal employees. The *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009) notes that TMU-designated land could incorporate design standards that promote highway access as well as safer highway ingress and egress. A 91-acre Special Study Area would receive a land use analysis to determine the best use of the area.

Bird's future land use is mainly low-density residential development and includes some Industrial, TMU, and Park and Natural Resource designations along the highway frontage lots, as well as a 155-acre Special Study Area to be assessed.

The *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009) notes that the communities are interested in promoting only light-industrial land uses over heavy industry. Additionally, the plan states the MOA supported DOT&PF projects being pursued at the time of the plan's development, which included projects to improve highway safety and separate local traffic from highway circulation, if development aligned with future land uses along the Seward Highway.

### 1.2.4.3 ANCHORAGE BOWL – RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL LANDS

The *Anchorage 2040 Land Use Plan* (MOA 2017), which builds off the *Anchorage 2020 – Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2001), designates the land within the Project area to be used primarily for large-lot residential neighborhoods. Park- or natural area-designated spaces are scattered across the area. The *Hillside District Plan* (MOA 2010) designates future land use in the Southeast Hillside area for limited and low-intensity residential space.

## 1.3 Socioeconomics and Communities

The following section discusses the social economic (socioeconomic) conditions of the Project area, including the socioeconomic demographic breakdown of the area residents, access to community facilities, and community character and cohesion.

### 1.3.1 Area Demographics

The Project corridor is within a largely undeveloped area that consists of Turnagain Arm or ARRC tracks on the western side of the Seward Highway (water side) and parkland/open space with small amounts of development on the eastern side of the Seward Highway (mountain side). The communities of Bird and Indian are adjacent to the Project area and rely on the Seward Highway as their only transportation route to community facilities in Anchorage and Girdwood. The study area also includes areas of southeast Anchorage in the Rabbit Creek neighborhood.

The existing population of the MOA is estimated to be 290,674, according to 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates data (USCB 2022). The Project area is less diverse than the MOA, which is 59.2 percent white, while the Project area ranges from 64.8 percent in Tract 27.13 to 89.9 percent in Tract 29. Table 1-3 provides estimates for selected demographic characteristics for the State of Alaska, MOA, and Project area census tracts. This includes the percentage of school-age children (under 18 years old) and those over the age of 65 years old.

The lowest average household income of the four census tracts that intersect the Project area is \$135,504, which is higher than both the average for MOA and the state. The only census tract to surpass the state and MOA with “persons with income below the poverty line in past 12 months” is Census Tract 27.13, with 10.7 percent (USCB 2022).

**Table 1-3. Summary of selected demographic characteristics, 2022.**

Characteristics	Alaska	MOA	Census Tract 27.13 <sup>a</sup>	Census Tract 28.22 <sup>a</sup>	Census Tract 28.23 <sup>a</sup>	Census Tract 29 <sup>b</sup>
Population	734,821	290,674	4,679	4,533	4,821	2,211
Under 18 years, percent	24.4	23.9	18.1	23.8	22.4	12.9
65 years and over, percent	12.8	12.0	12.5	15.4	19.5	17.0
<b><i>Race and Hispanic Origin</i></b>						
White alone, percent	61.3	59.2	64.8	81.4	83.5	89.9
Black or African American alone, percent	3.2	5.3	0.1	8.0	0.8	0.4

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Characteristics	Alaska	MOA	Census Tract 27.13 <sup>a</sup>	Census Tract 28.22 <sup>a</sup>	Census Tract 28.23 <sup>a</sup>	Census Tract 29 <sup>b</sup>
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent	14.3	7.4	4.3	2.2	4.6	0.6
Asian alone, percent	6.5	9.8	2.4	0.7	3.7	1.9
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander alone, percent	1.5	2.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Some other race	2.0	2.7	0.0	1.7	0.5	0.0
Two or more races, percent	11.3	12.7	28.3	6.0	7.0	7.2
Hispanic or Latino, percent	7.5	9.7	6.1	6.6	3.7	4.3
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	58.4	55.2	64.8	77.7	81.9	87.0
<b><i>Income and Poverty</i></b>						
Mean household income in the past 12 months	\$110,602	\$122,032	\$136,504	\$172,316	\$198,200	\$135,654
Per capita income, according to mean income in the past 12 months	\$42,828	\$46,554	\$50,825	\$54,892	\$78,714	\$65,100
Persons with income below poverty line in past 12 months, percent	10.5	9.6	10.7	2.9	1.2	8.3
<b><i>Employment and Labor Force</i></b>						
In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2018-2022	63.1	65.7	62.8	69.9	66.1	58.2

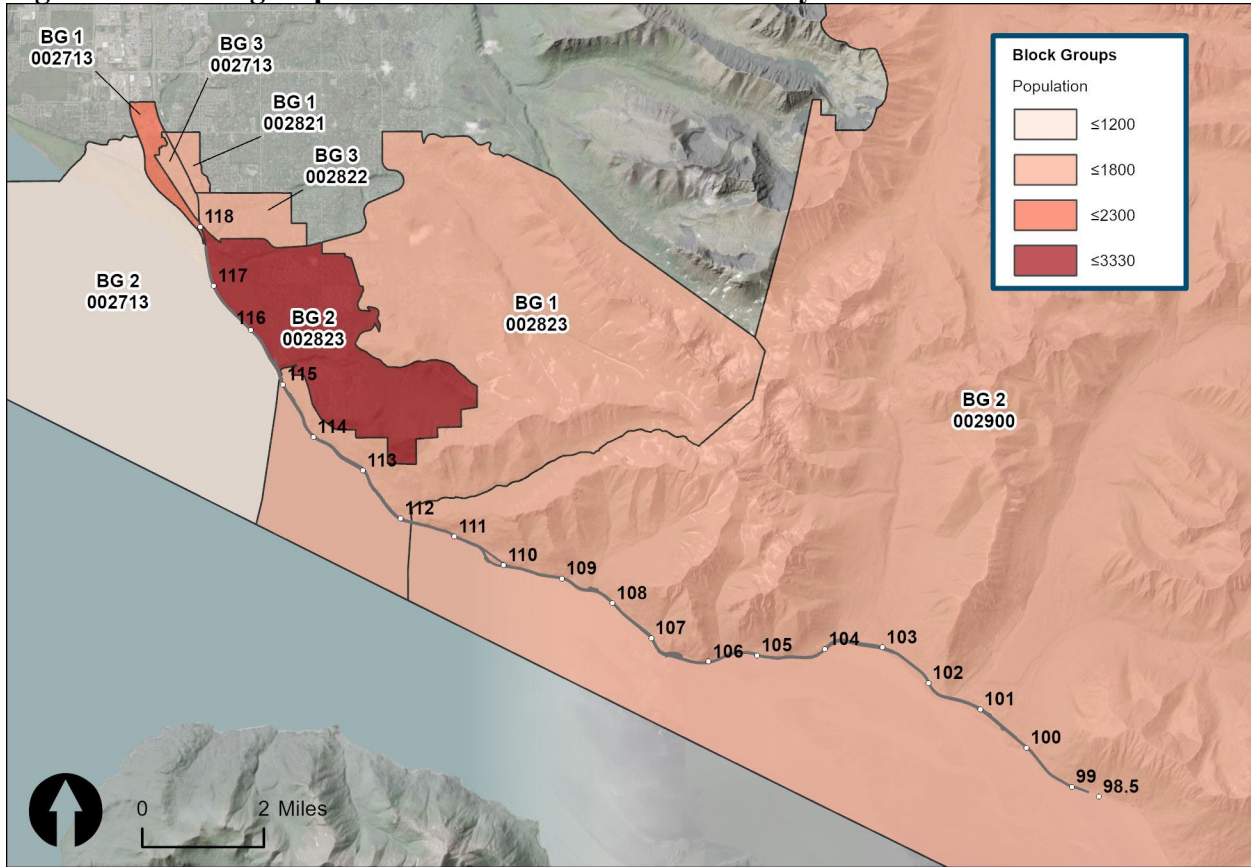
<sup>a</sup> Anchorage Bowl/Rabbit Creek community

<sup>b</sup> Turnagain Arm communities

Source: USCB 2022

Note that block group data was not available for much of the demographic characteristics information provided in Table 1-3, so census tract data was used instead. Figure 1-3 shows the affected census tracts and block groups within the study area.

Figure 1-3. Block groups and census tracts within the study area.



## 1.3.2 Community Facilities and Cohesion

### 1.3.2.1 ANCHORAGE BOWL (RABBIT CREEK) COMMUNITY – MPS 118–112

Anchorage relies on the Seward Highway as the sole form of roadway transportation to the Turnagain Arm area, including Girdwood, and the Kenai Peninsula. Rabbit Creek is composed primarily of residential, commercial, and vacant properties located in Census Tracts 28.23 (Block Group 2), 28.22 (Block Group 3), and 27.13 (Block Groups 1, 2, and 3). Refer to Figure 1-3 for a visual of these block groups and census tracts.

No residences or businesses in Census Tract 28.23, Block Group 1, are within the study area. Within Block Group 2, some residential and commercial lots are located between the new Seward Highway and Old Seward Highway (MPs 118 to 117.5), and some residential lots are located off Potter Valley Road (MPs 115.5 to 115).

Within Census Tract 28.22, Block Group 3, a small number of residences are located along the Old Seward Highway and adjacent to the Old Seward Highway-Seward Highway interchange at approximately Seward Highway MP 118. Within Census Tract 27.13, Block Groups 3 and 1, some residences abut the northern and western sides of the MP 118 interchange, respectively. Within Census Tract 27.13, Block Group 2, the only properties of note within the study area are Rabbit Creek Shooting Range, Potter Section House Railroad Museum, and some additional commercial and vacant land.

The Chapel by the Sea church is located on the southern side of the MP 118 interchange in Census Tract 27.13, Block Group 1. St. Tikhon Orthodox Church and Soccer Field is located in

Census Tract 28.23, Block Group 2, north of Potter Marsh on the Old Seward Highway, just before it joins Rabbit Creek Road.

The affected environment south of Seward Highway MP 118 is managed under the *Hillside District Plan* (MOA 2010), which declares the intent for most of the land within the study area to remain as limited and low-intensity residential property. One of the plan's main policies for the area is to maintain low-density neighborhoods and a rural residential character.

### **1.3.2.2 TURNAGAIN ARM COMMUNITIES – MPS 112–98.5**

Census Tract 29, Block Group 2, starts at approximately Seward Highway MP 112 and runs well beyond the Project area. This block group represents the communities of Bird, Indian, and Rainbow as well as Girdwood (not within the Project area), with a total population of 1,320. Refer to Figure 1-3 for the location of this block group and census tract.

Land within the communities of Indian, Rainbow, and Bird, some of which intersects with the study area, is primarily low-density residential; community character can be defined as small-town with a rural lifestyle, according to the *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009). Residents expressed hesitation regarding development in the plan, stating they are interested in preserving the rural character of communities and the scenic nature of the area, as well as protecting access to recreation areas and public land. However, they acknowledged that the growing population and tourism industry would likely affect the area. This plan also notes that any roadway upgrades, including the addition of highway frontage roads within the DOT&PF ROW in Indian and Bird, must balance impacts on the environment, landowners, and land use.

A limited number of stores, restaurants, churches, and similar facilities within the area provide opportunities for social interaction. Most community facilities are located within the Anchorage Bowl or in Girdwood, which Turnagain Arm residents access only by means of the Seward Highway. Community facilities that do not exist within the study area are instead accessed in either Anchorage or Girdwood include schools, medical facilities, and libraires. These facilities are described in detail in EA Section 3.3.9 Public Services and Utilities.

Valley Bible Chalet church in Indian is located adjacent to the highway within the study area at approximately Seward Highway MP 103. Many of the small, independent businesses within the study area support tourism, such as Indian Valley Mine & Gifts and the Bird Creek Motel & RV Park. However, small businesses are within the study area that also serve both tourists and local residents, such as the Brown Bear Saloon & Hotel and Birch & Alder coffee shop. Indian's Community Ballfield is located at approximately Seward Highway MP 103, on the southern side of the highway.

## **1.3.3 Relationship to Highway**

### **1.3.3.1 RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY**

The Rabbit Creek community was originally developed around the Old Seward Highway, which provided access into the southern part of the Hillside district and generated some commercial activity until development and traffic moved elsewhere in South Anchorage with the new Seward Highway (MOA 2010). The *Hillside District Plan* seeks to develop the Old Seward Highway into a multimodal road that still retains rural and recreational character, noting that the community finds the natural landscape and scenic nature of the Old Seward Highway very important.

Those residents who live east of the Seward Highway can access the Old Seward Highway where it connects to the new Seward Highway at approximately MPs 115.5 or 118.

### **1.3.3.2 TURNAGAIN ARM COMMUNITIES**

The Turnagain Arm area developed initially as rural enclaves along the highway but has transformed to also become a popular route for tourist travel (MOA 2009). The Seward Highway is the singular means of access to the majority of community facilities that do not exist in Bird or Indian, such as grocery stores and healthcare services.

Many of the small, independent businesses within Turnagain Arm communities support tourism; however, businesses also serve the local communities. Existing commercial development, as well as mixed-use vacant lots, are scattered along the highway frontage, which the *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009) states could support tourism activities.

For residents within the Turnagain Arm area, development of the Seward Highway is a delicate balance of preserving the existing rural character and lifestyle of the area, and supporting the growing tourism industry and increased levels of highway traffic, according to the *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* (MOA 2009). The *Turnagain Arm Comprehensive Plan* identifies policies addressing highway improvements, including ensuring any improvements are compatible with the existing community character and desires, adhere to existing and planned land uses, provide access to local businesses, and improve highway safety and reduce traffic volumes (MOA 2009). The plan states that MOA is supportive of highway improvements that separate local and highway traffic, as long as they do not interfere with planned land use.

## **1.4 Economics and Tourism**

A number of local businesses, cruise-ship terminals, and freight facilities are located within Seward Highway vicinity or are connected to major population centers and other transportation facilities by it. The following section describes the economic activities supported by the Seward Highway within the study area.

### **1.4.1 Economic Demographics and Workplace Travel**

The Seward Highway supports economic activities and is traveled by locals, tourists, and commercial drivers. The highway is a critical corridor that connects the Anchorage Bowl, Turnagain Arm area, and Kenai Peninsula Borough as well as provides access to the Ted Stephens Anchorage International Airport in Anchorage and major cruise ship terminals in Whittier and Seward. The Don Young Port of Alaska in Anchorage handles 90 percent of the state's waterborne freight (DOT&PF 2022), and the Seward Highway provides overland access for commercial trucking operations to distribute goods to and from the port.

Table 1-4 provides an overview of the existing income, employment, and commuting data for the Project area. Most residents within the Project area rely on personal vehicle transport for commuting to work. Due to the majority of businesses, community facilities, and major transportation facilities being located in Anchorage and Girdwood, it can be assumed that most residents travel to those locations for work purposes.

**Table 1-4. Summary of selected demographic characteristics, 2022.**

Characteristics	Alaska	MOA	Census Tract 27.13	Census Tract 28.22	Census Tract 28.23	Census Tract 29
<b><i>Income and Poverty</i></b>						
Per capita income	\$42,828	\$46,554	\$50,825	\$54,892	\$78,714	\$65,100
Persons with income below poverty line in past 12 months, percent	10.5	9.6	10.7	2.9	1.2	8.3
<b><i>Employment and Labor Force</i></b>						
In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2018-2022	63.1	65.7	62.8	69.9	66.1	58.2
Unemployment rate, civilian labor force, percent	7.4	5.6	7.0	5.0	3.6	0.7
<b><i>Commuting to Work (workers 16 years and over)</i></b>						
Car, truck, or van – drove alone, percent	68.8	76.3	69.8	74.1	81.0	70.1
Car, truck, or van – carpooled, percent	12.2	11.6	3.8	10.6	9.3	5.9
Public transportation (excluding taxicab), percent	1.4	1.6	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.1
Walked, percent	7.7	3.1	0.0	2.6	0.8	16.3
Other means, percent	5.2	3.5	3.4	6.2	3.2	3.9
Worked at home, percent	4.7	3.9	21.8	6.6	5.7	3.8

Source: USCB 2022

### 1.4.2 Tourism

The Seward Highway corridor, including the railroad, is the sole transportation link that allows tourists, including cruise ship passengers, to travel between Anchorage, Whittier, and Seward. Tourists travel the highway by renting a car, taking a coach bus (provided by cruise lines and independent companies), or riding the ARRC. Sixty-five percent of the 2.65 million tourists who traveled to Alaska during summer 2023 were cruise ship passengers; Whittier received 223,500 passengers and Seward received 191,500 passengers during summer 2023 (McKinley 2024). In 2024, five cruise ships docked in Anchorage between May and September; 46 cruise ships docked in Whittier between May and September; and 104 cruise ships docked in Seward between May and October (CLIA 2024). Alaska Cruise Transportation – Big Bus runs 27 total trips on the Seward Highway each week between Anchorage and Seward during the summer season (May to September), as well as 15 trips between Anchorage and Whittier (ACT 2024).

### 1.4.3 Freight

The Federal Highway Administration has classified the Seward Highway between Anchorage and the Sterling Highway on the Kenai Peninsula as a Primary Highway Freight System highway; the designation is for the most critical portions of highway in the country’s freight transportation network (DOT&PF 2022). Heavy freight truck traffic on the Seward Highway

represents 8.3 percent of total vehicle traffic within the Project area (HDR 2024). According to DOT&PF (2022), the highway serves an important role in delivering goods from major freight ports, such as the Port of Alaska and Port of Seward, especially because the Port of Seward has been traditionally viewed as the Port of Alaska’s back-up port. As the only roadway connecting Anchorage to the Kenai Peninsula and the Port of Seward, the Seward Highway’s truck volumes are among the highest in the state, with more than 2,000 trucks per day in Anchorage and more than 200 trucks per day within the Seward area (DOT&PF 2022).

The Alaska Trucking Association (ATA) reported in 2024 that the trucking industry supported 12,720 jobs in the state and transported 13,170 tons of goods per day (ATA 2024). Two issues affecting the trucking industry are safety and traffic congestion. The ATA (2024) reports that traffic congestion cost the industry \$70 million in 2021.

ARRC’s rail service, which travels along the Seward Highway, is additionally part of the Statewide Multimodal Freight Network and connects the ports in Anchorage, Whittier, and Seward. DOT&PF (2022) estimates that approximately 150 to 200 shipping containers travel between Whittier and Seattle each week, traveling by rail to and from the port at Whittier. See EA Section 3.3.10 Transportation for further discussion of freight transportation via the road and railway.

#### **1.4.4 Businesses**

Several businesses within the study area serve locals and tourists traveling the Seward Highway (Table 1-5). There are also businesses not within the study area that rely on the Seward Highway for customer and employee access, such as Forget-Me-Not Nursery and Indian Valley Meats in Indian. Additionally, certain land within the communities of Indian and Bird has been designated as TMU to support tourism-related services, such as shops or temporary housing for seasonal employees. Many of these properties were selected due to frontage access for those traveling the highway (MOA 2009).

**Table 1-5. Businesses within the study area.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Access from Seward Highway</b>
Rabbit Creek Shooting Range	15222 Seward Highway, Anchorage, AK 99503	Approximately MP 117.75; southbound and northbound turn-in at 154th Avenue
Indian Valley Mine & Gifts	27301 Seward Highway, Indian, AK 99540	Approximately MP 104; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto property
Turnagain View Lodge & Wedding Venue	27327 Seward Highway, Indian, AK 99540	Approximately MP 104; southbound and northbound turn-in onto access route that leads to property
Birch & Alder	27635 Seward Highway, Anchorage, AK 99540	Approximately MP 103.5; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto property
Turnagain Fish Company	27957 Seward Highway, Indian, AK 99540	Approximately MP 103; southbound and northbound turn-in at Boretide Drive
Brown Bear Saloon & Hotel	28065 Seward Highway, Indian, AK 99540	Approximately MP 103; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto property
Essential One	29383 Seward Highway Mile 101, Bird, AK 99540	Approximately MP 100.75; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto property and/or Sawmill Road
Bird Creek Motel & RV Park	29433 Seward Highway, Bird, AK 9954	Approximately MP 100.75; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto property and/or Sawmill Road

Name	Location	Access from Seward Highway
Birdhouse Garage	29521 Seward Highway Mile 101, Bird Creek, AK 99540	Approximately MP 100.5; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto Konikson Road
Whispering Bird Studio	58 Whispering Bird Lane, Indian, AK 99540	Approximately MP 100.25; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto Whispering Bird Lane
Alaska Log Structures	29859 Seward Highway, Anchorage, AK 99540	Approximately MP 100.25; southbound and northbound turn-in directly onto property

Source: Google Maps

## 1.5 Hazardous Materials and Waste

This section uses the term “hazardous materials” to describe known contaminated sites and other Recognized Environmental Conditions within the Project area. Hazardous materials are regulated at the federal and state level. This section includes a description of the known hazardous material conditions within the Project area and the sources used to identify hazardous sites.

DOT&PF conducted a search of state and federal regulatory databases to identify hazardous material sites near the Project corridor from Seward Highway MPs 118 to 98.5 (EA Appendix R Environmental Database Review and Site Reconnaissance Progress Letter).<sup>1</sup>

Table 1-6 describes a complete list of known (active and closed) hazardous materials sites within the Project area. A figure identifying sites along the Project corridor can be found in Appendix R.

The search found several active sites, including two Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERCLIS) sites, one active spill, one closed landfill, two registered underground storage tanks (USTs) that are currently in use, one active leaking underground storage tank (LUST), and eight contaminated sites. One Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) treatment, storage, and disposal (TSD) facility is not subject to corrective action.

The Project area includes sites that have been cleaned up according to the appropriate agency regulations. Additional undocumented hazardous materials, such as heating oil tanks, contaminants, herbicides, metals, and/or undocumented releases from various materials may be present.

<sup>1</sup> The distance from the Seward Highway varied based on the radii specified in ASTM International E1527-21.

**Table 1-6. Known hazardous materials sites.**

Name	Location	Within 1,500 feet of edge of ground disturbance?	Type	Notes	Source <sup>a</sup>
Indian ACS	Near Seward Highway MP 101.5	Yes	CERCLIS	No information on status of investigation	CERCLIS
Rabbit Creek Radio Relay Site	Near Rabbit Creek and Potter Marsh (10 miles southeast of Anchorage)	Yes	CERCLIS	No information on status of investigation	CERCLIS
RCRA TSD	Located within 0.5 mile of Seward Highway	Unknown	RCRA TSD	Not subject to corrected action	EnviroFacts
Bird House Garage (Spill No. 21239900602)	156 State Park Road (near Seward Highway MP 100.5)	Yes	Spill	Communication between ADEC and responsible party is ongoing	ADEC Prevention Preparedness and Response Program Spills database
Bird Creek Landfill	Approximately 0.5 mile north of Seward Highway MP 100.5	No	State Landfill/ Solid Waste Disposal Site	Class III; retired in 1982	ADEC Solid Waste Management database
Essential One – Bird Creek	29383 Seward Highway (near Seward Highway MP 101)	Yes	UST	15,000-gallon gasoline tank – currently in use	ADEC Underground Storage Tank database
Indian Wire Center	Seward Highway MP101	Yes	UST	300-gallon heating oil tank – currently in use	ADEC Underground Storage Tank database
Essential 1 (former Shoreside Texaco) –Bird Creek	29383 Seward Highway (near MP 101)	Yes	LUST	Benzene-contaminated soil; site is active	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
MOA AWWU Pump Station #31	Approximately 2,000 feet northeast of Seward Highway MP 116	No	LUST	Petroleum-impacted soil and groundwater; site was granted "Cleanup Complete – Institutional Controls" status in 2016	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
AWWU Pump Station #30	Approximately 1,600 feet east of Seward Highway MP 118	Yes	LUST	Site was granted "Cleanup Complete – Institutional Controls" status in 1999	ADEC Contaminated Sites database

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Name	Location	Within 1,500 feet of edge of ground disturbance?	Type	Notes	Source <sup>a</sup>
ACS Indian Substation	Between Sawmill and Konikson Roads between Seward Highway MPs 100.5 and 101	Yes	Contaminated Site	Soil contamination by diesel range organics; cleanup complete; site closure approved by ADEC in March 2001	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
Defense Energy Indian Booster Pump Station	Approximately 4,900 feet north of Seward Highway MP 103	No	Contaminated Site	Petroleum contamination; site designated as “cleanup complete with institutional controls”	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
Mile 98.6 Pipeline Leak; Duplicate site See CS Hazard ID 1775	Near Seward Highway MP 98.6	Yes	Contaminated Site	Soils, groundwater, and wetlands were impacted by a JP-4 fuel spill; site has been administratively closed and is monitored as part of the “Defense Energy Indian Booster Pump Station” site	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
DFSC – Indian Pump Station; Duplicate see Hazard ID 1775	Oceanview Road	No	Contaminated Site	Petroleum-impacted soil; contaminants may include JP-4, ethylene glycol, benzene, diesel, and other unknown substances; site has been designated “cleanup complete with institutional controls” and is monitored as part of the “Defense Energy Indian Booster Pump Station” site	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
Ptarmigan Terrace UST	3741 Ptarmigan Terrace (approximately 2,500 feet east of Seward Highway MP 117.5)	No	Contaminated Site	Petroleum- and benzene-impacted soils; site is designated as “cleanup complete”	ADEC Contaminated Sites database

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Name	Location	Within 1,500 feet of edge of ground disturbance?	Type	Notes	Source <sup>a</sup>
Parcel Spill, Potter Marsh Area	Approximately 2,400 feet southeast of Seward Highway MP 117.5 (near 16245 Old Seward Highway)	No	Contaminated Site	Heating oil fuel dumped into Little Rabbit Creek; impacted soil; site is designated as “cleanup complete”	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
Residence – Old Seward Highway	East of Seward Highway MP 118 (14941 Old Seward Highway)	Yes	Contaminated Site	Lead- and petroleum- impacted soil; site is designated as “cleanup complete”	ADEC Contaminated Sites database
Little Rabbit Cr. Drums Orphan Site	Approximately 2,700 feet east of the crossing at Seward Highway MP 118	No	Contaminated Site	Two abandoned 55-gallon drums found approximately 40 feet from the creek; site is designated as “cleanup complete”	ADEC Contaminated Sites database

Source: EA Appendix R Environmental Database Review and Site Reconnaissance Progress Letter

Notes: ADEC = Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation; AWWU = Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility; ID = Identification Number

<sup>a</sup> For information about these sources, see EA Appendix R Environmental Database Review and Site Reconnaissance Progress Letter

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