



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Highway
Administration**

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project
AK WHITTIER 2016(1)
Whittier, AK

This Finding of No Significant Impact is submitted pursuant to:
42 U.S.C. 4332(2)(c)

Decision

The Western Federal Lands Highway Division (WFLHD) of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) with the City of Whittier (City), in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service), has determined that the selected course of action for construction of the Shotgun Cove Road Extension will have no significant impact on the human or natural environment. The selected course of action is described as the Proposed Action in the *Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project Environmental Assessment* (EA) (FHWA, March 18, 2021), hereafter referred to as the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative and its mitigation measures meet the stated purpose and need of the project while minimizing impacts to the human and natural environment. Comments received through the public involvement process and review of the EA were considered in this decision; the comments and FHWA's responses are attached.

The EA was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which considers the effects of federal, federally-funded, and/or federally-permitted projects on the quality of the human and natural environment. The project is being financed through the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) and City match funding. FHWA is the federal lead agency for NEPA compliance and the City is a project sponsor. The Forest Service is a cooperating agency.

Selected Alternative

The project is located two miles northeast of Whittier, Alaska. The Selected Alternative would construct an extension to the existing Shotgun Cove Road beginning at mile 2.0, continuing on to Forest Service land at Trinity Point at mile 4.5, and would feature several short spur/access roads along the alignment to provide land access. The Selected Alternative, described in the EA as the Proposed Action, meets the purpose of the project because it will improve access to federal and state lands, alleviate pressure on Whittier's regional transportation system, provide access to City

land for year-round recreation and development, and allow the City to realize potential economic growth.

The Selected Alternative would be approximately 2.5 miles in length and would include nine new parking areas, and eight spur/access roads accessing future beach access points and future private parcels. The road extension would be constructed approximately 250 to 350 feet from the shoreline and would run roughly down the middle of City-owned land to terminate at Trinity Point with a turnaround and separate parking area to accommodate up to 50 vehicles. The main roadway would consist of two 10-foot-wide gravel travel lanes with 5-foot-wide gravel shoulders with recoverable slopes and drainage swales or rock cuts along uphill sides. The roadway would follow existing contours to limit steep grades (maximum grade would be 10%) and significant changes in grade. The spur/access roads would be slightly narrower, with two 9-foot-wide gravel travel lanes and varying width recoverable slopes. Both the mainline and access roads would have designed rockfall catchment areas on the uphill side. Typical traffic control and wayfinding signage would be installed along the route. Due to steep existing topography at the site, the main road would have a posted speed limit of 25 miles per hour, and the access roads would have lower posted speed limits.

Culverts would be installed at existing creeks and small drainage features, including wetlands. At four locations where anadromous or resident fish are present, culverts would be designed to allow for fish passage. Nine new parking areas would be constructed to provide access to public land along the corridor, with capacities ranging from 8 to 50 parked vehicles. Public toilet facilities would also be installed at two of the lots. The parking areas are planned in locations near recreation resources such as viewpoints, beach access, backcountry access, fishing, and kayak launch areas. A majority of the existing two-mile-long Emerald Cove Trail would be abandoned in place and would no longer connect the parking area at the current end of Shotgun Cove Road to Emerald Cove. Two segments of the existing Emerald Cove Trail near proposed parking areas would be retained and would undergo minor improvements for safety.

The project corridor traverses a steep grade, requiring a combination of rock cut blasting and fill. Since the project site is located in a rural area with no easily-accessible material sites, the project aims to balance cut fills from the site by using blasted rock for the embankments and road section. Material from the road excavation would be hauled by truck to the rock crushing area located at the staging area at the beginning of the project. Excess cut material that is stockpiled as construction of the road progresses would be used to construct the access roads, instead of being hauled miles away for disposal. The project would be constructed over several construction seasons, beginning with vegetative clearing and grubbing in spring 2022. Construction of the new roadway would begin at the terminus of the existing Shotgun Cove Road and progress in phases towards Trinity Point.

Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative

The EA analyzed the effects of the Selected Alternative on numerous resources, including: transportation and access; land use; recreation; wetlands; fish, wildlife, and vegetation; cultural and historic resources; soils and geology; noise; visual quality; air quality; water resources, water quality, and floodplains; social, community, and environmental justice; and cumulative effects for all of these resources.

No significant impacts to these resources were identified. These findings are based on the evidence and conclusions set forth in the EA, which is incorporated by reference here.

Table 1 summarizes the environmental consequences of the Selected Alternative by each evaluated resource.

Table 1. Summary of Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Transportation and Access | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing parking area at the end of Shotgun Cove Road temporarily closed No or limited access to Emerald Cove Trail Additional construction vehicles and equipment on local haul routes through Whittier <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicular access to federal lands at Trinity Point Slight increase in summer traffic in Whittier including through the Whittier Tunnel Minor congestion alleviation at the Whittier Harbor; increased points of access to Passage Canal for small watercraft |
| Land Use | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current land use of the area (parking lot, trail) not available during construction <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 23 acres of undisturbed land and trail converted to road right-of-way Approximately 150 acres of public land potentially made available for public sale at a future date |

Table 1. Summary of Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative |
|---|---|
| Recreation | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No or limited access to Emerald Cove Trail <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vehicle access to Trinity Point created • Additional recreational facilities (beach access, viewpoints, trailheads) created • Most of Emerald Cove Trail removed or segmented by the roadway • Some areas of recreational public land along the corridor above the 50-foot-wide public shoreline access easement no longer accessible • Potential for new privately-owned recreational cabins along the project corridor to the extent land is made available for sale to the public • Easier access to currently remote areas; potential for extended human impacts, crowding |
| Wetlands | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 0.1 acre of temporary wetlands impacts during construction <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 13 acres of permanent wetlands impacts • Potential future wetlands impacts from development of privatized lands and new recreation facilities |
| Fish, Wildlife, & Vegetation | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary increased noise displacement of wildlife • Temporary sedimentation in resident fish streams <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 23 acres of forested wildlife habitat converted to roadway • Increased interactions with wildlife • Potential for invasive species spread • Potential future forest clearing stemming from development of privatized lands |

Table 1. Summary of Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative |
|--|---|
| Cultural and Historic Resources | <u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None |
| Soils and Geology | <u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimal impact until disturbed areas stabilized; exposed soils subject to erosion if not protected. Temporarily unstable slopes if not retained or flattened <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New areas of exposed soil and rock cuts subject to wind and water erosion • Soil erosion from increased foot traffic along new trails • Soil erosion from potential private development |
| Noise | <u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary noise increase during construction from equipment and construction activities at the project area and at vehicle routes through the community <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased noise associated with motor vehicle use in an area with no sensitive noise receptors |
| Visual Quality | <u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary impacts to visual quality to boaters passing by on Passage Canal <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual impacts to boaters passing by on Passage Canal and at elevations above the project area from cleared trees and vegetation • Potential for minor visual impacts if private lots developed and small cabins added |
| Air Quality | <u>Temporary construction effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased dust and emissions <u>Direct and indirect effects</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minor air quality impacts from vehicles using the new roadway |

Table 1. Summary of Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Environmental Consequences of the Selected Alternative |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for future localized impacts from increased wood or fuel burning stove use from privately-owned recreational cabins |
| Water Resources, Water Quality, and Floodplains | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased temporary turbidity in surface waters Approximately 0.03 acre of temporary impacts during construction <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 0.93 acre of freshwater streams impacted (below ordinary high water) Increased potential for stormwater runoff contamination by roadway pollutants Potential for contamination of surface water and degradation of water quality from exposed soils erosion |
| Social, Community, and Environmental Justice | <p><u>Temporary construction effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased traffic volumes or delays due to construction equipment and vehicles Opportunities for construction-related employment <p><u>Direct and indirect effects</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations Increased community visitation and associated economic benefits |

Wetlands Determination

In accordance with Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands, the proposed roadway improvement and its wetlands impacts have been closely evaluated. As a result of the Selected Alternative, approximately 13 acres of wetlands will be permanently filled, of the existing 104 acres of wetlands within the study area.

The Selected Alternative includes all practicable measures to minimize harm to wetlands that may result from such use while still meeting the purpose and need of the project and applicable roadway standards. Mitigation for wetland impacts will be detailed in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Clean Water Act Section 404 permit. FHWA has determined there is no practicable alternative to the proposed construction in wetlands.

Basis for Decision

The Selected Alternative meets the purpose and need for the project because it will:

- improve access to federal and state lands,
- alleviate pressure on Whittier's regional transportation system,
- provide access to City land for year-round recreation and development, and
- allow the City to realize potential economic growth.

The Selected Alternative, along with the mitigation measures described in Chapter 3 of the EA, will not result in significant impacts to the environment.

Environmental Commitments

The EA includes numerous environmental commitments that would be utilized to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate potential effects to resources. Environmental commitments associated with individual resources are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Summary of Mitigation Measures by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Mitigation Measure(s) |
|------------------------|--|
| Transportation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage will be installed in advance of and during construction to inform the public regarding any traffic delays or interruptions. • Public advertisements will be completed (through direct mailers, newspaper advertisements, and local posters) regarding construction activities and potential closures along the existing Shotgun Cove Road. |
| Land Use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any proposed land use activities will be subject to applicable local land use permit requirements and will follow standards described in the City of Whittier Comprehensive Plan. • Proposed activities on Forest Service land are consistent with the Chugach Forest Plan per the Forest Service's consistency statement dated May 25, 2021. |
| Recreation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 13 acres of land will be reserved along the corridor for public recreation access as shown in Figure 3-3 and Appendix A. • Nine new parking lots will be constructed along the roadway and access roads as part of the Proposed Action. These parking lots will be constructed as roadway construction progresses from mile 2.0 to 4.5, with parking lots closer to mile 4.5 potentially installed the last year of construction. • To mitigate for the loss of Emerald Cove Trail, at a few of these parking lots segments of the existing trail will remain and undergo minor improvements (and at one parking lot a new trail segment will be constructed) to recreational resources or to the shoreline (Figure 3-3 and Appendix A). While the portions of Emerald Cove Trail to be left in place would not be widened or realigned, minor improvements will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ removing deteriorated or deficient puncheons and rebar; ○ hardening the trail surface with gravel base or surface course, wood retainers, and/or puncheons; ○ installing short-span (less than 10 feet) wood structures across small drainages; ○ pruning of branches impeding on the trail; and |

Table 2. Summary of Mitigation Measures by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Mitigation Measure(s) |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ removing old bridges in these sections. • New wayfinding signs will be installed to direct travelers to Trinity Point, Emerald Cove, viewpoints, parking areas, beach access, hiking, and picnic areas. |
| Wetlands | <p><i>Avoidance:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill area boundaries will be clearly delineated in the field to avoid accidental impacts from equipment operation and fill material placement. • In wetlands, the contractor will not place fill, clear vegetation, or run equipment outside the delineated clearing zone. <p><i>Minimization:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clearing zone widths are the minimum necessary for project construction and safe operation on segments crossing wetlands. • Steep (5:1) road embankment slopes will be used on wetland crossings to minimize the footprint width while providing long-term stability. • Culverts and drainage mats will be installed in wetland areas as appropriate to minimize road effects on natural drainage patterns and to maintain hydrologic flow. • All Best Management Practices (BMPs) and conditions identified in the USACE permit and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Fish Habitat permit will be implemented. <p><i>Mitigation:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approximately 6.4 acres of wetlands within the project corridor will be excluded from public recreation areas, private land sales, or future development and protected in perpetuity. • A restoration project in wetlands or waters of the U.S. within the same watershed as the Proposed Action will be designed and executed to compensate for unavoidable wetlands losses. • Informational signage focused on wetlands education will be installed at key locations along the corridor such as parking areas and trailheads. |
| Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing size will be kept to a minimum to reduce permanent forested habitat loss. • The project will follow U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) guidance regarding migratory birds (including eagles and their nests) for Southcentral Alaska and would avoid vegetation and tree cutting/clearing between May 1 and July 15 or between March 1 and August 31 if within 660 feet of an active eagle nest (USFWS 2017). Blasting would not be performed within 0.5 mile of an active eagle nest during the breeding season. • Project work will be restricted when lighting is required (dusk to dawn) during the bird breeding season window. • The project design team has worked and would continue to work closely with ADF&G biologists to determine stream crossing locations that would require design meeting ADF&G fish passage criteria. An ADF&G Fish Habitat Permit will be obtained prior to work involving streams containing fish. |

Table 2. Summary of Mitigation Measures by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Mitigation Measure(s) |
|------------------------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-water work in resident fish streams for culvert installations and stream rerouting will take place between late winter and mid-July per ADF&G recommendations. • Any blasting near resident fish streams will take place between late winter and mid-July as per ADF&G recommendations. If determined by the contractor that blasting would be needed near the anadromous reach of the waterbodies, blasting will occur from November to March or May to July to minimize impacts to fish per ADF&G recommendations. • The contractor will draft a blasting plan which will adhere to the requirements of ADF&G's Alaska Blasting Standards for the Proper Protection of Fish (Timothy 2013), particularly: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Blasting overpressures and peak velocities will be below the manual's specifications (instantaneous pressure rise in the water column less than 7.3 pounds per square inch and peak particle velocities less than 2.0 inches per second). • Any culverts proposed for installation on Forest Service lands will be reviewed by Chugach National Forest staff to ensure consistency with best management practices. • Marine mammals will be protected from construction-related blasting noise through the use of protected species observers and shutdowns, as needed, during blasting. See Appendix C. • All construction equipment will be inspected and cleaned prior to entering and exiting the construction site to minimize spread of vegetative materials and invasive species. • The construction contractor will be provided with "Selected Invasive Plants of Alaska" (2009) booklet and black slug handout to assist in the identification, treatment, avoidance, and reporting of invasive species. • All footwear, gear, and equipment will be cleaned and free of invasive plant materials and slugs and slug eggs prior to entering the construction site. Work in or near invasive infestations will be avoided where practicable, especially where invasive plants have gone to seed as these seeds can contaminate gear and be spread to other sites (e.g., dandelions). • Ground disturbance will be limited to the existing site footprint where practicable. Trampling and ground disturbance that could create favorable seed beds for non-native plants or trample sensitive plant species would be prevented. • All invasive species will be reported to the permit administrator who will report the location information, species, and infestation size (for plants) immediately to the 1-877- INVASIV (1-877-468-2748) hotline. • To avoid spread of invasive species, exposed slopes will be stabilized using clean shot rock (riprap) or shredded wood mulch from cleared trees on site. In the event that seeding or revegetation will be required, the project will maximize use of local organic soil and cleared material to promote regrowth of natural plants. • If revegetation is needed on Forest Service lands, approval will be requested from the permit administrator who will consult the Forest Service zone or forest ecologist to discuss and recommend seed mixes or materials prior to approval. |

Table 2. Summary of Mitigation Measures by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Mitigation Measure(s) |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational signage focused on the importance of protecting native vegetation and wetlands and preventing the spread of invasive species will be installed at key locations along the corridor such as parking areas and trailheads. • Boot brushes will be installed alongside informational signage along the corridor about invasive species. |
| Cultural and Historic Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project BMPs will limit the ground disturbance to within the clearing limits. • If previously unknown archeological materials or human remains are discovered during construction, all activities will cease in the immediate area of the finds pending further recommendations from the FHWA in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). |
| Soils and Geology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate sediment and erosion control BMPs will be installed before construction begins and will be maintained in working order throughout the construction period, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The contractor will be required to develop a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) in compliance with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC) Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) to control and prevent soil erosion and sedimentation from the construction site. ○ Erosion control measures (e.g., silt fence or other means) will be placed and maintained. These devices will remain in place until fill and other exposed earthwork attributable to the project are stabilized. ○ Construction limits will be staked and clearly demarcated. ○ Natural vegetation will be retained wherever possible. ○ Temporary and permanent stabilization measures will be initiated as soon as practicable by the contractor, but within at least 14 days on all portions of the site where construction activities have temporarily or permanently ceased. |
| Noise | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None proposed |
| Visual Quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project design includes a conservative clearing area (roughly 80 feet) to minimize disturbance to visual aesthetics. • No roadway lighting is proposed in conjunction with the Proposed Action. • Vegetation buffers will be left intact as much as possible along the project corridor. |
| Air Quality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All equipment will be operated in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations to minimize emissions. • Idling heavy equipment will be shut down when not in use. • BMPs will be implemented during construction activities to mitigate fugitive dust and reduce particulate matter emissions, e.g., apply water as needed to control fugitive dust emissions. |

Table 2. Summary of Mitigation Measures by Resource

| Environmental Resource | Mitigation Measure(s) |
|--|--|
| Water Resources, Water Quality, and Floodplains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The City may create approximately 8.5 acres of setback protection “non-disturbance zones” around select watercourses on City-owned land through the adoption of code. These zones will be defined in a future USACE permit application for the project. • Drainage ditches will be installed along the roadway, with wider ditches in muskeg areas (5 feet wide) to control surface water infiltration into the roadway. • The contractor would be required to develop a SWPPP in compliance with ADEC’s APDES and BMPs will be implemented to control and prevent stormwater runoff from causing sedimentation in wetlands, and turbidity in open waters. Erosion control measures would be left in place until exposed areas are stabilized. • All equipment operated in or adjacent to water bodies or wetlands will be clean of oil and grease and properly maintained. Equipment operators will carry absorbent pads and spill response kits, provide containment and cleanup for portable fuel tanks (including hose and nozzle), follow approved disposal methods for waste products and repair leaky equipment promptly. • No fuel storage, vehicle fueling, or maintenance will be conducted within 100 feet of water bodies. |
| Social, Community, and Environmental Justice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction schedules and other relevant information will be posted in public areas around Whittier such as the City office and the bulletin board at Begich Towers. • Project information materials in languages other than English will be provided, if requested. |

Public Involvement

Resource and regulatory agencies, nearby tribal governments, and the general public were engaged to provide information and to solicit feedback on the early alternatives that were considered and possible issues to address during environmental review and design stages of the project. Chapter 7 and Appendix F of the EA provide a summary of the project’s public, agency and tribal outreach activities that were conducted prior to release of the EA.

On March 23, 2021, FHWA published a Notice of Availability that the EA was available for review and comment. The Notice of Availability for the EA, including notification of the comment period, were placed in a local newspaper, the Anchorage Daily News. The Notice of Availability was also posted on the project website, the City website, Whittier Facebook group, and physically in the following locations in Whittier:

- Begich Towers
- Whittier Harbor Office
- Whittier Manor
- Anchor Inn Restaurant
- Anchor Inn Store/Museum

Copies of the EA were publicly available for viewing or downloading on the project website (<http://shotguncoveroad.com/>) or upon request.

As stated in the Notice of Availability, the 30-day public and agency review comment period for the EA started on March 23, 2021, and ended on April 24, 2021. FHWA received eight written comments during the comment period. The project team reviewed, evaluated, and responded to all comments. Appendix A and B include formal public comments and compilation of responses to comments from the public review period.

Permits and Approvals

The following permits and approvals would likely be required prior to construction of the Selected Alternative:

- ADEC Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Construction General Permit for Storm Water Discharges for Large and Small Construction Activities (Clean Water Act [CWA] Section 402)
- ADEC Water Quality Certification (CWA Section 401)
- ADF&G Aquatic Resource Permit (5 AAC 41)
- ADF&G Fish Habitat permit (Anadromous Fish Act/Fishway Act)
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources Temporary Water Use Permit (11 AAC 93)
- USACE, Alaska District, Wetlands Permit (CWA Section 404): POA-2003-0764
- Forest Service authorization for construction on National Forest System lands at Trinity Point

Finding of No Significant Impact

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), FHWA as the federal lead agency assessed the environmental impacts of the proposed project. The EA was prepared in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA Regulations set forth in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Parts 1500 to 1508, including the guidelines for determining the significance of proposed federal action (40 CFR 1508.27), and with FHWA Regulations contained in 23 CFR Part 771. The proposed project also conforms with all applicable federal statutes and executive orders.

The FHWA has determined that the Selected Alternative will have no significant impact on the human or natural environment. This FONSI is based on the referenced EA and related documentation, which has been independently evaluated by FHWA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the need, environmental issues, and impacts of the proposed project and appropriate mitigation measures. Comments received through the public involvement and EA review process were considered in this decision. The EA provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required by section 102(2)(C) of NEPA or its implementing regulations. The FHWA takes full responsibility for the accuracy, scope, and content of the attached EA.

RECOMMENDED BY:

SETH MATTHEW ENGLISH-YOUNG Digitally signed by SETH MATTHEW ENGLISH-YOUNG
Date: 2021.06.08 14:18:34 -07'00'

Seth English-Young, Senior Transportation Planner

Date

CONCURRED BY:

SCOTT RUSSELL SMITHLINE Digitally signed by SCOTT RUSSELL SMITHLINE
Date: 2021.06.15 13:16:58 -07'00'

Scott Smithline, Environmental Manager

Date

APPROVED BY:

 Digitally signed by DANIEL D DONOVAN
Date: 2021.06.17 13:53:11 -04'00'

Dan Donovan, Chief of Business Operations

Date

APPENDIX A

COMMENTS RECEIVED

From: David Rehak Suma [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, April 7, 2021 9:04 AM
To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]
Subject: Shotgun Cove Rd: Comment

Hello Mr. English-Young,

As a professional wilderness guide, based out of Whittier, I will tell you that the shotgun cove road will continue to be a disaster for those that live and work in and around Passage Canal, and that will be worsened by every square foot of forest or meadowland destroyed, every square foot of gravel or asphalt laid, and every vehicle which travels that road.

The businesses of Whittier which are dependent on people who enjoy what wilderness Whittier has to offer are dependent on an unadulterated Passage Canal for their business. The road work which has already been done has disrupted tours for those who would earn the right to discover the coves and shoreline of the Canal. Having people say "Oh, if I can just drive there, why would I take a tour?" cavitates business for the residents making a living from the harbor. Kayaking is an extreme joy in Passage Canal, because it makes a day away from the hum and noise pollution of the everyday, and to be in the middle of that experience, and have a car go whizzing past disrupts the continuity of one's wilderness experience like a hemorrhage disrupts the continuity of blood flow to the brain.

The life which makes Whittier a place worth living is dependent on the mostly undisturbed nature of that shoreline. A place where we currently boast at the very least one bald eagle per mile, will lose the birds to more favorable, quieter shores, at least until currently undeveloped projects make it to whatever refuge is left for them.

No longer will a boat captain and his fiancé be able to go swimming to a remote cove, to put on snorkel gear, and wade out into the water where two humpback whales are swimming by, Because Alice Wigglewort and her seven kids will have driven their 2 ton diesel back there, rolling coal and throwing Chicken n Biskit crackers at the whale spouts from the shoreline.

From the person who has already spent days cleaning up the once immaculate Portage Valley of beer cans, potato chip bags, and cigarette butts, can we please do Alaska a favor this one time, and actively work to preserve what's left of the natural world, so that those who would seek to enjoy it under their own manpower don't have to deal with the incessant disruption of industry?

There are far more moral reasons to stop the project in its' tracks. However one of the best reasons is that those who would drive all the way out there, take a picture, and get back in their car are already satisfied with the road as it is. For those who it isn't good enough for; they will walk, or they will kayak.

Mr. English-young, I leave you with this.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the stability and integrity of the biotic community; it is wrong when it tends otherwise.

David Rehak Suma

Sea Kayak Guide
Photographer

From: Nick Olzenak (AMDS) [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 9, 2021 10:13 AM
To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Shotgun Cove Road Extension RE: Comment

Mr. English-Young,

My name is Nick Olzenak, I am the Vice President of Alaska Mining & Diving Supply Inc, Alaska Motorsports & Equipment, and also own a couple of other small business based out of Prince William Sound. I am an avid snowmobiler and boater and a frequent visitor to Whittier, AK. I have been using Shotgun Cove Road to access the backcountry for almost 30 years.

Shotgun Cove Road is a vital piece of infrastructure for Whittier, and also all of southcentral Alaska. With Whittier being just a 45 minute car ride south of Anchorage, the most populated urban area in the state the opportunity for outdoor recreation year round very high. Whittier is the access point or the "Gateway" as it is called to Prince William Sound that is accessed primarily by boat for any recreation done outside of Whittier. This leaves recreation in the town of Whittier itself quite limited with only access available of some trails in town and the small spur of the current Shotgun Cove Road to access. Hikers, bikers, snowmobilers, skiers, snowshoers, etc. all use this small road to gain access to the backcountry and to otherwise inaccessible areas of the Chugach National Forest, the second largest and furthest north National Forest in the United States totaling 5.4 million acres.

Extending the Shotgun Cove Road further out will provide much needed room for all of those user groups to be able to co-exist and enjoy different forms of recreation year round. Currently there is not adequate parking or safe access to the higher alpine areas for these user groups. I visualize a summer road accessing all the way to Emerald Cove, with parking and access points for all types of users. A kayak launch and pavilion at the beautiful Emerald Cove and a winter trail groomed on the roadway for motorized and non-motorized users alike.

While Whittier provides a multitude of on water experiences out Passage Canal, there are likely thousands of people who would benefit from a land based experience who may not be physically capable of a boat or kayak experience or may not have the financial means for that but could easily drive a motor vehicle out to the end in the summer to enjoy a nice picnic with their families and friends on the forest.

In our Anchorage stores we sell products to people who want to get out and recreate in the backcountry and in the water in Alaska. We sell to tour operators and private citizens who use any and all access points available to them in Alaska. Areas close to Anchorage benefit all nearby communities from an economic standpoint from purchasing, fuel, groceries, supplies, parking user fees and others. And having more options closer to town means less drive time and more smile time! This also makes Anchorage, Indian, Girdwood, and Whittier more attractive for people looking to locate from the lower 48 to the last frontier. While Alaska is still vast and untamed wilderness, safe and adequate access continues to be a concern, the Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project is a major step in the right direction.



Nick Olzenak

Vice President, General Manager
Alaska Mining & Diving Supply, Inc

Phone: [REDACTED]

Direct: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

www.akmining.com

www.amealaska.com

From: Christian Y [REDACTED]

Sent: Tuesday, April 13, 2021 10:09 AM

To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]

Subject: Shotgun Cove Road

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hi Seth,

I am writing in support of the Shotgun Cove Road Expansion project. As a business owner in Whittier and avid outdoor enthusiast there is so much value in the project for a multitude of reasons!

First, without a vessel access to the Sound is fairly limited. The road would expand so many different year round recreational opportunities such as hiking, biking, snowmobiling, skiing, beach combing, etc. for those recreating without a vessel/boat.

The amount of fee simple land available in Whittier is limited. Should the project be seen through to completion, the amount of land available would increase. This benefits the community due to the increased tax revenue.

Whittier is a special place and I feel that the road expansion could be a catalyst to transform the community and opportunities to recreate there.

Thanks for your consideration,

Chris Yelverton

[REDACTED]
Anchorage, AK 99516

Sent from my iPhone

From: Dori Yelverton [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, April 17, 2021 9:59 AM
To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]
Subject: Shotgun cove road comment

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Mr English-Young,

My name is Dori Yelverton and I am an Anchorage resident, boat owner and I own and run a small business in Whittier, Ak.

I am so excited about the shotgun cove road extension project. We love all of the existing hiking trails in Whittier, but we would love to see more accessibility and increased space for visitors. We often hike with our children and they love exploring the coves and scenery.

There are so many beautiful places to explore in the Sound, and increasing accessibility will benefit so many Alaskans and visitors to Alaska alike.

We are often asked by tourists where they should explore and adventure in Whittier - and even though the existing trails are lovely, there is simply not enough parking, or infrastructure to support many visitors.

We have seen an increase in the last few years of local Alaskans who are exploring our state rather than traveling elsewhere. The more infrastructure we can provide visitors the better! With the limited options we currently have, it's easy to overtax the existing trails and parking.

Whittier and Prince William Sound are so beautiful and access should not be limited to the select few who can afford cruises or guided tours.

Thank you for the opportunity to add comment. We have been just thrilled to watch Whittier grow!

-Dori Yelverton

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: Farmer, Sabrina J [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, April 20, 2021 9:40 AM
To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]
Cc: Cooper, Douglass [REDACTED]
Subject: Shotgun Road Extension: USFWS Comments

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Mr. English-Young,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Shotgun Cove Road Extension Environmental Assessment (EA). We appreciate your commitment to protecting Alaska's fish, wildlife, and vegetation. The EA thoroughly addresses affects to the Service's trust resources. In addition to the mitigation measures stated in section 3.5 of the EA, please consider the following to increase conservation outcomes:

Minimizing impacts to eagles and migratory birds:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with project proponents to address anthropogenic impacts on trust resources, including migratory birds. Conservation measures for migratory birds may also benefit non-migratory species. Avoiding vegetation clearing in the nesting season, as mentioned in the EA, will decrease stressors for birds. In addition, consider:

- Prevent increases in lighting of native habitats, especially during the bird breeding season. To the maximum extent practicable, limit construction activities to the time between dawn and dusk to avoid illumination of adjacent habitats.
- Minimize increases in noise above ambient levels during the nesting and breeding season.
- Learn more about eagle and migratory bird conservation measures at: <https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/nationwidestandardconservationmeasures.pdf>.

Maximizing fish passage:

Retaining the biologic and hydrologic integrity of streams is essential to conserving Alaska's fish species, populations, and their habitats. Rivers provide corridors for migrating fish as well as connecting areas that provide critical feeding, spawning, rearing and overwintering habitats. This project will require crossing at least 4 anadromous streams. We recommend the following Service design standards to maximize conservation outcomes:

- Whenever possible, use full span bridge crossings to cross streams and rivers. Guidance for appropriate bridge spans can be found at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm91_054564.pdf
- If a full span bridge is not an option, design culverts to maintain important hydrologic functions such as sediment transport through the culvert, winter icing, flood flow conveyance, and to minimize the potential for scouring and scour pool formation at the culvert. Fish passage design guidance can be found at: <https://8d4bf1c8-f414-4c75->

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fc4d491fa659.filesusr.com/ugd/93b6b4_28b3142c87804e5f89c60f34ea76996d.pdf

- When installing culverts, align the culvert in a direction as nearly parallel to water flow as possible.

Limiting the spread of invasive species:

Invasive species are one of the greatest threats to native biodiversity and are a significant driver of native species loss worldwide. Projects proponents play an important role in limiting the spread of invasive species by implementing conservation measures into their project design.

The Shotgun Cove Road Extension EA includes mitigation measures such as cleaning all construction equipment prior to entering/exiting the project site and minimizing ground disturbance. The Service recommends to:

- Conduct project operations in un-infested areas first to ensure that invasive species do not contaminate equipment.
- Re-vegetate bare soils as soon as feasible to minimize the possible establishment of invasive plant species. Stabilize disturbed soils using appropriate erosion and sediment control procedures as soon as possible. Use certified invasive-free materials.
- Revegetate with native and local plant species. Vigorous non-invasive perennial grass species can also be considered since they can minimize the potential of invasive species to become established. Alaska Division of Agriculture's Plant Material Center (<http://plants.alaska.gov/>) is a good reference for appropriate seed mixes.
- Install boot brushes alongside informational signage about protecting native vegetation (signs already including as a mitigation measure in the EA) at key locations along the corridor.

The Service is happy to provide technical assistance if needed. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Ms. Sabrina Farmer at (907)271-2778 or sabrina_farmer@fws.gov and reference consultation number 07CAAN00-2021-CPA-0068 .

Cheers,
Sabrina Farmer

--

Sabrina Farmer (she, her, hers)
Ecological Services Biologist
Alaska Region, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

-----Original Message-----

From: Doug Penn [REDACTED]

Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 8:04 AM

To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]

Subject: Comments for Shotgun Cove Road Extension

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Attn: Mr. English Young

RE: Shotgun Cove Road Extension

Please accept the following comments for the current Shotgun Road Extension:

1. Proposed access roads should be removed from the plan and replaced with a trail equivalent of USFS class 3 trail. These could all be connected to proposed parking areas on the proposed main road extension.
2. Emerald Bay and all surrounding lands up to the main road should be designated as reserved lands. This area as along with Trinity Point are highly visible and preserving it's natural state should be a priority.
3. The existing trail from the current road terminus has been in existence for well over 30 years. Mitigation of the loss of that trail with small sections of designated trail is not a comparable recreational experience. Rather a trail from the new proposed road terminus extending out around Shotgun Cove would provide a similar recreational experience to the current trail that will be no longer accessible due to the proposed road.
4. The shoreline is a valuable multi-use recreational area and mitigation plans should include more that the 6.4 acres of wetlands to be excluded from public sale. In order to preserve this resource for public recreational users, shore line environmental reserves should be 300 feet in addition to the state easement of 50 ft up from mean high tide or up to the main road.

Respectfully submitted,

Douglas Penn and Laurie Van Huis

Current residents of Girdwood, Past residents of Whittier, and Prince William Sound recreational users for over 25 years.

From: Vincent Shen [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 8:58 PM
To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]
Subject: Shotgun Cove Road Extension – AK WHITTIER 2016(1) - Comments

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

After viewing part of the Environmental assessment

I have a few comments.

1. Removing existing Emerald Cove trail and replacing with smaller trails would remove the current recreational experience. Because of the new development of the current road, it has just been recently known as an excellent recreational area. If the city would promote and maintain the trail this would be a very significant recreation resource as it provides users with excellent natural views and plenty of berry picking.
2. Proposed road route proximity is too close to the shoreline and would clearly be visible from boaters and kayakers. It would ruin the current natural views that people have loved about the sound.
3. Access roads to beach locations should be replaced with smaller foot trails as they'll have less of an impact on these fragile areas. Foot paths can be connected to larger proposed parking areas.
4. Emerald Bay and all shorelines should be reserved lands and not be open for sale as these should be open to the general public for beach access. If any land does open up for sale, it should be on the south side of the main road.

Thank You

-Vincent Shen
Whittier Resident

From: Victor Shen [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 23, 2021 10:48 PM
To: English-Young, Seth (FHWA) [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Shotgun Cove Road Extension

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the Department of Transportation (DOT). Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Hello Mr. English Young

Please accept my comments for the current Shotgun Road Extension EA:

Page 10

Figure 3-1

All Access roads on coastal side of main road should be removed and replaced with a trail equivalent to USFS class three trail for access to recreation. Parking lots could be located adjacent to the main road.

Emerald Bay and all surrounding lands up to the main road should be designated reserved lands. Trinity point and surrounding area is a highly visible point of land to marine traffic. Preserving its natural state should be a priority.
Page 19

Recreation Emerald trail impacts

Mitigation should include a trail that offers similar environmental experience. The existing trail offers the unique experience of hiking miles into uninterrupted coastal temperate rainforest. The shorter trails in the mitigation plan fall short of that. A trail circumventing Shotgun cove from the road's terminus could be considered and could offer a similar environmental experience. While the city has decided it is not a significant recreation resource, I have personally used it to hike out to Emerald Cove over the past 20+ years and it has been significant to my family, friends, and me. I have also seen an increase of use indicated by the wear on the trail of the years.

Page 22

Wetlands impacts

Mitigation plans should include more than the 6.4 acres of wetlands to be excluded from public sale. Shore line environmental reserves should be 300 feet in addition to the State easement of 50 ft up from mean high tide or up to the main road. As a local kayak guide I believe this section of coastline is a highlight for many of the sea kayak day trips out of Whittier. It is an asset that needs to be protected from development and associated visual impacts

Thank you for considering my comments.

Victor Shen

APPENDIX B

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

| Date Received | Comment Number | Commenter | Category | Substantive Comments | Response to Comment |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|----------|---|--|
| 4/7/2021 | 1 | David Rehak Suma | Public | As a professional wilderness guide, based out of Whittier, I will tell you that the shotgun cove road will continue to be a disaster for those that live and work in and around Passage Canal, and that will be worsened by every square foot of forest or meadowland destroyed, every square foot of gravel or asphalt laid, and every vehicle which travels that road. The businesses of Whittier which are dependent on people who enjoy what wilderness Whittier has to offer are dependent on an unadulterated Passage Canal for their business. The road work which has already been done has disrupted tours for those who would earn the right to discover the coves and shoreline of the Canal. Having people say "Oh, if I can just drive there, why would I take a tour?" cavitates business for the residents making a living from the harbor. | Thank you for your comments. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) appreciates your insight into local conditions. As stated in Section 1.3 and 1.4 of the EA, one of the purposes of the project is to "realize potential economic growth." This applies not only to the City of Whittier but to the Whittier community as a whole and business owners in particular that depend on out-of-town recreators. With increased points of access along Passage Canal, it is anticipated that there would be an increase in visitors. Passage Canal would still be accessible for those who are able to paddle within the coves and along the shoreline of the canal. Improved ease of access could also lead to offering tours beyond Passage Canal, such as Decision Point State Marine Park, Blackstone Bay, and more remote National Forest-System lands. Providing road access to public lands would help accommodate the swell of summer visitors and also encourage an increase in year-round recreation which in turn would allow an increase in tourism or recreation-related businesses. |
| 4/9/2021 | 2 | Nick Olzenak | Public | General project support | Thank you for your comments and your support of the project. |
| 4/13/2021 | 3 | Chris Yelverton | Public | General project support | Thank you for your comments and your support of the project. |
| 4/17/2021 | 4 | Dori Yelverton | Public | General project support | Thank you for your comments and your support of the project. |
| 4/20/2021 | 5a | Sabrina Farmer | USFWS | We appreciate your commitment to protecting Alaska's fish, wildlife, and vegetation. The EA thoroughly addresses affects to the Service's trust resources. In addition to the mitigation measures stated in section 3.5 of the EA, please consider the following to increase conservation outcomes: <u>Minimizing impacts to eagles and migratory birds:</u> The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) works with project proponents to address anthropogenic impacts on trust resources, including migratory birds. Conservation measures for migratory birds may also benefit non-migratory species. Avoiding vegetation clearing in the nesting season, as mentioned in the EA, will decrease stressors for birds. In addition, consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prevent increases in lighting of native habitats, especially during the bird breeding season. To the maximum extent practicable, limit construction activities to the time between dawn and dusk to avoid illumination of adjacent habitats. Minimize increases in noise above ambient levels during the nesting and breeding season. Learn more about eagle and migratory bird conservation measures at: https://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/pdf/management/nationwidestandardconservationmeasures.pdf. | Thank you for providing comments about additional mitigation measures for consideration. We have addressed them individually below. EA Section 3.5.3 summarizes conservation measures that will be included in final project design and construction. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project work will be restricted when lighting is required (dusk to dawn) during the bird breeding season window. The EA will be amended accordingly to include this mitigation measure. Vegetation clearing and tree cutting/clearing will be avoided during the bird breeding season window; however, limiting daytime operational noise is not practicable due to Alaska's short annual construction season. FHWA and project proponents understand and will comply with any required eagle and migratory bird conservation measures. |
| | 5b | | | <p><u>Maximizing fish passage:</u> Retaining the biologic and hydrologic integrity of streams is essential to conserving Alaska's fish species, populations, and their habitats. Rivers provide corridors for migrating fish as well as connecting areas that provide critical feeding, spawning, rearing and overwintering habitats. This project will require crossing at least 4 anadromous streams. We recommend the following Service design standards to maximize conservation outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whenever possible, use full span bridge crossings to cross streams and rivers. Guidance for appropriate bridge spans can be found at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm91_054564.pdf If a full span bridge is not an option, design culverts to maintain important hydrologic functions such as sediment transport through the culvert, winter icing, flood flow conveyance, and to minimize the potential for scouring and scour pool formation at the culvert. Fish passage design guidance can be found at: https://84dbf1c8-f414-4c75-84e3-fc4d491fa659.filesusr.com/ugd/93b6b4_28b3142c-87804e5f89c60f34ea76996d.pdf When installing culverts, align the culvert in a direction as nearly parallel to water flow as possible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All fish stream culverts will be designed in coordination with Alaska Department of Fish & Game and a Fish Habitat Permit will be secured prior to construction. Two of the four fish stream crossings are bottomless fish passage arches designed with a stream simulation approach in coordination with Alaska Department of Fish & Game. The two culverted fish streams are being designed with these considerations in mind. Streams will be oriented as parallel to existing stream as possible; however, some realignment is required. |

| Date Received | Comment Number | Commenter | Category | Comment | Response to Comment |
|---------------|----------------|-------------------------------|----------|---|--|
| | 5c | | | <p>Limiting the spread of invasive species: Invasive species are one of the greatest threats to native biodiversity and are a significant driver of native species loss worldwide. Projects proponents play an important role in limiting the spread of invasive species by implementing conservation measures into their project design. The Shotgun Cove Road Extension EA includes mitigation measures such as cleaning all construction equipment prior to entering/exiting the project site and minimizing ground disturbance. The Service recommends to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct project operations in un-infested areas first to ensure that invasive species do not contaminate equipment. • Re-vegetate bare soils as soon as feasible to minimize the possible establishment of invasive plant species. Stabilize disturbed soils using appropriate erosion and sediment control procedures as soon as possible. Use certified invasive-free materials. • Re-vegetate with native and local plant species. Vigorous non-invasive perennial grass species can also be considered since they can minimize the potential of invasive species to become established. <p>Alaska Division of Agriculture's Plant Material Center (http://plants.alaska.gov/) is a good reference for appropriate seed mixes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Install boot brushes alongside informational signage about protecting native vegetation (signs already including as a mitigation measure in the EA) at key locations along the corridor. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infested areas have not been identified in the project area, and because of the linear nature of the project there is limited flexibility to skip sections of invasive species infestation that may be identified during construction. • Section 3.5.3 of the EA outlines the proposed methods for slope stabilization during project activities. Specifications were developed using Alaska Department of Transportation requirements for stabilization timing and certified invasive-free materials. Plans currently include the use of shot rock rather than seeding for slope stabilization. In the event that seeding or revegetation will be required, the project will maximize use of local organic soil and cleared material to promote regrowth of natural plants. The EA will be amended accordingly to clarify this mitigation measure. • Boot brushes will be installed alongside informational signage along the corridor about invasive species. The EA will be amended accordingly to include this mitigation measure. |
| 4/23/2021 | 6a | Doug Penn and Laurie Van Huis | Public | <p>Proposed access roads should be removed from the plan and replaced with a trail equivalent of USPS class 3 trail. These could all be connected to proposed parking areas on the proposed main road extension.</p> | <p>Thank you for your comments and your insight into local conditions. Comments are addressed individually below.</p> <p>The proposed access roads would provide recreational access points to a more diverse ability range of recreators. They would ease pressure on the Whittier Harbor by leading to parking areas and boat launches for small boat access into Passage Canal. Additionally, constructing trails off the main roadway rather than spur roads would not meet the project's purpose and need to provide adequate access for potential future private land owners along the corridor to use or build on their property.</p> |
| | 6b | | | <p>Emerald Bay and all surrounding lands up to the main road should be designated as reserved lands. This area as along with Trinity Point are highly visible and preserving it's natural state should be a priority.</p> | <p>When the City gained ownership of these lands (include those around Emerald Bay) from the state of Alaska, the purpose of the land transfer was to make parcels available for private sale. Some land around Emerald Bay would be available for sale and some would likely be retained by the City. At present, there are no plans to develop these lands.</p> <p>Trinity Point development would be managed by the Forest Service and the Forest Service would conduct a separate environmental analysis and involve the public in any future development plans. As stated in EA Chapter 3.9 and shown in Appendix E, road development on Trinity Point should not be visible from the waterline of Passage Canal.</p> |
| | 6c | | | <p>The existing trail from the current road terminus has been in existence for well over 30 years. Mitigation of the loss of that trail with small sections of designated trail is not a comparable recreational experience. Rather a trail from the new proposed road terminus extending out around Shotgun Cove would provide a similar recreational experience to the current trail that will be no longer accessible due to the proposed road.</p> | <p>A trail from the new road terminus to Shotgun Cove is outside the scope of this EA; however, to mitigate for the loss of trail sections, the project adds trail spurs to the coast and improves some sections on the existing trail where it would remain. In addition, the City has agreed to set aside some land along the corridor for recreation and preservation in perpetuity.</p> <p>Furthermore, it is expected that many recreators will use the new road as a recreation and travel corridor since the new road will have light traffic and slower speed limits in the summer months and little motorized use when it is not maintained outside of the summer months.</p> |

| Date Received | Comment Number | Commenter | Category | Comment | Response to Comment | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|----------|---|--|--|
| | | | | | | |
| | 6d | | | The shoreline is a valuable multi-use recreational area and mitigation plans should include more that the 6.4 acres of wetlands to be excluded from public sale. In order to preserve this resource for public recreational users, shore line environmental reserves should be 300 feet in addition to the state easement of 50 ft up from mean high tide or up to the main road. | The mitigation measures in the EA are sufficient to address impacts to public recreational shoreline users because the 50-foot-wide public access easement along the shoreline would be retained, and in some areas shoreline access via trail would be improved. In addition to the 6.4 acres of wetlands mentioned, there would be 13 acres of land excluded from public sale along the corridor for public recreation access (EA page 20). Figure 3-3 of the EA shows the locations of the proposed reserved land. | |
| 4/23/2021 | 7a | Vincent Shen | Public | After viewing part of the Environmental assessment I have a few comments. Removing existing Emerald Cove trail and replacing with smaller trails would remove the current recreational experience. Because of the new development of the current road, it has just been recently known as an excellent recreational area. If the city would promote and maintain the trail this would be a very significant recreation resource as it provides users with excellent natural views and plenty of berry picking. | Thank you for your comments and your insight into local conditions. Comments are addressed individually below. Maintaining the existing trail would not meet the project or funding purpose and need to provide access to City lands for recreation and development or alleviate pressure on Whitier's transportation system. The Shotgun Cove Road Extension is included in the City's 2020 Comprehensive Plan and is identified as a priority project that would meet future land use goals of improving and diversifying recreational opportunities. The current recreation experience would be changed; however, the City plans to promote recreation resources along the roadway corridor in the 13 acres of reserved public lands for beach access points, berry picking, and view points. Section 3.3.3 of the EA describes measures that will be implemented to mitigate for loss of recreation resources in the project area. | |
| | 7b | | | Proposed road route proximity is too close to the shoreline and would clearly be visible from boaters and kayakers. It would ruin the current natural views that people have loved about the sound. | Portions of the roadway would be visible from Passage Canal. Section 3.9 and Table 3-5 of the EA give an estimated location and size of visual impacts from the roadway, and a Visual Impacts Assessment is included in Appendix E. A total of approximately 1,500 linear feet (out of 13,000 linear feet) of the roadway would be in view from the water. Visual impacts were considered when designing the road alignment; where possible, the alignment was hidden from view by natural vegetation, elevation, and/or topographic features. A conservative clearing area for the size of road (roughly 80 feet) will be used to minimize aesthetic disturbances during the construction phase, and vegetative buffers would be left intact as much as possible. No roadway lighting was included in design of the project. | |
| | 7c | | | Access roads to beach locations should be replaced with smaller foot trails as they'll have less of an impact on these fragile areas. Foot paths can be connected to larger proposed parking areas. | Figure 3-1 of the EA shows the location of the access roads. Two of the access roads would lead to beach locations. One would provide access to private or City-owned parcels in the vicinity of Emerald Bay and the other would lead to a parking area closer to the water to facilitate non-motorized boat access and launching as per the purpose and need for the project. Alignment of these access roads was carefully analyzed to avoid sensitive resources such as wetlands and streams as much as possible. Other points along the shoreline would be accessed by improved sections of foot trails. | |
| | 7d | | | Emerald Bay and all shorelines should be reserved lands and not be open for sale as these should be open to the general public for beach access. If any land does open up for sale, it should be on the south side of the main road. | A 50-foot-wide public access easement along the shoreline would be retained, and in some areas shoreline/beach access via trail would be improved. | |

| Date Received | Comment Number | Commenter | Category | Comment | Response to Comment |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|----------|--|---|
| 4/23/2021 | 8a | Victor Shien | Public | <p>Please accept my comments for the current Shotgun Road Extension EA: Page 10: Figure 3-1</p> <p>All Access roads on coastal side of main road should be removed and replaced with a trail equivalent to USFS class three trail for access to recreation. Parking lots could be located adjacent to the main road.</p> <p>Emerald Bay and all surrounding lands up to the main road should be designated reserved lands. Trinity point and surrounding area is a highly visible point of land to marine traffic. Preserving its natural state should be a priority.</p> | <p>Thank you for your comments and your insight into local conditions. Comments are addressed individually below.</p> <p>The proposed access roads would provide recreational access points to a more diverse ability range of recreators, opening up natural areas to all levels of outdoor explorers. They ease pressure on the Whittier Harbor by leading to parking areas and boat launches for small boat access with close proximity to Passage Canal.</p> <p>Constructing trails off the main roadway rather than spur roads would not provide adequate access for potential future private land owners along the corridor to use or build on their property.</p> <p>When the City gained ownership of these lands (including those around Emerald Bay) from the state of Alaska, the purpose of the land transfer was to make parcels available for private sale. Some land around Emerald Bay would be available for sale and some would likely be retained by the City. At present, there are no plans to develop these lands.</p> <p>Any future recreational development on Forest Service land at Trinity Point would be managed by the Forest Service and the Forest Service would conduct a separate environmental analysis and involve the public in any future development plans.</p> <p>Road designers have attempted to make the road less visible from Passage Canal by minimizing large open cuts and shielding the road from view by placing it behind outcroppings as feasible. Based on visual modelling conducted for this effort, the road development would only be partially visible from the waterline of Passage Canal in a few areas.</p> |
| 8b | | | | <p>Page 19: Recreation Emerald trail impacts</p> <p>Mitigation should include a trail that offers similar environmental experience. The existing trail offers the unique experience of hiking miles into uninterrupted coastal temperate rainforest. The shorter trails in the mitigation plan fall short of that. A trail circumventing Shotgun cove from the road's terminus could be considered and could offer a similar environmental experience. While the city has decided it is not a significant recreation resource, I have personally used it to hike out to Emerald Cove over the past 20+ years and it has been significant to my family, friends, and me. I have also seen an increase of use indicated by the wear on the trail of the years.</p> | <p>Proposed mitigation measures for loss of Emerald Cove Trail are described in Section 3.3.3 of the EA. They include other recreational opportunities that will be accessible to a wider variety of recreators with differing physical abilities. There are other trails in the area, including some that extend into the backcountry above the proposed road. It is also expected that many recreators will use the road as a travel and recreation corridor.</p> <p>The Shotgun Cove Road Extension is included in the City's 2020 Comprehensive Plan and is identified as a priority project that would meet future land use goals of improving and diversifying recreational opportunities.</p> <p>A trail from the new road terminus to Shotgun Cove is outside the scope of this EA. If in the future a new trail to Shotgun Cove is considered, additional environmental evaluation would be required at that time.</p> |
| 8c | | | | <p>Page 22: Wetlands impacts</p> <p>Mitigation plans should include more than the 6.4 acres of wetlands to be excluded from public sale. Shore line environmental reserves should be 300 feet in addition to the State easement of 50 ft up from mean high tide or up to the main road. As a local kayak guide I believe this section of coastline is a highlight for many of the sea kayak day trips out of Whittier. It is an asset that needs to be protected from development and associated visual impacts</p> | <p>Wetlands are not present in most areas adjacent to the south shoreline of Passage Canal. Reserving more acreage along the shoreline would not further protect wetlands. In addition to the 6.4 acres of wetlands mentioned, there would be 13 acres of land excluded from public sale along the corridor for public recreation access down to the shoreline (EA page 20). Figure 3-3 of the EA shows the locations of the proposed reserved land.</p> <p>Portions of the roadway would be visible from Passage Canal. Section 3.9 and Table 3-5 of the EA give an estimated location and size of visual impacts from the roadway, and a Visual Impacts Assessment is included in Appendix E. A total of approximately 1,500 linear feet (out of 13,000 linear feet) of the roadway would be in view from the water. Visual impacts were considered when designing the road alignment; where possible, the alignment was hidden from view by natural vegetation, elevation, and/or topographic features. A conservative clearing area for the size of road (roughly 80 feet) will be used to minimize aesthetic disturbances during the construction phase, and vegetative buffers would be left intact as much as possible. No roadway lighting is included in design of the project.</p> |

APPENDIX C

ERRATA SHEET

ERRATA SHEET
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Shotgun Cove Road Extension Project
AK WHITTIER 2016(1)
Whittier, AK

Comments were received during the public comment period that warrant the preparation and distribution of an errata sheet on the above referenced Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. This sheet will become part of the project file.

| Response to Comment | | Errata (Added to the EA) |
|--|---|---|
| <p>EA Section 3.5.3 summarizes conservation measures that will be included in final project design and construction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project work will be restricted when lighting is required (dusk to dawn) during the bird breeding season window. The EA will be amended accordingly to include this mitigation measure. | | <p>3.5.3 Environmental Consequences – Proposed Action Alternative Mitigation Measures</p> <p>[Insert the following as the third bullet in the list of mitigation measures for Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project work will be restricted when lighting is required (dusk to dawn) during the bird breeding season window. |
| | <p>• Infested areas have not been identified in the project area, and because of the linear nature of the project there is limited flexibility to skip sections of invasive species infestation that may be identified during construction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 3.5.3 of the EA outlines the proposed methods for slope stabilization during project activities. Specifications were developed using Alaska Department of Transportation requirements for stabilization timing and certified invasive-free materials. Plans currently include the use of shot rock rather than seeding for slope stabilization. In the event that seeding or revegetation will be required, the project will maximize use of local organic soil and cleared material to promote regrowth of natural plants. • Boot brushes will be installed alongside informational signage along the corridor about invasive species. The EA will be amended accordingly to include this mitigation measure. | <p>3.5.3 Environmental Consequences – Proposed Action Alternative Mitigation Measures</p> <p>[Append the following to the third to last bullet in the list of mitigation measures for Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the event that seeding or revegetation will be required, the project will maximize use of local organic soil and cleared material to promote regrowth of natural plants. <p>[Insert the following after the last bullet in the list of mitigation measures for Fish, Wildlife, and Vegetation.]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boot brushes will be installed alongside informational signage along the corridor about invasive species. |
| | | <p>*Note: The EFH Assessment was omitted from Appendix B during draft EA distribution. It has now been added beginning at page 2 of EA Appendix B.</p> |