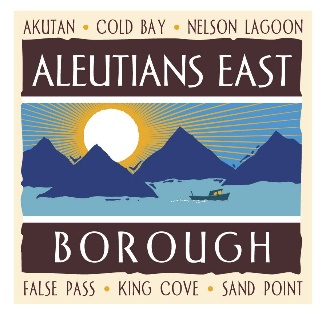
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False Pass Airport

White Paper

The following white paper on the False Pass Airport was prepared for the Aleutians East Borough Mayor and Assembly, Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy, the Alaska State Legislature, Alaska DOT&PF Commissioner John MacKinnon, U.S. Senators Lisa Murkowski, Dan Sullivan and Congressman Don Young, and the F.A.A.. It describes the need for a reconstructed airport with a longer runway to accommodate air ambulances and other planes. It also includes a history of the community’s airport.





**Summary:**  
  
The City of False Pass has a population of 40 year-round residents. However, during the two seafood plants’ peak commercial fishing and processing times (Silver Bay Seafoods – False Pass, LLC and False Pass Seafoods), the population of the community balloons to about 800 people. The processing plants operate nearly year-round.

One of the community’s greatest needs is to have a reconstructed airport with a longer runway. The city has a substandard gravel runway measuring 2,150 feet long by 60 feet wide, with a runway safety area of 2,630’ by 120.’ However, only 2000' feet of the runway are usable because Roundtop Valley Creek is running through it. The rest of the runway is used as a road.   
Unless there are near-perfect conditions (a 15-knot headwind and a dry runway), Grant Aviation typically limits weights coming out of False Pass to no more than 1,250 pounds.  The Navajos are capable of handling the full 1,650 pounds out of the community; however, it gets uncomfortably close to buildings and terrain, and could present safety issues*.*

The runway is located at the mouth of a narrow valley, with terrain tight against the approach path on both ends.During spring break-up, melting ice/snow and heavy rains cause the runway to become soft, which reduces aircraft performance as well as safety. The runway only has stationary approach lights on each end of the runway and does not have an adequate lighting system. Navigational aids are substandard and in disrepair. A portion of the apron is located too close to the runway, reducing safety standards. The airport does not meet FAA or Alaska Aviation System Plan standards, both of which require a minimum runway length of 3,300 feet. Rebuilding the False Pass Airport with a longer runway would substantially increase safety for pilots and passengers.

The city’s substandard runway creates major problems when patients need to be transported to a hospital due to medical emergencies. As a result, the community lacks access to a dependable level of higher care. Air ambulance companies, such as Guardian Flight and LifeMed Alaska (both operate King Air 200s), are unable to serve False Pass because the companies require a minimum runway length of 3,000 feet in order to land in a community.The city has a small health clinic, however, during medical emergencies, patients needing a higher level of care must travel to hospitals in Anchorage, 646 miles away, via Cold Bay, the hub airport in the Aleutians and the south Alaska Peninsula.   
  
During medical evacuations and when harsh weather prevents scheduled travel, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is called. The USCG has responded to nine medical emergencies in False Pass during FY2016 – 2020. According to the Coast Guard, air ambulance planes are far better equipped than a Coast Guard aircraft, and the crews are medically trained to a much higher degree. Rebuilding the community’s airport would provide reliable access to a higher level of care during medical emergency evacuations.

The commercial airline serving False Pass (Grant Aviation) provides scheduled flights five times weekly**,** with a connection in Cold Bay, via Ravn Alaska, which provides service six days per week. The majority of the time, Grant Aviation operates Piper PA-350 Navajos into and out of False Pass. On occasion, the airline operates Cessna Caravans. Rebuilding the airport would provide a significant contribution to improved health and quality of life.

The False Pass Airport Improvement Plan Environmental assessment, conducted in 2008, presented the preferred alternative of extending the existing gravel runway to 3,180’ x 120’ (with a runway safety area of 3,500 feet) to bring the airport closer to State Aviation System Plan standards. The project would have extended the runway on its existing alignment south into the marine environment. Other improvements would have included the installation of medium-runway lights, a beacon, a lighted windsock and improvements to the airport access road. Project funding was abandoned by DOT&PF in 2008 after not scoring well based on per capita costs. Since then, the population has grown substantially, with the expansion of one seafood processor over the past two decades and the addition of another that located in False Pass in 2018.

The False Pass Airport is an essential transportation facility in False Pass. The community has no road access and very limited ferry service. Correcting the airport’s deficiencies would result in one that meets FAA and Alaska DOT&PF standards. Further, it would accommodate anticipated aircraft operations for the next 20 years, and would provide dependable transportation of goods and people in and out of the community. The City of False Pass and the Aleutians East Borough have expressed strong support for a reconstructed airport with a longer runway.

**History:**

* **1920:** Sockeye Salmon Co. moved their cannery from Morzhovoi Bay to False Pass and leased it to Peter Pan Seafoods (at the time, known as P.E. Harris & Co.). Peter Pan canned 51,659 cases of salmon during their first season and eventually purchased the cannery from Sockeye Salmon Co.
* **1959:** Salmon traps were outlawed when Alaska became a state. Peter Pan started purchasing more salmon from independent salmon seiners and gillnetters.
* **1962**: The False Pass runway was surfaced with gravel (originally a narrow grass strip) and extended north over Roundtop Creek to a length of approximately 4,300 feet.
* **1963**: Inadequate culverts caused a portion of the runway to wash out, reducing it to half its length. No repairs were made.
* The south half of the runway continued to be used as a runway, and the north portion was used primarily as a street.
* 1968:A project to upgrade the runway, apron and access road was funded.
* **1973:** The Salmon Limited Entry system became law and salmon permits were issued for seining, drift gillnetting and set-netting. Peter Pan Seafoods sells its company boats to salmon permit holders, ending ownership of fishing vessels by the company.
* **1974** **-1976:** Peter Pan’s cannery in False Pass temporarily closed down due to low salmon runs.
* **1979:** Alaska DOT&PF resurfaced 2,600 feet of the runway south of Roundtop Creek with new gravel.
* DOT&PF built a bridge across Roundtop Creek.
* The bridge was repaired several times.
* **1981:** Peter Pan’s cannery buildings in False Pass burned down. Shoreside support facilities remained intact.
* **1981 – 2004:** Peter Panmaintained the store, mess hall, fuel farm and bunkhouses as a “fish camp” to help support the fishing fleet.
* **1982:** Erosion destroyed the bridge across Roundtop Creek as well as approximately 150 feet of the north end of the runway from erosion.
* Residents accessed the airport by driving across Roundtop Creek or by using makeshift bridges that the community had built.
* **1984:** Residents requested that a new bridge be built because the temporary culvert crossings installed after the 1982 flood were in such poor condition.
* **1990:** A project upgrade included expansion of the runway to 60’ x 2,150 feet, expansion of the runway safety area to 120 x 2,630, as well as the following additions: visual runway markers, two unlighted windsocks, one segmented circle, 200 x 400-foot apron with six sets of tie-downs, a 14 x 1,650-foot road with a 14 x 120-foot bridge, a 24 x 46-foot maintenance building, a 1900 Champion Grader for snow removal and runway maintenance, and an aviation and hazard easement of a ½ acre north of the airport.
* **1990:** False Pass became incorporated as a second-class city.
* **1993:** APICDA provided funding for the City of False Pass’s dock improvements.
* **1999:** APICDA started to rebuild the processing capacity in False Pass by purchasing and operating a processing barge called The Dipper.
* **2000:** APICDA Joint Ventures started building up infrastructure in False Pass to support a shoreside plant, including a bunkhouse, dock, sewer improvements and storage yard.
* **Nov. 4, 2003:** A public scoping meeting was held by Alaska DOT&PF for the False Pass Airport Master Plan Environmental Assessment (False Pass AMP EA).
* **April 6, 2004:** A second meeting was held as a follow up to the 2003 event. The False Pass community strongly voiced support for the project at this meeting as well as at the previous one in November.
* **2005:** Alaska DOT&PF, in cooperation with the FAA, began preparing the draft False Pass Airport Master Plan and Environmental Assessment. DOWL Engineers was contracted for the project.
* **Jan. 28, 2005:** Agency coordination included scoping letters sent via email.
* **Feb. 8, 2005:** DOWL Engineers scheduled an agency scoping meeting at their Anchorage office. Representatives from the following agencies/organizations participated: The City of False Pass, the Isanotski Corporation, the Aleutians East Borough, Alaska DOT&PF, the FAA, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Office of History & Archeology and DOWL Engineers. The meeting initiated the NEPA scoping process to solicit agency comments.
* **Feb. 28, 2005:** The deadline to submit comments for the agency scoping phase was Feb. 28, 2005. An agency scoping meeting was held.
* **March 15, 2005:** Another agency scoping hearing was held.
* **August 2005:** ASCG Incorporated performed an environmental site assessment report for DOT&PF as a subcontractor to DOWL.
* The purpose was to estimate the potential for hazardous substances present on the property at levels likely to warrant mitigation under the State of Alaska’s environmental laws and regulations.
* 2006: Construction began on the False Pass Boat Harbor.
* **January 2006**: ASCG Incorporated released its environmental site assessment report. The findings stated there were no suspected or confirmed release of hazardous substances that had been documented on the subject property in the federal, state or local environmental reviews.
* **Oct. 16, 2006**: A finding of No Historic Properties letter was sent to the False Pass Tribal Council, the Isanotski Corporation, the Aleut Corporation and to State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).
* **Nov**. **11, 2006**: SHPO concurred with the finding.
* **Nov. 28, 2006:** The second agency scoping meeting was held. Agency representatives in attendance included the City of False Pass, the Aleutians East Borough, the Alaska Department of Community, Commerce and Economic Development, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the FAA, NMFS, Alaska DNR, Pentec Environmental/Hart Crowser, Inc., and DOWL.
* **Jan.** **22, 2007**: Another agency scoping hearing was held to inform agency representatives what mitigation options were being proposed on the False Pass AMP EA and to get feedback. Representatives from the following agencies attended: Alaska DOT&PF, Alaska DNR, NMFS, FAA, USACE, Pentec Environmental/Hart Crowser, Inc. and Dowl Engineers.
* **2007:** The project was evaluated by the Aviation Project Evaluation board.
* **2008:** The shoreside Bering Pacific Seafoods (BPS) plant opened in June. Approximately 500,000 pounds of salmon is processed in the first season.
* **2008 – 2017:** APICDA invests a significant amount of funding to build the plant up to process a meaningful amount of Area M salmon, while increasing service and support for harvesters, job opportunities and city tax revenue.
* **Feb. 26, 2008:** Alaska DOT, in cooperation with the FAA, provided public notice that the False Pass AMP Draft EA was available for public review and comment. Comments were due within 30 days. (Project no. 56514).
* The Draft EA stated that the proposed project would include extending the existing runway to a total length of 3,100 feet with a runway safety area of 3,580 feet. The runway would be extended on its existing alignment south into the marine environment.
* Other improvements would include erosion protection, access bridge upgrades, airport lighting upgrades, demolition of 0.2 acre of existing apron, vegetation clearing along the sides of the existing runway and a portion of the existing apron, construction of a new snow removal equipment building, and purchase of a 1.6-acre avigation easement.
* A number of additional build alternatives were considered during early project planning but were dismissed due to conflicts with terrain restraints, environmental impacts, higher costs, and/or failing to meet the purpose and need of the project.
* The EA was also posted to DOWL Engineer’s website.
* **Feb. 29, 2008**: A notice of the opportunity for a public hearing and the availability of the EA was published in the Anchorage Daily News.
* **March 21, 2008:** Aleutian East Borough Administrator Bob Juettner wrote a letter to Alaska DOT, stating that the Borough agreed with the findings and recommendations of the EA. He said although it wasn’t the ideal alternative, it is the affordable choice and should be pursued. Juettner requested that DOT move forward with the construction of airport improvements.
* **March 26, 2008:** A notice was published in the Dutch Harbor Newspaper (Alaska Newspapers, Inc.) advertising the public distribution of the draft EA.  
  A notice of the opportunity for a public hearing and the availability of the EA was Also published in the Anchorage Daily News.
* **March 31, 2008:** Agencies and other interested parties were reminded by email about the comment period closing.
* **June 2008:** The False Pass Airport Master Plan EA final version was completed and published by Alaska DOT, in cooperation with the FAA.
* The proposed action and the no-build alternative were evaluated in the EA. A number of additional build alternatives were considered during early project planning but were dismissed due to conflicts with terrain restraints, environmental impacts, higher costs, and/or failing to meet the purpose and need of the project.
* Based on the EA analysis, the proposed project would not have any significant adverse impact on any environmental impact category.
* Proposed mitigation measures included: the footprint of rock fill in Isanotski Strait that would have been minimized by maximizing the steepness of side slopes; approximately 0.4 acre of new essential fish habitat would have been created by constructing a 10-foot-wide bench along the east side and south end of the runway extension; and one year of post-construction monitoring of the runway bench would have been conducted, consisting of four sampling events in one year, one in each season of the year.
* The State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the Finding of No Historic Properties Affected on November 11, 2006.
* **2008:** Based on the last cost estimate made, the False Pass Airport reconstruction project would cost approximately $23 million, a figure taken from the 2008 False Pass Airport Master Plan and EA.
* At that time, the project was considered very expensive, based on the community’s small population and on a per capita basis, according to Alaska DOT&PF.
* The project was deactivated after the EA was developed and more realistic cost estimates were available.
* 2009: Construction on the 5.2-acre False Pass Boat Harbor was completed. It accommodates more than 80 vessels between 32 to 120 feet in length. The Aleutians East Borough owns the harbor. The City of False Pass maintains it.
* 2012: Potable water, firefighting equipment, electrical services and lighting were installed at the False Pass Boat Harbor.
* **2014:** APICDA opens a fuel facility, False Pass Fuels, after Peter Pan closed its fuel farm.
* **2016:** Acontainerization system was successfully launched in False Pass. Each container can hold 48,000 pounds of frozen product which significantly streamlined shipping.
* The collaborative project with BPS, the City of False Pass, American President Lines and Samson Tug & Barge resulted in significant operational improvements.
* **2017:** BPS purchased and processed 7.5 million pounds of salmon – a 288% increase from the previous year.
* **2018:** The success of BPS attracted commercial interest.
* **Winter 2018**: APICDA entered into a partnership to transfer a majority ownership of Bering Pacific Seafoods (now False Pass Seafoods) to Trident Seafoods.
* Under Trident’s new leadership, the plant more than tripled its capacity, increasing its daily production of 250,000 pounds per day to almost one million pounds daily of salmon, Pacific cod, black cod, halibut and other species in False Pass.
* May **2018**: Silver Bay Seafoods – False Pass, LLC began construction of a new state-of-the-art seafood processing plant in False Pass.
* **June 2019:** Silver Bay Seafoods – False Pass, LLC’s seafood plant became fully operational. The company buys and processes salmon, cod and pollock. The nearly year-round facility has a substantial daily processing capacity.
* The company also has housing facilities, cold storage and a 166-foot-long dock with a pedestal crane.

**Sources include:**The June 2008 False Pass Airport Master Plan Environmental Assessment, Alaska DOT&PF, the FAA, False Pass Mayor Nikki Hoblet, APICDA, Trident, Silver Bay Seafoods – False Pass LLC, Mark Hickey of Hickey & Associates, Grant Aviation, Guardian Flight, LifeMed Alaska and the U.S. Coast Guard.