

King Salmon Airport Master Plan Update

Project No. SFAPT00545



Floatplane Meeting Summary

Meeting Information

Thursday, March 26, 2026, from 2:00 – 3:15 PM via Zoom

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), in coordination with DOWL, hosted a meeting focused on floatplane use at King Salmon Airport (AKN). The project team delivered a presentation including discussion segments, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Twenty-two (22) individuals attended the meeting, including members of the project team.

Project Team Attendees

Courtney Kreis, C.M., DOT&PF Aviation
Transportation Planner, Southcoast Region
Project Manager

Sharyn Augustine C.M., DOT&PF Southcoast
Region Leasing Chief

Josh Stuckey, C.M., DOT&PF Safety and Security
Officer

Tom Middendorf, DOWL Senior Aviation
Planner

Jessica Della Croce, C.M., ACE, DOWL Aviation
Planner

Tammi Scheier, C.M., ACE, DOWL

Talli Vittetoe, DOWL Public Involvement

Advertising

Email Notification

An email announcement was distributed via Constant Contact to the contact register on March 24, 2026. This email included details about the previous open house, floatplane meeting details, and participation instructions.

Project Website

The project website was updated with meeting details and participation information.

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Presentation

Introduction

The presentation began at 2:00 PM with a welcome from Tom Middendorf, DOWL Aviation Planner, who introduced the meeting as a focused session to review and discuss floatplane-related issues that were brought up at or since Public Open House No. 2 on March 19, 2026. Tom gave an overview of the three main topics to be covered in the presentation: lease lots and public use transient dock, floatplane-boat conflicts, and aeronautical and non-aeronautical uses. He also introduced key members of the project team.

Tom reviewed the history of the Master Plan, citing the recommendation from the 2001 Plan update for a Borough-wide study to identify a location for additional floatplane facilities. However, contrary to the future growth expected in 2001, operations and visitor traffic have not increased as forecasted in the 2001 master plan. According to pilots and the tower, floatplane-boat conflicts appear to be less of a concern now than in 2001.

Some floatplane-related issues identified to date include the need for a public-use dock and supporting facilities, additional aeronautical-use lots, mitigation of floatplane-boat conflicts, improvements to the access road, and upgrades to water, sewer, and drainage infrastructure.

Tom summarized feedback from Public Open House No. 2. A few participants expressed support for warning lights and a floatplane dock. There was strong interest in additional aeronautical lease lots, though sites downstream of the boat launch may be constrained by shallow water. A suggestion was made to limit step taxiing near the river curve to improve safety. Questions about floatplane use focused on whether tourism levels are limiting growth and whether the river can safely accommodate additional traffic. Non-aeronautical uses were noted as important to quality of life for some, and there was also interest in whether the Borough could own or operate the waterfront properties.

Lease Lots and Public Use Transient Dock

Potential Public Use Transient Dock

Tom discussed the potential benefits of a public-use transient floatplane dock. Operators without waterfront lease lots could use the dock to pick up passengers, wait out poor weather, or refuel. The dock could be built by DOT&PF, another public entity, or it could be built by a private airport tenant. Three potential dock locations were presented at Open House No. 2, and participants were invited to review the identified pros and cons and contribute additional input based on their experience.

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Discussion

Tom shared the following questions to prompt discussion:

- Is a dock needed?
- Should the dock be publicly or privately owned/operated?
- What is the optimal location?

One participant stated that a public-use dock is not needed; however, if one were constructed, it should be privately owned and operated, noting that a local individual in King Salmon may be interested in operating it. The participant also noted that there are limited viable locations for a dock because of the amount of space needed.

Another participant agreed that a public dock would likely see minimal use, given the availability of nearby water landing areas, like Pike Lake, for floatplane parking and the use of mobile fuelers at the boat landing. However, they also noted that if a dock were developed, private ownership would be preferable due to seasonal maintenance requirements.

Potential New Floatplane Lease Lots

Tom reviewed three potential lease lot expansion locations. Location A is in shallow water requiring long docks that would encroach on the water lane. This option would be expensive and could pose additional risks to water lane users. Location C has deeper water and wetlands, and is at the bend in the river, which could lead to more floatplane-boat conflicts. Additionally, this area could be more exposed to windy conditions. Location B is across the road from the waterfront and would require a public-use dock so floatplane operators could access their planes from their lots across the road.

Discussion

Tom shared the following questions to prompt discussion:

- Are downstream lots feasible?
- Are upstream lots feasible?
- Is shuttling passengers to public-use dock feasible?

A participant noted that downstream lease lots are likely infeasible due to shallow water, while upstream lots may be more viable. They added that shuttling passengers for commercial operations would depend on fuel availability and the capabilities of dock operators.

Another participant expressed concern that Location C could increase boat conflicts, particularly during the King Salmon fishing season when guide boat traffic is high in addition to local use.

Several participants raised concerns about conditions at Location C, noting that winds around the riverbend could make both dock maintenance and floatplane operations challenging. Three participants agreed with this assessment, with one adding that heavy wave action would further complicate use. It

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was also noted that while Location C may be suitable for a transient dock, it would likely be too risky for long-term aircraft parking or lease lots due to weather-related constraints.

Sharyn Augustine, DOT&PF Southcoast Leasing Chief, added that any potential lots would be designated for aeronautical use, and any other development would be subject to the standard building permit process. She also explained that if lots were established at Location C, site-specific operational challenges, such as wind and wave conditions, would need to be evaluated by operators, as advisory warnings would not necessarily be provided as part of the lease application process.

Boat vs Floatplane Conflicts

Conflict Mitigation

Tom mentioned the lack of clarity about responsibility for conflict mitigation, as the Alaska Department of Natural Resources has authority over the river bottom, while DOT&PF has operational authority over the shoreline. He introduced some mitigation strategies for floatplane-boat conflicts based on public feedback and project team recommendations, including:

- Discourage step taxiing in the river bend past Grassy Point
- Post signs for low wake zone
- Develop preferred floatplane and boat operating areas and determine best practices
- Encourage use of the main channel for floatplane takeoffs and landings
- Create and distribute operational and safety information
- Pilot and boater briefings at beginning of the season

Discussion

Participants generally advised that vigilance and awareness are important to maintain safe floatplane and boat traffic, and that safety can continue even with a growth in floatplane and boat operations.

A participant noted that step taxiing should not be discouraged, as it is sometimes necessary and pilots are trained in safe operating practices. Another participant added that step taxiing is a complex issue and emphasized the importance of pilot awareness of where it can be conducted safely, noting that step taxiing into blind corners is not safe.

A participant added that low-wake signage would likely be ineffective, as about half of takeoffs and landings occur entirely outside the water lane. Instead, the participant suggested that the tower improve its reporting of boat traffic, especially to departing floatplanes, as the floatplanes have less visibility of boats. The tower could report that a pilot is clear to proceed to the river when there is no boat traffic present. Designation of reporting points might also help identify specific locations of boats and floatplanes. They emphasized that ongoing coordination and shared awareness are more effective than

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introducing new procedures or policies and noted that annual safety meetings have been a successful forum for sharing information.

Josh Stuckey, DOT&PF Safety and Security Officer, identified these meetings as Runway Safety Action Team (RSAT) meetings, which are held at towered airports such as Kodiak, Bethel, King Salmon, Kenai, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. He noted that he and the Airport Manager should be involved in coordinating these meetings. The participant added that these meetings are effective and suggested encouraging greater participation from the boating community.

Another participant agreed that annual safety meetings are effective and noted that controllers can also help by identifying boat traffic locations when communicating with pilots.

A participant noted that there may be no easy solution to this issue, emphasizing that boats have right-of-way on the river. They also identified another safety concern, observing that some pilots begin takeoff from the middle of the water lane rather than back-taxiing to the end before initiating takeoff. By the time they reach the curve, they are at too high of a speed to alter course if a boat is coming.

Jessica Della Croce, DOWL Aviation Planner, asked for clarification on right-of-way between boats and floatplanes. The participant explained that the U.S. Coast Guard does not consider floatplanes to be vessels while on the water; therefore, registered vessels such as riverboats have right-of-way over floatplanes.

Install Warning Lights

Tom introduced a concept for DOT&PF to install a pilot-operated flashing lighted sign to alert boaters to floatplane operations. This installation would require DOT&PF acquisition of land and establishment of power infrastructure. Some public feedback indicated this light might not be useful as boaters often look down and away from where the light would be installed.

Discussion

Josh expressed concern that pilots may become complacent with activating the light due to the frequency of traffic in the area. He also noted that during peak summer months, the light would need to be sufficiently bright to be visible in near-constant daylight, and questioned DOT&PF's capacity to maintain this type of infrastructure.

One participant noted that the proposed riverbend location is surrounded by dense, tall brush that could obscure the light, though it may be effective if a clear location were identified. Another participant added that light could present a significant maintenance burden and suggested that enhancing control tower communication would be a more practical and implementable approach.

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Aeronautical vs Non-Aeronautical Uses

Sharyn described that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) provides most of the funding for capital improvements at an airport. Those FAA funds come to DOT&PF with grant assurances, which dictate that airport funding should be used for aeronautical purposes. The grant assurances state that non-aeronautical demand should not displace aeronautical demand and also inform Alaska Administrative Code's prioritization of aeronautical over non-aeronautical uses. Standard airport lease language reflects these regulations, stating a lessee should not jeopardize federal funding according to these regulations.

Sharyn defined aeronautical use as activities directly related to aircraft operations, including air taxi services, airlines, fueling, and fixed-base operators.

She noted that at least nine written leasing inquiries have been received over the past three years from floatplane operators seeking to expand existing lease lots, new operators, and individuals interested in developing a public floatplane dock.

Sharyn emphasized the FAA's focus on prioritizing safety for aeronautical users and their customers. Along the riverfront, this includes reducing conflicts between boats and floatplanes. Key contributors to these conflicts include aborted landings, near incursions, and parked floatplanes encroaching on adjacent lease lots. Potential strategies to improve safety include reducing the number of boats originating from airport property and allowing floatplane operators to spread out along the riverfront to minimize encroachment.

She also outlined four potential options for existing non-aeronautical tenants. One option is for a non-aeronautical tenant to sell its lease to an aeronautical tenant. A second is for a non-aeronautical tenant to start using their existing lease for aeronautical purposes, such as aircraft fueling. A third option is to have mixed-use leases, defined by the FAA as concurrent aeronautical and non-aeronautical use, which would require FAA approval. This could include seasonal use, such as aeronautical use in the summer and non-aeronautical use in the winter. A fourth option would be mixed use, in which aeronautical activities are primary and non-aeronautical uses are de minimis.

Questions & Comments

Talli Vittetoe, DOWL Public Involvement, shared the planning team's contact information and project website, and invited participants to provide comments, questions, and additional input.

Tammi Schreier, DOWL Aviation Planner, asked participants to confirm whether riverfront aviation is feasible during winter conditions. Three participants indicated that aviation activity typically pauses during the winter in King Salmon, with one noting that ice thickness is generally insufficient to support aircraft and that winter winds present additional challenges.

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A participant asked which agency is responsible for approving mixed-use lease lots. Sharyn clarified that approval is granted by the FAA Alaska Region Compliance Office.

Tom reiterated that participants are encouraged to submit additional feedback through the project website, email, or Mentimeter, which will remain open for approximately 30 days. He also noted that while the Master Plan may identify more potential projects than can be funded, documenting these needs helps position them for future funding opportunities.