

**Department of Transportation  
Federal Aviation Administration**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
Deering Airport and Access Road Improvements  
Project No. NFAPT00249**

**Purpose and Need**

The Deering Airport and existing access road are subject to seasonal flooding and the airport does not meet current Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) design standards, described below. Airport rehabilitation and new access road construction would ensure safe and reliable year-round air transportation for Deering. The purpose of the project is to provide the community of Deering with safe and efficient airport access and address Deering Airport deficiencies that would bring the airport to current standards.

***Existing Airport Deficiencies*** - The current aircraft fleet mix serving Deering consists primarily of the Cessna 208B, PA31 Piper Navajo, and Casa C212; with larger deliveries made by DC-6, and medevac services by Beechcraft 200.

The Deering Airport has two gravel surface runways designated as Runway (RW) 3-21 and RW 12-30. Snow removal operations have graded off most of the runway surfacing, resulting in rutting and ponding. Drifting snow collects west of the runway intersection, requiring an extensive annual snow removal effort and creating meltwater ponding against runway embankments in the spring. These elements keep airport maintenance costs high. Additionally, the airfield's surface course and lighting system have exceeded their useful lifespan and need rehabilitation or replacement.

***Inmachuk River Flooding*** - The Deering Airport is subject to flooding due to spring ice jams and strong periodic storm surges from Kotzebue Sound. In 2015 and 2016, ice jams at the Inmachuk River mouth submerged portions of the airport access road (Deering-Inmachuk Road which lies mostly off airport property) between the community and the airport and extending to the runway embankment. In 2016, these conditions caused the State of Alaska to declare a community disaster at Deering. Historical flood data does not indicate that floods have crested the airport surfaces.

Deering is off the road system, with the only year-round accessibility by air transportation, and barge service limited to summer months. While small boats, all-terrain vehicles, and snowmachines are used for

personal inter-village and subsistence travel, Deering relies heavily on year-round air transportation for major commerce, supplies, fuel, access, and medical evacuation needs.

### **Requested Federal Action**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) is requesting the following federal actions from the FAA: (1) approval of the Proposed Action; (2) participation in funding the proposed improvements using Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grant funds; and (3) property acquisition for right-of-way (ROW) as necessary for airport improvements.

### **Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action would address existing airport deficiencies, bring the Deering Airport into compliance with current Alaska Statewide Transportation Plan (ASTP), the Alaska Aviation System Plan (AASP), and FAA design standards, and include the following elements:

#### **Airport**

- Rehabilitate and resurface airport surfaces.
- Repair runway embankments.
- Apply dust palliative to airport ground traffic surfaces.
- Replace the airport lighting system.
- Improve or re-establish sufficient airport drainage.

#### **Access Road**

- Construct a new airport access road, including several cross-drainage culverts and a new bridge over Smith Creek. Overhead utilities will be adjusted for proper clearance, which may include installation of two new power poles adjacent to the new roadway corridor.

#### **Material Sources**

- Utilize existing gravel bar(s) within the Inmachuk River floodplain for a material source and mobilize these materials and other equipment to the airport construction area using the combined existing community barge landing and developed roads.

- *Inmachuk River Bars #1*
- *Inmachuk River Bars #2*
- *Gravel Site 8*
- *RMS #2*
- *2020\_09*
- *9-Mile Pit*

### **Reasonable Alternatives**

A Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) approved Environmental Assessment (BIA-EA) in 2017 analyzed the West Airport Road Project, with a similar alignment to this project. The BIA-EA also analyzed improving the existing bridge and airport access road and found that project had much higher costs and would not take the existing road out of the flood zone – a particular concern during highwater. The EA stands on its own, due to the age of the BIA-EA except where FAA has incorporated a specific limited component by reference.

The DOT&PF Northern Region has evaluated the feasibility of various airport improvement alternatives, mobilization routes, and material source locations that would allow for continued safe and reliable air transportation to Deering.

### **Proposed Action Alternative**

The Proposed Action alternative rehabilitates the airport by creating a safe, reliable, and cost-effective facility that provides the community with adequate access, supports the community's long-term development goals, and is consistent with current FAA design standards and safety guidelines.

Originally, 30 material source alternatives along the Deering-Inmachuk Road were considered as potentially eligible to be included in the project. From the potential material sources, locations were then dismissed based on proximity to cultural resources, distance from the project construction site, location within wetlands or habitat areas, or unsuitability of the potential material for this project. After this screening process, 6 material sources advanced to agency permitting.

### **No Action Alternative**

No airport improvements would occur under this alternative. All the existing deficiencies would remain present at the airport. This alternative would not bring the Deering Airport into compliance with FAA safety guidelines, and the airport and access road would remain vulnerable to flooding and erosion. The BIA-EA found that the flooding and erosion of the access road would continue with its No Action. This remains valid today, due to the topography of the access road and its vulnerability to flooding and erosion. Continual degradation would impact the road and airport and require airport closure resulting in a loss of commercial, passenger, and cargo service.

## **Coordination**

The public, federal and state agencies, the Native Village of Deering, and various local entities were consulted throughout project planning and design. Table 8 of the Environmental Assessment summarizes the tasks and activities undertaken to ensure involvement and coordination.

Public meetings were held in September 2020. The Draft EA was circulated for public and resource agency review on January 26, 2022. A public meeting to present and discuss the Draft EA was held on March 10, 2022. The proposed project was well received by the attending public; no opposition was voiced to the Proposed Action.

Agency scoping began with scoping letters sent on June 5, 2020. Agency comments again solicited on the Draft EA on January 26, 2022 and were received through February 28, 2022. Agency comments and correspondence are documented in the Appendix to the EA.

## **Impact Assessment**

The Final EA analysis determined that the Proposed Action would not have significant adverse effects. Details of the environmental consequences are presented in the Final EA.

No significant impact to fisheries is anticipated. Material source development are anticipated to convert one type of habitat to another, including creating overwintering habitat. Smith Creek would be crossed by a single span bridge. No permanent structures (pilings, piers, etc.) would be placed in the stream, but rock armoring would be placed below ordinary high water to protect against substrate scour at each abutment. A temporary pier may support erection of the permanent bridge structure during winter. Water withdraws for use would be limited and regulated by Alaska Department of Fish and Game Fish Habitat Permit Conditions.

No significant impact to wildlife is anticipated given the abundance of neighboring, intact habitat types surrounding Deering. The Proposed Action would result in wildlife habitat alteration from vegetated habitat to gravel embankment, and some open gravel bar bird nesting habitat along the Inmachuk River would be permanently lost during material site excavation.

No significant impact to marine mammals and/or endangered species is anticipated. If project specific barges or small vessels are used to carry out the Proposed Action, mitigation measures would be implemented to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse effects to marine mammals. Project effects are not anticipated to negatively impact polar bears or their barrier island or feeding critical habitats. The project's proposed eider

nest surveys would avoid potential residual adverse effects of the project for spectacled eider and Steller's eider.

No significant impact to migratory birds is anticipated. While a permanent loss or alteration of bird habitat would result from the project, there are similar vegetation community types widespread throughout the region. The DOT&PF would require the construction contractor to follow the USFWS guidelines on scheduling construction activities.

No significant impact to plants is anticipated. The undeveloped areas of the project footprint is dominated by wetland plant habitats. There are similar vegetation community types widespread throughout the region.

No significant impact to hazardous waste is anticipated. Given the distance from known contaminated sites to the project, contamination is not anticipated to impact the Proposed Action.

The State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) concurred with a finding of no adverse effect by the Proposed Action.

No significant impact to land use is anticipated. The Proposed Action is consistent with local land use and transportation plans and would meet high priority community needs. The Proposed Action would acquire new right of way under the new access road from NANA Regional Corporation Inc.

No significant impact to Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice, Children's Health and Safety Risks, or Subsistence is anticipated. There may be a temporary increase in local employment opportunities for construction-based activities, but long-term employment effects are not expected. The project is specifically designed to benefit minority and low-income populations. The entire area around Deering is used for subsistence activities. For this reason, the Proposed Action minimizes the footprint of proposed facilities as much as possible and maximizes use of already developed facilities and fill pads. This project has been designed to avoid potential impacts to subsistence resources and activities to the extent practicable.

No significant impact to visual resources is anticipated. The Proposed Action would improve the airport lighting. The improved lighting would be similar to the current lights, but more efficient.

No significant impact to wetlands, floodplains, surface water, or groundwater is anticipated. Project construction would result in unavoidable wetlands impacts. There are similar vegetation community types widespread throughout the region. Floodplain drainage patterns would not be altered by the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action would not adversely affect community water supply and would not affect long-term water quality.

### **Avoidance, Minimization and Mitigation Measures**

Conditions of approval associated with this project are detailed in the Final EA and project permits and will be included in the construction contract documents. The project has been coordinated with the appropriate agencies and local Tribes and includes measures to avoid and minimize impacts. The following is a partial list of commitments included in the project to reduce environmental impacts. Full commitments, including construction and material site development methodologies and required monitoring are listed in the EA.

#### **Fisheries**

- Compliance with the Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) Construction General Permit (CGP), and implementation of the required Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) during airport and access road construction would reduce the potential for sediment laden storm water runoff during construction. Stabilization of side slopes with vegetation or non-erodible material would also be implemented as part of CGP compliance to further reduce the potential for sedimentation of nearby streams.
- Construction of all crossing and drainage structures would adhere to appropriate Best Management Practices (BMPs) for in-stream work to minimize potential effects to fishes and fish habitats from sediment mobilization and transport, and accidental contaminant spills.
- Fuel operations would be conducted under a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) plan to prevent impacts to surface water quality.

#### **Endangered Species**

- A polar bear interaction plan would be developed as required by US Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Where possible, vegetation clearing, site preparation, and construction activities would adhere to the recommended periods to avoid vegetation clearing:
  - Forest/Woodland: 1 May – 15 July
  - Shrub/Open: 10 May – 20 July
  - Raptors may nest 2+ months earlier than other birds.
  - Black scoter is known to nest through August 10.
  - Seabird Colonies: 20 May – 15 September
  - Eagles: 1 March – 31 August

- When not possible, and vegetation clearing, site preparation, and construction is planned within these periods, pre-construction nest surveys would be conducted by qualified personnel and appropriate mitigation developed in consultation with the USFWS.

**Invasive Species**

- Ensure that ground disturbing activities are minimized, and disturbed areas are re-vegetated according to the specification in the ADEC Alaska Construction General Permit with seed recommended for the region by Alaska Department of Natural Resources’ (ADNR) “A Revegetation Manual for Alaska;”
- Construction equipment would be inspected and cleaned prior to being barged to Deering to minimize spread of vegetative materials.

**Cultural Resources**

- Incorporation of an Inadvertent Discovery Plan, and a commitment to stop work if unidentified archeological resources are discovered during the course of the project,

**Required Permits and/or Approvals**

#	Permit/Authorization; Agency	Why Permit/Authorization is Required
Federal Permits and Authorizations		
1	Section 404 Clean Water Act Wetlands Fill Permit; USACE	Project elements were designed to avoid and minimize wetland impacts to the maximum extent practicable. A Section 404 individual permit would be obtained prior to construction for the placement of fill within jurisdictional wetlands and waters of the U.S.
2	Migratory Bird Treaty Act compliance; USFWS	USFWS recommendations would be followed to avoid migratory bird take during vegetation clearing.
3	Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act EFH consultation and assessment; NMFS	DOT&PF prepared an EFH Assessment to describe potential EFH impacts and proposed conservation measures to reduce impacts.
4	MMPA Consultation; NMFS	DOT&PF prepared a MMPA Consultation to describe potential impacts and propose conservation measures to reduce impacts.
5	ESA Section 7; USFWS, NMFS	DOT&PF prepared ESA Consultations to describe potential impacts and propose conservation measures to reduce impacts.
6	Government to Government Consultation	Consultation in accordance with Executive Order 13175 consultation was conducted with the Native Village of Deering to obtain meaningful and timely input regarding proposed FAA actions and address relevant community concerns/issues.

#	Permit/Authorization; Agency	Why Permit/Authorization is Required
State Permits and Authorizations		
7	Section 106 Consultation; SHPO, Tribes, and Consulting Parties	DOT&PF prepared a Section 106 Consultation to describe potential impacts and propose conservation measures to reduce impacts.
8	Section 401 Certification – Certificate of Reasonable Assurance; ADEC, Division of Water Quality	A 401-water quality certification would be issued prior to the USACE 404 permit and would notify compliance with state water quality administrative code. ADEC requires a pre-application meeting and application prior to certification. Measures to protect water quality in accordance with permit stipulations would include the use of BMPs to minimize potential for erosion and sedimentation of wetlands and waterbodies.
9	Alaska Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (APDES) Construction General Permit (CGP); ADEC, Division of Water Quality	For projects with disturbance of over 1 acre, compliance with the APDES CGP is required. A SWPPP and notice of intent to seek coverage under the CGP would be required prior to construction. The CGP requires implementation of BMPs to protect water quality during construction.
10	Title 16 Fish Habitat Permit; ADF&G	A Title 16 permit would be required for project activities occurring below ordinary high water of a fish bearing stream. Measures to maintain fish passage, and avoid and minimize impacts to fish and their habitats, within these waters would be implemented in consultation with ADF&G.
Local Permits and Authorizations		
11	Title 9 Land Use Permit; NAB, Planning Department	The Proposed Action is within the NAB and would require a Title 9 Permit.

**Federal Finding and Approval**

I have carefully and thoroughly considered the facts contained in the attached EA. Based on that information I find the proposed Federal action is consistent with existing national environmental policies and objectives as set forth in Section 101(a) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other applicable environmental requirements. I also find the proposed Federal action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment or include any condition requiring consultation pursuant to Section 102 (2)(c) of NEPA. As a result, FAA will not prepare an EIS for this action.

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Responsible FAA Official