



Number of Participants: 27 (including 5 Project Team see list at end)

Presentation Summary:

- The meeting started with a 40-minute presentation that provided an overview of the project purpose and need, the environmental review process, the proposed action, the environmental consequences, and the schedule for project completion.
- The presentation is attached.

Summarized Public Comments (Project Team Responses in Text Boxes in Italics)

Purpose & Need

- There were several commentors that currently or previously have operated seaplanes from the existing seaplane base and in the channel. They emphasized the deficiencies associated with the existing seaplane base and the need for the new facility.
- Seaplanes are essential transportation for food, medical care, and other goods for many of the regional small communities. In particular, seaplanes used to transport people into Sitka for health care at SEARHC facilities and getting vaccines out to communities.
- Bringing tourists into regional lodges from Sitka vs Juneau would increase spending in Sitka and have economic benefits.
- Commercial seaplanes serve all the local communities and also boats. The seaplane base is needed to support these commercial operations. The lack of a good seaplane base has resulted in a lack of commercial operators operating out of Sitka. The demand is here. Without a good seaplane base, the economic benefits go to Juneau instead of coming in to Sitka.
- There is a pilot shortage in the world. This is an opportunity for University of Alaska to train pilots, aviation mechanics, etc. A lot of the students at Mt. Edgecumbe come from rural communities that are dependent on aircraft. This is an economic opportunity to train and employ pilots, mechanics, trainers, etc. Schools should embrace this opportunity.
- Because Canada isn't allowing cruise ships through to southeast Alaska, there will be more large yachts coming in. And they like to park their yachts out remotely and fly in to see Sitka and its historic sites.

The Project Team agrees that there is strong support for the project and that it has benefits to the economy as well as to the overall transportation system.

Alternatives

- There was a question about the evaluation of the proposed site near the Sitka commercial airport and whether the problem with using that site.



There were some safety issues with wind and wave exposure as well as some conflicts with trying to use airport facilities for support and getting between airport and seaplane base. Information on the sites evaluated in the previous studies is summarized in Appendix A of the Draft EA. We will put the previous siting studies onto the public outreach site.

Cultural Resources

- There were questions about whether this project would have to comply with procedures to stop work and consult if cultural resources were found during construction.

This is a federally-funded project and so it must comply with the National Historic Preservation Act and would have a plan to stop work and consult if unexpected cultural resources are found.

- There was discussion about whether there was any way to retain the observation post on the site and develop around it.

The upland site area has to be at 22 feet of elevation to be out of the floodplain. Since the observation post is at 15 feet, it doesn't look like this would be possible. The team did look at trying to retain it but it doesn't look possible.

- There was a question as to whether comments from the National Park Service on the cultural resource documentation are available to the public.

The cultural resource documents are available in Appendix D of the Draft EA but team has not received comments on them yet from the NPS or State Historic Preservation Office. Hopefully comments will be received soon.

Marine Resources

- The site will disturb marine animals, to what degree? And how much tribal harvest occurs in this area that may no longer be available?

The biggest impact is about 1.5 acres of intertidal area would be filled. Then there will also be the floats. It is likely that marine life may stay farther away from this area when it is developed and in operation. There will also be disturbance of marine life during construction, as pile driving can affect them. There will need to be monitors to make sure that no marine mammals get too close to the construction site; pile driving may need to stop if they get too close. An authorization to disturb marine mammals will be needed. People will be able to go under the facility and still get around to shoreline areas.

Noise

- There was discussion about the noise levels at Mt. Edgecumbe High School and the SEARHC hospital sites (existing and proposed).



The EA indicates that overall noise levels would be within acceptable compatibility limits based on using FAA noise model for analysis.

- Most takeoffs from existing seaplane base are to northwest and are at full power near the high school and hospital. With the new facility being farther north, some of the operations are likely to occur north of this and so it should mitigate some of the noise to the school and hospital.
- Pilots could develop a Fly Friendly program to encourage pilots to power back once seaplane has left the water and is in the air.
- SEARHC's proposed new hospital could have more noise than the current location.

The FAA modeling showed that the noise would be a bit less at the proposed facility vs the existing facility.

- The state airport has noise already: turboprops, helicopters, etc. Even pyrotechnics used to mitigation bird hazards on the runway. Seaplane takeoff run only takes 45 seconds-1 minute and then decreases quickly. Seaplane noise seems like it wouldn't be an issue with the noise from the state airport. And, new site to the north will reduce noise from seaplanes. Don't let noise concerns result in keeping project from moving forward. Seaplanes are needed for Sitka, so consider that when considering noise.
- Most seaplane traffic is in the summer. Winter flight operations are almost exclusively essential flight services. And seaplanes don't fly at night, especially the commercial operations.

Wetland Permitting/Compensatory Mitigation

- Question as to what is being proposed for compensatory wetland mitigation or are there reasons that compensatory mitigation may not be required.

Design is not at the level where we can complete our wetland permit at this point and so the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) cannot make a determination on whether compensatory mitigation would be required and if so, what would be appropriate. CBS is consulting with USACE and appropriate mitigation would be detailed, if needed, during final design and permitting process.

Potential Contaminated Sites

- Question as to whether the site has been evaluated for contamination from WWII operations.

As part of the environmental review, research was done on known contaminated site on Japonski Island. There was no evidence of contamination documented on the site. During development, if contaminated materials were encountered, construction would stop until consultation with Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation on appropriate measures to deal with the contamination.

- The Sitka tribe has done a lot of work on cleaning up old WWII sites and Jeff Feldpausch would have information on those activities.



Potential Marine Use Conflicts/Safety

- Channel is congested; always has been. That won't change. But new site is better.
- There were questions regarding whether the proposed action would adversely impact those fishing boats that avoid harbor fees by anchoring in the channel. Have there been discussions with the commercial fisherman about this project? Most of the boats tend to anchor south and east of the proposed seaplane base and there would still be room for them to anchor in the channel.

We appreciate the additional information on fishing boat anchoring areas. This will be addressed further in the EA.

- There was discussion of the potential for conflicts between boats and seaplane takeoff and departures in the channel and whether there was a way to designate and/or mark the sea lane and communicate that to boats using the area.
- It was noted that when seaplanes are landing they have good view of any potential conflicts but when they are taking off it is more difficult to see/avoid small skiffs crossing channel.
- Safest way to takeoff is to the northwest because it is more congested in the channel to the southeast and you don't have to go under the bridge. But the boats do anchor across the channel from Thompson Harbor and that area can get pretty congested. The safety concern is if a seaplane was on step for take off and a skiff was to try to shoot across from the anchored boats to the harbor could be dangerous. However, no known collisions between seaplanes and boats in the channel. This is a concern now and could be a concern in the future.

There is an option in the FAA guidance for seaplane lanes to be marked. This could be considered in consultation with FAA, USCG for navigational aids, etc.

- In British Columbia, most of the small port towns have a system where pilot can activate a beacon that alerts folks that a plane is coming in or taking off. Could there be a strobe put up near Thompson Harbor like that?
- There are more birds than boats to avoid.
- Boats anchor throughout the area. There are no regulations saying you have to anchor here or you can't anchor there. But overall the commercial fisherman and others know that there is seaplane activities on the channel and are respectful of that fact. This is common in many areas where seaplanes operate (that there are also boats operating and anchored). Not a problem when seaplanes are landing because they have a good view; could be an issue when seaplanes are taking off because when you are on the water you might not notice seaplane taking off until it gets close to you.
- Don't think you need to spend the money to mark a sea lane, unless USCG thinks some marking will be required. Seaplanes don't operate at night because of depth perception and the trickiness of landing on water at night. When seaplane is on the water it has to abide with the same navigation regulations as the boats on the channel.



Other Comments

- Question on whether there has been a study of the takeoff routes from new seaplane base and whether there would be any conflicts with state airport flight paths.

The takeoff and landing area is not very different than the existing area, so that had not been raised as a concern.

- FAA has established traffic patterns for arriving or departing the state airport and the seaplane base as well as communications requirements. There have been no notable conflicts between operations at the two due to communications and traffic patterns.
- Tribal member didn't have access to the graphics on the presentation.

The project team will provide a hard copy of the Draft EA and biological assessment to the tribe's Resource Protection Committee.

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