

# KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH

## 2016 Federal Priorities

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## **KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH**

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### **BOROUGH ASSEMBLY**

February 23, 2016

The Honorable Dan Sullivan  
United States Senate  
702 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D. C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senate  
709 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Don Young  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2314 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Kenai Peninsula Borough 2016 Federal Priorities

The Kenai Peninsula Borough respectfully submits for your consideration the attached document identifying projects and programs of importance to Kenai Peninsula Communities. The projects and programs listed span the Borough, and include Kenai Peninsula Borough Projects, Transportation Projects, School District Projects. Should you require additional information regarding a particular project, please contact the Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor's Office at (907) 714-2150.

We look forward to working with you and your staff to accomplish our mutual goals. As always, the borough assembly and administration will be happy to provide any assistance whatsoever.

Sincerely,

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Blaine Gilman  
Assembly President

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Mike Navarre  
Borough Mayor

## **Kenai Peninsula Borough 2016 Federal Legislative Priorities**

### **Wildfire & Wildland Hazard Fuels Mitigation Program**

Each of the past two summers (2014 & 2015), Kenai Peninsula Borough residents have been forced to evacuate their homes in advance of large uncontrolled wildfires. Large expanses of forest, classified as having extreme fire intensity potential, remain near and within community areas and are at risk of catastrophic fire events. Federal support and funding is needed to accomplish fire mitigation projects designed to help alleviate this dangerous fire hazard condition. Actions are needed to update Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP); to conduct Firewise projects to make communities more resilient against fire events; to mitigate blocks of hazard fuels at strategic landscape locations; and to develop community fuel breaks and defensible space around important infrastructure such as mainline natural gas pipelines and portions of the Alaska power line intertie system. The Kenai Peninsula Borough requests a continuation of funding for its Wildfire & Wildland Hazard Fuels Mitigation Program. This program was a component of the successful Spruce Bark Mitigation Program. This project will reduce hazardous fuel loads and establish fire breaks similar to the ones that so successfully enhanced emergency response efforts during the Funny River Fire in 2013. Funded projects will be addressed in collaboration with All Lands – All Hands members; a group comprised of local federal, state, native and Borough land management representatives. Participation in this program puts the Borough side by side with State, Federal and Tribal partners in reducing wildfire hazard.

### **Sterling Highway MP 45-60 Project (Cooper Landing Bypass)**

The Sterling Highway is the sole road linking the majority of borough residents to the rest of Alaska. Many residents travel this road year round in order to reach services in Anchorage that aren't available on the peninsula. The visitors who travel this road for tourism and recreation are crucial to the economy of the peninsula communities. Since 1978, the Alaska DOT has recognized the necessity of improving safety and reducing traffic congestion along this vital road. This project – bypassing the narrow winding section of road through the community of Cooper Landing - aims to reduce highway congestion, meet the current highway design standards, and improve highway safety. Benefits of this project include increased travel safety and efficiency, reduced risk of fuel spills to the Kenai River, and reduced traffic in the community of Cooper Landing.

This traffic currently produces dust and noise and limits the ability for residents to safely walk and bike through their community. The Kenai Peninsula Borough requests continued federal funding for this Federal Aid Highway Project. This project is essential for the safety of residents and economic strength of the Peninsula.

### **Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and Secure Rural Schools (SRS)**

The federal government owns approximately 6 million acres within the Kenai Peninsula Borough, 60% of the total land area in the borough. Most of these lands are located within the Lake Clark, Katmai and Kenai Fjords National Parks, the Kenai and Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuges, and the Chugach National Forest. Federal lands are not subject to local property taxes or developed; however, the Kenai Borough's budget is impacted by services provided to residents and visitors related to federal lands. As a borough comprised of more than half untaxable land mass, PILT and SRS provide desperately needed funds to maintain essential community services and school programs.

### **Federal Fishery Management**

Declining King salmon stocks are of grave concern to the Kenai Peninsula Borough, a community which generates a substantial amount of economic benefit through fisheries related businesses, including tourism. The borough has advanced the Anadromous Waters Ordinance to protect salmon spawning habitat alongside streams and rivers, while the State of Alaska regulates the opening and closing of various fisheries as conservation measures. We urge the involvement of federal fishery management agencies in this time-critical decline of the King salmon. Fishing practices and regulation in federally controlled waters directly impact the yearly return of the King salmon. Without federal attention and involvement, no amount of local protections will be able to revitalize this fishery. The Assembly unanimously approved Resolution 2013-013: *“Urging the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to Adopt Measures that Reduce the Chinook Salmon Bycatch in the Gulf of Alaska and Bering Sea Trawl Fisheries,”* on February 5, 2013.