

# KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH

## 2015 Federal Priorities

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## **KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH**

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### **BOROUGH ASSEMBLY**

February 3, 2015

The Honorable Dan Sullivan  
United States Senate

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Washington, D. C. 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
United States Senate

709 Hart Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Don Young  
U.S. House of Representatives

2314 Rayburn Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Kenai Peninsula Borough 2015 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, and 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 assistance.

Sincerely,

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Dale Bagley  
Assembly President

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Mike Navarre  
Borough Mayor

## **Kenai Peninsula Borough 2015 Federal Legislative Priorities**

**Sterling Highway MP 45-60 “Cooper Landing Bypass”.** The Cooper Landing Bypass has been recognized as a high priority project since 1978. This bypass would provide vastly improved safety and traffic flow on this section of the Sterling Highway. This highway is heavily traveled, particularly during the summer months when visitors to Alaska are traveling to the Kenai Peninsula. At an estimated cost of \$220-\$270 million dollars, it is anticipated that the Federal Highway Trust Fund will be needed for much of the funding for the project. The draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement was reviewed by the Federal Highway Administration in 2014 and we are hopeful that construction on the Bypass can begin as soon as 2018.

**Elodea Eradication.** Elodea is an invasive aquatic plant which multiplies quickly, inundating and clogging water bodies. Elodea invasion degrades fish habitat and devastates salmon spawning environments. Elodea was identified in three lakes on the Kenai Peninsula in 2012 and 2013; the Kenai Peninsula Borough recognized the seriousness of the threat and has initiated an urgent eradication effort in collaboration with the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. The Kenai Peninsula Borough — with its economic foundation of tourism, commercial fishing and sport fishing — will see significant negative impacts if its extensive network of lakes and waterways are consumed by Elodea.

Federally owned lands encompass more than half of the Kenai Peninsula. Without substantial concomitant Elodea eradication efforts being taken by federal land managers, our efforts to prevent the spread of this invasive weed will be ineffective and futile. If the region’s lakes become so widely infected that eradication is impossible, the Kenai Peninsula Borough will suffer substantial and irreversible economic, social and cultural impacts.

**Cook Inlet Beluga Whale Endangered Species Act Listing and Research.** The Endangered Species Act listing of the Cook Inlet beluga whale has impelled critical concerns regarding environmental impacts on the species. The Cook Inlet is home to a flourishing and dynamic oil and gas industry, with seismic exploration generating new data on available resources. The Kenai Peninsula Borough — in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) — is building

an emergent body of research, seeking best practices to follow for the regeneration of this species. It is imperative to have good science to determine the appropriate actions to aid the recovery of the Cook Inlet beluga whale and the avoidance of actions that could bring about economic distress to those who depend upon the Cook Inlet for their livelihoods. Completed research provides only a foundational understanding of the habits and needs of this declining species; additional funding is needed to fully develop an understanding of how the beluga whale and the human economy of our borough can both flourish in their shared environment.

**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.** Struggling 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 period of low abundance for 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.