



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Office of the Borough Manager

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 28, 2021
 TO: Mayor and Assembly
 FROM: Michael Brown, Borough Manager
 RE: Manager's Weekly Post

Wetland Mitigation Bank Quarterly Report: There has been no new activity for credit sales since the last report of March 17, 2021.

Landfill Gravel Extraction Update: Borough staff have contacted the local gravel contractor suggested at the last Assembly meeting. The owner operates a gravel pit that has been established for many years. The owner was made aware of our needs and what we were going to do in the C&D pit, along with future gravel removal needs. The owner expressed interest in the contract and was pleased to hear we are in the process of having the gravel analyzed for types and quality of material. We explained that our scope of work will include extracting, screening, and possibly breaking the material into usable material for potential Borough uses for roads, salted sand, parks etc. We discussed varieties of material we would need to make and advised him that we should have a scope for competitive bidding ready in a few weeks. If possible, we would like to start gravel removal this year, but due to timing realize we may not be able to actually start executing the contract until spring.

Wildland Fire Mitigation Update:

Community Wildfire Prevention Plans (CWPP) Update:

OVERALL FIREWISE OVERVIEW		
Report Date:	July 26, 2021	
	Since Last Report	Total
Surveys Requested:	2	38
Completed:	7	25
Additional Info:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Received two new survey requests on the Borough web page. Presentation outreach at Community Council (CC) meetings in Big Lake, Chickaloon, Meadow Lakes, Sutton, Susitna, Knik-Fairview, and Trapper Creek. Also presented to 		

Nancy Lake Homeowners Association, and with Deputy Director Brian Davis at Lynx Lake Road Mitigation with Department of Forestry (DOF).

- Talkeetna CC scheduled for August 2, followed by Tanaina CC, Butte CC, Point MacKenzie and South Knik River in August.
- Outreach table has been staffed at Willow Farmers market; will be attending Houston Founders Day celebration.
- FireWise website is reviewed daily for new interest.
- Completed rough draft of CWPP update with demographic information. Waiting for fire statistics from DOF.
- Working with Copper Basin on the Lake Louise Plan, and assisting Chickaloon in writing a CWPP and becoming a FireWise Community. Received request for wildfire protection plan assistance from Starlight Cove in Big Lake.

Beetle Brush Collection:

Below is the requested information for beetle brush material collected at the four landfill collection sites so far this season. This material is collected at no charge to the community, saving Borough residents \$128 per ton or \$129,024 in fees so far in 2021.

Beetle Brush Collection Program		
January 2021 - June 2021		
<u>Location</u>	<u># of Customers</u>	<u>Tons Collected</u>
Big Lake	1,710	214
Central Landfill	1,960	652
Sunshine	187	23
Willow	<u>953</u>	<u>119</u>
	4,810	1,008
Savings to Community		\$ 129,024

Timber Salvage and Timber Transport Permit Repeal: Attached is a copy of Borough Natural Resource Manager Emerson Krueger’s memorandum dated July 23, 2021 in support of Community Development’s recommendation of an ordinance amending MSB 23.20, and repealing MSB 28.60.070 Traffic Safety Plan and MSB 28.60.080 Timber Transport Permit in their entirety. This legislation will be introduced to the Planning Commission on August 16, 2021 and will be making its way to the Assembly for consideration in September.

Public Affairs Media Flyover:

Schools

[Borough breaks ground at new Houston High School site](#)

Mat-Su Borough

[Army Corps of Engineers and Mat-Su Borough say local input is very important for potential flood.](#)

[Wasilla City Council to vote on whether to oppose Mat-Su Borough proposed sales tax](#)

Assembly

[Erosion buyout fails Assembly](#)

[Assembly votes to approve gravel removal](#)

[Permit denied for large Mat-Su gravel pit in middle of neighborhood off Parks Highway](#)

State

[Alaskans will have chance to weigh in on long-term budget changes, starting next week](#)

Covid

['This is not the same virus': A new resurgence of COVID-19 shuts Cordova seafood plant](#)

Notable MSB Facebook Posts for June

[Photos of Houston High Groundbreaking \(5,834 reached\)](#)

ATTACHMENTS



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Community Development Department

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: July 23, 2021
TO: Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission
THRU: Eric Phillips, Community Development Manager
FROM: Emerson Krueger, Natural Resource Manager
FOR: Timber Salvage and Timber Transport Permit Repeal, Agenda of August 16, 2021

REQUEST:

The Community Development Department seeks review and support from the MSB Planning Commission on amendments to Timber Salvage sales on Borough-owned land in MSB 23.20.130 and repeal of the Traffic Safety Plan and Timber Transport Permit from MSB 28.60.

SUMMARY:

The amount of beetle kill spruce and other dead and damaged trees across forestland in the Borough is at an all-time high. Borough-offered timber sales have received zero interest from the public in the last several years; therefore, in an effort to help improve forest health and reduce fire hazard, a code amendment to MSB 23.20.130 is proposed to make it easier and more productive to salvage dead and dying timber. The amendment would exempt harvest of dead and dying trees from the five-year timber harvest schedules, provide for over-the counter sales, remove the fair market value determination, and remove the traffic safety plan and timber transport permit requirement in their entirety. Amending Borough code is intended to attract commercial interest and contracts before the trees die, blow over, or simply rot on the ground.

The goal under the amended harvest requirements is to target Borough-owned forestland comprised primarily of beetle-killed spruce and over-mature and insect damaged birch. The amendment would reduce the time required to issue timber contracts thereby encouraging the local timber industry to remove dead and dying trees from Borough-owned land. Public notice would still be required for individual applications under the amended code and harvests in excess of 64,000 cubic feet or 500 cords would still be presented to the Assembly for approval.

DISCUSSION:

The recent spruce die-off associated with the bark beetle has reached levels never seen before in the Borough. Over 1.2 million acres of forest in South Central Alaska have been affected, with over 60,000 acres of land in the Borough impacted in 2020 alone. Additionally, the invasive birch

leafminer has impacted over 170,000 acres. The birch defoliation coupled with birch trunk and canker rot are increasing the mortality of over-mature birch trees.

According to Alaska Forest Health Condition Reports, insect infestations continue to expand across South Central Alaska. Roughly half of the Borough-owned forestland is covered with over-mature, diseased, or defective trees which present a higher fire danger. Forestland owned by the State, Native Corporations, Alaska Mental Health Trust, and the University, comprise over 80% of the forestland in the Borough, and are in a similar condition. Removal of damaged/dying trees is proven to enhance growth of younger, healthier, fire-resistant trees.

Demand has been rapidly outpaced by supply for low value timber products such as wood chips and firewood. The local timber industry has been inundated with requests to cull the dead trees from public and private land; however, there is little to no interest from loggers to pay the Borough to cut timber on Borough forestland when they are actually receiving compensation to cut private timber. Removal of beetle-kill spruce on Borough-owned land is estimated to cost tax payers millions based simply on the volume of dead trees and access challenges.

The U.S. Forest Service defines timber salvage as: the removal of dead, damaged, or susceptible trees, essentially to prevent the spread of pests or pathogens and promote forest health. Proposed Borough timber salvage locations will be designated in areas with high concentrations of standing dead or dying trees, areas with high fuel loads, areas for fuel breaks, and areas determined to be in the path of insect infestations. Michigan State University Extension Service provided a very good recap pamphlet about timber salvage which is included herein for informational purposes.

Timber salvage sales targeting dead and dying trees is part of the Borough's wildfire preparedness effort. In addition, the Borough implemented a new policy in 2021 allowing homeowners to thin trees on Borough-owned land in accordance with the FireWise prescription to reduce wildfire risk to their property. A Borough policy was also approved in 2021 allowing homeowners to fell hazard trees on Borough-owned land that could fall and damage their private property.

The Borough hired a contractor in 2021 to fell hazard trees – many of which were beetle killed spruce - along public trails in Alcantra Sports Complex, Crevasse Moraine Trail System, Government Peak Recreation Area and the Jim Creek Recreation Area. Borough staff and the public have partnered to remove these trees for personal use firewood as well as sale of firewood at Borough campgrounds. In order to avoid conflicts between timber salvage areas and public recreation, proposed salvage areas will not overlap existing designated recreation areas.

Beetle-kill firewood harvest areas opened to the public by the Borough in 2020 were very successful. New personal use firewood harvest areas were opened in June 2021 offering free permits to the public to harvest beetle-killed spruce from Borough forestland. The Borough is also working with the State Division of Forestry to reduce fuel loading at the urban-wildland interface and is planning additional fuel reductions for the coming winter.

The requirements for a traffic safety plan and timber transport permit were adopted into Borough Code in 2006. One timber transport permit has been issued since 2006 for a timber harvest that was not cut. General traffic safety and commercial traffic standards enforced by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Department of Safety apply to timber harvest operations utilizing public roads. Repealing MSB 28.60.070 and MSB 28.60.080 will alleviate an additional layer already covered by state requirements and supplemented by other Borough code

requirements for artificial lighting, noise, and buffers. Additionally, road maintenance concerns can be adequately addressed during contract review by the Borough Attorney's office. Repealing these Borough requirements are anticipated to help spur future timber harvests. Title 28 is adjudicated under the Planning Department who has reviewed the Title 23 amendments, concurs it will provide a public benefit, and supports repealing MSB 23.60.070 and MSB 23.60.080 in their entirety.

RECOMMENDATION:

Community Development respectfully recommends that the Planning Commission adopt a resolution of support recommending Assembly adoption of an ordinance amending MSB 23.20 and repealing MSB 28.60.070 Traffic Safety Plan and MSB 28.60.080 Timber Transport Permit in their entirety.

Attachments:

Michigan State University Extension Pamphlet (4 pp)

MSB 28.60.070 Traffic Safety Plan (2 pp)

MSB 28.60.080 Timber Transport Permit (2pp)

Draft Assembly Ordinance (6 pp)

Planning Commission Resolution Serial No. 2021-18 (3 pp)