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Department of Transportation & Public Facilities
PO Box 112500
3132 Channel Drive
Juneau, Alaska 99811-2500

August 18, 2023

Re: Juneau Douglas North Crossing PEL Study

Dear Director Goines,

Please accept these comments on behalf of Ducks Unlimited for the Juneau Douglas North Crossing PEL Study, a proposal to provide a second bridge crossing between Juneau and Douglas Island. The Level 1 Screening Report of March 2023 identified five alternative crossings for the proposed bridge. Four of these alternatives crossed the Mendenhall State Game Refuge, while the fifth alternative lies just outside of the Refuge's eastern boundary.

The 4,000-acre Mendenhall Refuge was established in 1976 and is located within the Gastineau channel. It was created, in part, due to public concerns over the ongoing loss of estuarine habitat in the channel. The purpose of the Refuge "is to protect natural habitat and game populations, especially waterfowl, as well as to provide recreation (1990 Refuge Final Management Plan). It has succeeded in both those goals as it supports thousands of waterfowl each spring and fall, and provides over 2,000 waterfowl hunter-days each year.

Providing accessible hunting opportunities near population centers like Juneau is important. Hunters contribute significantly to conservation funding in Alaska through license sales and excise taxes on the sale of firearms and ammunition, made possible by the Pittman Robertson Act of 1937. Through these funds, Alaska receives the majority of their funding for state wildlife management and conservation work. Importantly, the PEL Study Report recognized that the Sunny Point alternative crosses the part of the refuge that is noted for the duck hunting opportunities it provides.

In addition to waterfowl, the Refuge supports over 200 species of birds. It also provides recreational opportunities outside of hunting including hiking, wildlife viewing and photography, boating, fishing and scientific and educational studies. Altogether, the refuge supports nearly 20,000 user-days to the citizens of Juneau.

One of the goals of the Mendenhall Refuge "is to minimize the loss of habitat due to fragmentation" (1990 Refuge Final Management Plan). Ducks Unlimited hopes the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities will consider a project alternative that meets that helps meet this goal and reduces the impacts on migratory birds and their habitats, while balancing the needs of the local community.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and we look forward to reviewing future iterations of this important infrastructure project.

Sincerely,

Jeff McCreary
Director of Operations
Western Regional Office