

Matanuska-Susitna Borough
HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN



*9 "S-KIDS" TEAM
KNIK. ALASKA. 2.9.11.*

Mat-Su Borough Historic Preservation Plan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historic preservation can be a powerful tool in helping communities understand their collective past and make informed choices for the future. It allows the celebration of unique, vibrant aspects of the community for both residents and visitors. Preservation and engagement with the past can be an economic driver, a tool for healing, an educational opportunity, and more. The Mat-Su Borough residents are proud of our unique heritage, longevity, and resilience. Historic preservation helps reflect this pride of place.

The purpose of the Mat-Su Borough Historic Preservation Plan is to identify and reflect the public's current interests and priorities regarding historic preservation and show strategies to achieve the identified goals. An updated plan also facilitates the Borough's continued participation in the Certified Local Government (CLG) program, which allows local governments to participate in federal and state historic preservation funding and programs. The current Mat-Su code does not include requirements for historic preservation, and nothing in this plan will change that. Instead, the plan seeks to highlight the benefits of historic preservation and identify ways the Borough and partners can work together to achieve locally led efforts. The plan is also meant to guide the Historical Preservation Commission's program of work, through which the public, staff, and Assembly can seek guidance and information regarding preservation.

The plan provides the legal framework for historic preservation at each level of government that supports preservation work, and how the Mat-Su Borough, as a CLG, fits into that picture. Because much work has been done since the last plan was published in 1987, the plan describes accomplishments in the Borough and a snapshot of known historic properties and resources. As mentioned above, this plan has been shaped by individuals and organizations in our community who are passionate about protecting cultural resources and identifying, sharing, and celebrating the stories of our region. It explains how public engagement has driven the development of the goals, objectives, and strategies to support the historic preservation community in the Mat-Su Borough.

Finally, the appendices provide more detailed information for those interested in past historic preservation projects in the Mat-Su, resources for learning more, and ways to get involved in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We acknowledge that this plan, while written for the present generation, is about the stories of the many generations who have come before us on these lands, the ancestral lands of the Dena'ina and Ahtna Dene people, that today make up the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. This plan references Alaska Native histories and cultural knowledge, and we are grateful that tribal knowledge bearers have chosen to share their wisdom and traditions, handed down since time immemorial. Through historic preservation, we also honor the voices, lives and cultures of more recent settlers who established farms and homesteads, developed infrastructure, built businesses, and shared their traditions, resulting in the multicultural society we live in today. We hope that by expanding our understanding of all facets of this history, every current and future resident will be able to find a deeper sense of place and belonging in the Mat-Su, this place to call home.

This plan would not have been possible without the stakeholders and interested citizens of the Mat-Su Borough. Thank you to all the local organizations and individuals who provided crucial insight and feedback throughout the entire planning process. We give special thanks to the Mat-Su Borough Historical Preservation Commission for their ongoing work in creating this plan and dedication to protecting, sharing and celebrating history. We appreciate the work done by Information Insights and Dowl on the first and second phase of plan development, respectively. Thank you

to each Borough staff member who contributed their time and energy to this plan: Adam Bradway, Kim Sollien, Gerrit Verbeek, Leda Borys, Emily Laurin, Maggie Brown and Paul Clark.

Grants received through the Alaska State Historical Preservation Office made hiring professionals in public outreach and historic preservation possible. Thank you to the State Office of History and Archeology and the National Park Service, who manage Historic Preservation Funds and make grants available to Certified Local Governments. This publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and administered through a Certified Local Government grant by the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, Office of History and Archaeology.



INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

Most people, from lifelong Alaska residents to tourists, realize that the place we live is unique. Alaska is different than much of the United States in its climate, landscapes, and the lifestyles of its residents. Within Alaska, the Mat-Su Borough has a special combination of history and culture not found anywhere else in our state. The Dene tribes, indigenous to most of the region that now makes up the Mat-Su Borough, have one of the oldest continuous cultures on earth, with a language and a sense of identity spanning at least 13,000 years. The waves of Russian, Euro-American, and American immigrants who began arriving in the 1800s added their own elements to the region's story: exploration, agriculture, gold rushes and oil booms, and many other threads that weave together here. Every community in the Borough provides a unique perspective of our history to residents and visitors through physical evidence, including archaeological and historic sites, historic buildings and structures, districts and landscapes, and places associated with traditional cultural practices

But our uniqueness is also fragile. The Mat-Su is the fastest-growing region in Alaska and one of the fastest-growing in the United States, and it's also very transient, with thousands of people moving in and out each year. With so much demographic change and development, it can be easy for new residents to lose – or never gain – a sense of place in the same way as long-time residents. We want to ensure not only can we keep those connections to our unique history but also offer new residents and future generations the same opportunity to become rooted in this place. Residents here recognized how important preserving history is in 1987, when they first voted to empower the Borough government to play a leading role in local historical preservation. The decisions that are made now regarding preservation will shape what it means to be a Mat-Su resident now and in the future. The purpose of this plan is to identify and reflect the public's priorities regarding historic preservation, and to strategically guide collaborative activities to protect, share, and celebrate the cultures, histories, and special places of the Mat-Su Borough.

WHAT IS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

The National Park Service describes historical preservation as “a conversation with our past about our future”, spurring the curiosity to explore a place more deeply (www.nps.gov). Historic preservation involves cultural resources, which refer to tangible or intangible things that hold significance to a community’s heritage, traditions, history, or identity. These can include historical sites, buildings, artifacts, landmarks, practices, customs, languages, and oral traditions contributing to a community’s cultural fabric. Through historic preservation, individuals can explore history from diverse perspectives, pose varied questions about the past, and gain new insights into history and human identity. It serves as a crucial method for conveying an understanding of the past to future generations. The Nation’s history has many facets, and preservation helps tell these stories. Sometimes, historic preservation involves celebrating events, people, places, and ideas; other times, it can consist of recognizing moments in history that can be painful or uncomfortable to recognize.

Historic preservation is a conscious decision to keep those meaningful places and objects in their original states, to the greatest extent possible, while still meeting the needs of today’s population. Through

preservation work, we maintain our physical connection to the past, by seeing the places and objects that filled it, reading and hearing the stories of the people who inhabited it, and learning about the events that shaped landscapes and communities over many generations. Preservation of historic places gives community members a visual link to how the Mat-Su Borough and the communities within it were formed, offering a tangible record of the intentions and lives of those who came before us.

Historic preservation can be a powerful tool in helping communities understand their collective past and make informed choices for the future. It allows the celebration of unique, vibrant aspects of the community for both residents and visitors. Preservation and engagement with the past can be an economic driver, a tool for healing, an educational opportunity, and more. The community should be proud of its unique heritage, longevity, and resilience. These traits will be reflected in an updated HPP.

OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL AND STATE PRESERVATION PROGRAMS

At the federal level, historic preservation is overseen by the National Park Service in the U.S. Department of the Interior. The National Park Service works with states, tribal partners, local governments, non-profit organizations, and individuals to assist in guiding historic preservation efforts. The framework for historic preservation in the United States was established in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966. A decade later, Congress created the Historic Preservation Fund to help implement the vision laid out in the NHPA.

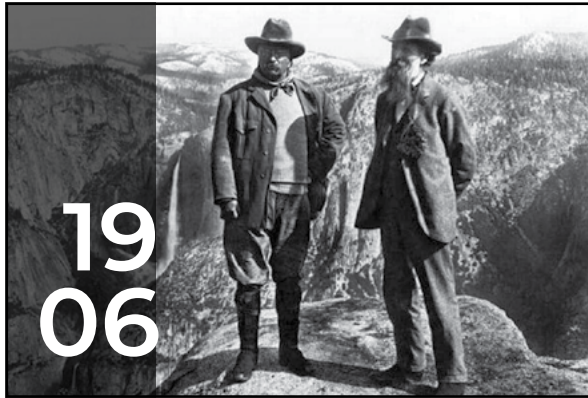
Although a federal law, the NHPA identified that historic preservation would be implemented at all levels of government to be effective, especially at the state level. Importantly, it includes regulations for State Historic Preservation Programs, including the duties of the State Historic Preservation Officer. These state programs administer federal preservation programs, including activities such as nominating properties to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), participating in the project review process to protect cultural resources (often called the Section 106 process), and reviewing projects that are seeking certification for federal tax breaks. The NRHP is a federal program that recognizes and protects sites, buildings, districts, and objects of historical, cultural, and architectural significance. Being listed in the NRHP helps preserve these places and may make them eligible for funding and tax incentives.

In Alaska, the SHPO is housed in the Office of History and Archaeology (OHA), under the State Division of Parks within the Department of Natural Resources. According to their website (<https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/oha/>), the mission of the OHA and SHPO are to “provide programs to encourage the preservation and protection of the archaeological, historic, and architectural resources of Alaska.” OHA staff administer federal Historic Preservation Fund grants, provide technical expertise in historic preservation, and work with Certified Local Governments. They also develop and update the Alaska State Historic Preservation Plan; the current draft plan is titled *Saving Our Past: For A Resilient Future (2025-2034)*. OHA also maintains the Alaska Heritage Resource Survey database (AHRs) which serves as a data repository for reported cultural resources across the state. Because some of those sites are sensitive, the survey is not publicly accessible. The Alaska Historical Commission is the citizen review board for state history policy and recommends National Register nominations and Historic Preservation Fund grant awards.

The Mat-Su participates in the preservation structure through its status as a Certified Local Government (CLG). A Certified Local Government (CLG) is a local government certified by the state to participate in federal historic preservation funding and programs. Requirements include having a historic preservation commission, a historic preservation plan, and local review process for projects that may have an impact on historic resources. It also provides access to grant dollars to assist in preserving, protecting, and educating the public about cultural resources.

FEDERAL LAWS

1930



The American Antiquities Act

The American Antiquities Act, signed into law in 1906, grants the U.S. President the authority to designate national monuments on federal lands to protect significant archaeological, cultural, and natural sites. The Act was the first federal legislation aimed at preserving historic landmarks and objects of scientific interest. It also prohibits the destruction or alteration of such sites without proper permission, marking a key step in the development of the nation's historic preservation policies.

1930



The Historic Sites Act

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 established the National Historic Landmarks program and set the foundation for preserving the nation's historic sites. It declared that it is the policy of the U.S. government to preserve and maintain historically significant sites, buildings, and objects for public education and enjoyment. The Act also created the National Park Service's role in identifying, evaluating, and protecting these resources, marking a pivotal moment in the development of federal preservation efforts.

1950



The Federal Highway Aid Act

The Federal Highway Aid Act, particularly through its later amendments, requires that transportation projects funded by federal highway grants consider the impact on cultural resources, including historic sites and landmarks. Under Section 4(f) of the act, transportation projects must avoid or minimize harm to publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife refuges, and historic sites. This provision ensures that federal highway development takes cultural and historical preservation into account, promoting a balance between infrastructure development and the protection of significant cultural resources.



National Historic Preservation Act

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 established a national policy to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of the United States. It created the National Register of Historic Places, a list of significant sites, buildings, and districts, and established the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to review federal preservation efforts. The Act also requires federal agencies to consider the impact of their projects on historic properties, ensuring that preservation is integrated into government planning and development activities.



The Department of Transportation Act

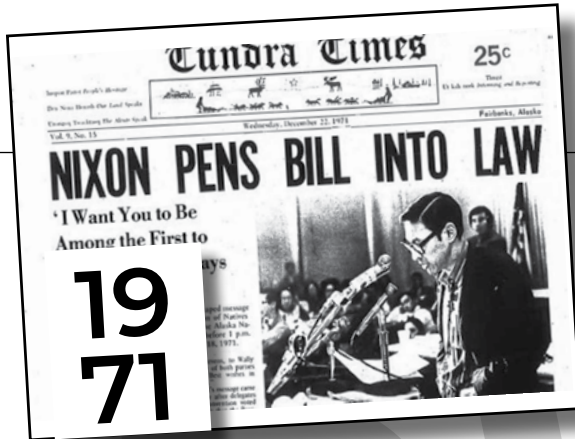
The Department of Transportation Act of 1966 established the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) and outlined its mission to ensure a coordinated and efficient transportation system. The Act's Declaration of Purpose emphasized the need for safe, efficient, and accessible transportation across the nation. Section 4(f) of the Act specifically protects public parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites from being adversely affected by federal transportation projects, requiring agencies to avoid or minimize impacts on these resources whenever possible.



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 requires federal agencies to assess the environmental impacts of their proposed actions, including effects on cultural resources. Specifically, NEPA mandates that agencies consider how their projects may affect historic sites, archaeological resources, and cultural landscapes. Through the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, agencies must evaluate and disclose potential harm to these resources and explore alternatives to mitigate or avoid negative impacts on cultural heritage.

1970



The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 was a landmark law that resolved land claims by Alaska Native groups and provided compensation for lands taken by the U.S. government. The Act created 12 regional corporations and over 200 village corporations, which were given land and financial resources to support economic development and self-determination for Native communities. ANCSA also extinguished most Native land claims in exchange for title to land, cash payments, and other benefits, while recognizing the rights of Alaska Natives to their cultural heritage.



Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act

The Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974, also known as the Moss-Bennett Act, mandates that federal agencies ensure the preservation of archaeological and historic sites that may be affected by federal projects. It requires agencies to conduct surveys and assessments to identify sites of cultural or historical significance before undertaking development or construction. The Act also allocates funding for the preservation of such sites and emphasizes the importance of protecting archaeological resources from destruction.



American Indian Religious Freedom Act

The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA) of 1978 protects the rights of Native Americans to practice their traditional religions. It ensures access to sacred sites, freedom to use religious objects and materials, and the ability to engage in ceremonial practices. The Act acknowledges the importance of preserving cultural and spiritual practices and encourages federal agencies to respect and accommodate these religious freedoms in their policies and actions.



Archaeological Resources Protection Act

The Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979 is a federal law designed to protect archaeological sites and resources on public and Native American lands. It prohibits the excavation, removal, or destruction of archaeological resources without proper permits and establishes penalties for violations. The Act also sets guidelines for the lawful excavation and management of archaeological sites, aiming to prevent looting and unauthorized activities that harm cultural heritage.

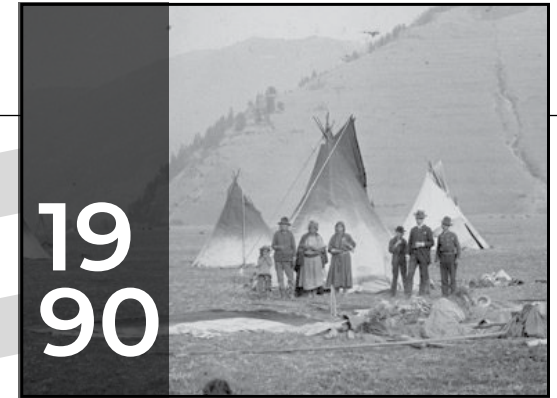
1980



Abandoned Shipwreck Act

The Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987 grants the federal government the authority to manage abandoned shipwrecks on submerged lands in U.S. waters. It allows states to claim ownership of shipwrecks within their waters, provided they meet specific criteria, and emphasizes the preservation of shipwrecks as important historical and cultural resources. The Act also facilitates cooperation between federal, state, and local governments in the protection and management of these maritime heritage sites.

1990

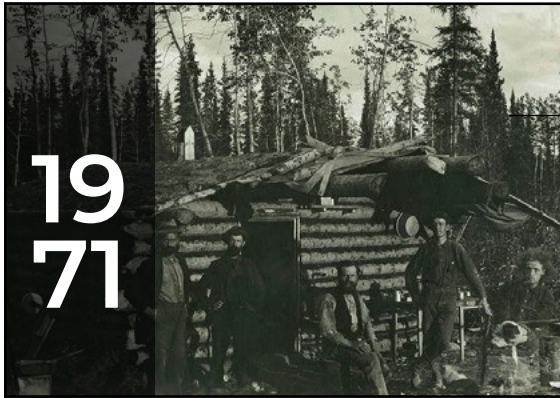


Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) of 1990 requires federal agencies and museums to return Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and cultural patrimony to their respective tribes or descendants. The law provides a process for tribes to assert claims for repatriation and mandates that these items be protected from illegal excavation or sale. NAGPRA also promotes consultation between Native American communities, museums, and federal agencies to ensure the respectful handling of Native cultural materials.

ALASKA LAWS

1980



The Alaska Historic Preservation Act

The Alaska Historic Preservation Act of 1971 was enacted to establish a framework for preserving the state's historical and cultural resources. It created the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology and authorized the state to identify, evaluate, and protect historic properties. The Act also encourages cooperation between state and federal agencies, local governments, and Alaska Native communities to safeguard historic sites and landmarks across the state.



The Historic District Revolving Loan Fund

The Historic District Revolving Loan Fund, established in 1980, provides low-interest loans to property owners in designated historic districts to assist with the rehabilitation and preservation of historic buildings. The fund is designed to encourage the restoration of these properties while maintaining their historical integrity. As loans are repaid, the funds are reinvested into future preservation projects, creating a sustainable source of financial support for historic preservation efforts.

MAT-SU BOROUGH CODE

Chapter 1.10.160 gives the Borough powers to “pre-serve, maintain, and protect historic sites, buildings, and monuments situated within the borough.” (Ord. 94-001AM, § 2 (part), 1994; Ord. 87-7, § 2, 1987)

Chapter 4.46 establishes the Historical Preservation Commission (HPC) and defines its purpose, functions, and composition. This section underwent revisions in 2022 to update the role and functions of the HPC.

4.46.010 ESTABLISHMENT AND PURPOSE

In order to comply with the Certified Local Government Program of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough has established a historical preservation commission. The purpose of the commission is to encourage, participate, and coordinate historic preservation activities within the borough, to provide local government involvement in regional and state-wide historic preservation efforts, and to advise and report to the assembly as outlined in the functions listed below.

4.46.020 FUNCTIONS

(A) The commission Shall

- (1) advise the assembly in identifying, protecting, preserving, and interpreting cultural resources within the borough that are of archaeological, historical, cultural, scientific, or geographic importance;
- (2) develop and maintain an inventory of cultural resources within the borough;
- (3) – (7) [Repealed by Ord. 22-015, § 2, 2022]
- (8) recommend to the assembly a local historic preservation plan providing for the identification, protection, management, and interpretation of cultural resources within the borough;
 - (a) The preservation plan shall be compatible with the Alaska Historic Preservation Plan.
 - (b) The preservation plan will be reviewed by the commission annually and updated every five to ten years to reflect: newly identified cultural resources; changes to local, state, and/or federal laws that affect cultural resources within the borough; and any other relevant information regarding cultural resources within the borough;
- (9) review and make recommendations to the assembly regarding local projects that might affect properties identified in the historic preservation plan;
- (10) receive, review, and recommend to the assembly nominations for listing borough cultural resources on the National Register of Historic Places; and
- (11) review and recommend certified local government grant applications and/or grant applications from the Matanuska-Susitna community.

MAT-SU BOROUGH CODE

4.46.030 COMPOSITION

The commission shall consist of seven citizens of the borough who have demonstrated an interest, competence, or knowledge in the historical and cultural foundations of the borough and the state, which includes Alaska Native traditional knowledge bearers who are members of federally recognized tribes within the borough. To the extent available in the borough, the mayor shall appoint, subject to confirmation by the assembly, citizens with professional expertise in the disciplines of architecture, history, architectural history, planning, archaeology, or other historic preservation-related disciplines, such as urban planning, American studies, American civilization, cultural geography, or cultural anthropology.



TIMELINE OF MAT-SU BOROUGH

CODES FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION



Historic Preservation Commission Established (Serial No. 1982-14)

The Mat-Su Historic Preservation Commission was established in 1982 through an Ordinance of the Assembly (**Serial No. 1982-14**), which laid out the functions of the Commission (Matanuska Susitna Borough 1982). These functions were to:

- A.** Advise the Assembly in the identification of buildings, sites and landmarks and writings and objects within the Borough that are of historic, cultural or geographic importance;
- B.** Develop and maintain an inventory of landmarks, historical buildings and sites and writings and objects within the Borough;
- C.** Advise the Planning Commission on planning in connection with historic preservation.

D. Advise the Borough and private property owners on restoration and maintenance of historical buildings, sites and landmarks and writings and objects.

E. Coordinate, assist and aid in the planning of historical preservation and restoration projects in the Borough.

F. Recommend to the Assembly buildings, sites and landmarks and writings and objects of historical, cultural or geographic significance in the Borough for designation as historical landmarks by the U.S. or State governments and seek approval from City Councils within cities.

G. Recommend to the Assembly historical preservation and restoration programs and site improvements to be implemented by or supported by the Borough.

1984



Areawide Historic Preservation Powers Established (1984-1987)

Serial No. 1984-154 in 1984 to include a ballot initiative for historic preservation (Matanuska Susitna Borough 1984). The initiative, Proposition 2, was passed by voters in 1985. Ordinance of the Assembly Serial No. 1987-07, authorizing the Borough to “exercise the areawide power to preserve, maintain and protect historic sites, buildings and monuments situated within the borough, as approved by the voters.” Following the addition to the Borough’s code, the Mat-Su became one of the first local governments in Alaska to achieve CLG status under the National Historic Preservation Act.



First Historical Preservation Plan.

As a requirement of CLG status, the Historical Preservation Commission drafted a historic preservation plan, which was adopted by the Assembly in 1987. This plan focused on objectives and actions for Mat-Su Borough cultural resources staff to focus on in accordance with CLG status. The goal of the plan was to conserve important historic and prehistoric resources, including artifacts, archaeological sites, buildings, writings, and oral histories within the Mat-Su to benefit those in the present and future. **Four objectives specifically called out in the 1987 plan were:**

- ▶ Identification of Cultural Resources
- ▶ Evaluation of Cultural Resources for the National Register of Historic Places
- ▶ Registration of Cultural Resources for the National Register of Historic Places
- ▶ Protection of Cultural Resources

The plan includes an extensive list of actions for each objective, including a list of cultural resource surveys to accomplish, methods for evaluating, cataloging and prioritizing resources, potential “support groups” to participate in or support preservation activities, and a list of techniques and tools the Mat-Su Borough and private property owners could use for historic preservation purposes. Many of these actions were implemented by the Borough’s cultural resource specialists over the next thirty years, often funded by Historic Preservation Fund CLG grants, substantially increasing the number of identified resources listed in the Alaska Heritage Resource Survey and on the National Register of Historic Places, developing partnerships across communities, and expanding awareness and appreciation for the historic properties and resources across the Mat-Su Borough.

2002



Plan updated but not adopted

In 2002, the Borough received funding through the CLG program to update its HPP. Many of the additions to the updated plan focused on codifying a legal framework for reviewing actions related to designated cultural resources. The updated plan was submitted to the assembly for approval but was not adopted (Matanuska Susitna Borough 2003). The 1987 plan was incorporated by reference as part of the 2005 Mat-Su Borough Comprehensive Plan.

2004



Culture resource review (2007- 2012)

In 2007, the Assembly passed Title 27: Subdivisions, which was added to the Borough Code (Title 27) in 2007 (Matanuska Susitna Borough 2007). The title codified the authority of the Borough to review platting applications and included a review of cultural resources prior to plat approval for new subdivisions. During the period when Title 27 was active, the Historical Preservation Commission would forward their recommendations to the Mat-Su Planning Department, and the Cultural Resources Division would complete surveys on the land to identify cultural resources before plat approval. Title 27 was repealed in 2012 and replaced with Title 43 (Serial No. 11-072) (Matanuska Susitna Borough 2011), which does not include requirements for cultural resource review.

2012



Historical Preservation Commission functions updated

In 2017, the Borough began a comprehensive review of all boards and commissions. As a result of this review, the HPC's functions were revised in 2022 through ordinance 22-015 to focus on meeting the Borough's responsibilities as a Certified Local Government.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN THE MAT-SU BOROUGH

Evidence of Mat-Su's successful tenure as a CLG is apparent throughout the region. For example, visits to the streets of downtown Talkeetna, hikes at Independence Mine, events in Colony barns, and concerts on the lawn of the Palmer Ale House showcase the ongoing preservation work that keeps each community's heritage alive in daily life.

Upon adoption of the 1987 Historic Preservation Plan, the HPC and cultural resources staff began establishing an inventory of cultural resources in the Mat-Su Borough. The first CLG grant received in 1987 was \$8,050 to survey and evaluate cultural resources across the Borough. Properties on that list were evaluated for their unique attributes to determine if they were significant and required preservation. Several properties were determined as significant and became eligible for inclusion into the NRHP. Some of these properties include the Knik-Rainy Pass Trail, Knik River Highway Bridge, Katie Wade Homestead, and the Benteh Village Site. Eleven cultural resources were listed on the NRHP, the first being Colony properties like the Bailey Colony Farm, the Berry House, and the Matanuska Colony Community Center. Subsequent surveys included a more in-depth study of homesteads, the Old Knik Townsite, historic sites in Wasilla, and many others.

The Mat-Su has been one of the most active CLGs in the state in terms of applying for and receiving grant dollars to complete projects. The Borough has received 43 CLG Grants since 1987, equaling \$743,225. Most grants (19) have gone to cultural resource survey efforts, followed by planning (8), education (6), predevelopment and development (4), NRHP Nominations (3), and training (3). Development and predevelopment grants equaled a total of \$200,000. NRHP Nomination grants have equaled \$20,099. Appendix B provides a full list of CLG grants awarded to the Mat-Su.



GRANTS

Development/Predevelopment

Projects: 4 | \$200,000

Education

Projects: 6 | \$70,163

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

Projects: 4 | \$38,099

PLANNING

Projects: 8 | \$175,388

SURVEY & INVENTORY

Projects: 19 | \$260,205

TRAINING

Projects: 3 | \$17,370

TOTAL: \$761,25

Some notable success stories directly supported by these grants include the stabilization and rehabilitation of the Rebarchek Colony Farm, the restoration of the Old Willow Community Center, the installation of interpretive signs in Wasilla, and the advancement of the Willow, Houston, and Susitna Historic Preservation Plans.

The Rebarchek Colony Farm is a historic agricultural site that dates to the early 20th century. Originally part of the Matanuska Valley Colony Project, the farm significantly influenced the region's agricultural development. The site features historic buildings and structures, reflecting the area's pioneer farming history. Efforts to stabilize and rehabilitate the farm focused on preserving its historical significance while ensuring the longevity of its physical structures for future generations. The farm is currently used for exhibitions and experimental farming.

The Old Willow Community Center features a museum that safeguards the area's rich history. This facility is a vital asset to the local community and tourists, offering a space for education and connection. Recent rehabilitation efforts have focused on maintaining the integrity of the building, ensuring it remains both safe and accessible for all who visit.

The Wasilla Cultural Resource Interpretive Signs offer visitors an educational glimpse into the area's rich cultural and historical heritage. These signs highlight significant local landmarks, Native Alaskan history, and the development of Wasilla as a key community in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. By showcasing the

region's history through informative displays, the interpretive signs aim to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of Wasilla's cultural significance for both residents and visitors. These examples effectively demonstrate how funding through these grants supports a wide range of community goals.

CURRENT INVENTORY OF CULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE MAT-SU BOROUGH

As mentioned above, the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) serves as the central data repository for reported cultural resources across the state. Access to AHRS is restricted to help protect identified cultural resources, so just a summary of sites and inventories is listed here.

Sites: 782 AHRS sites are listed in the Mat-Su Borough, including twenty-five sites eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, one contributing property, and three that are pending consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. There are twenty-nine sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places within the Mat-Su Borough. These sites are shown in the table below, and more information for each site is available in the National Register Database.

Investigations:

Investigations are studies conducted to identify, document, and better understand cultural resources in an area. In the context of historic preservation, investigations can include background research, field surveys, archaeological testing, architectural documentation, and evaluations of a resource's significance. These studies help determine what cultural resources are present, how they are distributed, and whether they may be eligible for protection or listing in the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey or the National Register of Historic Places.

Property Name	City	Area of Significance	Level of Significance
Bailey Colony Farm	Palmer	Community Planning And Development; Agriculture; Architecture; Social History	Local
Berry House	Palmer	Community Planning And Development; Agriculture; Architecture; Social History	Local
Campbell House	Palmer	Social History; Agriculture; Architecture; Community Planning And Development	National
Cunningham-Hall Pt-6,Nc-692W	Palmer	Transportation	State
Curry Lookout	Talkeetna	Entertainment/Recreation	Local
Fairview Inn	Talkeetna	Commerce	State
Herried House	Palmer	Community Planning and Development; Agriculture; Architecture; Social History	Local
High Ridge (Machetanz Cabin)	Palmer	Art; Literature	Local
Hyland Hotel	Palmer	Commerce	Local
Independence Mines	Palmer	Industry	State
Kirsch's Place	Talkeetna	Commerce	Local
Knik Site	Wasilla	Transportation	Local
Matanuska Colony Community Center (Palmer Historic District)	Palmer	Community Planning And Development; Politics/Government; Architecture; Social History	True

561 investigations are recorded in the AHRS within the Mat-Su Borough, including 407 literature reviews (including national register nominations), 125 reconnaissance surveys (including aerial/windshield surveys, remote sensing, architectural, and pedestrian surveys), 18 intensive surveys (testing for DOE and NRHP), and 7 mitigation reports (monitoring and data recovery).

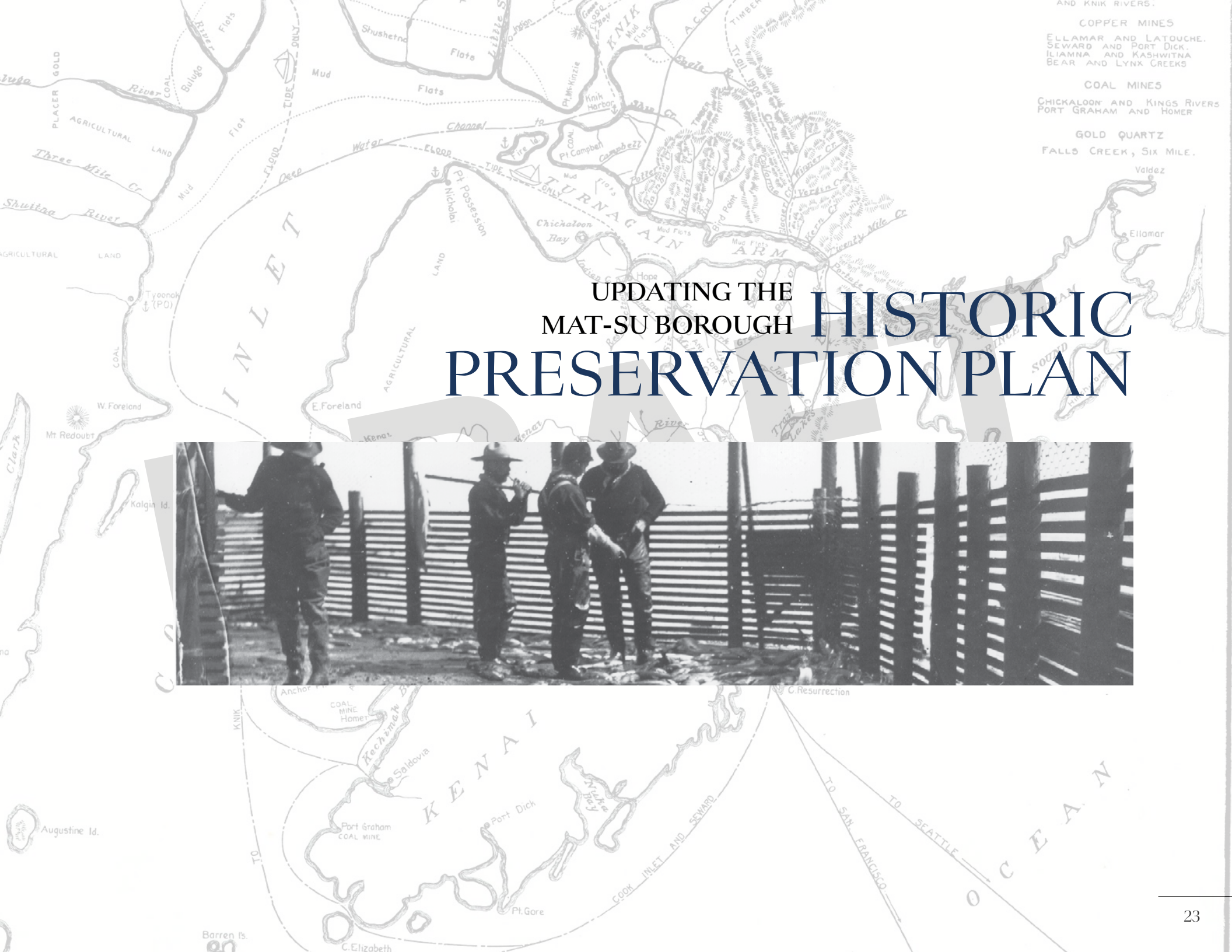
Historical Data in the Mat-Su Borough Archives

Although the Mat-Su Borough office does not serve as a repository for archives, there are nonetheless a variety of historical resources that have been collected over the years. These include forty-seven artifacts and soil samples gathered during field surveys, 104 audio cassettes and film reels, 261 maps and blueprints, including designs of Matanuska Colony buildings from the mid-1930s, over 300 books and reports, and over 4,000 photos. Most of these are physical, although efforts in the past fifteen years have digitized over 150 documents and 390 photographs. Digitizing these resources makes them more broadly accessible, helps preserve these unique links to our past, and prevents the loss of critical information that should be passed down through generations.

The main topics that are reflected in the archival collections include dwellings (cabins, houses, homesteads, etc.), industries (mining, dairy, etc.), cultural resources documents (reports, nominations, memos, etc.), transportation (roads, bridges, trails, etc.), oral histories, and the towns or areas within the MSB, primarily Palmer, Wasilla, and Talkeetna.

Old Willow Community Center	Willow	Social History	True
Palmer Depot	Palmer	Transportation	False
Patten Colony Farm	Palmer	Community Planning And Development; Agriculture; Architecture; Social History	National
Puhl House	Palmer	Community Planning And Development; Agriculture; Architecture; Social History	National
Rebarchek, Raymond, Colony Farm	Palmer	Exploration/Settlement	State
Sutton Community Hall	Sutton	Social History	Local
Talkeetna Airstrip	Talkeetna	Transportation	Local
Talkeetna Historic District	Talkeetna	Exploration/Settlement	Local
Tangle Lakes Archeological District (Boundary Decrease)	Glennallen	Prehistoric	National
Teeland's Country Store (Herning's, Knik Trading Post	Wasilla	Commerce	Local
Tryck, Blanche and Oscar, House	Wasilla	Exploration/Settlement	Local
United Protestant Church	Palmer	Architecture; Social History	Local
Wasilla Community Hall	Wasilla	Architecture; Social History	Local
Wasilla Depot	Wasilla	Transportation	Local
Wasilla Elementary School	Wasilla	Education; Religion; Social History	Local
Whitney Section House	Wasilla	Transportation	Local





AND KNIK RIVERS.

COPPER MINES
ELLAMAR AND LATOUCHE.
SEWARD AND PORT DICK.
ILIAMNA AND KASHWITNA.
BEAR AND LYNX CREEKS

COAL MINES
CHICKALOON AND KINGS RIVERS
PORT GRAHAM AND HOMER

GOLD QUARTZ
FALLS CREEK, SIX MILE.

UPDATING THE MAT-SU BOROUGH HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN



A Plan Reflecting Today's Mat-Su Borough: The Purpose & Need for a Plan Update

One of the key functions of the HPC is to develop and recommend a historic preservation plan to the Assembly. The current plan, adopted in 1987, established goals, objectives, and actions to guide the HPC and Mat-Su Borough staff. It sought to institutionalize historic preservation into Borough planning and management and focused on actions the HPC and staff could take in support of that aim. The plan was shaped by the fact that historic preservation was a relatively new concept for the Mat-Su Borough, and it reflected the needs and interests of the Assembly, administration, and public at that time. Reading through the 1987 plan, many of the goals, objectives, and actions are as relevant today as they were forty years ago. At the same time, an effective historic preservation plan must reflect the community's current priorities, possibilities, and limitations. It must also build on what we have learned from past efforts. It is the intent of this plan update to meet the needs of today's Mat-Su Borough while honoring and building upon these foundational efforts.

It is likely that the Mat-Su region today would be unrecognizable in some respects to those who developed the 1987 plan, especially in the more urbanized areas. At the beginning of 2024, the population of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough was estimated to exceed 116,000

residents (State of Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, 2024), up from a population of 59,322 in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). This trend positioned the Mat-Su Borough as the fastest-growing region in Alaska during that timeframe and among the most rapidly expanding areas in the United States. While this growth has been ongoing for decades, the population density remained relatively low, preserving the Borough's predominantly rural character. However, within the last 15 years, population growth has reached a density sufficient to form a continuous urban community centered around Palmer and Wasilla. This development marks a significant shift in the Mat-Su Borough's history and change in residents' experiences, with the emergence of substantial urban and suburban spaces.

A significant amount of work has also been accomplished since the first plan was adopted nearly 40 years ago, as described earlier in this plan. Prior to 1987, while some archeological and historical research had taken place, very few surveys had been conducted or registered, and few properties had been evaluated for the National Register of Historic Places. With continued support from the local community, and with consideration to continued rapid population growth and demographic change in the region, we have created an adaptable plan shaped by the priorities of individuals and organizations involved in historic preservation and cultural resource management across the Borough. It also reflects the very limited staff capacity for the

Mat-Su Borough to do on-the-ground activities, thus emphasizing the need to work collaboratively and in support of grassroots champions at the local level even more than the last plan did.

Lastly, a historic preservation plan for today's Mat-Su Borough needs to reflect the importance of tourism to the regional economy, something that the 1987 plan mentioned but did not emphasize. The Mat-Su Borough's natural and cultural landscapes draw large numbers of visitors from out-of-state and from the rest of Alaska. In the summer of 2016 over 700,000 visitors to the Mat-Su Borough generated about \$258 million in direct spending (Alaska Travel Industry Association, 2017). Although more recent data is unavailable, it is reasonable to assume that these figures have increased, considering the resurgence in statewide tourism following the travel disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Heritage tourism is an essential pillar in the region's overall tourism economy. Iconic events like the Iditarod, the broader practice of dog mushing, back-country aviation, historic gold mines, farm tours and the distinct character of downtown Talkeetna all rely heavily on preservation to remain vibrant and attractive to visitors.

The Plan Update Process

To ensure the updated plan reflected community interests and priorities for historic preservation, the Mat-Su Borough designed a process driven by public participation from start to finish. During the initial phase in 2020-2021, Mat-Su Borough staff partnered with a contractor, Information Insights, to gather input from key stakeholders and the public to guide the formation of the plan's vision, goals, and objectives. Approximately fifty stakeholders and members of the public participated in this process. The planning team conducted interviews with ten stakeholders, which included representatives from tribal organizations, local government, interest groups, museums, and historical societies. The first phase also included stakeholder surveys and virtual public meetings, as well as digital engagement through a website, social media posts, email outreach, and electronic flyers.

Interviewees were asked about which histories in the Mat-Su they were most familiar with; histories they believed to be well-represented in planning, preservation, and education throughout the Borough and those that may be underrepresented; and challenges that prevent Borough residents from fully realizing the potential of historic preservation. The following is a summary of what emerged from these interviews:

- Historic preservation promotes a deeper understanding of and connection to the region. History tells a story. It creates a sense of place and connects people to each other and the land through shared understanding and experience. This fosters a sense of collective identity and stewardship.
- History gives our past a future.
- What we're living through will be something that people want to know about one hundred years from now.
- We will face adversity and come through it as others did before us. We will have our own stories to tell.
- Healing happens through understanding and acknowledgment of shared histories.
- Understanding different historical perspectives is part of a healing process for tribal citizens and an important part of the healing process for the community to help move beyond stereotypes and preconceptions.

The following Stakeholders were interviewed during Phase I of the project:

Alpine Historical Society

Nancy Dryden (*President*)

Chickaloon Village Traditional Council

Jessica Winnestaffer

(*Environmental Stewardship Director*)

Palmer Historical Society

Sheri Hamming (*President*)

Palmer Museum of History and Art

Sam Dinges (*Executive Director*)

Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Bonnie Quill (*President and CEO*)

Mat-Su Historical Preservation Commission

Fran Seager-Boss

Museum of Alaska Transportation & Industry

Sherry Jackson (*Executive Director*)

Talkeetna Historical Society & Museum

Sue Deyoe (*Executive Director*)

Wasilla Museum & Visitor Center

Bethany Buckingham Follett (*Curator*)

Wasilla-Knik Historical Society

Linda Frey (*Co-Secretary*)

Willow Historical & Wildlife Foundation

Madeline Gocke (*President*)

The people, places, stories, and events that are important to the Borough's history:

- Natural history and the arrival of people 14,000 years ago
- Alaska Native heritage and continued culture, including the Dena'ina, Ahtna, and Alutiiq
- Transportation, including river travel, the Iditarod Trail, mushing, and the railroad
- Mining for gold and coal
- Smallpox epidemic
- Russian in-migration
- Agriculture, including homesteading, the Colony Project, and the Matanuska Experiment Farm
- Numerous other site-specific histories across the region

The best-represented historical contexts include Palmer's history and the Matanuska Colony Project, Talkeetna, agriculture, the Iditarod, dog mushing, and historic buildings in the Mat-Su. The underrepresented historical contexts include Indigenous histories, colony histories outside of the Palmer area, pre-colony history in Palmer, and homesteading.

Following the interviews, two rounds of stakeholder surveys and public meetings gathered input from a larger pool of people. The first survey looked at respondents' familiarity with historic preservation planning as a concept and with previous preservation planning efforts in the Mat-Su. It also asked about stakeholder priorities

for historic preservation planning going forward. Responses were combined with information gathered from the interviews and helped inform the framework for the stakeholder meetings.

Three meetings were held virtually to draft a vision, mission, and goals and then receive feedback on those. Nineteen individuals representing various organizations and groups participated in the first meeting, where they engaged in a series of activities and brainstorming exercises to help articulate goals. The emerging concepts included a need for broader education, cultural recognition, and celebration and preservation of specific sites. These ideas were later integrated into the draft vision, mission, goals, objectives, and strategies. Stakeholders also discussed specific needs within the region and their ideas for historic preservation activities, including continued coordination of stakeholders and innovative ideas for public education.

The second meeting and survey focused on refining the draft vision, mission, and goals. When asked to prioritize the drafted goals, the top four goals that emerged from the survey were:

- Elevate Alaska Native presence and histories across the region,
- Support existing and emerging historic preservation efforts,
- Promote collaboration and share resources,
- Identify and preserve cultural resources and landscapes.

With the draft vision, goals, objectives developed, eighteen individuals participated in the last stakeholder meeting that focused on identifying strategies needed to achieve the stated objectives. Participants generated additional action steps after reviewing each objective.



Phase II

The second phase of the planning process took place in 2022-2024 to identify possible data gaps, continue public and Mat-Su Borough leadership engagement, and better understand the priorities and needs of stakeholders involved in historic preservation throughout the region to finalize goals, objectives and strategies. Historic themes were also developed based on the collected input from the entire planning process.

One virtual and two in-person meetings were held. A survey was then created and shared with area stakeholders to reach a wider audience. Some of the ideas that surfaced during the public meetings are as follows:

- More strategy on soliciting funds for structure preservation
- Support in the National Heritage Area designation
- Increased interest in making materials publicly available
- Increased interest in having a central database for materials from here and their current locations, both local and nationally

The survey questions included respondents' priorities over the next ten years, historical information their organization would like to share, requests for assistance in making information more publicly accessible, and feedback on the outline of the plan. Survey feedback regarding the direction of the plan included the following:

- Ensure a focus on ways to cultivate a sense of identity for our whole community
- A return of the Cultural Resources Division at the Mat-Su
- Additional work that promotes area history in the tourism industry
- Increased promotion and support of local organizations coordinating their efforts

Most respondents' priorities were geared toward increasing their organization's ability to reach the public, possibly through upgrades and modernization of collections, including physical or digital resources (archived photos, newsletters, websites, museums with physical collections and buildings) and interactive resources (such as guided tours or school-based educational opportunities).

Regarding assistance needs, participants noted that they would like more access to information regarding indigenous histories (oral, written, and more). They also widely noted needing assistance with receiving grant dollars for work on both archives and physical structures. It was a common theme that many resources provided to the public could use upgrading. Therefore, assistance from well-trained professionals either on a paid basis (funded with grants) or volunteer basis (perhaps from the Mat-Su Borough and other organizations) would be valued.

Preservation Needs in the Mat-Su Borough

While much has been accomplished over the last forty years, historic preservation in the Mat-Su Borough is still in its early stages, shaped by the region's rich cultural complexity and the practical realities of rapid growth, changing demographics, and uneven documentation of the past. Local organizations, tribal partners, and residents have expressed a strong desire for broader access to information, improved coordination, and renewed investments in preservation capacity. Public outreach, interviews, and stakeholder surveys consistently reveal that certain histories such as the Matanuska Colony Project, the Iditarod, Talkeetna's development, mining and agriculture development, and some exploration and transportation stories are well represented, many others remain overlooked or insufficiently documented. These include Indigenous histories, homesteading in the early 20th century, and cultural narratives outside the core urbanized area between Palmer and Big Lake. More work could be done in these areas to improve our knowledge of these important topics.

Also, most of the lands in the Mat-Su Borough have never been surveyed for cultural resources, so it is likely we are aware of only a small fraction of what is out there. Not surprisingly, people throughout time have sought out optimum places to make a living and ideal routes for travel, so often the places with the most cultural resources are also those places with higher levels of modern development and use. For instance,

rapid development in and around the core population area, often done without cultural resource surveys, can result in the loss of materials that could help us better understand historical contexts in areas where countless generations have inhabited the uplands adjacent to Knik Arm and major river systems. Also, several large development projects are proposed in and through the Mat-Su Borough which, if implemented, would significantly alter currently undeveloped areas. On the other hand, federally funded projects must assess impacts to cultural resources in accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, so they can serve as an important opportunity to discover and protect resources, and thus help improve our understanding of earlier human occupation and use of the area. It is important that the Mat-Su Borough staff and communities stay involved in both small and large-scale development planning to ensure that we do not permanently lose these windows into the past.



HISTORIC THEMES OF THE MAT-SU BOROUGH REGION



This section provides a brief overview of the history of the Mat-Su Borough from its earliest inhabitants to the present. Some of these themes have been extensively researched and shared with generations of residents, while others have received less attention, leaving much to be explored and uncovered. A longer supplemental narrative will soon be available to learn more about each of these themes. This information is intended to be a starting point for further exploration by researchers and to support further development of historic contexts for preservation efforts throughout the Borough. If these short descriptions catch your interest, a more extensive narrative for each theme is available in a supplemental document.

AND KNIK RIVERS.
COPPER MINES
ELLAMAR AND LATOUCHE.
SEWARD AND PORT DICK.
ILIAMNA AND KASHWITNA
BEAR AND LYNX CREEKS
COAL MINES
CHICKALOON AND KINGS RIVERS
PORT GRAHAM AND HOMER
GOLD QUARTZ
FALLS CREEK, SIX MILE.
Valdez
Ellamar

PEOPLING THE MAT-SU

Ancient: Archaeological Traditions in the Mat-Su

The earliest evidence of human habitation in Alaska dates back more than 14,000 years. However, within the boundaries of the modern Mat-Su Borough, human presence began around 12,000 years ago following the retreat of massive glacial systems. These early inhabitants utilized the Chulitna, Matanuska, and Susitna rivers for travel and subsistence, leaving behind a legacy of stone tools that serve as vital archaeological indicators of their existence (Wygol & Krasinski, 2019).

American Paleo-Arctic Tradition

(11,000 B.P. - 5,500 B.P.)

The American Paleo-Arctic tradition represents one of the earliest known cultural phases in Alaska. Characterized by a mobile lifestyle centered on big-game hunting, this tradition includes the 'Denali Tool Complex,' which features microblades, burins, and bifacial knives. Sites associated with this tradition are commonly found along high ridges and river terraces in the Mat-Su, particularly around the Tangle Lakes region (Dixon et al., 1985; Wygal, 2010).

Northern Archaic Tradition

5,500 B.P. - 2,500 B.P.)

Succeeding the Denali Complex, the Northern Archaic tradition introduced new technologies such as notched projectile points, signaling an adaptation to broader subsistence strategies including salmon fishing. Artifacts from this period reflect a transition from big-game specialization to diversified hunting and gathering practices, often found in more forested and aquatic-rich environments (Reger & Wygal, 2016).

Alutiiq/Sugpiaq People

The Alutiiq, or Sugpiaq, people represent one of the first identifiable coastal cultures in Southcentral Alaska. Originally centered on maritime subsistence, the Alutiiq extended inland into Cook Inlet and the Mat-Su region approximately 3,000 to 1,000 years ago. This inland movement led to the emergence of the Kachemak tradition, a subculture that adapted to terrestrial environments and freshwater resources. Kachemak sites are known for specialized fishing tools and more permanent housing structures, distinguishing them from earlier nomadic cultures (Workman & Workman, 2010). The term 'Riverine Kachemak' is used for Alutiiq groups that settled along river corridors such as the Susitna, showcasing a unique adaptation to inland environments (Schneider, 2013).

Indigenous: Dene-Speaking Peoples

Two Dene-speaking Athabascan groups traditionally inhabited the Mat-Su region: the Ahtna and the Dena'ina. These groups practiced a semi-sedentary lifestyle with seasonal mobility dictated by the availability of resources. Social structures were matrilineal and clan-based, with long-standing oral traditions and extensive place-naming practices that demonstrate a deep-rooted connection to the land (de Laguna & McClellan, 1981).

Ahtna

The Ahtna people occupied the Copper River Basin and adjacent parts of the Mat-Su. Their use of native copper set them apart as exceptional metalworkers among indigenous North Americans. The Western Ahtna were known for their mobility, following caribou and salmon migrations, and maintained cultural and linguistic ties with the neighboring Dena'ina (Kari & Fall, 2003).

Dena'ina

The Dena'ina are unique among Northern Athabascans for occupying coastal territories and utilizing marine resources, including salmon and beluga whales. Technological innovations such as the fish weir and underground storage pits enabled them to settle in more permanent villages. Salmon, a cultural keystone species, shaped Dena'ina social organization and seasonal subsistence rounds (Fall, 1987; Garibaldi & Turner, 2004).

CHANGE

Contact Between Indigenous and Western Cultures

The numbers and settlement patterns of human populations in the Mat-Su Borough before recorded history, stretching back to the first inhabitants after glacial retreat, is a puzzle that may never be solved. Uncovering more about this aspect of the Mat-Su Borough's history helps us to understand the human settlement of the American continents and to understand some of the oldest continuous cultures on earth.

The best estimate of the population of the Mat-Su Borough circa 1800, prior to the epidemics associated with outside contact, is roughly 3,000 individuals from the Dena'ina and Ahtna tribes (Fall, 1987; Langdon, 2002). Alutiiq and Sugpiaq settlements on the shores of Cook Inlet and up the Susitna River Valley have been found in the archaeological record, but both the scientific evidence and the oral history of indigenous populations indicate that the Dena'ina had displaced Alutiiq populations from the Mat-Su territory by the 19th Century and prior to the first Russian contact (Workman & Workman, 2010).

The Dena'ina and Ahtna peoples encountered Western influences in three primary phases as described by anthropologist James Fall (1987): incipient-early contact, contact-traditional, and government-commercial. These phases cover the introduction of trade goods, missionary activities, and the eventual influx of American settlers following Alaska's purchase by the United States.

Russian Influence

European contact began with Captain James Cook's expedition in 1778, which found Dena'ina already in possession of Russian trade items (Cook, 1967). Russian fur traders subsequently attempted to establish dominance through trade and coercive tribute systems, provoking resistance from Native groups. The Dena'ina notably destroyed several Russian forts, asserting their territorial control and limiting Russian influence in the Mat-Su region (Boraas, 1996). These conflicts eventually gave way to a more stable trade relationship, setting the stage for later cultural exchange.

Russian Orthodoxy entered Upper Cook Inlet in the 1840s and became the first Christian denomination to engage with the Dena'ina. The religion was often accepted due to its spiritual compatibility and minimal interference with indigenous customs. Orthodox chapels were built in Native villages, and while few priests learned local languages, Native interpreters facilitated religious practice (Znamenski, 1998). This religious shift marked the beginning of a transformation in Native spiritual and cultural life.

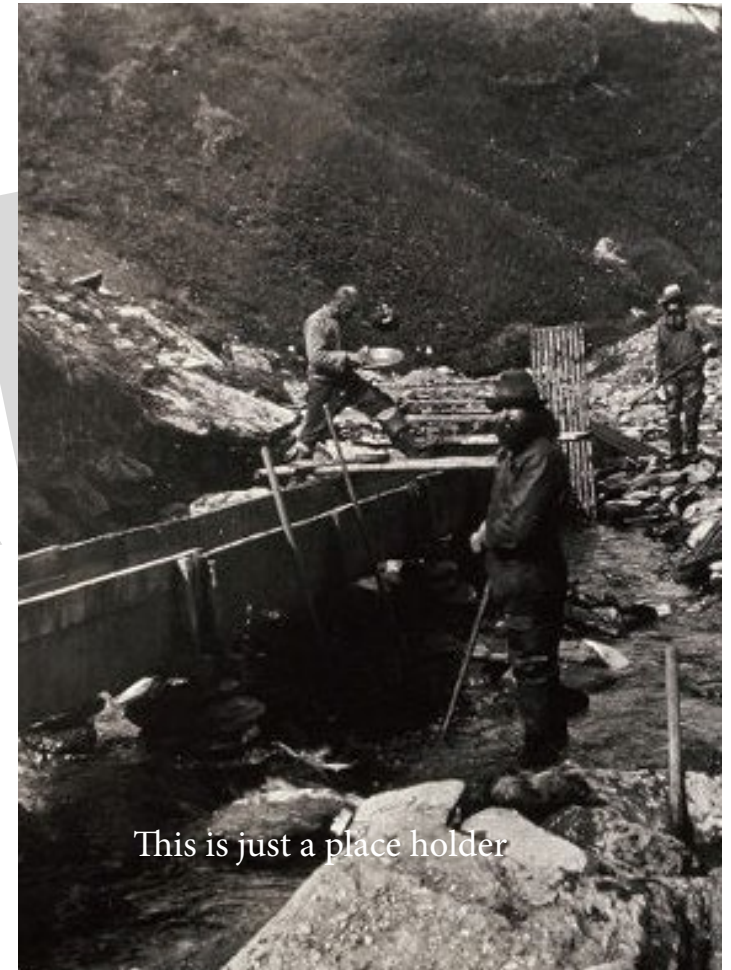
Disease

The introduction of diseases such as smallpox and influenza had devastating effects on indigenous populations. The 1836-1840 smallpox epidemic ravaged the Dena'ina population, which was reduced by nearly 50 percent by the time the U.S. purchased Alaska in 1867 (Langdon 2002). A second devastating epidemic of influenza followed around 1917, with other waves of diseases such as mumps reported in between. Every outbreak of a new disease was devastating because it was the first time the population had ever been exposed to that pathogen. A similar epidemic has not been experienced in modern memory; over half of the indigenous population of coastal Alaska died in one generation. These losses fundamentally altered village life and led to population consolidations in places like Tyonek and Eklutna (Langdon, 2002).

Early American Settlement

Following the 1867 Alaska Purchase, American settlers introduced a new wave of cultural, economic, and legal systems. Despite their deep local knowledge, Alaska Natives were regularly disenfranchised, as they could not become American citizens until 1915, and not universally until 1924. This led to them also being excluded from land claims and homesteading. The Alaska Native Allotment Act of 1906 provided restricted land titles (meaning the land could not be sold or leased) on up to 160 acres, but only 80 allotments were approved between 1906-1960 across the entire territory/state (Early settlement in the Mat-Su was characterized by cooperation as well as inequality, with many Natives aiding newcomers while being denied land ownership and voting rights (Fall, 1987). In 1926, Congress passed the Alaska Native Townsite Act, which granted was Early settlement in the Mat-Su was characterized by cooperation as well as inequality, with many Natives aiding newcomers while being denied fee simple land ownership and voting rights (Fall 1987).

The population in the Mat-Su region from 1900 until the establishment of the Matanuska Colony in 1935 was small by any standard, but larger than many imagine or give it credit for. Several thousand short-term residents flocked to the Susitna drainage during the gold rush, and Knik boasted a population of around 500 by 1915. Records from the Bureau of Land Management for the area between Palmer and Wasilla show that a large amount of land had already been homesteaded well before the Colony project. The histories of many early townsites associated with mining and railroad construction begin in this era, including Eska, Jonesville, Willow, the defunct town of



This is just a place holder

WESTERN EXPLORATION IN THE MAT-SU REGION

The full scope of non-governmental early European and American exploration is largely a mystery, and the few records we do have emphasize how much we don't know. Organized Dene and Alutiiq resistance to Russian exploration in the 1780s ensured that the Russians never established permanent settlements in Upper Cook Inlet, but they did send occasional exploration parties. The Lebedev-Lastochkin Company, which controlled fortified trading posts at Kachemak Bay and at Kenai, sent expeditions up the Matanuska River to Tazlina with varying degrees of success in 1794, 1803, and the 1840s (Grinev 1993).

Especially during the early American era, many known accounts of explorers refer to surprising encounters with other individuals prodding around the edges of the modern Mat-Su Borough. For instance, the 1898 party led by O. G. Herning, credited with striking the first placer gold in the Hatcher Pass region at Grubstake Gulch, in fact encountered five men, whose stories are lost to history, already working the area (Naugatuck Daily News 1898). Other names such as 'Hatcher' and 'Bartholf' are still associated with the region, though not many modern current residents know the stories of the individuals behind those names.

Interest in the Mat-Su region increased with the discovery of gold in the late 19th century. Early government expeditions, including those led by Captain Edwin Glenn in 1898 and 1899, explored potential travel corridors into Alaska's interior. These missions mapped key river systems and mountain passes with the help of Native guides and were instrumental in opening the

region to further exploration and eventual settlement (Brooks 1907). Later government exploration primarily focused on mapping at ever-increasing levels of detail in support of private resource development. To this end, the U.S. Geological Survey did more work to explore the Mat-Su Borough than any other government agency, producing dozens of maps and technical assessments for the areas where resource prospectors showed interest (Brooks 1907).

In 1910, Congress directed a public land survey across Alaska, dividing the land into townships measured by common meridians. The Bureau of Land Management surveyed the finer details of those townships, which enabled legal descriptions of land and helped establish private land ownership. By 1920, the U.S. Geological Survey had written dozens of reports specifically about exploration in the Mat-Su. Survey work by agencies such as the Alaska Engineering Commission and the Alaska Road Commission supported the railway and highway construction described under the Transportation themes in this chapter. Exploration of the Mat-Su Borough by different levels of government continues today largely in a scientific sense, and involves tools like satellites, numerous radar techniques, and aerial photography.



This is just a place holder

MODERN INFLUENCES: PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT & DEMOGRAPHY ACROSS THE MAT-SU

The demographic and cultural landscape of the Mat-Su Borough region changed significantly during the 20th century. Major developments such as the construction of the Alaska Railroad and the establishment of the Matanuska Colony contributed to the formation of key population centers, first at Knik, then in Wasilla and Palmer. Although the Mat-Su Borough has had limited direct military infrastructure, nearby military developments have influenced the region. Military roads and airfields constructed during World War II contributed to local economic growth and helped establish long-term connectivity.

Post-World War II investments and infrastructure, such as the Parks Highway and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), spurred further growth (Hunsinger, Howell, & Sandberg, 2012). Along with these major infrastructure projects, the continued availability of homesteading greatly increased the amount of private landownership in the region in the early and mid-20th century and continues to influence how land is developed.

These developments led to a rapid population increase, especially from the 1970s onward. While the population of Anchorage has stabilized or declined in recent decades, the Mat-Su has experienced continual growth, reflecting its increasing role as a commuter and residential area for Southcentral Alaska. One notable demographic shift is the recent increase in the percentage of the population over 65 years old, suggesting that more people are choosing to spend their retirement years here.



DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAT-SU ECONOMY

The residents and visitors in this region have produced, created, and traded since the beginning of human occupation. The early economy revolved around food, furs, and skilled crafted goods with additional imports from a widespread ancient trade network. In the American era, the introduction of a cash-based economy with a foundation based on bulk natural resource extraction led us to the lifestyles, settlements, and transportation patterns we see today. Understanding how people made, and continue to make, a living in this part of Alaska is useful for understanding a more comprehensive history of the Borough.

The Dena'ina and Ahtna both particularly benefited from trade due to their locations as gatekeepers between their fellow Dene neighbors in the Interior to oceangoing cultures. The Ahtna controlled the Copper River and trade from Eyak and Tlingit sources, while the Dena'ina occupied a unique position as the only coastal Athabascans and controlled the flow of goods such as furs and copper from Yupik peoples of the Alaska Peninsula and Outer Kenai Coast. When Europeans initially arrived, they did not set up new trade systems; they slotted themselves into the existing system. British and Russian ships bartered for goods in Cook Inlet in the same way that any other visitor would, and the Alaska Commercial Company store at Knik was strategically located on the well-established trade route. Not until the 1880s would the transition to a cash economy, and the introduction of large volumes of industrially manufactured goods begin to challenge the traditional trade system.



Hunting & Trapping

For any human hoping to live in the Mat-Su and not be utterly reliant on imported food and clothing, the skills of catching, killing, and processing wild game into meat and useful materials are indispensable. The Dena'ina, Ahtna, Alutiiq, and other Native cultures of Alaska each learned to use the species within their territories to the fullest, and furs and other animal products were the primary commodity in the trade networks described in the previous section. The Russians and the English, along with the Spanish and French to a lesser degree, considered furs the most lucrative trade good the North Pacific offered, and explored the region in hopes of dominating the fur market in Asia and Europe. Decades before gold rushes and salmon canneries, that fur trade was what first attracted year-round American residents to Upper Cook Inlet and the edges of what is now the Mat-Su Borough. During the Russian era the records of the Lebedev-Lastochkin Company trading posts at Kenai and Kodiak indicate a one-man trading outpost operated for a couple of seasons somewhere in the Matanuska region, but it was not until the after the purchase of Alaska Territory that the Alaska Commercial Company was the first to establish a permanent store in Upper Cook Inlet, at Knik in 1886 (Oswalt 1967). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the fur trade and big-game hunting became significant economic activities for both Indigenous residents and newcomers. American trappers and hunters used established Native trails and waterways to access remote areas, supplying regional and global markets while supporting roadhouses and transportation networks

(Potter 1967). Trapping remained an important seasonal livelihood well into the territorial period.

While not widespread in the Mat-Su region, some fur farming also occurred. In the boom years of the 1920s, records can be found of fox and mink farms on Montana Creek, Caswell Lakes, and in Wasilla. The Matanuska Minkery in Wasilla was an early source for start-ups to purchase breeding pairs of the mustelids around 1925, and the Susitna Mink Breeders Association formed in 1930. Gerrit 'Heinie' Snider's ambitious and professional mink operation was also located in Wasilla, boasting of a "\$1000 mink shipment" in a 1929 photograph. Snider's operation was one of the largest in Alaska, and he managed to stay in business through the Great Depression (Isto 2012). The last fur farm in the Mat-Su Borough closed in 1988.

Mining

Mining played a defining role in the early settlement and transportation development of the Mat Su Borough. Gold discoveries in the Mat-Su occurred toward the end of a series of gold rushes that had rippled westward across the United States throughout the 1800s before pushing north into Alaska. Early strikes around Sixmile Canyon, and Resurrection creeks fueled the rise of the boomtown of Sunrise in 1895 and Hope in 1896, soon moving across Turnagain Arm to Crow Creek near Girdwood and Indian Creek. As gold became harder to find in those areas, prospectors gradually moved north-

ward, exploring the Susitna, Knik, and Matanuska river valleys. Within the following decade, waves of miners struck gold in each of the three major districts that define mining history in the Mat Su: The Willow Creek, Yentna, and Valdez Creek gold districts. The Willow Creek Gold District, encompassing what is now known as Hatcher Pass, was organized in 1898 and yielded the first major gold production in the Mat-Su. Orville G. Herning and a crew working for the Klondike & Boston Company established the district's first large-scale operation and helped bring national attention to the area, although independent prospectors had already been working there for several years. While early placer mining declined, the district surged after 1906 when Robert Hatcher discovered quartz gold at his Skyscraper Claim, later incorporated into Independence Mine. The following decade brought rapid development, including the Fern, Lucky Shot, Mabel, and Gold Cord mines. Production peaked during the 1920s and 1930s, and by 1940 Willow Creek ranked as the third-largest lode gold district in Alaska—a position it would maintain until major discoveries near Fairbanks several decades later. Like most gold mining operations in Alaska, Willow Creek mines were shut down during World War II after War Production Board Order L-208 classified gold mining as a non-essential industry. Although far less well known, the Valdez Creek Gold District ultimately produced a volume of gold production of the railroad, could be shipped to markets in state and beyond.

The legacy of mining remains highly visible in the Mat Su landscape through historic districts, abandoned infrastructure, altered waterways, and transportation routes that later supported agriculture, recreation, and settlement. Independence Mine State Historical Park in Hatcher Pass stands out as a destination to explore mining history. Overall, mining shaped the Borough's growth patterns and remains a foundational theme in its historic development and identity.

Farming and Homesteading

Farming and homesteading developed together in the Mat-Su Borough and remain central to the identity of communities such as Palmer and Point MacKenzie, even though agriculture has historically supported only a limited number of full-time families. The Borough contains some of Alaska's most productive farmland and has long dominated statewide agricultural output, despite soils, climate, and growing conditions that remain marginal by national standards (Stone 1950; Burton 1971). Interest in farming increased between 1911 and 1914 as gold strikes, coal claims, and federal surveys attracted settlers to the region. Some homesteaders arrived with the intention of farming, while others turned to agriculture after unsuccessful prospecting. By 1915, local production had grown enough to create challenges with storage, marketing, and seed supply, leading to the formation of the Matanuska Farmer's Association and the

construction of shared root cellar facilities (Burton 1971). Transportation improvements, particularly the arrival of the Alaska Railroad, expanded access to markets and increased local demand for agricultural products. Federal concern over crop viability and profitability led to the establishment of the Matanuska Experimental Farm in 1917 to test crops and livestock suited to Alaska's climate and support a self-sustaining agricultural economy (Brooks 1907).

During the New Deal, the federal government launched the Matanuska Colony Project in 1935, relocating 204 Midwestern families to government-planned farms near Palmer. Administered by the Alaska Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, the project provided land, buildings, and credit but faced challenges including unfinished infrastructure, limited farming experience among colonists, and competition for the most fertile lands. Within a few years, approximately sixty percent of the original colonists left the project (MVM).

While the Colony succeeded as a relief and settlement experiment, it had limited long term impact on agricultural livelihoods. By 1948, only a small number of colony families earned most of their income from farming (Stone 1950). Commercial agriculture expanded more significantly after World War II, supported by population growth, military investment, and research through the Palmer Agricultural Research Station. Agriculture

peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s, when the Mat Su produced most of Alaska's crops, livestock, and dairy products (Burton 1971).

By the late 1970s, rising land values, suburban development, and new employment opportunities led to declining agricultural use and the subdivision of many former farms. Homesteading and farming nonetheless laid the foundation for settlement patterns, land ownership, and community development that continue to shape the Borough today.

Tourism and Outdoor Recreation

Tourism and outdoor recreation in the Mat Su Borough developed gradually from transportation access, exploration, and settlement, rather than through deliberate early promotion. The same rivers, trails, rail corridors, and highways that supported mining, homesteading, and military activities also introduced visitors to the region's scenic landscapes and recreational opportunities. In the late 1800s and early 1900s American, English, and German sportsmen traveled to Alaska for trophy moose, bear, and sheep. The Kenai Peninsula received the bulk of the traffic in that era, but the Knik River became a destination for Dall sheep.

Many Alaska Native men provided guiding services to the hunters, using their traditional skills and deep knowledge of the landscape. Jim Nikita, the namesake of Jim Creek on the Knik River, guided the first recorded Knik River hunting expedition. Harry Hicks and his Dena'ina brother-in-law, Billy, also formed a successful guiding duo. Aside from guiding, the Dena'ina found work supplying meat to settlements and work crews, and from selling furs and gear like mittens, parkas, and snowshoes. By the 1920s and 1930s, guides such as Lee Waddell (1890-1950) and Arthur Allen "Tex" Cobb (1872-1962) were bringing out-of-state clients up the Knik River and into the local mountains. Cobb was a true jack-of-all-trades - a guide, trapper, and homesteader who settled near Matanuska in the 1920s and had a successful ranch by the time the Matanuska Colonists arrived.

The arrival of the Alaska Railroad in the early twentieth century expanded access and brought visitors to lakes, rivers, and alpine areas near population centers such as Wasilla and Palmer. Professional guiding developed alongside mining, railroad construction, and increased access to the Interior. By the mid-twentieth century, guided hunting trips were drawing non-resident visitors to the Mat-Su, particularly for moose, sheep, and bear. Guides, roadhouses, and seasonal lodging developed informally along transportation routes to serve travelers and sportsmen (Potter 1967). Along with hunting, the

allure of climbing the tallest peak in North America has attracted adventurers for over 100 years. In 1954, Don Sheldon flew the first commercial flight from Talkeetna to the Kahiltna Glacier to take climbers to base camp; this continues to be the most common way to access and climb Denali (www.nps.gov). Although Denali, a Koyukon Athabascan word meaning "the tall one" or "the great one", lies just outside of the Mat-Su Borough boundary, Talkeetna has served as a base for mountaineering expeditions since the mid-Twentieth century and helped turn it into a tourism and outdoor recreation destination.

After World War II, improved highways, population growth near Anchorage, and increased automobile ownership drove a sharp rise in recreational use. Aviation also significantly expanded guiding operations by allowing rapid access to remote drainages and mountain areas (Bowers 2012). Activities expanded through time to include camping, backpacking, motorized and non-motorized boating, hiking, skiing, snowmachining, and mountaineering, with areas such as Hatcher Pass gaining regional recognition.

By the late twentieth century, state parks, trail systems, and private guiding and lodging businesses reflected the growing economic role of tourism and recreation. Today, outdoor recreation is central to the Mat Su Borough's identity and economy, including being branded as

the "stillwater fishing capital of Alaska" thanks to its extensive and accessible lake systems filled with wild and stocked fish populations (Mat-Su Borough 2009). Ongoing planning efforts seek to balance recreational access with protection of historic resources, cultural sites, wildlife habitat, and scenic landscapes that have drawn visitors to the region for more than a century.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS IN THE MAT-SU

Fundamentally, all transportation routes connect places that humans see value in and are motivated to visit. Two considerations have guided the development of human transportation networks: where are people motivated to go, and what technology do they have to get there? The previous sections of this chapter outlined the major resources that current and past generations of this region have been motivated to access. The transportation networks described in this section were all created, expanded, and in some cases abandoned in response to those motivations, guided by the transportation technology of the time.

Early transportation networks in the Mat-Su were made up of a system of integrated trails and waterways. Alaska Natives used these routes for thousands of years, and when Europeans and Russians entered the region, they adopted many of the routes and applied new technologies including steam ships and wagons. As the non-Native population increased, some routes were improved, while new networks, like rail and roads, were built. Air-based travel “took off” immediately following World War I, and Alaska, including the Mat-Su Borough, has emerged as a global leader in innovation and use of private aircraft.



Trails and Waterways

Trails and waterways formed the earliest transportation system in the Mat-Su Borough and functioned as a single, integrated network. The region is exceptionally water-rich, shaped by major river systems including the Susitna and Matanuska rivers and extensive wetlands and lakes that dictated travel routes long before road or rail development (Brooks 1907; Potter 1967).

Because these waterways are generally shallow, fast-flowing, and frozen for much of the year, they served as seasonal corridors. Rivers supported canoes and shallow-draft boats during summer and became frozen travel routes for foot traffic and dog teams in winter. Overland trails developed alongside waterways to connect river systems, bypass lowland wetlands, and provide access where water travel was not feasible (Potter 1967).

Dene people established the foundational trail network, connecting villages, fish camps, hunting areas, and interior trade routes. The importance of these corridors is reflected in place names: the Dena'ina and Ahtna names for the Matanuska River—Ch'atanhtnu and Ts'itohhna'—translate to “Trail Comes Out River,” underscoring its role as a major connection between Cook Inlet and the Interior (Kari and Fall 2016).

Early American exploration, the fur trade, and settlement relied heavily on these established routes. Gold and coal discoveries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries drove rapid expansion and improvement of the trail system. Existing footpaths were widened or paralleled along higher, drier ground to support pack animals, sleds, and wagons, creating routes such as the Herning (Willow Winter Sled) Trail and access trails to the Yentna and Nelchina Susitna mining districts (Martin and Mertie 1914; Cole and O'Hara 1985). The system of trails extended north as gold fields were discovered in the Talkeetna Mountains and Yentna River drainage. When gold was found along the Innoko River in 1906, a new trail was blazed for the dog teams – the Iditarod Trail.

The newly formed Alaska Road Commission was charged with establishing a through trail from Seward to Nome in 1908, to connect the interior gold fields and early military posts to tidewater ports and navigable streams. That same year, gold was discovered at Iditarod Creek, and the new town of Iditarod sprang up as thousands of prospectors flooded the region. The Iditarod Trail followed portions of old Russian trails and some Alaska Native trails. Beginning in January of 1908, W.L. Goodwin and a three-man crew scouted and blazed a trail from Seward to Susitna Station, then west over Rainy Pass and across the Kuskokwim Valley to the Innoko Mining District, and the towns of Ophir,

McGrath, and Takotna. The trail was used every winter through the World War I era and well into the 1920's, with parts of it being used as late as the 1940's. The inevitable end for the Iditarod and other long distance winter sled trails in Alaska was brought by the airplane. The first airmail in Alaska was flown in 1924 from Fairbanks to McGrath by legendary aviator Carl Ben Eielson, and the use of airplanes rapidly spread throughout the territory (Bowers 2012).

Waterborne transport remained critical into the early twentieth century, with Knik serving as a transfer point between ocean traffic and inland routes. Large infrastructure projects such as Jack Dalton's Chickaloon-Knik Trail blurred the distinction between trails and roads and directly informed later highway alignments (Potter 1967). Many of these early corridors evolved into modern transportation routes or remain in use today as recreational land and water trails.

Dog Mushing

Dog mushing became the primary form of winter transportation in the Mat-Su during the gold rush era of the late 1890s through the 1910s. Thousands of sled dogs were imported to move miners, mail, freight, and gold between ports, mining districts, and interior communities (Potter 1967). Development of the Iditarod Trail beginning in 1908 connected Seward, the Matanuska-Susitna region, and the Innoko gold fields, forming a statewide sled-trail system (Bowers 2012).

The years between the construction of the Iditarod Trail and the railroad were the peak of mushing as a practical activity in the Mat-Su. In November of 1911, O.G. Herning noted in his diaries that 120 mushers passed through Knik in a single day (Mielke 2011). Fragile freight such as eggs and oranges road the trails. Dog teams became famous for their speed and ability to deliver mail, gold, and passengers on time. The sizes of the dog teams also grew. One of Herning's last entries before moving his store to Wasilla was on December 31, 1916, in which he wrote "3,400 pounds of gold came through Knik hauled by 46 dogs." It was, however, one of the last teams through Knik. The gold was offloaded in Wasilla onto the Railroad, soon to be the new gold route from the northern fields to the open port of Seward (Mielke 2011). The legacy of this era continues through recreational mushing and the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, which officially starts from Willow in early March.

Roads

One of the earliest roads in what is now the core urbanized area of the Mat-Su Valley was the Carle Wagon Road, built in 1909, that ran from Knik to the gold fields east of Hatcher Pass. The road was the product of frustrated miners in the quartz mining district who passed the hat to finance a decent road. J.S. Carle put in \$2,500, with the Bartolfs donating \$1,200; the final tally between all the miners for upgrades on the road over the next several years came to approximately \$50,000 (Cohen 1982). After much lobbying from local miners, the Alaska Road Commission upgraded the road to all-weather access in 1912. Later road improvements were completed to support government efforts promoting homesteading and farming opportunities in the Mat-Su. The much-improved road provided secure access to available land for new homesteaders, who flocked to the region. Eventually, parts of this early road were paved as the Knik-Goose Bay Road and Fishhook Road (Coghlan 2016).

The Alaska Road Commission, established in 1905 by the Department of War, constructed several roads in the first decades of the century, establishing many of the arterial roads in the greater Palmer-Wasilla area. To help allocate limited resources, a petition system was created so residents as they often had a better understanding of where roads would be most useful, could lobby the commission to prioritize specific projects (Mead and Hunt 2014). For example, what is now the Palmer-Fishhook Road originally had its start when the residents of

Knik circulated a petition to construct a connecting road from mile 25 of the Carle Wagon Road to the Matanuska River (Knik News 1914). The Palmer-Wasilla Highway, Trunk Road, and the Willow-Fishhook Road to Hatcher Pass are other early Road Commission projects. By 1934, the Alaska Road Commission was responsible for grading and maintaining roughly 100 miles of road that cut across the Mat-Su and was beginning to think about links to neighboring communities.

Soon after the survey of the Palmer Townsite in 1936, the Anchorage-Palmer Highway was completed, serving as the first major road out of the Matanuska Valley. The last major engineering hurdle was the bridge over the Knik River, which was completed in 1937 and opened with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The Anchorage-Palmer Highway is now known as the Old Glenn Highway. The two modern highways through the Mat-Su, the Glenn and the Parks Highways, were completed as population grew throughout World War 2 and the Cold War, and the federal government began to see Alaska as a strategic asset for the Pacific. The eastern end of the Glenn Highway, from Glennallen to Caribou Creek, was blazed by Harry Heintz of Slana with pack horses and a bulldozer on behalf of the Alaska Road Commission in 1939 and 1940. In the following years, the entire section to Palmer was expanded into an unpaved pioneer road by Federal crews, who built a spur north to Lake Louise for an Army recreation site. The Glenn Highway was first paved in the early 1950s. The Parks Highway is even more recent, reaching Talkeetna in 1964, bridging the Susitna in 1968, and finally connecting to Fairbanks in 1971.

Railroads

Construction of the railroad in 1915 contributed to the demise of Knik and the emergence of new commercial hubs (Matanuska Susitna Borough, 1985). The following year a rail spur had crossed the Knik and Matanuska rivers, reaching the Matanuska Wishbone Hill coal resources, and by 1917 iron was laid as far as Wasilla (Potter 1967). Tent camps followed the rails north as construction crews laid the tracks.

The City of Wasilla was established at a railroad encampment between Lake Wasilla and Lake Lucille at the crossing of the Carle Wagon Road with the railroad. The townsite of Matanuska was platted at the intersection of the mainline and the Matanuska spur. The abandonment of Knik had begun with the announcement of the railroad route in 1915, and the creation of those townsites in 1917 caused the few remaining merchants in Knik to pack up and move to Wasilla, or to Anchorage.

As the tracks moved north toward Fairbanks, new hamlets were built along the way as homesteaders claimed lands cleared by the railroad workers. Each small hamlet became a hub from which trails radiated out to various placer and Quartz mining operations and, later, recreational areas. Passengers traveling north on the railroad today may see signs identifying places along the route north through the Mat-Su. Some of them have blossomed into communities while others are just an outpost or a name along the tracks. Heading north from Wasilla, they are as follows: Pittman, Big Lake, Houston, Willow, Kashwitna, Sunshine, Talkeetna, Chase, Curry,

Sherman, Gold Creek, Canyon, Chulitna, Hurricane, Honolulu, Colorado, Broad Pass and Summit. Although Trapper Creek is not on the railroad, it too dates to construction of the railroad. The small community located across the Susitna River from Talkeetna was an important hub that serviced the mines in the Peters Creek, Cache-Creek gold mining district after the abandonment of Knik. Construction of the railroad was completed in 1923, establishing what we now call 'The Railbelt', running from Seward in the south to Fairbanks in the north.

Aviation

Alaska is an ideal location for aviation. Huge stretches of wilderness and relatively few roads that access the far reaches of the large state combine to make flying an appealing form of transportation.

"No matter how you figure it- by number of aircraft, number of pilots, number of passengers, or amount of cargo - Alaska is the flyingest state in the Union on a per capita basis."

-FAA Pamphlet, 1962

Anchorage established itself early as the hub of flying in southcentral Alaska, with airstrips first downtown at Delaney Park from 1923-1930 and later at Merrill Field. Noel Wien, Russ Merrill, Frank Dorbandt, Ben Eielson,

and Joe Crosson were early pioneers in the new industry. Most of their commercial activity supported trappers and fur farmers, prospectors, and big game hunters throughout Alaska, including the Mat-Su region. Shipping goods by airplanes became a lucrative business in Alaska.

Residents of the Mat-Su were accustomed to lengthy distances and rough travel conditions between towns and to and from mining districts. It is no surprise, then, that given the opportunity to greatly reduce travel times, many residents embraced the airplane. The first airstrips to be built in the Mat-Su were in Cache Creek in the early 1920s and Willow in 1925. These facilities, like the strip in Petersville (1936), were used to support the mining districts of Willow, Moose Creek, and Cache Creek. By the 1930s, nearly every community and camp in the Mat-Su had an airstrip. The community strip in Talkeetna (1939) and later the larger airport (1951) not only supplied remote mining outposts but also provided support for mail delivery and passenger services. Beginning in the mid-1940s, Cliff Hudson and Don Sheldon were based out of Talkeetna to ferry mountaineers, scientists, and photographers to Denali (Redding 2002).

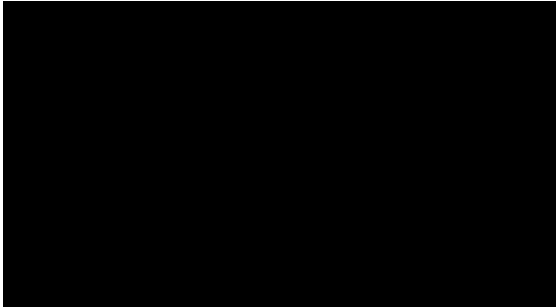
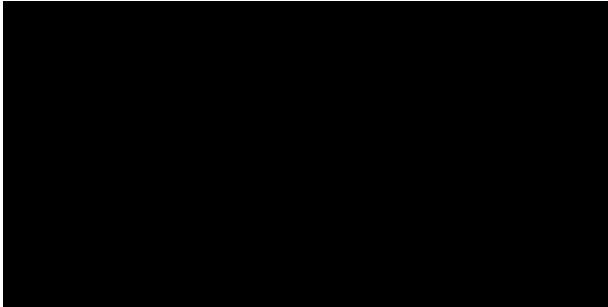
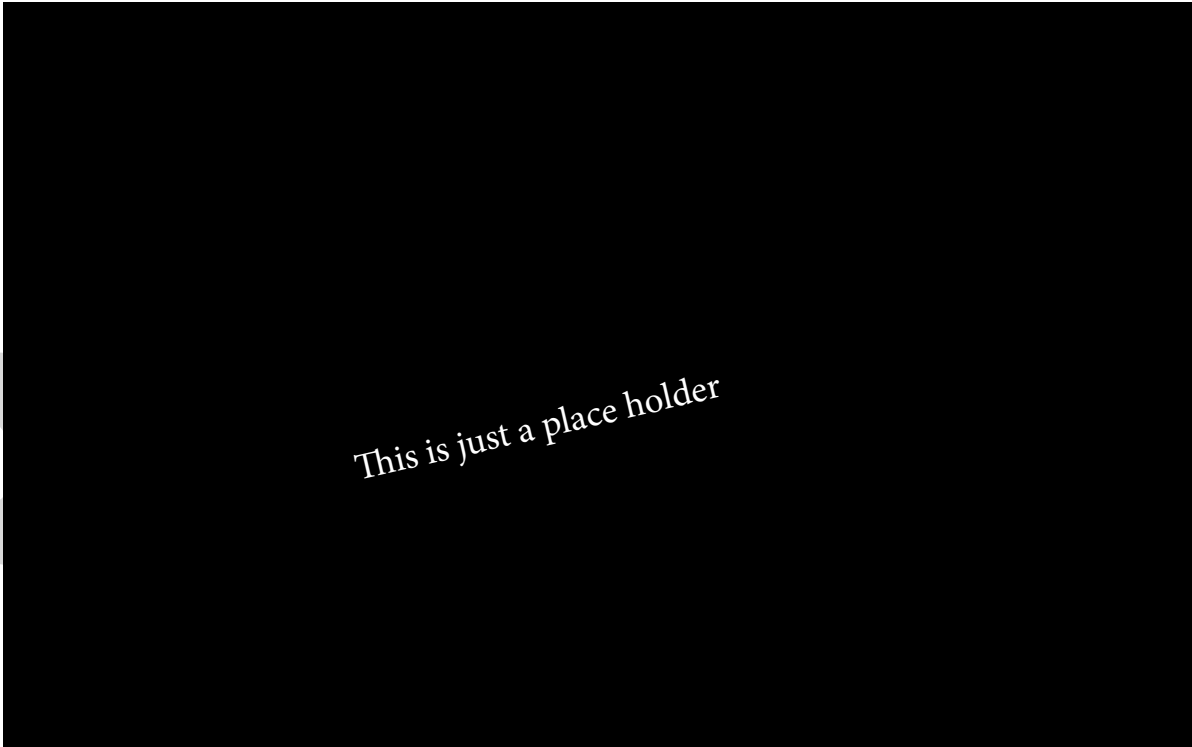
Today, there are 133 registered airfields in the Borough, not to mention the thousands of lakes, glaciers, and gravel bars known to pilots. The aviation history of the Borough is rich, and the constant sight of aircraft in the sky throughout the year shows that travel by small plane continues to be a significant method of travel to reach remote, roadless places.

SHAPING THE GOVERNANCE LANDSCAPE

Local Governments

After decades of development and growth through mining and agricultural activities, Palmer became the first incorporated city, and first formal local government, in the Mat-Su region in 1951. After Alaska became the 49th state in 1959, work began to establish a system of local governments across the state. The unit of regional government written into the State Constitution was called a 'borough' – deliberately setting them apart from the 'counties' of the Lower 48. Article 10 of the Constitution of the State of Alaska, Local Government, includes key clauses describing the vision for the boroughs in Section 3.

In February 1963, the Alaska Legislature passed the 'Mandatory Borough Act', which was signed into law by Governor Egan. The Act required the most populous regions of the state – the Mat-Su, along with Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak Island, Juneau, Sitka, and Ketchikan, to promptly hold local elections and establish a first or second-class borough by the beginning of 1964. Within the Mat-Su, two competing proposals were developed. In May 1963 a petition circulated calling for a Mat-Su Borough with essentially the boundaries it has today, which was the most popular design among Mat-Su residents. A second proposal called for a 'Captain Cook Borough', with a boundary including both Anchorage and the Mat-Su. Neither one was approved by voters before time ran out.



Having failed to establish a Borough by local action, the Mat-Su Borough was automatically defined using the existing boundaries. On December 18, 1963, the Mat-Su Borough Assembly and School Board held their first meeting. The Mat-Su Borough was officially incorporated in 1964, with Palmer as the government seat. Palmer evolved into the hub for federal, state and borough government.

The other two incorporated cities in the Mat-Su Borough, Houston and Wasilla, were incorporated in 1966 and 1974, respectively. Houston began as a transportation center along the Herning Trail and then the Alaska Railroad. It was first incorporated as a third-class city in 1966 and then re-classified as a second-class city in 1973. Wasilla also sprung up as a transportation hub when construction of the railroad reached the area in 1916-1917. Wasilla grew quickly as businesses and residents from Knik moved east to the new settlement, joined by new residents working for or supplying the railroad's needs. It would be another fifty years, however, before Wasilla became a second-class city and then, in 1984, reclassified as a first-class city.

ANCSA, ANILCA, and Tribal Governance

When the United States purchased Alaska in 1867, Alaska Natives were excluded from citizenship and land ownership under American law. Early federal legislation, including the Organic Act of 1884, acknowledged Native use and occupancy of land but deferred any clear mechanism for establishing legal title.

"Indians or other persons in said district shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use or occupation or now claimed by them, but the terms under which such persons may acquire title to such lands is reserved for future legislation by Congress"
(First Organic Act 1884).

As mentioned earlier, there were significant barriers to Native land ownership. The first opportunity the Dene and other indigenous inhabitants of Alaska were given to own land was the Alaska Native Allotment Act passed by Congress in 1906 (Ch. 2469, 34 Stat. 197), but on top of the hurdles of language barriers and accessing surveys and legal representation, the homesteading requirements were substantially incompatible with Dene lifestyles in the Mat-Su or with other traditional subsistence practices across Alaska. Only 80 allotments in the entire state were approved under the Act between 1906 and 1960.

Federal legislation in the mid 20th century, including the amended Indian Reorganization Act (1936), enabled tribal self governance, but Alaska Statehood in 1959 left unresolved Native land claims. The modern framework for Alaska Native land ownership and governance was established with passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) in 1971. ANCSA extinguished aboriginal land claims in exchange for title to approximately 44 million acres and financial compensation, conveyed through newly created Alaska Native regional and village corporations owned by Native shareholders. In the Mat Su Borough, village corporations

include Chickaloon Moose Creek Native Association and Knikatu, Incorporated, while the Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated (CIRI) serves as the regional corporation. These corporations manage land and economic interests and support shareholder services. The CIRI Foundation, established in 1982 by the CIRI Board of Directors, serves as the regional non-profit association and provides scholarships and heritage project grants among other services.

Tribal governments, operating independently from ANCSA corporations, were established to provide local governance through federally recognized tribal councils, based on the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (as amended in 1936). Chickaloon Village Traditional Council, which Tribal Elders re-established in 1973 "to reassert the Tribe's identity, cultural traditions, economic self-sufficiency and to reunify our citizens", was federally recognized in 1982 (Chickaloon Native Village 2018). The Knik Tribal Council was formally recognized in 1989. These organizations provide governmental services, administer programs, and maintain cultural continuity for their communities. Although the Native communities of Native Village of Tyonek (federally recognized in 1939) and the Native Village of Eklutna (federally recognized in 1982) lie outside the present day boundaries of the Matanuska Susitna Borough, they are also deeply connected to the Mat Su region through shared history, culture, and long standing use of regional lands and waterways.

A Patchwork of Meaning: Place Naming in the Mat-Su Borough

Place names throughout the Mat-Su Borough, whether those of natural features or human-created places, reflect the people and events throughout the region's history. Some place names reflect land features that were prominent several thousand years ago, while others like roads and buildings reflect development and change within the last half century or less. Many places have been named and renamed throughout history; in fact, many places often continue to retain multiple names. Even the modern jurisdictional name "Matanuska-Susitna Borough" carries layers of this history, combining Dena'ina, Ahtna, Russian and English languages in a single phrase that suggests at a complex story of contact, translation, and settlement.

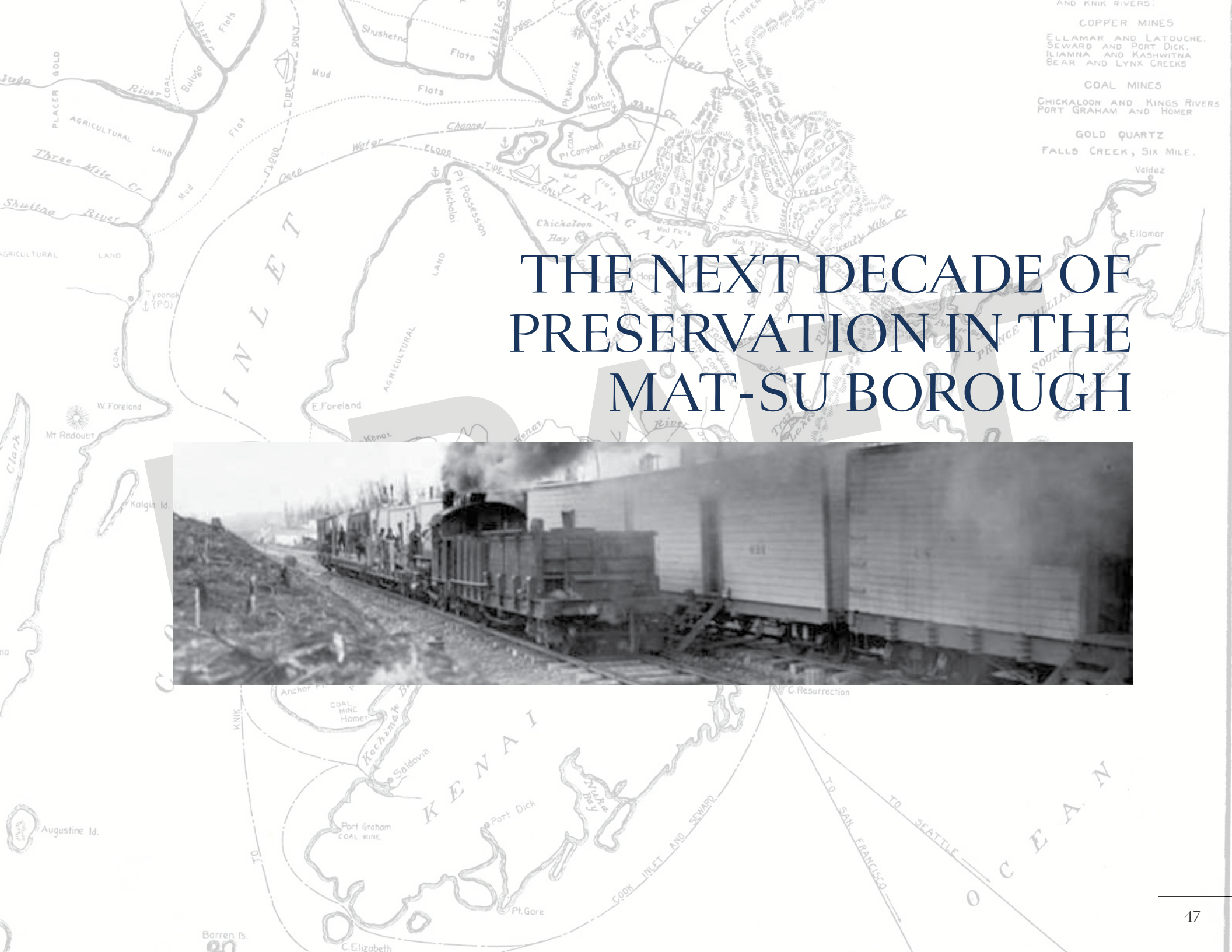
As Euro-American and American settlement accelerated in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many Mat-Su place names were established through practical use and then cemented by maps, postal records, railroad timetables, and government land surveys. Newcomers often reused Indigenous travel corridors but applied names that reflected their own 'discovery' during mining rushes, homesteaders and merchants, transportation infrastructure, or prominent officials and explorers. Just as often, names emerged informally at roadhouses, rail sidings, and river landings and later became "official" through repeated local use. In many cases, Indigenous names and later settler names continued side by side, used in different contexts and by different communities, rather than

one fully replacing the other. This process produced the familiar patchwork seen today, where community names (*Palmer, Wasilla, Talkeetna, Sutton, and Willow*) sit alongside landscape and recreation destinations tied to settlement-era activity and boosters—Knik and the Old Knik Townsite, Hatcher Pass and the Independence Mine area, the Susitna and Matanuska river corridors, and places like Big Lake and Houston that grew with rail and road connectivity.

While many familiar names reflect explorers, settlers, and developers who came to the area in the past 150 years, little is known about exploration of the Mat-Su by Alaska Natives prior to the arrival of Europeans, like the exact dates and the names of the first people to reach a certain point. One reason that Alaska Native cultures place less emphasis on feats of individual exploration and very rarely named geographic features after individuals. We can be confident that the Dene and Alutiiq extensively explored the landscape they could access, based on evidence discussed earlier, as well as geographic names referencing resources which can only be seen up close, such as Ggigajit'in K'ilant ("Where There is Pyrite," at the west end of Bald Mountain Ridge). Other names for certain mountains such as Qununahch'dghashjuy ("That which we go up to watch," a mountain north of Chulitna Pass) confirm that the Dene did not confine themselves to the easy terrain (*Kari and Fall 2003*).



This is just a place holder



COPPER MINES
ELLAMAR AND LATOUCHE.
SEWARD AND PORT DICK.
ILIAMNA AND KASHWITNA
BEAR AND LYNX CREEKS

COAL MINES
CHICKALOON AND KINGS RIVERS
PORT GRAHAM AND HOMER

GOLD QUARTZ
FALLS CREEK, SIX MILE.

THE NEXT DECADE OF PRESERVATION IN THE MAT-SU BOROUGH



Vision, Goals, Objectives, and Strategies for 2026-2036

While the goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in this plan are modest and focused on achievable actions within the next decade, numerous opportunities for additional funding exist that could support more comprehensive versions of these goals.

Community members who advocate for historic preservation, whether as part of organizations or groups, or as individuals are encouraged to contact the Mat-Su Planning Division or the Mat-Su Historic Preservation Commission for further information or guidance. To support preservation efforts, these entities can advise on local and individual incentives, such as low-interest loans and small grants.

The Mat-Su region features a distinctive and remarkable history that resonates with both Alaskans and visitors alike. This plan aims to ensure the continued success of the CLG grant program, which provides essential funding for preservation initiatives shaped by community input.

Purpose of the Plan

To protect, share, and celebrate the cultures, histories, and special places of the Mat-Su Borough.

Vision

A vision statement is a forward-thinking statement that describes what we want to achieve in our future. It says where we want to go and how we plan to get there. The MSB Historical Preservation Commission (HPC) drafted the Vision for Historic Preservation through several rounds of public and stakeholder outreach. Public meetings provided stakeholders and the public with opportunities to learn about ongoing preservation planning efforts and to help define the vision, mission, goals, and objectives that will shape those efforts going forward. The vision statement developed because of these efforts is:

Across Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the rich, interconnected history of the region is preserved, accessible, and celebrated. Shared understanding and experience of the Borough's unique history creates a sense of place that connects people to each other and to the land.

Goal: Celebrate Cultural Heritage and Continue Learning

This goal aims to elevate lesser-known histories and strengthen connections to place and belonging across the Mat-Su Borough by maintaining an up-to-date historic preservation plan, expanding historical knowledge and perspectives, integrating research, and engaging tribal citizens, local organizations, and preservation partners in inclusive planning

Objective 1: Improve Plans & Knowledge

- Update the Borough's Historic Preservation Plan, including the Historic Contexts, on a regular 10-year cycle to incorporate new information and address evolving community needs and priorities.
- Continuously gather new data and perspectives to refine historical themes, drawing from contributions by individuals, local organizations, and preservation partners.
- Integrate academic research and encourage the development of narratives highlighting lesser-known histories.
- Ensure inclusive planning efforts by engaging stakeholders, including tribal citizens.

Objective 2: Incorporate Historical and Multicultural Uses in Maps and Signage

- Update Borough maps, publications, and signage (e.g., interpretive, educational, wayfinding) to include traditional names and uses, such as trails and landscapes for hunting and fishing. Collaborate with tribal citizens to implement these updates.
- Support the use of established traditional place names through the geographic place names process where features are currently not named in USGS records

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- Support the use of established traditional place names through the geographic place names process where features are currently not named in USGS records

Goal: Increase Public Awareness of Historic Preservation Across the Mat-Su

This goal seeks to increase public awareness of the Mat-Su Borough's history and cultural resources by improving access to information, increasing visibility of preservation efforts, and sharing stories and materials through digital platforms, partnerships, and public outreach.

Objective 1: Improve digital access to historic preservation materials and stories using the Mat-Su Borough website as a hub

- Digitize Borough archives and collaborate with tribal councils and cities to showcase preservation-related projects.
- Re-publish or digitize existing Borough materials, such as posters and books, for online access.
- Compile and host state and federal resources about Mat-Su histories on the Borough's website.

- Increase public engagement in historic preservation by:
 - o Maintaining a dedicated page on the Borough's website to highlight preservation work funded by CLG grants.
 - o Including a historic preservation section in the Borough Planning Department's monthly newsletter, inviting community interaction.

Objective 2: Enhance Tourist Connections to Mat-Su History

- Compile and maintain an up-to-date directory of museums, cultural centers, and public sites. Share this information through the Mat-Su Convention and Visitor Bureau and the Borough website.
- Utilize grant funding to create new, community-supported signage highlighting historically significant locations.
- Update the feasibility study and revisit the idea of designating the Mat-Su Borough as a National Heritage Area to unlock additional funding opportunities.

Objective 3: Facilitate Information and Resource Sharing

- Identify and showcase successful examples of historic preservation in the Mat-Su Borough, such as the downtown experiences in Palmer and Talkeetna.
- Highlight Mat-Su-based preservation achievements in the State Historic Preservation Office's monthly Heritage newsletter and Preservation Alaska's quarterly Preservation Notes newsletter.
- Promote free training resources like the National Preservation Institute's online courses (e.g., Finding New Sources of Funding in Challenging Times: An Introduction).

Goal: Increase Community Participation and Collaboration

This goal aims to strengthen community-led historic preservation by facilitating information sharing, supporting local and tribal partners, and expanding opportunities for collaboration, education, and volunteer engagement across the Mat-Su Borough.

Objective 1: Fulfill CLG Responsibilities

- Respond to community requests for preservation assistance as resources allow.
- Encourage the Historic Preservation Commission to submit nominations for the National Register of Historic Places through the State.

- Develop and publish a step-by-step guide, supported by the Historic Preservation Commission, to assist the public in nominating properties to local, state, or federal registers.
- Expand the Borough's Historic Preservation web page by including links to state and federal resources for property nominations and information on available grant funding for preservation projects.

Objective 2: Provide Community Education Opportunities

- Continue leveraging CLG grant funding to support training and educational initiatives in historic preservation.
- Develop networking opportunities for individuals involved in historic preservation to foster collaboration, mutual support, and the creation of publicly accessible resources.
- Organize an annual online preservation forum hosted by the Mat-Su Borough and the HPC to discuss current and future preservation projects and provide public engagement opportunities.
- Apply for CLG grant funding to support customized group training sessions tailored to the community's preservation needs, utilizing resources like the National Preservation Institute's offerings.

- Elevate local histories in K-12 education, both in and outside the classroom, to build the next generation's interest in history and historic preservation.

Objective 3: Promote Volunteer Engagement in Historic Preservation

- Empower the HPC to coordinate volunteer opportunities with museums and organizations to digitize archival materials such as photos, maps, and interviews.
- Advertise volunteer opportunities through the Borough's established communication channels to reach broader audiences.

Objective 4: Expand Awareness of Funding Sources and Preservation Incentives

- Broaden applications for preservation grants and actively communicate funding opportunities to the public, such as CLG grants, National Park Service grants, tax incentives, and benefits tied to National Heritage Area designation.
- Continue submitting CLG grant applications on behalf of area projects proposed by community members and organizations.

Goal: Preserve and Protect Known Cultural Resources

This goal focuses on safeguarding documented cultural and historic resources by integrating historic preservation into planning and land management decisions, improving documentation and inventories, and supporting long-term protection of significant sites and landscapes.

Objective 1: Integrate Historic Preservation into Regional and Local Planning

- Encourage project and planning staff to consult the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey, the National Register of Historic Places, and the Alaska RS 2477 Map for listed sites during reviews of platting actions and other land use considerations.
- Follow the management guidelines for Cultural Resources and Heritage Sites in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Asset Management Plan: Natural Resource Management Units to identify and protect these resources on Borough-managed lands.

Objective 2: Document Existing Cultural Resources

- Compile comprehensive data on known historic buildings, sites, and cultural use areas, including maps, photos, interviews, and research.
- Consolidate the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) and local resources data into a geospatial inventory of cultural resources.

Objective 3: Preserve Lands to Protect Historical Character

- Explore the use of conservation easements to safeguard heritage lands, such as farmsteads and trails.
- Prioritize the placement of new parks or public use areas in proximity to significant cultural resources.

Goal: Discover and Document Cultural Resources

Because so much of the Mat-Su Borough has not been surveyed, plenty of work remains to find and protect evidence of the area's heritage. The Borough and preservation partners will seek to identify, document, and appropriately treat previously undocumented cultural resources by expanding surveys, research, partnerships, and public awareness to improve understanding of the Mat-Su Borough's cultural landscapes.

Objective 1: Identify Undocumented Cultural Resources

- Conduct systematic surveys through volunteer-driven archaeological and architectural efforts.
- Partner with the State Historic Preservation Office to perform cultural surveys on Borough-owned land.
- Review historical maps and publications to uncover potential locations of undocumented cultural resources.

Objective 2: Promote Appropriate Treatment of Newly Discovered Cultural Resources

- Collaborate with industrial training schools to provide training for heavy equipment operators on recognizing cultural resources during excavation activities.
- Provide interested landowners with contact details for external cultural resource survey services to aid resource identification and preservation efforts.

Conclusion

The Mat-Su Borough's historic preservation story is one of community commitment, shared responsibility, and deep appreciation for the cultural and historical landscapes that shape our sense of place. This updated Historic Preservation Plan builds on decades of local effort, beginning with the 1987 plan and strengthened through years of surveys, public engagement, collaborations, and stewardship work carried out by the Historical Preservation Commission, local organizations, tribal partners, and residents across the region. It reflects the priorities of a rapidly growing borough while honoring the traditions, knowledge, and lived experiences of the many generations who have called the Mat-Su home.

As the Borough continues to change, historic preservation remains essential to understanding the region's evolving identity. The goals, objectives, and strategies outlined in this plan provide a clear path forward for the next decade—one centered on elevating lesser-known histories, expanding public access to information, strengthening partnerships, supporting local organizations, and safeguarding both documented and yet-to-be-discovered cultural resources. These efforts will help ensure that residents and visitors alike can continue to learn from and connect with the diverse stories that make the Mat-Su unique.

Preservation is an ongoing process rather than a single action. To remain relevant and effective, this plan must evolve alongside the Borough itself. The Historical

Preservation Commission will conduct annual reviews to track progress on identified strategies, assess emerging needs, and recommend adjustments. A comprehensive update every 10 years will ensure that new research, discoveries, technologies, and community perspectives are incorporated into future versions of the plan.

Ultimately, the continued success of historic preservation in the Mat-Su depends on the combined efforts of its people—tribal leaders, local governments, cultural organizations, educators, historians, volunteers, landowners, and residents. By working together, the Borough can preserve its rich and interconnected heritage, foster community belonging, support economic and educational opportunities, and ensure that future generations inherit a clear and meaningful record of the past. This plan serves as both a guide and an invitation: a guide to coordinated, thoughtful preservation efforts, and an invitation for all who care about the Mat-Su's history to take part in shaping its future.



This is just a place holder



APPENDICES



Appendix I: References

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Appendix 2: Past Certified Local Government Grants

Year	Task	Amount	Grant Intention
2025	DePriest Farm Nomination for the National Register of Historic Places, Grant #24004. Project in progress.	\$18,000	National Register of Historic Places
2023	Historic Preservation Plan Phase II, Grant #22002	\$50,000	
2023	Rebarchek Colony Farm Rehabilitation. Grant # 22003	\$80,000.00	Development/Predevelopment
2019	Historic Preservation Plan Phase I, Grant #19003	\$25,000.00	Planning
2019	Settlers Bay Coastal Park Cultural Resources Survey. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #19---. Federal shar \$10,000. Grant awarded.	\$10,000.00	Survey and Inventory
2018	Rebarchek Farm colony house stabilization. Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Grant #18004. Federal share \$25,000. Work on foundation done during summer 2018.	\$25,000.00	Development/Predevelopment
2017	National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Forum 2018: Des Moines, Iowa. Staff training: Matanuska-Susitna Borough, Grant #17019, Federal share \$5,297.	\$5,297.00	Historic Preservation Education
2015	Cottonwood Creek Archaeological District. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #15014. Federal share \$26,060. Kathryn Krasinski. Information on 126 sites collected or updated for the Alaska Historic Resources Survey (AHRs), and National Register of Historic Places	\$26,060.00	Survey and Inventory
2014	Fish Creek Townsite Survey and Inventory. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #14609. Federal Share \$12,964.00. Project cancelled.	\$12,964.00	Survey and Inventory
2014	National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Forum 2014, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Matanuska Susitna Borough, Grant #14612, Federal share \$2,595.21	\$2,595.00	Historic Preservation Education
2013	Cottonwood Creek Survey. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #13597. Federal share \$20,000. Survey report and draft National Register of Historic Places nomination. 69 pages.	\$20,000.00	Survey and Inventory
2012	Middle Susitna Archaeological Survey and Inventory. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #12561. Federal share \$20,000. Fran Seager-Boss, Kathryn Krasinski, Brian Wygle, John Moosey. Archaeological survey. 74 pages.	\$20,000.00	Survey and Inventory
2011	Wasilla Interpretive Signs. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #11555. Federal share \$20,000. Fran Seager-Boss. Seven interpretive signs on the Dena'ina people.	\$20,000.00	Historic Preservation Education

Year	Task	Amount	Grant Intention
2010	Palmer Agricultural Research Station Housing. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #10538. Federal share \$9,127. Fran Seager-Boss. Draft National Register of Historic Places nomination. 52 pages.	\$9,127.00	National Register of Historic Places
2010	Knik Pool Hall. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #10542. Federal share \$25,000. PND Engineers Inc. Final report. 17 pages with photographs.	\$25,000.00	Development/Predevelopment
2009	City of Wasilla Historic and Prehistoric Sites Survey. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #09513. Federal share \$24,562. Alaska Green Solutions. 211 sites. 5 pages.	\$24,562.00	Survey and Inventory
2008	Preservation Plans. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #08494. Federal share \$20,000. Pacific Northwest Resources Consultants. Willow, Houston, and Susitna historic preservation plans. 172, 126, 144 pages respectively.	\$20,000.00	Planning
2007	National Heritage Areas Designation Study, Phase II. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #07484. Federal share \$16,500. Complete a feasibility study with development of historic themes. Fran Seager-Boss, Summary. 4 pages.	\$16,500.00	Planning
2005	Planning for Protection of Palmer's Historic District. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #05447. Federal share \$15,444. Matanuska Colony Historic District Design Guidelines. 20 pages.	\$15,444.00	Planning
2005	National Heritage Areas Designation Study. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #05460. Federal share \$15,444. Fran Seager-Boss. The Valley: National Heritage Area Design: A preliminary study. 5 pages.	\$15,444.00	Planning
2004	Planning for Preservation of the Palmer Historic District. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #04432. Federal share \$16,500. Building the Future: Preserving and Enhancing the Matanuska Colony Historic District. 29 pages.	\$16,500.00	Planning
2003	Interpretive Signs and Brochure – Matanuska Colony Community Center Historic District, Phase II. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #03407. Federal share \$17,800. Six interpretive signs.	\$17,800.00	Historic Preservation Education
2003	Interpretive Signs – Old Knik Townsite. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #03409. Federal share \$8,580. Two interpretive signs.	\$8,580.00	Historic Preservation Education
2002	Survey and Evaluation of Small Cemetery at Knik for National Register Nomination. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Federal share \$0. Project cancelled.	\$0	Survey and Inventory

Year	Task	Amount	Grant Intention
2002	Historic Preservation Plan and Ordinance Review. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #02394. Federal share \$16,500. Deborah Abele. Historic Preservation Plan for Matanuska- Susitna Borough. 15 pages.	\$16,500.00	Planning
2001	Survey, Evaluation, and Inventory of the Residential Portion of Old Knik Townsite, Phase IV. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #01369. Federal share \$13,400. Fran Seager-Boss, Sheri Bowden, Dane Stone. Report on 2001-2002 field work. 45 pages.	\$13,400.00	Survey and Inventory
2001	Interpretive Sign Project for Matanuska Colony Historic District. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #01355. Federal share \$4,500. Fran Seager-Boss. Text and photographs for six signs. 27 pages.	\$4,500.00	Historic Preservation Education
2000	Survey, Evaluation, and Inventory of the Residential Portion of Old Knik Townsite, Phase III. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #00339. Federal share \$14,255. Fran Seager Boss. Report on 2000-2001 fieldwork. 54 pages.	\$14,255.00	Survey and Inventory
1999	Survey, Evaluation, and Inventory of the Residential Portion of Old Knik Townsite, Phase II. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant # 99330. Federal share \$18,300. Fran Seager-Boss. Report on 1999-2000 field work. 122 pages.	\$18,300.00	Survey and Inventory
1998	Survey, Evaluation, and Inventory of the Residential Portion of Old Knik Townsite, Phase I Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #98321. Federal share \$12,642. (Companion to FY'97 grant.) Fran Seager-Boss. Report on 1998-1999 field work. 107 pages.	\$12,642.00	Survey and Inventory
1997	Survey, Evaluation, and Inventory of the Residential Portion of Old Knik Townsite, Phase I. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant # 98321. Federal share \$7,357. Fran Seager-Boss. Survey of a portion of Knik townsite. 107 pages.	\$7,357.00	Survey and Inventory
1995	Archaeological Survey and Inventory. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #95299. Federal share \$9,800. Fran Seager-Boss. Survey of 14 sites. 92 pages.	\$9,800.00	Survey and Inventory
1994	Archaeological Survey and Inventory of Chief Wasilla's House Site. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #94293. Federal share \$16,777. Fran Seager-Boss. Survey of site and study of eligibility for the National Register. 79 pages.	\$16,777.00	Survey and Inventory
1993	Survey and Inventory of Homestead Sites in the Matanuska-Susitna Area, Phase II. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #93284. Federal share \$6,500. Fran Seager-Boss. Historic information and identification of 9 sites. 104 pages.	\$6,500.00	Survey and Inventory

Year	Task	Amount	Grant Intention
1992	Evaluation of Historic Sites on the Chickaloon and Carle Wagon Trails. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #92273. Federal share \$11,110. Fran Seager-Boss. Survey of 8 sites. 48 pages.	\$11,110.00	Survey and Inventory
1992	Historic Preservation in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Slide Show. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #92276. Federal share \$8,300. Fran Seager-Boss. Outline of text and visual materials for slide program. 7 pages.	\$8,300.00	Historic Preservation Education
1991	Homestead Survey 1898-1940, Part 1. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #91270. Federal share \$6,269. Fran Seager-Boss and Lawrence E. Roberts. Survey of 20 homesteads in the Knik, Wasilla and Palmer areas. 78 pages.	\$6,269.00	Survey and Inventory
1990	Talkeetna Historic District National Register Nomination. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #90262. Federal share \$3,500. Fran Seager-Boss and Lawrence E. Roberts. Documentation of 13 properties. 31 pages.	\$3,500.00	National Register of Historic Places
1990	Major Coal Towns of the Matanuska Valley: A Pictorial History and Coal Mining Educational Curriculum. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #90263. Federal share \$10,983. Fran Seager-Boss and Lawrence E. Roberts. A history with curriculum materials	\$10,983.00	Historic Preservation Education
1989	Evaluation of Historic Sites, Talkeetna, Alaska. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #89257. Federal share \$7,472. Fran Seager-Boss and Lawrence E. Roberts. Survey of 20 buildings. 109 pages.	\$7,472.00	Survey and Inventory
1989	The Settlement and Economic Development of Alaska's Matanuska-Susitna Valley Multiple Property National Register Nomination. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #89257. Federal share \$7,472. Fran Seager-Boss and Lawrence E. Roberts. Multiple property	\$7,472.00	National Register of Historic Places
1988	Survey of Historic Sites in the Matanuska Coal Field, Alaska. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #88254. Federal share \$14,684. Susan Lee and Fran Seager-Boss. Historic contexts for coal mining, transportation, government, settlements, prospecting and native history; and	\$14,684.00	Survey and Inventory
1987	Evaluation of Historic Sites in Palmer, Alaska. Matanuska-Susitna Borough. Grant #87250. Federal share \$8,050. Susan Lee, Pandora Willingham, Vickie Cole, Donna Lane, and James Fox. Survey of 72 properties. 226 pages.	\$8,050.00	Survey and Inventory

Appendix 3: Preservation Partners

Tribal Government Local Museums

Palmer Museum of History and Art

723 S Valley Way
Palmer, AK 99645
(907) 746-7668
[www.https://palmermuseum.org/](https://palmermuseum.org/)

Palmer Historical Society

PO Box 1935
Palmer, AK 99645
<https://palmerhistoricalsociety.org>

Alpine Historical Society / Sutton Alpine Historical Park

11266 Chickaloon Way (Glenn Highway Mile 61.6)
Sutton, Alaska 99674
(907) 745-7000
<https://alpinehistoricalpark.org/>

Talkeetna Historical Society and Museum

22248 D Street
Talkeetna, AK 99676
(907) 733-2487
www.talkeetnamuseum.org/

Knik Museum

Mile 13.9 Knik Goose Bay Road
Wasilla, AK 99654
(907) 376-775
www.wkhsociety.org

Museum of Alaska (Formerly Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry)

3800 W. Museum Drive
Wasilla, AK 99623
(907) 376-1211
www.museumofalaska.org/

Wasilla Museum and Visitor Center

391 N Main Street, Wasilla, AK 99654
(907) 373-9071
www.museum@ci.wasilla.ak.us

Willow Historic and Wildlife Foundation

West Willow Community Center Circle
Willow, AK 99688
willowhistoric@gmail.com

Tribal Governments

Knik Tribe

Culture & Historic Preservation Program
1744 North Prospect
Palmer, AK 99645
<https://www.kniktribe.org/culture-historic-preservation-program>

Chickaloon Village Traditional Council

21117 E Meyers Ave
Chickaloon, AK 99674
<https://www.chickaloon-nsn.gov/historicpreservation/>

Native Village of Eklutna

History & Culture Department
26339 Eklutna Village Road
<https://eklutna-nsn.gov/departments/history-and-culture/>

Native Village of Tyonek

100 N Street
Tyonek, AK 99682

Appendix 4: Regional, State & National preservation Resources

Regional, State & National Preservation Resources
Many federal and state agencies, local governments, Native organizations, historical societies and museums focus on supporting or implementing historic preservation through grants and technical assistance.

Regional Resources

Matanuska-Susitna Borough
350 E Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645
(907) 861-7801
<https://matsu.gov/boards/historical-preservation-commission>

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough was established in 1964 and supports the region's historic preservation, as a Certified Local Government (CLG), which allows the Mat-Su Borough to apply for Historic Preservation Fund grants to help fund projects across the region. A 7-member Historic Preservation Commission was established in 1982 to advise the Assembly and to help protect significant historic and prehistoric resources for current and future generations.

The CIRI Foundation

3201 C St, Suite 506
Anchorage, AK 99503
(907) 793-3575
<https://thecirifoundation.org/>

The CIRI Foundation was established in 1982. As described on their website, their mission is "to foster individual self-development and economic self-sufficiency through education while preserving the rich culture and legacy of Alaska Natives who are original

shareholders of CIRI, and their lineal descendants."
The CIRI Foundation supports Alaska Native cultural preservation and living traditions through programs, grants and publications.

Statewide Resources

State Historic Preservation Office / Alaska Office of History and Archaeology

550 West 7th Avenue, Suite 1310
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 269-8700
www.dnr.oha.alaska.gov

The Office of History and Archaeology serves as the Alaska State Historic Preservation Office and administers programs authorized by both the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and the Alaska Historic Preservation Act of 1971. The office works with local governments, the public, and educational and not-for-profit organizations to identify, preserve, protect, and interpret the state's cultural, historic, and archaeological resources ensuring that our heritage is passed on to future generations.

National Park Service, Alaska Region Heritage Assistance Program

240 W 5th Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 644-3470
www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoriclandmarks/

Alaska's Heritage Assistance Program is a team of historians, architects, archaeologists, and anthropologists who take part in history and culture projects all over Alaska. The team partners with tribes, community groups, government agencies, Alaska Native corporations, parks, universities, and nonprofits to provide technical assistance, facilitate research projects, and participate in community events. The Program offers education and public outreach event, survey and testing of archaeological sites, guidance for compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and assists in nominating properties for the National Register of Historic Places.

Alaska Anthropological Association

PO Box 241686
Anchorage AK 99524
www.alaskaanthro@gmail.com

The Alaska Anthropological Association was founded in 1975 as a statewide professional organization for people working, studying, and interested in all areas of northern anthropology. The Association provides a forum for projects in archaeology, linguistics, cultural studies, oral history, medical anthropology, museum exhibitions, cultural resource management, human genetics, and more. Their peer-reviewed publications, the Alaska Journal of Anthropology and the Aurora monograph series, are available digitally and provide current perspectives on Alaska's past.

Preservation Alaska - Alaska Association for Historic Preservation

PO Box 102205
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 929-9870
www.AKPreservation@gmail.com

Preservation Alaska was founded in 1981 and is dedicated to the preservation of Alaska's prehistoric and historic resources through education, promotion and advocacy. The organization aids in historic preservation projects across Alaska and monitors and supports legislation to promote historic preservation, serving as a liaison between local, statewide, and national historic preservation groups.

Alaska Historical Society

P.O. Box 100299
Anchorage, AK 99510
(907) 276-1596
www.alaskahistoricalsociety.org

The Alaska Historical Society is dedicated to the promotion of Alaska history by the exchange of ideas and information, the preservation and interpretation of resources, and the education of Alaskans about their heritage. The Society is volunteer-based group that advocates for state and federal history programs and funding, for social studies programs in schools, statewide commemoration activities, and special projects that improve both scholarship on, and education about, Alaska's history.

Alaska Historical Commission

550 W. Seventh Ave., Suite 1310
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 269-8714
www.dnr.oha.alaska.gov

The Alaska Historical Commission is a forum for citizens' voices in the development of state history policy. Members advise the Governor on state policy and programs concerning history and prehistory, historic sites and buildings, and on geographic names. The nine-member commission includes the Lieutenant Governor, three citizens trained in history, architecture, or archaeology, an individual representing Native ethnic groups, two members recommended by the Alaska Historical Society, one member from the general public, and the State Historic Preservation Officer. The Commission reviews nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, coordinates publication of materials that present all aspects of Alaska's history, makes recommendations on grant proposals for preservation, and can help you to identify sources of Alaska's history.

Appendix 4: State & National Partners

Statewide

Museums Alaska

625 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99501
(907) 371-4348
<https://museumsalaska.org/>

Museums Alaska was formed in 1977 by “museum people” to promote the protection and preservation of objects, specimens, records, and sites significant to the natural and human history of Alaska. They support museums and cultural centers in Alaska and help enhance public understanding of their value. Museums Alaska maintains information about museums and cultural centers across the state, offers grants and assistance in preparing grants for historic preservation, and represent a diverse group of professionals, students, consultants, and museum enthusiasts who are interested in caring for and sharing Alaska’s heritage.

National

National Trust for Historic Preservation

600 14th Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, DC 20005
1-800-944-6847
www.savingplaces.org

The National Trust for Historic Preservation provides technical advice and financial assistance to nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and individuals involved in protection of historic resources.

Advisory Council on Historical Preservation

<https://www.achp.gov>

The ACHP is the only federal agency whose sole mission is to promote the preservation of America’s historic places. It advises the President and Congress on national preservation policy and oversees the Section 106 review process, ensuring federal agencies consider impacts on historic properties. It also provides guidance, technical assistance, and a public forum to support preservation outcomes in federal projects.

Preserve America Program

<https://www.achp.gov/preserve-america>

A federal initiative that encourages communities to preserve and celebrate cultural and natural heritage. It provides recognition, promotional tools, and—when funded—grants supporting heritage tourism, education, and preservation planning.

- Recognition through Preserve America Communities designations for places that protect and celebrate their heritage.
- Promotional tools, technical assistance, and (when appropriated by Congress) access to Preserve America grants for heritage tourism, education, and planning.
- Public visibility through NPS travel itineraries, educational materials, and White House recognition.

National Alliance of Preservation Commissions

<https://napcommissions.org>

A nonprofit that strengthens local preservation commissions through education, training (including the CAMP® program), technical assistance, advocacy, and professional networking.

- CAMP® (Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program): High-quality training for preservation

commissions on legal basics, design review, community engagement, and preservation standards.

- Technical support and a nationwide information network to help commissions accomplish preservation goals.
- Advocacy at local, state, and federal levels to strengthen preservation policies and programs.
- Publications and resources, including The Alliance Review and messaging guides for local preservation programs.

Main Street America

[Main Street America: Home](#)

A nationwide program that revitalizes historic downtowns through preservation based economic development, offering training, technical support, resources, and the Main Street Approach™ to help communities strengthen historic commercial districts.

- Training, field services, and professional development through the Main Street Academy and Resource Center.
- Grants, tools, and strategic guidance for communities working to improve historic districts and local economies.
- Nationwide networking with 1,600+ community coalitions and technical support for place-based development.

Appendix 5: Potential Funding Sources

National Park Service, National Trust for Historical Preservation

- NPS – funded by the Historical Preservation Fund – established in 1977, provides financial assistance to States, Tribes, territories, local governments, and non-profits and is managed by the National Park Service Grants Division. Funding comes from Outer Continental Shelf oil and gas lease revenues, not tax dollars, and has culminated in more than \$2 billion committed to preservation projects.

Tribal Heritage Grant Program

[Tribal Heritage Grants - Historical Preservation Fund \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

- This program provides grants to Federally recognized Indian Tribes, Alaskan Native Villages and Corporations, and Native Hawaiian Organizations for cultural and Historical preservation projects that protect their unique cultural heritage and traditions. This can include projects aimed at protecting oral histories, plant and animal species important to tradition, sacred and Historical places, and the establishment of Tribal Historical preservation offices.

Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) Grant Program

[Grant Opportunities - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

- The Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) requires museums and federal agencies to return specific cultural items to lineal descendants and outlines the process to do so. It requires that federal agencies plan for situations occurring on federal land in

which these specific items might be disturbed. The grants available through NAGPRA aim to increase the number of successful returns of Native American human remains and cultural items. There are two types of grants available; one for consultation and documentation and one for repatriation activities.

Underrepresented Communities Grant Program [Grant Opportunities - Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

- This program funds projects that help diversify the listings submitted to the National Register of Historical Places. The funds can be used for surveys and inventories, as well as the development of the nominations.

History of Equal Right Grant Program

[History of Equal Rights - Historical Preservation Fund \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

- This grant broadly funds preservation efforts for sites that relate to the struggle to achieve equal rights in America. These grants are not limited to any specific group and aim to fund the widest range of projects possible. Projects can include physical preservation work, pre-preservation planning activities for currently listed or sites determined eligible for National Register of Historical Places or National Historical Landmark status.

Paul Bruhn Rural Revitalization Grant Program [Paul Bruhn Historical Revitalization Grants Program - Historical Preservation Fund \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

- This unique program provides recipients with funds to support programs designed by those

recipients to direct funding to other sub-awardees in the community. The program is for buildings in rural communities. The primary grantee is responsible for building a program that determines the eligibility of buildings and resources. The intention is to give communities the ability to determine their own processes and priorities and to build a framework for future preservation efforts. Capacity building.

Save America's Treasures Grant Program

[Save America's Treasures Grants - Historical Preservation Fund \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](#)

- This grant program helps preserve nationally significant historical properties and collections. \$300 million has been awarded since 1998.

National Trust for Historical Preservation

National Park Service, National Trust for Historical Preservation

[National Trust Preservation Funds Find Funding: National Trust Grant Programs | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- Funding is intended to encourage preservation at the local level by supporting on-going preservation work and by providing seed money for preservation projects to nonprofit organizations and public agencies.

Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fund for Historical Interiors

[Cynthia Woods Mitchell Fund for Historical Interiors: Guidelines & Eligibility | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- The purpose is to assist in the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of Historical interiors.

Hart Family Fund for Small Towns

[Hart Family Fund for Small Towns: Guidelines & Eligibility | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- This grant is intended to encourage preservation at the local level by providing seed money for preservation projects in small towns with populations of 10,000 or less. The funds may go to training for technical expertise needed for specific projects or to educating the public on concepts and techniques.

Johanna Favrot Fund for Historical Preservation

[Johanna Favrot Fund for Historical Preservation: Guidelines & Eligibility | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- These funds aim to save Historical environments, foster an appreciation of our nation's diverse cultural heritage, and preserve and revitalize the livability of our nation's communities.

Backing Historical Small Restaurants

[Backing Historical Small Restaurants | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- These grants assist small and Historical restaurants with money going towards rejuvenating, innovating and expanding their business so that their legacies can endure. This program demonstrates that preservation can invigorate local economies while serving the communities they anchor.

National Fund for Sacred Place

[National Fund for Sacred Places | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- This program is a collaborative effort between Partners for Sacred Places and the National Trust for Historical Preservation, which aims to help communities protect and preserve their historical houses of worship.

Historical Tax Credit

[Historical Tax Credits | National Trust for Historical Preservation \(savingplaces.org\)](#)

- This federal tax credit is the most significant investment the federal government makes toward preserving historical buildings. It can assist in revitalizing communities and help spur economic growth. It's also net positive for the Treasury, returning \$1.20 in tax revenue for every dollar invested. The National Trust supports those credits as well as State Tax Credits, although the State of Alaska does not have any.



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