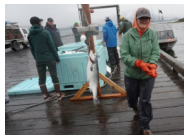


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Juneau Independent

The True Local Newspaper of Alaska's Capital City

August 9, 2026

How to prepare for this year's glacial lake outburst flood

As a release from Suicide Basin looms, steps to take and information

By ELLIE RUEL, Reporter

The annual glacial lake outburst flood is expected within the next two weeks as the water level in Suicide Basin nears overtopping. Below are resources and information to prepare.

Local scientists estimate this year's release will result in a similar magnitude of flood to last year due to competing changes in basin capacity. As of Wednesday evening, Suicide Basin's water level is at about 1,340 feet. According to the National Weather Service Juneau, the basin will start overflowing once the water level reaches 1,350 feet. It's also possible for the basin to release before it reaches full

*See **Prepare** on Page 9*



The Mendenhall River is seen on July 8, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

SHI unveils plans for \$40M City Hall Replacement

New building with cultural tourism and education facilities would supplement programs on adjacent properties

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

Demolishing the aging City Hall and replacing it with a three-story building featuring tourist attractions, year-round cultural activities, and possibly a relocated city museum is being proposed by Sealaska Heritage Institute. But because SHI estimates the new structure will cost \$40 million to build, it doesn't want to pay a suggested \$2.5 million or more to buy the existing City Hall in an open-bid action just so



An illustration of a three-story multiuse building Sealaska Heritage Institute is proposing at the current City Hall site. (Illustration provided by Sealaska Heritage Institute)

*See **City Hall** on Page 10*

Shipping ban on EVs, owners and businesses don't see a clear road out

Southeast shipping companies say they have no plans to change their policy, as enthusiasts worry about getting vehicles to Juneau and servicing them

By PAT FORGEY, Juneau Independent

Juneau's electric vehicle enthusiasts have been among the most fervent in the nation, so far bringing about 1,000 fully electric or hybrid vehicles to Juneau, said Will Judy, president of the Juneau Electric Vehicle Association.

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Alaska reports drop in federal jobs in 2025

Alaska reported 13.2% drop in federal jobs in 2025; a state-owned magazine now claims it's 4.5%

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

The latest issue of a state-owned economic magazine claims Alaska lost 4.5% of its federal jobs in 2025, but an earlier report from the agency publishing the magazine puts the loss at 13.2% during the first year of President Donald Trump's second term.

The August 2026 issue of Alaska Economic Trends also appears to drastically undercount federal job losses nationwide. It reports 87,000 fewer jobs (2.9%) nationally and 700 fewer in Alaska, while other reports cite between 238,000 and 260,000 nationally (10% to 12%) and 2,000 in Alaska.

An official U.S. government dashboard puts the national decline in federal jobs at 272,283 as of Monday morning.

The difference is because the magazine is averaging the month-by-month impact of employment losses, said Karinne Wiebold, a senior economist with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development who wrote the article, in an interview with the Juneau Independent on Monday.

She said most of the decline in federal jobs occurred during the final three months of the year, so the workforce and economic impacts were far less than if Alaska had 2,000 fewer federal workers during all of 2025.

"I don't think it's misleading," she said. "All we're trying to do is talk about what the impact over the course of a year looks like, not a single month or at the end of the period."

Wiebold's article is headlined "Alaska
See Federal on Page 4

New Amalga gold mine approved for faster federal permitting process

Unapproved project has no official timeline, is awaiting a permitting schedule

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

The New Amalga Gold Project was authorized to undergo an expedited federal permitting process last week, but officials say that doesn't mean the project can skip any regulatory steps or is more likely to get approval.

The gold mine is proposed near Herbert Glacier by Grand Portage Resources Ltd., a Canadian mining company. The U.S. Forest Service will serve as the lead federal permitting agency for the Amalga project, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies are expected to help establish the mine's regulatory and permitting timeline.

The expedited process commonly referred to as FAST-41 was established in 2015 by the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council, with the language in Title 41 of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act. It's meant to improve transparency, coordination and efficiency in the federal environmental review and authorization process for infrastructure projects nationwide, according to the council's website.

Grand Portage's preliminary economic assessment, released in April, provides a conceptual timeline for the New Amalga Gold Project. The actual permitting timetable will be set with federal agencies through FAST-41, according to a company news release issued Tuesday. "Our next technical milestone is a Preliminary Feasibility Study (PFS). Tribal consultation is a government-to-government process led by the federal agencies and NEPA includes formal public comment peri-

ods," Grand Portage states in the release. "We fully support the process and remain committed to engaging Tribes and the wider community throughout the life of the project, which has the potential to bring year-round jobs and economic activity while building on Juneau's mining legacy."

The mine is expected to create 277 jobs and a pre-tax net present value of nearly \$1 billion during an initial seven-year production cycle, according to a Grand Portage spokesperson. The preliminary estimate projects the mine has about a million ounces of gold.

The State of Alaska signed a memorandum of understanding with the permitting council in August 2025 with the goal of "streamlining the permitting process for critical infrastructure projects across Alaska." Since then, five mining projects in Alaska have been accepted for the faster permitting process.

"I am excited to welcome the New Amalga Gold Project to FAST-41 coverage as the 61st mining and mineral processing project listed on the Permitting Dashboard under President Trump's leadership," said Emily Domenech, the permitting council's executive director, in a prepared statement.

However, being a part of the program does not mean the project will be approved, according to the permitting website. "It is important to note that a project's inclusion on the Permitting Dashboard does not imply Federal endorsement of or support for the project or create a presumption that a cov-

ered project will be approved, favorably reviewed by any agency, or receive Federal funding," the website states.

The council also has not posted a permitting schedule for Amalga yet, so it's unknown just how fast the program will speed up the environmental review process. The FAST-41 statute requires publication of the permitting timetable within 60 days of a project being added to the program. The New Amalga Gold Project's timetable publication should occur on or before Sept. 28.

President Donald Trump's executive order to increase American mineral production states such projects should be considered as transparency projects on the permitting dashboard established under FAST-41.

Coverage under the program originally focused on transportation infrastructure until Trump's first presidential administration in 2021.

In June, the mining company announced it intended to formally initiate NEPA in early 2027 and that the project seeks to obtain all authorizations by mid-2029, with an initial production target of 2031. That timeline anticipates a permitting process of about two years.

The June release states Grand Portage will work concurrently with state permitting and consultation with Alaska Native tribal governments.

In a prepared statement on the FAST-41 authorization, Grand Portage CEO Ian Klassen said the mine's covered project status "will deliver predictable regulatory review timelines, maintain coordination between various federal agencies having jurisdiction over different aspects of the project, enhance accountability and transparency, and ensure our project meets and exceeds

See Mine on Page 4

MINE

Continued from page 3

the highest standards of environmental management and regulatory compliance.” Grande Portage declined further comment on the permitting council’s news release or on the FAST-41 program and instead directed questions to the council. The council did not respond to media inquiries sent Tuesday by the Juneau Independent about the expedited process.

“FAST-41 does not change any statutory or regulatory requirement, environmental law, regulation, review process, or public involvement procedure, and does not predetermine the outcome of any federal decision-making process,” the council’s website states. The permitting council states it can cut a project’s review time down by 18 months.

About 50 people gathered for an event last month organized by the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council and Southeast Alaska Land Trust to learn more about the potential impacts of New Amalga. People who enjoy hiking and biking on the Herbert Glacier Trail opposed the gold mine and its access road due to anticipated disruption to recreational activities.

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FEDERAL

Continued from page 2

lost 4.5% of its federal jobs,” with a subhed declaring “Reductions were widespread across departments in 2025.”

“In the first quarter of 2025, federal employment was up slightly from the first quarter of the previous year,” the article states. “Second quarter jobs were down by 454, and third quarter

by 762. Losses more than doubled in the fourth quarter, with federal employment down by 1,607 from the last quarter of 2024.”

A state labor department report published earlier this year citing employment figures for January 2026 notes there were 13,100 federal jobs compared to 15,100 in January 2025, a drop of 13.2%.

Reports about federal employment declines nationwide vary somewhat, but are generally described using year-end figures.

A Pew Research Center analysis cites a 10.3% drop, reporting 348,219 people quit, retired, were laid off or otherwise left federal employment, while 116,912 people joined, for a total decline of nearly 238,000 workers. The New York Times, citing the U.S. government’s dashboard, reports a 2025 decline of about 260,000 federal jobs, or more than 12%.

Common to all of the reports is the numbers have fluctuated widely, due to factors such as announced mass layoffs that were later reversed by court challenges or subsequent Trump administration actions.

“The effects of the announced cuts were difficult to track,” Wiebold’s article notes. “Thousands of employees remained on the payroll for months after resigning, an unusual benefit meant to encourage more federal workers to leave. Over that time, some were rehired and some who were fired were reinstated through court order. Other complicating factors included the federal hiring freeze, early and regular retirements, and a long federal shutdown.”

The article also states Alaska had the third-highest loss of federal jobs among states by percentage, using month-to-month tracking. While other reports citing higher total federal job losses do not provide figures by state,

the Economic Policy Institute notes Alaska as of March 2025 ranked sixth among states in federal employees as a percentage of the total workforce.

Among the agencies most affected — in total jobs, not percentage — as job losses accumulated toward the end of the year were the Department of Defense, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, according to the Alaska Economic Trends article. The biggest agency loss by percentage during the year was the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, dropping to one employee compared to 35 the previous year, a 98% decline.

The biggest percentage declines in federal employment by region were the North Slope and Petersburg.

The Pew study states USAID with 92.4% of jobs lost and the U.S. Department of Education at 42.6% were the biggest reductions nationally. Employment at NOAA and the U.S. Geological Survey dropped about 20%, according to the American Institute of Physics.

Alaska Economic Trends’ reporting was previously questioned when staff for Gov. Mike Dunleavy suppressed the publication of an article in the October 2023 issue examining the competitiveness of teacher pay in Alaska. The deleted article stated Alaska’s teachers are paid more than the national average but “pay premium” has declined significantly since the 1980s.

After strong criticism of the removal by the department’s research chief and four former department commissioners, the article was published with a different headline and a few minor changes in the December issue.

Wiebold said the current article about federal employment isn’t seeking any kind of political spin in how

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FEDERAL

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the data is presented.

"This is an attempt at doing what we always do, which is as soon as we have a full year of data we look at a full year of data," she said. "In Alaska, it matters a lot that some of these people were working in the beginning of the year. It matters a lot that some of these people who were not working in December were paid through September. They had wages that they were earning here."

"So that all has an impact on our economy and is reasons why we look at this annualized. And because the fourth quarter was such an important period of change we focused on that very particularly so we can see where things are going. But I completely disagree with the idea that this is in any way trying to sweep it under the rug, make it any less obvious. This is just a very standard way that we look at data."

• *Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.*

EVs

Continued from page 1

But that adoption rate may have hit a roadblock that's been making additional growth more difficult, and it shows no signs of weakening.

Ironically, that roadblock began at sea, when a fire broke out on a huge car carrier in the Gulf of Alaska about 300 miles south of Adak on June 3, 2025.

The car carrier Morning Midas had hundreds of electric vehicles among the 3,000 it was carrying. Those ranged from fully electric to plug-in hybrids, but all were powered by



Electric vehicles in the Juneau Arts and Culture Center parking lot during Renewable Juneau's clean energy fair and the annual EV Roundup on Sept. 21, 2025. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

vesvsel eventually sank on June 24.

The Morning Midas fire highlighted the dangers of shipping electric vehicles.

Alaska Marine Lines, Juneau's main shipping company, almost immediately banned shipment of fully electric and plug-in hybrids. The risk of a catastrophic fire, especially at sea, was just too great, the company said.

But that left Juneau with a problem.

"It's not just getting them in," Judy said. "It's getting them out, it's been getting them serviced."

Juneau's only other shipping company, Sitka-based Samson Tug and Barge, isn't an alternative because it uses space on Alaska Marine Lines barges to provide its service to Juneau. That means AML's ban also applies to Samson.

In any event, Samson has a ban on carrying electric vehicles on the company's barges.

A year after the AML ban was imposed, the company said there are no plans to change it.

"We continue to evaluate options to mitigate the fire risk, but as of now our shipping policy remains the same —

Alaska Marine Lines will not ship electric vehicles (EVs) or plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs)," said Ryan Dixon, a spokesperson for Lynden Inc., AML's parent company

Samson's ban remains in place and there are no plans to reconsider it, a company manager said.

Juneau and other Southeast communities now rely solely on the Alaska Marine Highway System.

"As far as I know, we might be the only people that do still carry them; I think AML does not, but we do two per voyage," said Gabe Strong, an AMHS spokesperson.

Those safety limits, imposed even before the Morning Midas fire, are intended to keep electric vehicles away from other vehicles.

These limits were created after AMHS Marine Director Craig Tornga brought in marine firefighting and EV firefighting experts in 2024.

Establishing the two-per-trip maximum involved a joint firefighting exercise aboard the Kenni-

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EVs

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cott with the Ketchikan Fire Department to determine how many EVs were safe, Strong said.

But while that policy allows the Columbia to carry two electric vehicles per trip, it is the only ferry currently traveling between Alaska and Bellingham, Washington, and it makes only a single trip each week.

Those limits make expanding the fleet of electric vehicles in Juneau challenging, Judy said.

That's despite Juneau being what he called the "Goldilocks" of communities for EVs, with nearly the perfect climate.

Batteries can be less effective at extremely high and low temperatures, a problem in places such as Fairbanks or Phoenix, but not in Juneau, according to Judy. A significant portion of electric vehicle battery power is sometimes used to heat and cool the passenger compartment, and at extreme temperatures batteries can provide less power and see shorter lifespans.

Neither the lows of Fairbanks nor the highs of Phoenix are a problem in Juneau.

Juneau is also powered almost entirely by renewable hydropower from a network of dams around the city.

Elsewhere, there is a possibility the electricity to power a vehicle might come from coal or other fossil fuels, diminishing the environmental benefits of electric vehicles.

"They make a lot of sense in a lot of ways for Juneau, but it is hard to get them there now," said Strong, based out of AMHS' headquarters in Ketchikan.

"We like to offer that service; it's just because of the safety issues with them that we have to limit how many we can bring on a vessel," Strong said.

Along with the Columbia, space is available on state ferries that run from Haines to Juneau on a near-daily basis.

Driving the traditional highway route from elsewhere in Alaska or the Lower 48 can be a viable option for individual travelers willing to challenge weather and range anxiety, but car dealerships

don't have that option.

A new electric car setting out to drive the Alaska Highway would be a used electric car by the time it arrived in Juneau.

Car dealerships instead have to truck their vehicles to Haines, then get an available ferry for shipment to Juneau or another Southeast port. They'd previously been able to use AML, rather than competing for space on a ferry's car deck.

The new shipping hurdles may slow the rate of adoption of new electric vehicles in Juneau, Judy said, but he recognizes AML's concerns.

"That's our lifeline for all of our goods and services. If an EV caught fire, however unlikely, if an EV caught fire it would be a significant impact on Juneau, and I understand that," he said.

• *Pat Forgey is a longtime Alaska journalist who has written for the Juneau Empire and Anchorage Daily News. He can be contacted via editor@juneauindependent.com.*



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Dzantik'i Heeni Playground and two other parks expected to open this fall



The unfinished Dzantik'i Heeni Playground seen on Wednesday, July 29, 2026. (Mark Sabbatini / Juneau Independent)

Two parks in Lemon Creek, one in Mendenhall Valley near completion

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Three playgrounds are expected to open this fall after years of public input, according to an announcement last week by the City and Borough of Juneau.

The Dzantik'i Heeni Playground in Lemon Creek is expected to be complete later this fall. The construction contract for Dzantik'i Heeni's playground was awarded for \$855,410, according to city project manager Lisa EaganLagerquist. The total project budget is \$1.3 million.

"We are doing our very best to open it as soon as possible and we are really excited to share it with the community because I think everyone's really going to love it," she said. "The purpose of the playground is, one, to serve the students at the programs that are hosted at that campus, and then also to provide more play area for the kids right in that immediate neighborhood." The original estimated comple-

tion date for the Dzantik'i Heeni Playground was October 2025. EaganLagerquist said funding was the main challenge in advancing the project.

The playground is partially funded by the Juneau Assembly, which approved \$735,000 for site preparation last fall. The money went toward installing safety surfacing and fencing. In March, the Assembly approved \$493,000 from the Juneau School District's fund balance for the project.

The Benito and Frances C. Gaguine Foundation agreed to match up to \$250,000 to help pay for part of the project. The Juneau Board of Education approved up to \$180,000 in funding in January to help pay for playground equipment and match the foundation's grant.

The school district also raised more than \$70,000 through its "Buy a Brick" campaign it launched last fall. The purchased bricks will create a permanent pathway leading to the new

playground. The other hurdle for the project was timing.

"With any construction project through the city, we need to design it, and then we need to put it out to bid, and then you need to construct it over the summer," EaganLagerquist said. "So once we missed the summer of 2025, then we knew we were aiming for the summer of 2026. And here we are."

She added while the playground is expected to be in use this school year, its exact opening date is undetermined due to incorrect playground parts that need to be replaced.

"This week we're installing the safety surfacing pile, and we're also still installing the fencing," she said. "But by the end of next week we hope to just be waiting for some required replacement parts."

EaganLagerquist said there could also be a partial opening of the park depending on when parts arrive.

Neighborhood meetings were held back in 2024 to receive feedback from neighborhood families and families of students attending programs at Dzantik'i Heeni on what they wanted the playground to include.

"Some students told us they wanted a lot of slides, and there's some really amazing slides. There's one that's really wide and will fit like three to four kids across," EaganLagerquist said. "Also, there was really a request to make the play area accessible. So we have a concrete sidewalk, and we have these safety surfacing tiles that make it very accessible for students — or anyone — with low mobility. So anyone using a wheelchair or a walker will be able to reach the play equipment and there's some transfer stations, so that's very exciting." She said another feature of the Dzantik'i Heeni Play-

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PARK

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ground is a communication board.

“It’s going to have a whole bunch of pictures of common words you might use on a playground,” Eagan-Lagerquist said. “So if someone is nonverbal, instead of not being able to talk, they’ll be able to go to the communication board and point to the word of what they would like to share.”

Eagan-Lagerquist said other planned components include a “cozy dome,” offering students a quieter spot to retreat to, and a “friendship swing.”

The playground is split into two sides. Part of it is fenced off for two- to five-year-olds and the other is geared toward kids between five years old and 12 years old.

Since the district consolidated schools in 2024, the Dzantik’i Heeni campus has hosted students ranging from preschool through high school. It was formerly the Dzantik’i Heeni Middle School, so it didn’t need a playground for recess.

Since Montessori Borealis, Juneau Community Charter School and Yaakoosgé Daakahidi High School moved into the building, students and their families have been eagerly awaiting a playground.

“It’s very fun looking, but please don’t enter,” Eagan-Lagerquist said. “It’s not done. Some of the parts we are waiting



The finished Sigoowu Ye Park in an undated photo. (Courtesy of City and Borough of Juneau)

for are structural, and so it’s really important that everyone stays off the equipment until it’s open because it’s not safe.”

However, construction is complete at the nearby Sigoowu Ye Park with new playground equipment, upgraded pathways, enhanced lighting and improved landscaping.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony and community barbecue is planned for “Fun Place Park” on Aug. 29 from 12 to 2 p.m. It first opened to the public on Friday and is located at 5921 Pine St. in Lemon Creek.

Updates to Sigoowu Ye began in 2023 when Parks and Recreation began collecting feedback on safety improvements and accessibility. Most park updates were completed last fall, but surfacing was delayed to this summer due to weather and contractor availability.

Si’t Tuwan Park is also expected to

open this month, located in the Mendenhall Valley between Threadneedle and Kanat’a Deyi St. The name means “beside the glacier” in Lingít. The park’s updates include new play equipment for multiple age groups, picnic tables and a basketball court.

Playground structures have been built, and contractors will work on surfacing next before carrying out final landscaping and design. This site remains closed as construction continues. The upgrades to Sigoowu Ye and Si’t Tuwan are estimated to cost around \$900,000 each, according to Marc Wheeler, director of Parks and Recreation. The playgrounds were funded by sales tax dollars. Sigoowu Ye also received a \$125,000 grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

• *Contact Jasz Garrett at jasz@juneauindependent.com or (907) 723-9356.*

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PREPARE

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capacity.

Past subglacial releases have started one to six days after the basin fills. Mendenhall River's flood stage usually peaks within a day or two, depending on conditions and release rate.

To stay informed on current conditions, residents can sign up for emergency alerts to receive texts and calls about flood risk.

The City and Borough of Juneau advises impacted residents to evacuate once the ice dam breaks and the release starts. The National Weather Service will send out a flood warning, and in-person evacuation notices will be given to neighborhoods within the possible inundation area. Newly updated evacuation maps include 1,900 Mendenhall Valley homes, nearly double the number from previous maps, to account for possible road blockages in the event of a HESCO breach.

If there is a HESCO breach, the National Weather Service will issue a flash flood warning advising those in the area to shelter in place. First responders will be staged on both banks of the Mendenhall River.

Evacuation routes from CBJ are linked below, mapped to prevent traffic congestion.

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities will close the Back Loop Bridge to all traffic and the Brotherhood Bridge to foot traffic during the flood, beginning when the Mendenhall Lake gauge reaches 12 feet.

"Do not attempt to drive or walk on flooded roads or approach closed bridges," DOT's webpage states. "Floodwater moves fast and conditions can change without warning."



A truck is filled with sandbags at Dimond Park on July 11, 2026. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

An emergency shelter will be operated by the American Red Cross at the Floyd Dryden Gymnasium, and extra vehicle parking is available at various locations through this registration link.

For those evacuating with pets, limited spaces are available at the Red Cross shelter. Juneau Animal Rescue offers emergency pet sheltering and an emergency pet planning brochure.

Before evacuating, the city recommends residents pack a go bag with medications, food, water, essential documents and, if needed, pet supplies. If possible, it's also recommended to move valuables to higher locations in homes and dispose of or secure household hazards.

Sandbags are available at the Dimond Park Field House via drive-through every Saturday until the flood, and supplies to personally fill sandbags are available all week. A video by the Juneau Flood Solution Advocates shows how to manually fill a sandbag. As of Wednesday, the city announced sandbags will be hand-filled until repairs are made to the sandbag-filling machine.

Pumps will be running along HESCO barriers to minimize damage

from seepage.

Sandbag distribution events in front of the field house are scheduled for Thursday from 4 to 6 p.m. and on Saturday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. if the basin has not released.

During the flood, people are advised to stay clear of the river and barriers. Updates on river conditions can be found through the Juneau Flood Solutions Advocates Eyes on the River livestream.

"We're thankful to have the flood barrier system in place to protect Juneau residents from the flood. But while they're effective, the barriers are not perfect — water can seep through, and flooding due to tree strikes is possible," a CBJ social media post states. "For your safety, and for the safety of first responders, please stay away from the barriers."

CBJ has set up a flood hotline at 907-500-0890, operating Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Once the release begins, it will switch to 24-hour operation. Residents can also contact floodresponse@juneau.gov or view the city's guide to flood preparedness.

• Contact Ellie Ruel at ellie.ruel@juneauindependent.com.

CITY HALL

Continued from page 1

the building can be torn down. Instead, the Alaska Native nonprofit is offering \$1.5 million for a purchase that bypasses the auction process.

"Right now we don't have \$40 million to spend, and the cost to tear that down and mitigate all of the asbestos, the lead paint, and the heavy metals that we know are underneath," Lee Kadinger, SHI's chief of operations, said in an interview Tuesday.

City officials have estimated City Hall needs more than \$14 million in structural, safety and systems repairs. Kadinger said that makes him question the rationale — and likelihood — of a \$2.5 million minimum bid if the building is put up for auction.

"City Hall is not an asset," he said. "City Hall is a liability because of the costs there. There have been no appraisals of what the building is worth that we could even lean on. So while we respect the city's request for a \$2.5 million minimum bid, I feel it's a little hopeful."

Both proposals are scheduled to be discussed at a Juneau Assembly meeting on Aug. 17, including an opportunity for public testimony. The Assembly has approved moving City Hall to the first two floors of the Michael J. Burns Building, on the premise that it will be less expensive than remaining in current space, with that relocation now scheduled for next May.

SHI on Tuesday issued a press release featuring illustrations of its proposed building, which were published last month by KTOO. The institute estimates the building would be about 30,000 square feet, making its footprint roughly comparable to the 21,884-square-foot City Hall that has two stories.

A glass-blowing studio and retail



gallery for "high-end art" are among the prominent features detailed in the press release, which also notes it would offer various hands-on programs aimed at tourists and residents.

On the second floor, SHI states it would "give the city first right of refusal to relocate the Juneau-Douglas City Museum to the second floor of the building." But whether the city would want that option is questionable.

Catherine Melville, who as director of Juneau Public Libraries is overseeing the museum after the budget cuts, stated in an email to the Independent on Tuesday that "CBJ is not considering moving the Juneau-Douglas City Museum at this time."

City Manager Katie Koester, in a May 4 memo, noted the 8,000-square-foot second floor would be 2,000 square feet bigger than the current museum, which last month cut back its staff and operating hours due to budget cuts made by the Assembly in the wake of voter-approved tax reductions.

"At market rate...it is difficult to imagine a scenario where CBJ is able to recoup personnel and lease costs in ticket sales, regardless of location," Koester wrote.

Kadinger said if SHI provides space to the city under a tax-exempt community-use provision the lease amount "cannot charge more for the

space than what it costs us to operate that space." He said that would be significantly less than what might be charged to a for-profit operator.

"We feel that it's a good marriage between SHI and the city...because we have curators, we have archivists, we have a lot of people that work with us and so why not be able to share those resources?" he said.

SHI is also considering setting aside some space for apartments in recognition of the community's housing needs, as well as its own employees," the release notes.

Kadinger said he believes it will take about four years to raise the funds — and the \$40 million estimate includes cost increases occurring during that time — and construction would take about 18 months.

The new site would create a five-building Sealaska complex along both sides of Heritage Way, including the headquarters of its for-profit corporation and four occupied by the independently run nonprofit established by the company. The other buildings include a retail gift shop, offices, historical exhibits, traditional crafts workspaces, and a recently opened Indigenous science building featuring digital as well as traditional activity areas.

• *Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.*



A salmon is weighed at the Auke Nu Weigh Station during the 79th Golden North Salmon Derby on Saturday, Aug. 9, 2025. (Ellie Ruel / Juneau Independent)

80th Golden North Salmon Derby pays tribute to teller of fish tales

Organizers dedicate three-day derby starting Friday to Kelly Peres, who has provided radio coverage of the event for the past 50 years

By MARK SABBATINI, Editor

The first Golden North Salmon Derby in 1947 featured 30 prizes "ranging from a Plymouth sedan to canned fruit." For the 80th derby, organizers are offering something with more splash.

"The big thing we're doing this year is giving away a boat (in a raffle) to anybody who participates," said Ryan Beason, chair of the derby, in an interview Wednesday. "That's something that we have not done in the past."

He added people don't have to fish to buy a derby ticket and be entered for a prize.

The three-day derby scheduled to begin Friday has evolved in many ways during its history, from when it takes place during the summer to the type of fish participants can catch.

"The biggest one I can tell you there is in the pioneer days of the derby it was a king salmon derby, and it hasn't been that for probably 30 to 35 years," said Kelly Peres, who has given derby reports for KINY radio and its affiliates for the past 50 years, in an interview Thursday. Coho salmon now account for the majority of fish caught.



Dock activity during the Golden North Salmon Derby in 1964. (Alaska State Library historical collections ASL-P351-124)

The first Golden North Salmon Derby in 1947 featured 30 prizes "ranging from a Plymouth sedan to canned fruit." For the 80th derby, organizers are offering something with more splash.

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Beason and Peres will each be in familiar places this year: Beason will be fishing in a spot where he was the derby winner in 2001 and 2002 ("down south of town is what I tell people"), and Peres will be on the air providing updates — although others are now taking on the lead responsibilities.

The 80th derby is officially being dedicated to Peres by Territorial Sportsmen Inc., which sponsors the event and refers to him as the "voice of the Golden North Salmon Derby." Peres said he learned about that honor about two weeks ago.

"I feel honored over the top," he said. "If anything at all, I wonder if it's warranted, for lack of a better term. But if I can do anything to help promote Territorial Sportsmen and what they do — and the Derby and the scholarship program and the rest of that — I'm full force ahead."

The scholarship reference is for a program that began in 1954, which has awarded more than 350 scholarships

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totalling more than \$2 million. Beason, who won the derby as a youth in 2001 and 2002, also was among the nine people to win a scholarship when he was a high school senior in 2007.

"What they do is they spread it out over four years and you get a payment each year, so it helps a lot," he said. He said he's been helping organize the derby for the past decade because "this is like me giving back in a way."

The first Golden North Salmon Derby began on Aug. 31, 1947, although it didn't officially acquire that name until the following year, according to an article published in 1989 about the inaugural event. The first derby was suspended on its opening day "by high winds and rough water," and when it resumed the following Sunday it was with changes to safety and other rules.

Dick Harris was the first derby winner, with a 38-pound, 4-ounce salmon, according to the article.

Organizers of the first derby expected people on about 200 boats to compete for the \$4,500 in total prizes. Beason said participation peaked in the mid-1990s with about 2,500 participants, and there have been about 800 to 1,000 participants during the past decade.

"It's just changing trends, fishing not being what it used to be, smaller fish," he said. "I think it's a combination of everything, but I think overall the general theme for the derby has stayed pretty much the same. It's a good family weekend to get out in the boat and have your chance of winning some good prizes."

It's also gotten harder over the years to find volunteers to help during the three-day weekend, but technology has made some of the tasks simpler,

Beason said. Electronic tickets are now offered, organizers stopped requiring validations of tickets at docks last year, and live results are available online.

Live updates of results have, of course, been broadcast by KINY for decades. Coverage of the event has also changed with time and technology, Peres said.

"When I got started back in the old-timey days — this is pre-cellular telephone days, back in the late '70s, early '80s — there was a lot more to the communications end of it," he said. A frequent crisis involved the station paying phone companies to provide lines down to the weigh-in station docks, which could go haywire depending on the tides.

"If you're the telephone line guy and you run a line all the way down the dock, you might run that line 200 or 300 feet down a dock — the length of a football field," Peres said. "And if the tide happens to be high at that point, that line is going to be much shorter than when the tide goes out. And if that dock drops 13, 15, 17 feet, that line will snap like a bad fishing line and your communications are shot. And I can't tell you how many times that happened over the decades that I was involved."

Cellphones have largely solved that problem — except reception is unreliable at Amalga Harbor, located nearly 25 miles north of downtown Juneau, Peres said.

"The other thing that has happened, given technology, is we're a lot better at getting fisherpeople and their catch public exposure faster," he said. "Now we've got reporters with cellphones at the weigh-in stations taking pictures and texting those pictures back to Derby Central — which in this case I guess now is Mendenhall Mall for

KINY — and then distributing those up on our Facebook page and some of our other web pages."

The radio broadcasts by various station personnel and recruited helpers are scheduled from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, but Peres said he never had difficulty coming up with things to present for 12 hours when he was the primary voice involved with the broadcast.

"There's a lot going on," he said. "We have special fish story features coming up. We have special parody commercials coming up. We have interviews with people who are out on the water. We have almost a constant flow from people who are on boats sending stuff."

The station and its affiliates will also be using a Super Bowl theme for coverage of the 80th salmon derby, but "I can't get into too much detail there without spilling too many beans that I'm not supposed to spill," Peres said.

Live derby coverage will be on both KINY and Mix 106 throughout the weekend, along with updates from those broadcasts carried on other stations.

The weather forecast is for clouds and light wind on Friday, a chance of rain on Saturday, and mostly cloudy skies on Sunday, according to the National Weather Service. Beason said the fishing so far this year has been spotty.

"Hopefully the cohos show up because that's where we make most of our money," he said.

• *Contact Mark Sabbatini at editor@juneauindependent.com or (907) 957-2306.*

View Drive residents prepare for glacial outburst flooding without short-term protection



Bob Winters stands on his elevated front porch at his View Drive home on July 11, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

The city is funding the appraisals, title and environmental research to make a buyout offer to homeowners this fall, but not in time for the flood

By JASZ GARRETT, Managing Editor

Last year the View Drive neighborhood was promised to have a flood solution, although not their ideal one, by the time of the next outburst.

But a federal buyout program is moving more slowly than the Juneau residents without HESCO barriers had hoped

The original plan was for the buyout project to be completed within 220 days of its federal funding approval, which was last November. That means buyouts should have been finalized before this August's expected flood. The Natural Resources Conservation Service approved an extension for the City and Borough of Juneau until May 1, 2027. The agency's expectation is

for the project to be fully completed by then, including demolition and mediation.

The buyout project is through the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program. It's a first of its kind for Alaska. The federal government pays 75% while the sponsor — the city — pays 25%. The city's portion is estimated to be up to \$6 million.

The Juneau Assembly voted May 18 to pay for View Drive appraisals, appropriating up to \$558,000. The total includes \$6,000 per parcel for appraisals and \$25,000 per parcel for total project cost estimating.

The Assembly decision allows homeowners and the city to determine the total cost of the buyout project. The

city is also funding the title and environmental research. But where local funding comes from afterward is undetermined. In February, the city asked the 18 eligible View Drive homeowners to help pay the 25% cost share.

"We're going to do this work, we're going to invest that, make that commitment and then we'll craft the offers," said Ryan O'Shaughnessy, the city's emergency programs manager. "We'll get to the point where we can say, 'OK, here's the all-in number, here's what you would get as a homeowner, and here's the amount you would have to pay.' The money that it takes to get to that point, the city's going to pay for."

The May vote doesn't necessarily mean the program will move forward past these steps toward property demolition. After receiving their cost estimate, a homeowner can still back out of the program.

"Some of us might feel like it's the right decision, but if we have to go in debt to demolish our house..." said Kim Peterson, a View Drive resident.

The project cost takes into account the estimated values of the homes, demolition costs, remediation of properties, and environmental restoration. The Emergency Watershed Protection program uses the appraised value before the 2024 flood due to a federal disaster declaration that year. NRCS representatives first met with homeowners last July.

If a resident opts in after receiving a cost estimate, the property becomes a hazard and it can never be redeveloped.

"Obviously this buyout program could be beneficial, although we're looking at having to come up with 25% and unknown costs for tearing the house

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down,” said Randy Hurtte, another View Drive resident, in his May testimony to the Assembly.

He said he testified to share the plight of his family so people know the ramifications of living in a house that’s flooded regularly. His home has flooded severely for the last three years in a row.

Hurtte added his household was seriously considering the buyout program since “we have no value of the house at this point.”

The program is offered for properties found to be at imminent risk, especially when there is a threat of a future hazard. Glacial lake outburst floods from Suicide Basin have occurred annually since 2011, but risen to record-setting levels each of the past three years.

On June 3, Hurtte and several other View Drive residents gathered at the Mendenhall Valley Public Library to learn more about the Emergency Watershed Protection program.

Outside of unknowns about how the local 25% cost share will be paid, the other challenge for View Drive residents — like hundreds in the Mendenhall Valley — is waiting for answers on a long-term solution to the flooding. Proposed short-, medium- and long-term mitigation measures are expected to be reviewed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers headquarters this month.

Before the 2025 glacial outburst, the Army Corps provided more than two miles of HESCO barriers for the city to install along the Mendenhall River. Nearly 300 Valley homes were damaged in the 2024 flood, but were mostly protected by the levees last year. Without protection, some homes on View Drive reported major 2025

flood damage. This year, the Army Corps paid for and installed about another three miles of levees along the Mendenhall River and armored 1.85 miles of riverbank to prevent erosion.

“I’m glad that all those folks are protected now, because that was scary for those people, but what do we have to look forward to if we don’t do this?” asked Peterson.

Army Corps and city officials state View Drive was found ineligible for HESCO barriers due to soil stability and low home elevations.

Right across the Mendenhall River from View Drive is a 1,100-foot-long earthen berm meant to protect Back Loop Road and downstream areas, according to the Army Corps.

On July 11, Mike Babcock had just finished building a rock and sand berm around his View Drive home.

He said he raised the ground by about three feet around the house and stabilized the riverbank with riprap. Babcock said their house hasn’t flooded in the past, but he took out a loan of around \$100,000 for the mitigation measure. A new road built on the property cost another \$100,000, and his son also took steps to protect his house.

“Sadly, what happened last year is we lost 40 feet of riverbank that just sloughed off and went down river,” Lara Babcock said. “So that’s how we were affected last year.”

Mike Babcock said it cost him \$103,000 last September to add back the riverbank.

“The city wouldn’t help us. The Army Corps of Engineers wouldn’t help us and I think it’s terrible that they’ve done all this work right across the bridge, and when I asked them to help us stabilize our bank and protect it from the flood they said, ‘No, you’re on your own,’” Mike Babcock said.

He said if his household took the buyout with an expectation to help pay the 25% cost share, “we would have to get a loan to pay off our mortgage.” He said it was less costly to pursue his own flood mitigation.

“They just decided to protect everybody down there, and everybody up here is on your own,” he said. Mike Babcock added he has been a contractor for 50 years and doesn’t understand the infeasibility reason given by the Army Corps.

“It’s a hard thing because for most of these folks this is their whole everything,” his wife added. “We love it here.”

She said they have lived on View Drive for a decade. Lara Babcock said their approach to the buyout program is different since their house is higher up on the street and hasn’t flooded before. The couple said they are hopeful for a permanent solution and were excited about possible local mining involvement in expediting one.

Along with the dike, Mike Babcock bought a \$3,500 pump for potential water inside his house. The Army Corps provided about 40 pumps this year that are being set up along the Mendenhall River’s barriers to prevent seepage, but none were allocated to View Drive.

O’Shaughnessy said the decision was made “to do the most good that we can with the resources that we have.”

“In emergency management we’re faced with the difficult question of allocating resources to do the most good at a given time within a set of circumstances,” he said. “We’re looking at this situation of, ‘This is a public resource,’ and we have a responsibility to the public to do the most good that we can with that resource.” O’Shaugh-

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nessy added without barriers, the pumps would likely be ineffective for the neighborhood due to the volume of water. He said the neighborhood was provided with sandbags.

Bob Winters' heightened house could be seen peeking through the spruce trees down the street from the Babcocks.

"We didn't use to be able to see his house," Lara Babcock said.

Winters, like other View Drive residents, has taken measures into his own hands.

Last year, Carol and Don Habeger, with the help of two neighboring households, built a rock berm surrounding their properties at the end of View Drive. But the 2025 flood with a Mendenhall River record crest of 16.65 feet seeped underneath.

Winters said his home is one of only two in the Mendenhall Valley that have been raised to fight the flood. The other home elevation was by Sam Hatch on Meander Way.

Winters built his house in 1981 and said he recalls flooding in the garage every year since then. He said when it was built and permitted, his house was not in the floodplain.

"Even up to 2014, I was the only one that got wet," Winters said, adding he and his wife lost furniture and had to do extensive repairs following that flood.

He said it cost about \$2.4 million to raise his house a total of three times.

The house has now been raised in total by nine feet and the garage by 12 feet.

The first time was in 2015 after the flood that impacted View Drive. The house was raised three feet and the garage by six feet. In 2023, he experienced flooding again, so in 2024, Win-



Stairs lead up to the home of the Winters on View Drive on July 11, 2026. The house has been raised by nine feet over the years. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)



The home of the Babcocks is seen surrounded by a personal berm above the Mendenhall River on July 11, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

raised the house by two more feet. "Once you flood it's like a four-month process by the time you dry everything out underneath, get everything torn out," he said. "You've got to empty all the rooms out, take all the carpeting out, order the flooring, wait for it to get in, wait for somebody that can put it in

for you. You're basically four months without a kitchen, without floors, with fans going the full time. Everything is damp."

In 2025, his house flooded again, leading to his decision to elevate once more. The garage was raised six feet
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The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers works on an earthen berm near Back Loop Road on July 11, 2026. (Jasz Garrett / Juneau Independent)

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and the house by four this year.

"It irritates me to see the Corps and the city say the HESCOs aren't causing any problem upstream," he said.

Winters said he is worried about the earthen berm across the road, along with the downstream levees and riprap, causing the water to rise in his neighborhood.

But he said since he's finished the home elevation ahead of the 2026 flood, he no longer feels as stressed.

"It's like I'm in a treehouse," he said, looking over the edge of his elevated porch.

The outside walls also have an ice

and water shield. Flood vents were installed to allow water to come and go freely.

Winters said he declined the buyout program because he's already invested too much into his house to abandon it at a personal loss.

"I'm almost 80," he added. "So last thing we want to do is move."

In an interview, O'Shaughnessy said appraisals and environmental assessments are ongoing. He said the city's hired contractor started scheduling appraisals with homeowners.

"I believe that the only piece that we might still be in procurement on is the technical appraisal review," O'Shaughnessy said.

He said nearly all 18 homeowners eligible for the buyout program requested appraisals. O'Shaughnessy said the two homeowners who declined have experienced flooding in the past.

He encouraged evacuation for homeowners when Suicide Basin begins to release. New city maps this year show 1,900 homes in the evacuation zone.

The next update on the buyout program will be given at the scheduled Assembly Committee of the Whole meeting on Aug. 31.

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Voices

Support for Ballot Measure 1

By SALLY SMITH

After careful and extensive study, the League of Women Voters of Alaska develops positions on issues. As a non-partisan organization, however, it doesn't support or oppose political candidates or parties.

In the Aug. 18 primary election the League supports Ballot Measure 1 which places limits on campaign contributions in state and local elections. Ending unlimited individual and group contributions in these elections would allow candidates to campaign more equitably for public office and reduce the risk of large donors and interest groups holding undue influence over those elected.

In 2006, 73% of Alaska's voters approved contribution limits; however, in 2021 the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that those limits not only were too low, but that they didn't allow for an inflation adjustment.

Since that ruling, individuals and groups have been able to make unlimited contributions to candidates and groups, leveraging the possibility of an unfairly biased outcome.

Passage of Ballot Measure 1 would set a ceiling on donations to in-state candidates, and based on consumer inflation rates, would adjust that level every 10 years. Additionally, Ballot Measure 1 would shift campaign limits to follow an election cycle rather than the current annual cycle, which not only makes sense, but would remove a possible advantage to incumbents. To protect the integrity of our elections, and to help ensure that each-

of us has a meaningful voice in choosing who represents us, the League of Women Voters urges your support for Ballot Measure 1 on the Aug. 18 primary ballot.

• *Sally Smith, vice president
Juneau League of Women Voters*

3,000 people

By MICHELLE BONNET HALE

I don't know where to start. Astonishment. I am astonished that the Alaska Division of Elections has removed 3,048 people from Alaskan active voter rolls. In what can only be called a fishing expedition, Alaskan election officials provided DMV with a list of approximately 15,200 DMV license and ID applicants, asking that DMV provide citizenship information for these applicants. This expedition netted 3,048 people who had initially gotten driver's licenses or state IDs as non-citizens. Without further inquiry, the Division of Elections summarily removed them from active voter rolls.

Once you become a naturalized citizen in Alaska, you are not required to apply for a new driver's license or state ID. When naturalized citizens apply for a Permanent Fund Dividend, they are asked in their PFD application if they are a U.S. citizen, as we all are. With the automatic voter registration accompanying the PFD application, most are then automatically registered to vote in Alaska.

The naturalized citizen can also register to vote outside of the PFD process. Many do, and often in the very same venue where they obtained citizenship. Again, they are not required to have an updated driver's li-

cense. These are two remarkably clear and simple paths for those 3,048 people to have become registered voters without having updated their driver's licenses or state IDs. It's so remarkably clear and simple that one would have expected the Division of Elections to have thought of it before they summarily yanked 3,000 voters off the active voter rolls.

Per Matt Acuña Buxton of The Alaska Current on July 29, 2026, approximately 8,000 people became naturalized citizens in Alaska over the last eight years. An Alaska driver's license or state ID is valid for 8 years. Those 3,048 people could easily have come from this pool of newly naturalized citizens.

Automatic voter registration through the PFD application process is an entirely legal process. Standalone voter registration is an entirely legal process. How must it feel to have followed the laws and followed the process only to have had your prized ability to vote as a citizen in your new country ripped from you, right before the election season.

At a time when the federal government, through its ICE force, is arresting and deporting and killing immigrants in this country, I wonder if the partisan and politicized Division of Elections is hoping that a large percentage of these new citizens will not even pursue getting back on the voter rolls. I wonder why the Division of Elections chose to take this action just weeks before the August 2026 primary election. I wonder what additional actions they will take leading up to the general elections. I wonder where that initial list of 15,200 people came from

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3,000

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and what the criteria was for that list. I wonder if the federal Department of Justice provided that list, since they have our voter rolls.

I am an outspoken critic of our current federal administration. I wonder if I am on that list. My partner is trans and changed her name and gender in the last few years. I wonder if she is on that list. It is breathtaking that the Division of Elections dropped this hammer on so many of our newest citizens. Now, the burden is on each and every one of those 3,048 people to contact the Division of Elections to reinstate themselves.

We don't know all of the stories of these individual people caught up in this witch hunt. What we do know is that they have lives and families and people they love. They have homes and jobs. They contribute to our society. Many immigrants also have very difficult backstories that prompted them to come to our country that once welcomed them but now no longer does.

I thought that the Dunleavy administration and the Trump administration had long ago worn out my outrage, though not my determination to maintain our country as a democracy. This purge of voters, however, renews my outrage that our government can so mistreat our fellow Americans. I am outraged at this barely-disguised effort, with no legal reasoning, to skew the vote in our upcoming elections.

We all know the adage from WWII, "first they came for the Jews and I didn't speak up," with its ending that by the time they came for me, there was no one left to speak up. Well, in our country at this time, first they came for illegal immigrants, and now they are coming for legal immigrants.

You fill in the dots. They are not going to stop unless we take action and insist on legality and accountability.

A fishing expedition? The Division of Elections knows who they are fishing for. This is nothing other than a voter purge.

For those who don't follow authoritarian regime change, voter purges are right up there with masked police forces in the authoritarian playbook. Voter purges. Masked police forces.

This is absolutely unacceptable. I am grateful to the legislators who have spoken out and demanded a reversal of this action from the Division of Elections. I am grateful to Alaskan reporters Mark Sabbatini, Dermot Cole, Matt Acuña Buxton, James Brooks, Corrine Smith, and others for clear reporting on this gross infringement of civil rights.

The action for all of us to take right now is to vote early and vote in person in the Alaska primary election. The action required of us is to vote immediately and to not miss the opportunity to vote that our fellow citizens have just lost. We cannot afford to lose this chance to vote. We don't know who is next on the Division of Elections' list. It could well be us.

To vote in person before the Aug. 18, 2026 primary election day in Juneau, go to the Mendenhall Mall annex or to the State Office Building atrium on the eighth floor between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. weekdays. The Mendenhall Mall annex is also open for shorter hours on the weekend. For voting locations outside Juneau, go to elections.alaska.gov and scroll down to the "Early and Absentee In-Person Voting Locations" section.

• *Michelle Bonnet Hale's roots go deep in Juneau and Southeast Alaska. She and her partner share their household with various relatives and*

three dogs. She served for six years on the Juneau Assembly.

Why I'm supporting Sen. Dan S. Sullivan

By PEGGY ANN MCCONNOCHIE

As a longtime resident of Juneau who has called Alaska home for decades, I am writing to strongly endorse the re-election of U.S. Sen. Dan S. Sullivan. Having watched our state wrestle with economic challenges and resource development debates, I have come to value Sen. Sullivan's consistent, outcome-focused approach. Time and time again, he's put Alaska first, producing real wins that strengthen Southeast communities and the state's overall economy.

In an era of political gridlock, Sen. Sullivan's record stands out for his effectiveness. His work has made a real difference in Southeast Alaska. He's been a committed champion for home-ports a U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker in Juneau, which brings jobs and badly needed infrastructure to Southeast. He's also pushed federal officials to provide a long-term solution to the Mendenhall Valley glacial outburst flooding, helping the community overcome the federal bureaucracy to secure funding and engineering help to protect local homes and families.

Sen. Dan S. Sullivan is the right choice to keep Alaska moving forward. His support for responsible energy development, military investments that strengthen Alaska's strategic position, and commitment to Alaska families are key to the state's future. Sen. Sullivan's leadership ensures Alaska's voice is heard in Washington. I urge my fellow Alaskans to join me in supporting his re-election this year.

• *Peggy Ann McConnochie, Juneau*

Sports



Maddox Carroll is shown playing for Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé against South Anchorage at Adair Kennedy Memorial Park pitch, Friday, May 22, 2026.

Olympic Development Program selects Juneau's Crimson Bears trio to western regional team

Hard pitch work pays off for soccer stars Carroll, Erickson, Mazon

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

Their hard work over days, weeks and months has culminated into a soccer “pitch of dreams” for Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé incoming senior soccer players Sonny “Sam” Mazon and Maddox Carroll and junior Ayla Erickson.

“Making the regional ODP team has been a longtime goal of mine, and representing Alaska at this level means a lot to me,” Carroll said, referring to the Olympic Development Program. “It is something I have worked toward for years, and now it is rewarding to see that hard work pay off. I am excited for the opportunity to compete against some of the best players in the country while taking another step in my soccer journey.”

The three were selected to the U.S. Youth Soccer Olympic Development

Program Western Regional team to compete at upcoming inter-regional events. This is the first time Juneau players have advanced this far into the ODP program.

“I am very excited to get the opportunity to experience playing at a higher level with ODP,” Erickson said. “I love playing soccer because it’s such a creative sport and there’s always something else you can learn and try. I always have goals to work towards and ways I want to improve. I also love being able to meet new people and play on teams with some of my closest friends. I’m very grateful for all the opportunities I get.”

ODP has four regions, and each region picks its best players through state or regional club tournaments, try-out camps and athlete potential. Said Mazon, “I am just happy the hard work is finally paying off.”

For Carroll, Erickson and Mazon, the journey started with Alaska club team play from May through August 2025. That resulted in their being selected to the Alaska state ODP team.

“What I love about soccer is more than just the games,” Carroll said. “It is the teammates, traveling around the world and the lessons that stick with me. Soccer has taught me that dedication and persistence get you somewhere, even when things don’t go the way you planned.”

That Alaska team competed in January at the Region 4 ODP National Championships in Mesa, Arizona, which brought close to 20 of the best ODP teams in the western United States to play. This is where ODP regional coaches got their first good look at players for selection consideration. Invites to regional selection camps or direct promotion to the regional team followed over the coming months.

The trio, along with Juneau players Ibrahima Diouf and Imanol Vera Alvarado, were selected to attend ODP camps this summer. The trio, along with Diouf, advanced this July. Mazon and Erickson received regional team selection last week and Carroll on Wednesday.

To get selected for a regional ODP team, a player must advance from club soccer through state tryouts, earn selection into a state or sub-regional training pool and stand out during regional ID (identification) camps or summer ID camps evaluated by regional staff scouts. “The last two years have been rough for me,” Carroll said. “A major knee surgery in spring

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SOCCER

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"A major knee surgery in spring 2025 and then being largely absent from my high school season for the second year in a row. There were times it felt nothing would go my way, but I believe the adversity and my resilience also taught me more than anything else would. By staying dedicated to getting back, I made it just in time for this camp, thankfully being able to be successful during it... Now I am taking those lessons forward and giving everything I have got representing my state and the west region."

Erickson will now compete with the girls' ODP Western Regional team in inter-regional play in Orlando, Florida, in November. Mazon and Carroll will represent the boys' ODP Western Region at an inter-regional camp in Orlando in January.

At those events, national coaches will be scouting players for the U.S. Soccer Youth National Team, the next potential step for this trio and a rare experience for athletes.

• *Contact Klas Stolpe at sports@juneauindependent.com*



Juneau's Sonny Mazon, Ibrahima Diouf and Maddox Carroll are shown at the US Youth Soccer ODP West Regional camp this July in Salt Lake City, Utah. (Photo courtesy Keegan Carroll)

GCLL Majors fall in state title game

Abbott-O-Rabbit wins 10-2, will represent Alaska at Northwest Regionals

By KLAS STOLPE, Sports Editor

The Gastineau Channel Little League Major All-Stars fell behind early in Monday's third game in their best-of-three series against Anchorage's Abbott-O-Rabbit Little League at the Alaska Little League Baseball State Tournament on Ketchikan's Dudley Field, and could not recover, losing 10-2. GCLL won game one 9-0 Saturday and lost 12-2 in game two Sunday.

"The key for us is these kids understand they each play a critical role on this team," AOR manager Tom Mueller said. "They put the team first. They pick each other up when things are less than perfect and they treat individual success like team success. Juneau has a great team and a great coaching staff..."

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Juneau's Gastineau Channel Little League Major All-Stars huddle during their state championship game loss to Anchorage's Abbott-O-Rabbit at Ketchikan's Dudley Field, Monday, Aug. 3, 2026. (Reed Lofstedt / Ketchikan Daily News)

BASEBALL

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"They punched us in the mouth in Game one. I am beyond proud of how our boys responded. We emphasize focusing on making the next play and not dwelling on a mistake. The same goes for a loss. We hit the "reset button" and went to work in preparing for the next game."

AOR advances to the Northwest Regionals in San Bernardino, California.

"We have had an incredible run and things did not work out like we wanted," GCLL manager Ron Winkelman said. "They should be proud of themselves. Years from now they will not remember the score. They will remember the friendships they made and hopefully the life lessons along the way. They have dealt with adversity along the way. We reminded them about POW and the tragic situation that community has had to endure." Winkelman was referring to an ATV

The team found hope in attending the tournament and played their best ball to a third-place finish. The Ketchikan Little League did a moment of silence at the district opening ceremonies. They felt the importance of acknowledging when tragedy happens.

"Baseball is a game," Winkelman said. "Hats off to the POW team for showing up and playing like they did at our district tournament."

Winkelman acknowledged the strength of his GCLL team and how they endured into the state tournament.

"We decided early on that we were not going to have any captains," Winkelman said. "What we had were team leaders and that was on a rotating basis almost every day. More of a team concept."

AOR's Mueller said his team's bats came alive in Game 2.

"We had a great team win," Mueller said. "Juneau is going to hit the ball well, our defense did a great job supporting some great pitching. The team was fired up, but just like a tough loss, we can't dwell on a big win. We went

back to work and focused on the next game. Game 3 was very similar to Game 2 in that every single player contributed offensively while our defense backed up a great pitching performance. Regardless of the score, we never took Juneau for granted and we didn't take our foot off the pedal. We knew Juneau was capable of putting big points on the board."

On Monday, AOR's Kam Bevegne earned a lead-off walk, advanced to second on a fielder's choice hit by Connor Mueller, and to third on a Titan Nerland hit that was mishandled to load the bases. George Andary hit a hard ground ball and reached on an error that scored Bevegne and Nerland for 2-0.

GCLL put the bat on the ball in the bottom of the first but their hits went directly to defensive players for putouts.

GCLL pitcher Gavin Ludeman kept AOR off the bags in the top of the second inning as his pitches resulted in a fly out to Landon Love at second base, a fly out to Cash Stekoll in center field and a ground ball to shortstop Colt Winkelman, who threw to Sebastian Nelson at first base to end the inning. In the bottom half of the second inning, GCLL had two runners on with two outs, but the inning ended with a close call at third base on a steal attempt that stopped a rally.

AOR added runs in the top of the third, with Keeton Perkins earning a lead-off walk, advancing to third base on a double by Federico Lozano and scoring on a fielder's choice hit by Leo Peterson to GCLL shortstop Winkelman, who only had time to throw out the runner advancing to third base.

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BASEBALL

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AOR's Bevegni followed with a single and Connor Mueller earned a walk to load the bases. A single by Nerland scored Peterson for 4-0. George Andary reached on an error, scoring Bevegni for 5-0. West Arnold singled, scoring Mueller for 6-0, and Gus Witthoft hit a triple, scoring Nerland, Andary and Arnold for 9-0. Bennett King earned a walk and Witthoft scored on a steal at home plate for 10-0.

GCLL had the highlight of their state tournament in the bottom of the third inning as Cooper Duvall put a two-ball, two-strike pitch over the left field fence to trail 10-1.

That momentum carried into the top of the fourth, as GCLL relief pitcher Sebastian Nelson recovered from a lead-off single and relied on his fielders to make plays. Indiana Strong fielded a ground ball and threw out the lead runner for one out. Center fielder Stekoll fielded a hit and threw out a runner advancing to second base, and Stekoll caught another fly ball to end the inning. GCLL could not get more than a walk in the bottom half of the fourth inning and left Evans Mallott on base.

GCLL's Nelson struck out the first two AOR batters in the top of the fifth inning and the third out was a fielding catch in center field by Stekoll. In the bottom half, GCLL started a two-out

rally with Strong and Ludeman earning walks and Nelson reaching on an error to load the bases. Stekoll singled to center field, scoring Strong to trail 10-2, but three runners would be stranded on base with a strikeout to the next batter.

GCLL showed true grit in the top of the sixth inning, as Nelson walked two batters and relief pitcher Colt Winkelman hit the next batter to load the bases. Winkelman struck out the next two AOR batters and the third out came via a ground ball to Ludeman at shortstop to end the at-bat.

GCLL had a final shot in the bottom of the sixth inning as Charles Boghosian earned a lead-off walk and Max Metzgar reached on a hard one-out single to left field. But a freak baseball play saw Mallott pop up a bunt attempt that AOR catcher Bevegni caught in the air and threw to first baseman Arnold, catching Metzgar off the bag to end the game.

GCLL used three pitchers. Ludeman (2.2 innings pitched, six hits, 10 runs, two walks and one strikeout), Nelson (2.1 IP, 1 H, 3 BB, 2 SO) and Winkelman (1 IP, 2 SO). Stekoll, Nelson, Duval and Metzgar had one hit each. Strong and Duval scored one run apiece. Stekoll and Duval had one RBI apiece. Strong, Ludeman, Stekoll, Boghosian and Mallott earned one walk each. Eli Mulvey, Carter Talatoa, Love, Stekoll, Duval, Herman and Metzgar had two at-bats each, Winkelman, Strong, Ludeman, Nelson, Boghosian and Mallott one each.

GCLL's Winkelman earned five put outs, three at second base and two strikeouts, and fielded two ground balls; Nelson had four put outs, two at first base and two strikeouts, and fielded two ground balls; Stekoll three put outs in center; Strong and Love one put out apiece at third and second, respectively, and Strong fielded a grand ball. Ludeman had a strikeout and a putout while pitching, a putout at shortstop and fielded two ground balls, and Herman had a putout at second base.

Manager R. Winkelman said, "I am so thankful for this team and for coaches Nick Nelson and Spencer Stekoll." AOR pitcher Nerland earned the win (4.2 IP, 2 H, 2 R, 4 BB, 6 SO) and Mueller closed (1.1 IP, 2 H, 1 BB, 2 SO).

AOR's Andary and Witthoft led with three RBI apiece, Nerland, Arnold and Peterson one each. Nerland had two hits, Bevegni, Arnold, Witthoft, Perkins, and Lozano one each. Bevegni and Nerland score two runs apiece, Mueller, Andary, Arnold, Witthoft, Perkins and Peterson one each. Bevegni, Mueller, Arnold, Landon MacKinnon and Bennett King earned one walk each.

AOR's Arnold had seven putouts at first base; Nerland had seven strikeouts (one was a dropped third strike with the runner thrown out) and one putout in the field. He also fielded two ground balls.

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BASEBALL

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Mueller had one strikeout and fielded two ground balls at shortstop. Catcher Bevegni had a putout and threw out a runner stealing third and a runner heading to first on a dropped third strike. Perkins had a putout at third base and King at second base.

AOR had gone undefeated in their District 1 tournament, but GCLL gave them a first loss to open state play, 9-0. AOR responded with a 12-2 win on Sunday and the state title 10-2 win Monday.

"Getting the win is just huge," AOR manager Tom Mueller said. "The team showed a lot of resilience... First day here, getting through the transition, trying to get used to Ketchikan and the flight, and the very next day we are out here in the rain and Juneau beat us up pretty good... Those kids hit the ball really well... It was the first loss for our kids, but just so proud of the way they responded. They bounced back, they kept it light, kept it loose. We teach them to forget about it, the next game's the next game, whether it was a win or a loss... It is just always a team effort and that is what you know we are really big about, focusing on team and everybody, nobody has to do it themselves... After tonight's game I told the team, 'You did it! You believed in each other, you supported each other, you picked each other up, and every single one of you contributed to becoming the 2026 Alaska Little League State Champions!'"

AOR advances to the Northwest Regionals in San Bernardino, California, beginning Saturday, with the state



Anchorage's Abbott-O-Rabbit players throw their caps into the air to celebrate a 10-2 win over Juneau's Gastineau Channel Little League in the Alaska Major League State Championship at Ketchikan's Dudley Field, Monday, Aug. 3, 2026. (Reed Lofstedt / Ketchikan Daily News)

"It is a great opportunity to represent AOR and the families and players that make that league run," AOR manager Mueller said. "it is an incredible baseball/softball organization. More than that, we are all proud to have the opportunity to represent the great state of Alaska on a national stage. We only have two days to prepare for the Regional Tournament. Our plan is to take advantage of the great facilities here in Ketchikan. They have been an incredible host to us. We will be hitting the batting cage hard over the next couple days. We anticipate a jump in pitching speed so we will work on that and some live hitting at the Upper Dudley field. Defensively we have a few things to work on in preparation for San Bernadino."

The region winners from the Great Lakes (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio), Metro (Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island), Mid-Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland,

Pennsylvania, Washington D.C.), Midwest (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin), Mountain (Colorado, Montana, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming), New England (Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont), Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington), Southeast (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia), Southwest (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas East, Texas West), and West (Arizona, Hawaii, Northern California, Southern California) advance to the World Series in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Aug. 19-30, along with 10 teams from international locations.

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