



Meeting
Conservation Lands Advisory Committee
February 7, 2025, 1:00 PM
Gustavus City Hall
Public welcome to attend

Committee members

John Barry
Tanner Horst
Larry Landry
Colleen Stansbury
Kathy Streveler
Susan Warner
Mike Taylor (Chair)
Shelley Owen (non-member volunteer) Secretary

Agenda

1. Call to order
2. Approval of minutes from January 3, 2025, meeting.
3. Review of Committee authorizing resolution CY 24-12
4. Review of Committee web page and discussion
5. Reports from committee members on assigned tasks and discussion.
 - a. Map development and descriptions of Gustavus conservation lands (Barry)
 - b. TNC contacts and MOU consideration (Streveler, Stansbury, Horst)
 - c. Land Legacy history and purchase of Forelands Preserve tracts (Stansbury)
 - d. Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) MOU consideration (Warner)
 - e. SEALT--Beach Meadows tracts conservation easement (Warner)
 - f. Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area status review (Taylor, or reassign?)
 - g. Other issues?
6. Adjustments and updates to assigned tasks (confirmation)
7. Next meeting date and time
8. Adjournment

Gustavus Forelands Preserve: A brief history

Following a 1996 court settlement, the Alaska Mental Health Trust gained clear title to nearly 5,000 acres of the Gustavus Forelands. Greg Streveler and Meadow Brook, quick to realize the fate of these lands would determine the town's character, called an informal meeting to brainstorm options. Nate Borson and Hank Lentfer showed up. A few Rainiers later, the group decided to explore the possibility of purchasing at least of a few of the acres. The Gustavus Land Legacy, a committee of the Gustavus Community Association (this was pre-city) was formed. The committee's first act was to send a questionnaire to all residents asking which of the Mental Health parcels was the highest priority for protection. Central Beach (between Salmon River and Good River) emerged as the community's first pick.

After an initial round of fundraising, Hank Lentfer was hired as the sole employee of the Gustavus Land Legacy. Sushi dinners became the go-to fundraising event (Wild People for Wild Lands). Dave Lesh hosted the event a few times at the Inn. The dinners then migrated to the Annie Mae. Dozens of people helped roll the sushi. Dozens more wrote checks. Enthusiasm ran high but the bank account did not grow anywhere near the purchase price of Central Beach.

In 1999, after three years of fundraising, Hank got a call from Randy Hagenstein with The Nature Conservancy. Randy had heard about the effort and offered TNC's support. Randy and Hank traveled to Anchorage to meet with the director of the Mental Health Trust. A purchase agreement was signed between the Trust and TNC. The agreement created a three-year window for TNC to raise funds. The Trust agreed to not entertain other buyers during the three years.

The Trust hired a private consultant to evaluate their Gustavus holdings and advise them about what parcels they should keep for future real estate sales and which they should sell to TNC. (The Trust still owns roughly 800 acres in Gustavus.) The Trust also hired a surveyor to determine how much accreted land they owned along the beach front. The survey showed the holdings increased by 1,100 acres since a 1921 survey (1921 was the most recent survey of the whole Gustavus coast).

At the close of the three years, both parties agreed to abide by whatever price was set by a licensed appraiser. Both parties also agreed to the order in which parcels would be purchased. After signing the purchase agreement, fundraising jumped to a whole new level. A grant was submitted to the USFWS Coastal Wetlands Protection Fund. Since NGOs were not eligible to apply for these funds, TNC and the Land Legacy work with the state Fish and Game staff. The first grant was submitted with the signature of the Fish and Game Commissioner. The \$1.2 million grant was awarded in 2003. A second grant (\$1.45 million) to the same agency was awarded in 2004. The Gustavus community chipped in \$120,000 (\$20k from fundraisers, \$20k from individual donations, \$80k from a single anonymous donation.) Ducks Unlimited contributed \$50k. TNC donors made up the remainder of the required matching funds for the large federal grant.

The appraisal (done by Horan) put the purchase price at \$800/acre. The lower-than-expected appraisal and the higher-than-we-ever-dared-dream fundraising (\$3.2 million) meant all the lands the Trust was willing to sell were purchased. The deal closed in 2004. TNC took title to 4 parcels totaling 2,620 acres. An additional 2 parcels totaling 1,439 acres adjacent to the Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area were

deeded from the Trust to the State of Alaska. Bonnie and Hayden hosted the party. The bonfire was as hot as ever. Justin and the Cook County Blues band rocked the night.

Hindsight: There were a 100 ways this deal could have (and almost did) fall through. The \$2+ million in federal funds required a line item in the Governor's budget to pass the funds through the state. Murkowski was the Governor. Robin Taylor held the senate gavel. The line item got tossed from the budget. It took building an alliance with the Alaska Outdoor Council and other lobbying efforts to get the line item re-instated in the budget.

While the \$120,000 raised by the Gustavus community was a tiny part of the final purchase price, it was essential evidence of the community's support of the project. As important as the raised money was the complete absence of vocal opposition. A single phone call or letter from a Gustavus resident to the right senate office or Governor's aid could have sunk the deal. Morgan Deboer played a key role in voicing his support and helping to calm potential skeptics.

After the purchase, the Gustavus Land Legacy dissolved. Hank was hired by TNC to be the Preserve Steward. The SEAL Trails program (federal trail dollars) and a grant from the City's endowment fund helped pay for construction of the Nagoonberry Trail.

Greg and Meadow were right. The fate of these lands have determined the fabric of the community. Future developed will be concentrated in the center of town. We walk dogs, pick berries, harvest moose and get married on the land. The open country is not only good for our tourist-based economy but it's good for the whole community - good for the cranes and owls, children and bears.