

**Conservation Lands Advisory Committee
Report for March 10, 2025, Council General Meeting**

The City of Gustavus Conservation Lands Advisory Committee was established by Resolution CY24-2 in May 2024. We now have seven members:

John Barry
Tanner Horst
Larry Landry
Colleen Stansbury
Kathy Streveler
Mike Taylor (Chair)
Susan Warner

Shelley Owens graciously serves as a non-voting secretary preparing our minutes.

Our charge from Resolution CY 24-2

Mission: Provide recommendations, strategies, and supporting documentation to the City on oversight and stewardship of conservation lands within the City boundaries.

Scope: The committee's efforts shall be limited to undeveloped lands recognized or formally-identified for their conservation values. Developed properties and City lands with industrial or intensive recreational uses are outside the committee's scope.

Activities may include:

- Develop a framework for Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), comment on management plans, joint projects, and title transfers with owners of conservation lands and conservation easements on those lands;
- Help to develop formal deed instruments for full protection of all conservation lands;
- Participate in management planning on the City's behalf;
- Advise private owners in designating protection for the golf course area;
- Advise or facilitate transfer or association of private parcels to larger conservation units.

We last reported to the council on November 12, 2024, when we described initial organization, public meeting provisions in accordance with the Open Meetings Act, and our Mission and Problem Statement. We identified initial tasks to include:

- Map lands in existing formal conservation status and undeveloped lands of potential conservation interest.
- Establish cooperative relationships and develop Memorandums of Understanding with conservation agencies with interests or lands in Gustavus, particularly The Nature Conservancy of Alaska (TNC), Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT), Alaska Division of Fish and Game (ADF&G).
- Work with SEALT to support conservation measures for the DeBoer Beach Meadows tracts on both sides of Dock Road.

The Committee has accomplished much since last fall.

Beach Meadows Tracts with Southeast Alaska Land Trust

After reviewing perceived threats to established and potential conservation lands of concern to Gustavus, the committee set its *initial top priority* to be protection of the Beach Meadows tracts on east and west sides of Dock Road. The DeBoer family has generously enabled public, low-impact, recreational use of their private land. Ben DeBoer has been in contact over several years with the Southeast Alaska Land Trust, (SEALT) expressing his wish to sustain the natural character of the tracts for public enjoyment and wildlife habitat while achieving a modest return to the family.

Committee member Susan Warner leads our work with SEALT. The committee formulated a plan to encourage the family and SEALT to reach an agreement to sustain the Beach Meadows for the enjoyment of present and future Gustavus generations. We proposed a project partnership with SEALT to provide anchor funding for a temporary, 2-year conservation easement on the tracts, to be negotiated by SEALT with the DeBoer family. During the project term, the tracts will remain open and available for public recreational use, and SEALT will work to agree and fund a permanent, long-term conservation easement with the DeBoer family in the community's interest. For both the short-term project and the long-term vision, the tracts will remain in private ownership with management and use informed by the conservation easement. We are thankful for the Council's approval of our plan and the supporting Endowment-Fund grant of \$21,036. Local private donors have graciously contributed \$9,500 additionally to supplement the City grant and SEALT will contribute more funding from their resources to round out the 2-year easement acquisition budget. We are grateful for our partnership with SEALT and especially for the Deboer family's positive response. Stephanie Lawlor, SEALT Lands Conservation Manager, joined our February meeting and reports that negotiations with the family to establish terms for a conservation easement are proceeding well. SEALT is writing major grant applications to fund the long-term provisions. Our two-year, community-supported easement project demonstrates vital local support.

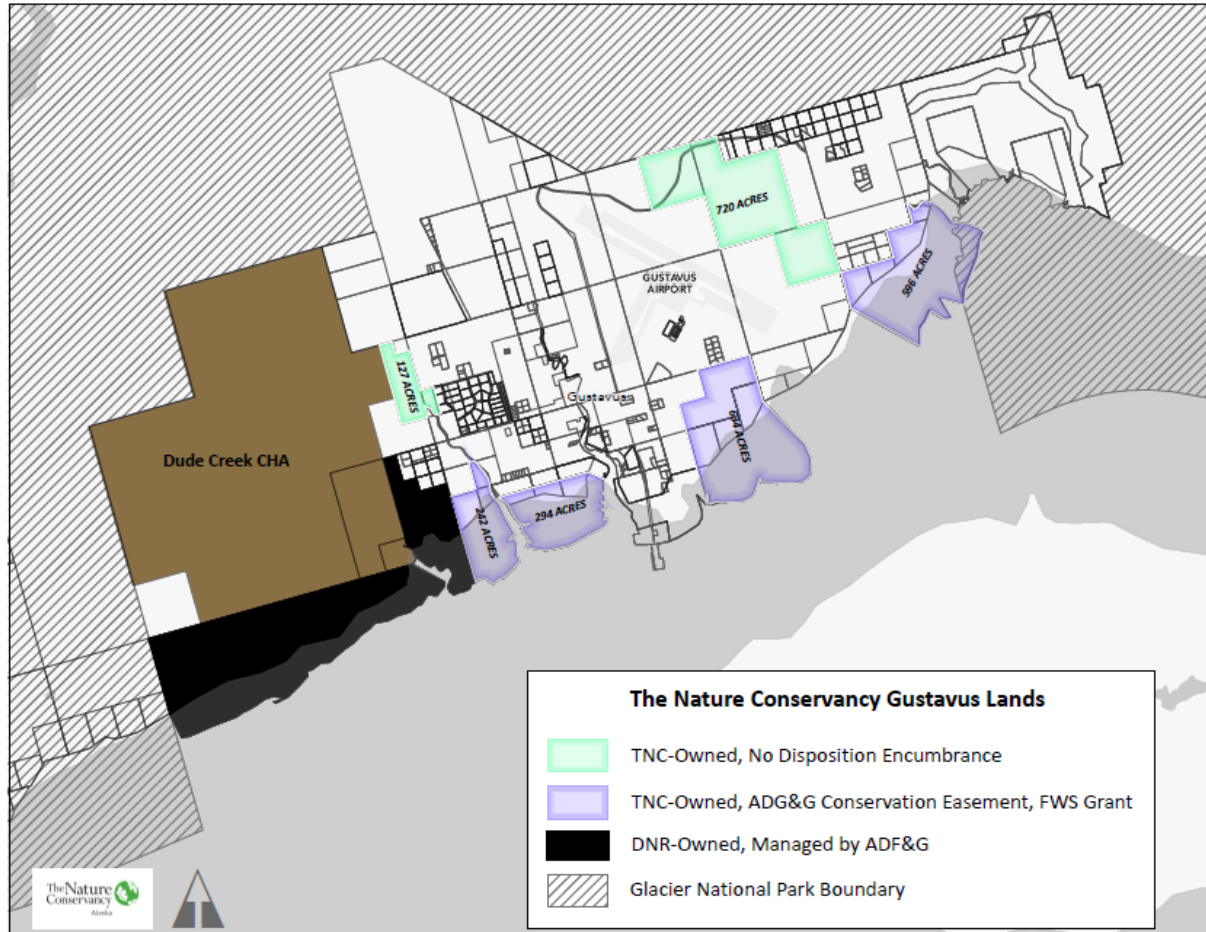
In late April, SEALT representatives will visit Gustavus to conduct supporting land evaluations for the baseline documentation report. They will also meet with Gustavus residents to gather perspectives on this project. For May 2, Susan has organized the *Gustavus Beach Meadows Art Show and Photo Contest* at the Gustavus Community Center. Watch for announcements!

Mapping Conservation Lands

Committee member John Barry is mapping and describing conservation-related lands using Alaska Mapper and other recorded sources. He identifies ownership, land status, and any existing conservation provisions. John's fascinating and comprehensive descriptions are the first of their kind for Gustavus. With help from Clerk Liesl Barker and committee member Susan Warner, the data will soon be available to the public on the City Committee's web page. The maps and information will inform our committee's work going forward and a valuable reference for decades.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Gustavus Forelands Preserve

Committee team members Kathy Streveler, Colleen Stansbury, and Tanner Horst are developing our partnership with TNC to strengthen stewardship and assurance for the much-loved Gustavus Forelands Preserve.



The preserve was established as a “Gustavus Land Legacy” two decades ago through the hard work of Gustavus residents and the effective fundraising and organizational work of TNC. Expectations at the Preserve’s formation were that TNC and the newly formed City of Gustavus would partner in stewardship activities, including management planning and oversight with the city assuming greater responsibilities over time. The new City’s officials were then, however, focused on establishing city functions with no time to assume Preserve responsibilities. Fortunately, TNC employed Hank Lentfer to oversee stewardship of the lands. Hank managed the construction of the popular Nagoonberry Trail.

Today, Gustavus is better prepared to partner and share stewardship responsibilities with TNC for the Preserve as originally intended. As guidance, the committee plans to draft for council approval a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with TNC outlining our partnership. We expect to contribute to management planning for sustainability and for optimizing recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. Two TNC tracts

(green on TNC map above) lack cross-protective conservation easements, which we would like to see secured. We envision a more extensive trail system on the beach uplands and other tracts. TNC representatives Julie Nave and Hank Lentfer joined our March 7 meeting by video conference to discuss partnership opportunities to ensure the Preserve lands are sustained in their natural character with public access for present and future generations. Kathy, Colleen, and Tanner will continue to meet as a subcommittee and work with TNC to develop new approaches. They will report on initiatives each month to the full committee. Hank suggested a celebration of two decades of the Preserve this summer, perhaps in conjunction with the Science Symposium in July. We look forward to a TNC staff for a site visit this spring or summer to walk the lands and meet with Gustavus residents who love the Forelands Preserve. At a February 27th TNC reception in Juneau, I shared with TNC staff members and trustees our community's appreciation for TNC's purchase of the lands from the Alaska Mental Health Trust and our hopes for an enduring partnership ensuring sustainability of the Preserve.

Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area (DCCRA) ADF&G

We made an introductory contact with Carl Koch at ADF&G Habitat Division in Juneau last fall. Carl is responsible for managing critical habitat areas, including ours at Dude Creek. He is familiar with Gustavus having worked on Moose habitat and game management here in past years. The DCCHA has a well-informed management plan, which was updated a few years ago with input from Gustavus. The committee expects to develop a more-active relationship with ADF&G to ensure the DCCHA is sustained as a vital habitat for sandhill cranes and other wildlife, and for hunting and other recreational uses by Gustavus residents. A future issue may be vegetation management if the spread of trees across the wetlands begins to impact crane habitat.

Two beach tracts (black on TNC map above) between the south boundary of the DCCHA and the shoreline of Icy Passage were part of the Land Legacy purchase by TNC but were deeded back to Alaska DNR for inclusion in the DCCHA with ADF&G management. Our legislative delegation hopes to effect an official legislative transfer of the tracts to the Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area.

Mike Taylor

Conservation Lands Advisory Committee Chair