



## Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska

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September 18, 2024

United States Army Corps of Engineers  
Alaska District  
ATTN: CEPOA-PMC, Mr. Bruce Sexauer  
P.O. Box 6898  
JBER, AK 99506-6898

Subject: Request for Feasibility Study on Mendenhall Glacial Outburst Flooding and Erosion

Dear Mr. Sexauer,

On behalf of the Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, I am formally requesting the partnership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Alaska District, to conduct a Feasibility Study addressing the severe impacts of Mendenhall Glacial Outburst Flooding and the associated erosion. This study is crucial to support both Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska and the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) in mitigating these destructive events. The findings of this study will enable us to pursue critical federal resources, such as the Alaska Coastal Erosion grant and other relevant funds, to protect our people, infrastructure, and cultural resources from future glacial floods.

The Mendenhall Valley—a densely populated residential area that is the traditional home of the Tlingit & Haida peoples and is Alaska's capital—is facing a worsening crisis due to annual glacial lake outburst floods (Jökulhlaups). Since the first event in 2009, these floods have increased in both frequency and severity. Our community has endured 14 of its top 20 recorded floods since 2011, with the 2024 flood breaking previous records, reaching a flood stage of almost 16 feet. This event caused widespread bank erosion, substantial damage to public infrastructure, and the flooding of approximately 300 homes, and hosts over 470 Tlingit & Haida citizens in the current and outdated flood zone.

As the glacier continues to recede, the threat grows. These Jökulhlaups are expected to occur every three months for the foreseeable future, putting our citizens, traditional lands, and cultural practices at constant risk. As of September 19, the basin is half full and continuing to fill. At this rate of fill, and without a partial release, Juneau could have another catastrophic flood as early as October 2024. The community of Juneau needs USACE to use advanced measures to address an imminent threat of unusual flooding. This is not just a local issue—it is a national challenge that requires federal partnership under our government-to-government relationship. Tlingit & Haida is committed to working with the U.S. government to develop long-term solutions that will protect both tribal citizens and the broader Juneau community.

In addition to the physical damage, the floods have caused significant harm to our cultural and subsistence resources. Garages where families store freezers filled with traditional foods—such as salmon, deer, berries, and seaweed—have been destroyed, compromising food security and cultural heritage. The loss of traditional tools and ceremonial items is a profound blow to our way of life. Moreover, the mental health toll on our community is growing, particularly among our elders and

children, who live in constant fear of the next outburst.

To address these challenges, we request the initiation of a feasibility study under the authority of Section 8315 of the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) 2022, which authorizes the Secretary of the Army to conduct projects aimed at storm damage prevention, coastal erosion, and glacial damage in Alaska.

We understand that, if the USACE receives funding for this project, the initial scope of work and feasibility study costs will be identified and agreed upon with Tlingit & Haida and CBJ prior to executing a Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA). Feasibility study costs will be shared 50/50 between Federal and non-Federal entities. Furthermore, any projects initiated as a result of this study would be cost-shared 65 percent Federal / 35 percent non-Federal, as outlined in Section 105(a) of the WRDA of 1986 (Public Law 99-662, as amended).

At the September 9, 2024, CBJ Assembly Committee of the Whole meeting, the Assembly directed CBJ staff to move forward with USACE on this feasibility study. In alignment with this, the Assembly also voted to draft an ordinance to fund \$3 million in local match to support the study and subsequent projects. Tlingit & Haida stands ready to collaborate fully in this process, bringing our resources and knowledge to the table as we seek sustainable, long-term solutions.

As a sovereign tribal government, we are committed to upholding our responsibilities to protect our people, lands, and culture. However, we cannot do it alone. We urgently request your partnership to initiate this feasibility study so we can secure the necessary funding and support to protect our community from the devastating effects of future glacial outburst floods.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to working closely with USACE to develop comprehensive solutions that ensure the safety and resilience of our community.

Sincerely,



Richard Peterson  
President

cc: Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Senator Dan Sullivan  
U.S. Representative Mary Sattler Peltola  
Katie Koester, CBJ City Manager

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