

19. REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION

19.1 Introduction

The study described existing and planned inter- and intra-regional overland, water, and air transportation facilities and services for the Lake and Peninsula Borough communities in the Bristol Bay drainages regional study area. The study objective was to document these facilities and services.

The regional study area for the transportation study encompassed an area from Naknek and King Salmon in the south to the northern boundaries of the Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, with an emphasis on the communities of Igiugig, Iliamna, Kokhanok, Levelock, Newhalen, Nondalton, Pedro Bay, and Port Alsworth (Figure 1-1 in Chapter 1). Within the regional study area is the central study area, which is composed of the mine study area and the transportation-corridor study area (Figure 1-4 in Chapter 1).

The study methods relied on a review of existing transportation studies, plans, and documents for relevant information. This information was supplemented with interviews of several transportation services providers.

19.2 Results and Discussion

The region is characterized by small, remote, inland settlements; limited and circuitous water access; and rugged, environmentally sensitive terrain. The existing overland and water transportation infrastructure is spotty and is restricted to a few situations where special local circumstances have warranted development. Air transportation is the primary mode for moving people and goods to, from, and within the regional study area.

The eight study area communities are not connected by interregional roads to other areas of southwest or southcentral Alaska. The state-owned, 15.03-mile-long, unpaved Williamsport-Pile Bay Road is the only publicly maintained road in the transportation-corridor study area. This road is also partially in the Cook Inlet drainages study area (Chapter 47). It is open for use only seasonally, between June and November. It is used mainly to transport commercial fishing vessels and small freight overland between Cook Inlet and Iliamna Lake and its surrounding communities. In the regional study area, the Iliamna/Newhalen area has the most extensive local road system (including the Iliamna and Newhalen village roads and the Iliamna-Nondalton Road) and the highest rate of vehicle ownership and use. Elsewhere, local roads and vehicle traffic are very limited. There are no roads to or at the Pebble Deposit area.

Except for Nondalton and Port Alsworth, the eight study area communities are accessible by water via Iliamna Lake, which is accessed from the Kvichak River on the west or the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road on the east. Traditionally, most waterborne cargo was shipped to Naknek and then barged up the Kvichak River. In recent years, low water levels and river shoals

made this service infeasible. In 2009, a new shipper, Iliamna Development Corporation, began shipping freight via the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road. Waterborne cargo consists mainly of bulk fuels and other freight too bulky or heavy to ship by air. Local dock and cargo-handling facilities are limited and typically are in poor repair. The shipping season is generally from late July to the end of September. The Alaska Marine Highway System does not serve any of the eight communities.

These communities rely heavily on air transportation for movement of people and goods to, from, and within the region. Each community has a state-owned airport, except Port Alsworth, which has two private landing strips. Iliamna Airport is the primary regional air-transportation hub through which most inter- and intra-regional air traffic travels. For most of the year, air cargo is the only means of transporting goods (including foodstuffs, consumer goods, building materials, and in some cases, bulk fuels) to these communities. At present, exploration activities at the Pebble Deposit area are supported by helicopter service based at Iliamna Airport.

The State of Alaska's *Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan* (PB Consult Inc., 2004) identifies three regional surface corridors for future transportation improvements: a Cook Inlet to Bristol Bay Corridor, a Dillingham/Bristol Bay Area Corridor, and an Alaska Peninsula Corridor. The plan's top-priority is the Williamsport-Pile Bay Road and associated navigation and dock improvements. The plan's next two priorities are the Iliamna-Nondalton and the Naknek-South Naknek improvements. All of these projects are part of the Cook Inlet to Bristol Bay Corridor. As part of its Industrial Roads Program, the state is evaluating the feasibility of a new deepwater port in the Williamsport vicinity, with a new road link to the Pebble Deposit area. This road would likely generally follow the Cook Inlet to Bristol Bay Corridor identified by the *Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan*.

The state is proposing airport improvements in Igiugig, Iliamna, and Kokhanok after fiscal year 2012. The ongoing airport master plan for the Port Alsworth Airport may result in the construction of a new state-owned airport.

19.3 References

PB Consult Inc. 2004. Revised Southwest Alaska Transportation Plan. Prepared for the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Central Region.