This is the presentation that was given online and in-person on August 21, 2025. The speaker notes were updated to allow folks to review the presentation on their own and participate in the poll.

The purpose of these meetings was to understand the priorities of community members as we evaluate alternative scenarios for the future of the Denali area airport system. The information gathered at these meetings and through online engagement will be used during scenario evaluations, which will lead to one or more recommendations to DOT&PF.

Agenda

▶Welcome and Introductions

▶Purpose and Overview of the Study

▶Project Progress

▶Potential Scenarios and Request for Input

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Meeting Rules

► Stay muted unless you've been called on
  ► Raise your hand to speak
► Be respectful
► Stay on topic

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Ground rules were set at both meetings. We will not share the recording or transcript of the online meeting for privacy reasons.

Purpose and Overview

This section provides details about the purpose of the project and the process that the team is following.

Vision of the study: To identify alternatives to create a regional airport system that enhances safety and access for residents and visitors.

Purpose of the DAAPS

To determine where future investments should be focused to best serve the community and meet the FAA goals for a National Airspace System.

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The purpose of this study is to prioritize future investments in the Denali area. The study was prompted by challenges at Healy River Airport and because the Denali Borough expressed interest in a regional airport in its 2015 Comprehensive Plan and 2018 Land Use & Economic Development Plan.
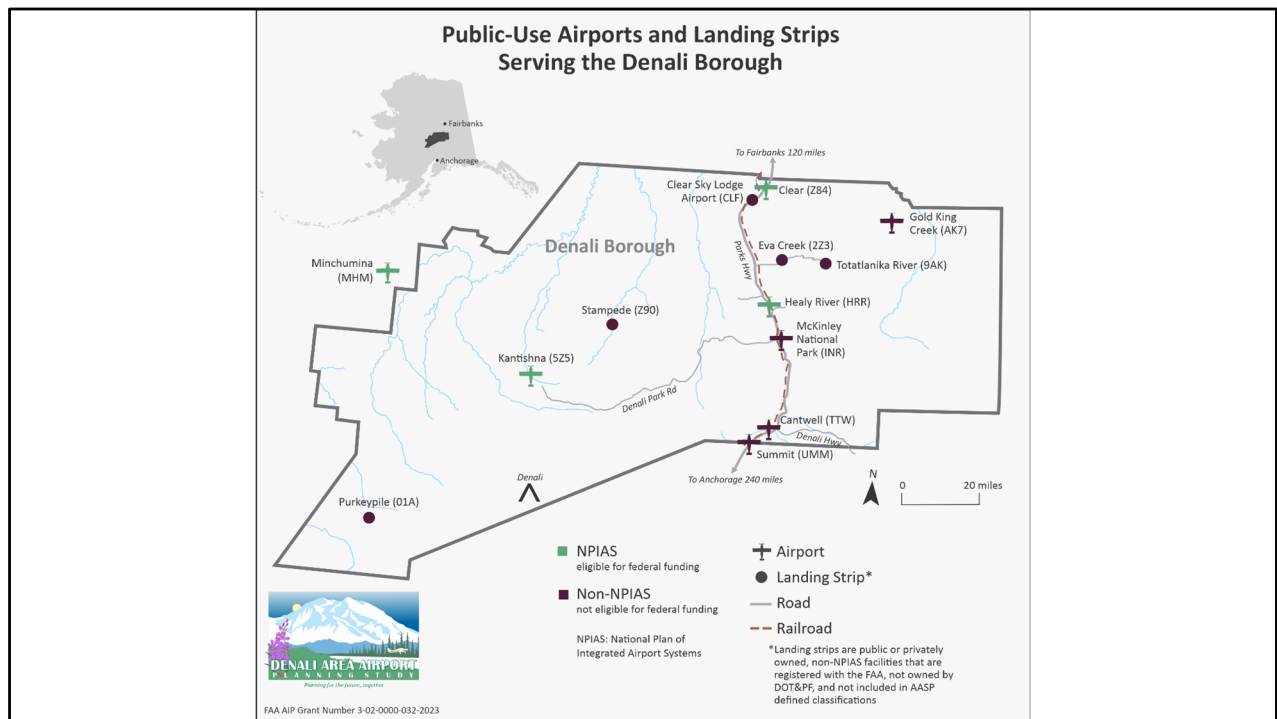
These are the public-use airports in the Denali area. Please note that Eva Creek (2Z3) is closed.
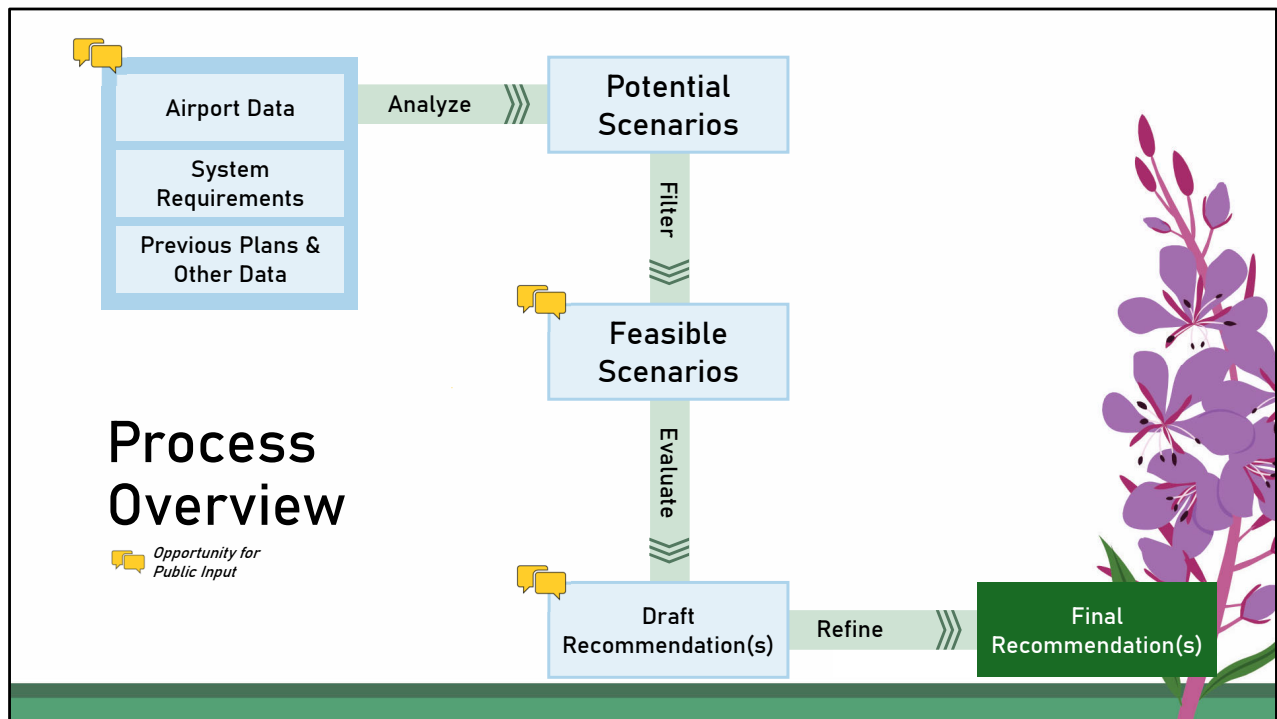
The process for this study began with the team reviewing data and plans, conducting public outreach, and assessing the requirements for the aviation system. This information was evaluated to develop potential scenarios. The potential scenarios were filtered to remove options that were not possible or acceptable. For example, "Close Healy River Airport and maintain other airports at their current levels" is not an acceptable option because it would be harmful to the residents, visitors, and businesses in the Denali area.
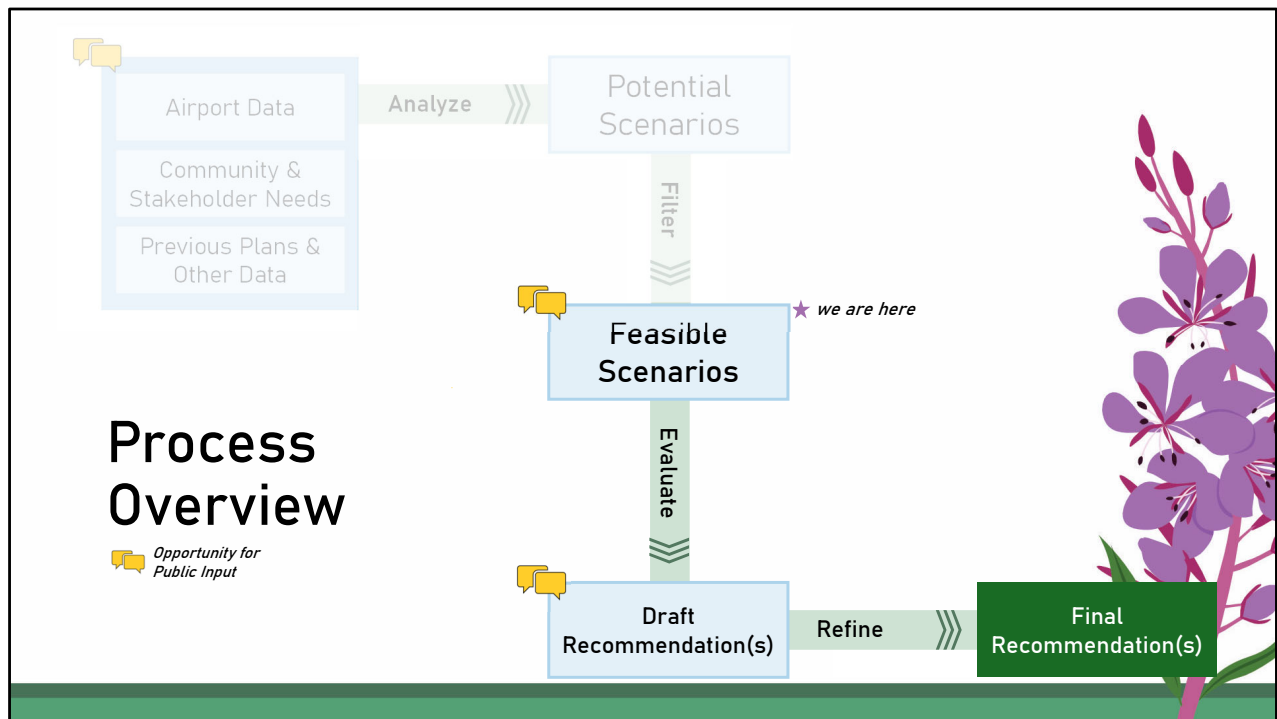
Now that DOT&PF has a list of feasible scenarios, we are asking for more public input. The three feasible scenarios are included in this presentation and are the focus of the poll questions. After we have collected input, we will evaluate the scenarios to develop draft recommendations. The draft recommendations will be shared with the public for additional input. That input will be used to create final recommendations.

Project Progress

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This section includes details about the information gathered so far in the project.

Key Takeaways: Survey and Public Meetings

►Safety is a priority, including medevac access

►Pilots want more maintenance, weather reporting, and fuel concessions

►Many residents are concerned about noise, environmental impacts, and traffic, though there is some interest in a larger airport

►Tourism is important, but so is the borough's rural character

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PLANNING STUDY

Key Takeaways: Interviews & Forecasts

Aviation Industry

► HRR is the most used airport in the region and is important to the visitor industry

► Interviewees did not see a need for a new airport

Economic/Hospitality Industry

► Interviewees said visitor industry is near capacity (food, lodging, transportation)

► Workforce is limited by available & affordable housing

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STEEP TERRAIN

BLUFF

ROAD

RAILROAD

Healy River Airport
Constraints

The challenges at Healy River Airport are a central focus of this study. DOT&PF has to create a plan to either commit to Healy River or find an alternative airport to fill its role.

Physical Constraints
The airport is located between a road and a bluff, with the railroad nearby. These features limit expansion of the airport if more space is needed for a longer runway or more lease lots.

Land Ownership and Grant Funding
DOT&PF owns the airport, but the Alaska Railroad Company owns the land. When DOT&PF accepts federal grant money, they make a commitment to maintaining that airport for at least 30 years. If DOT&PF is renting the land, it is hard to make that commitment.

Clear Airport

▶ The Long-Range Discrimination Radar at the Clear Space Force Station makes Clear Airport nearly unusable

Population Centers Denali Borough Area
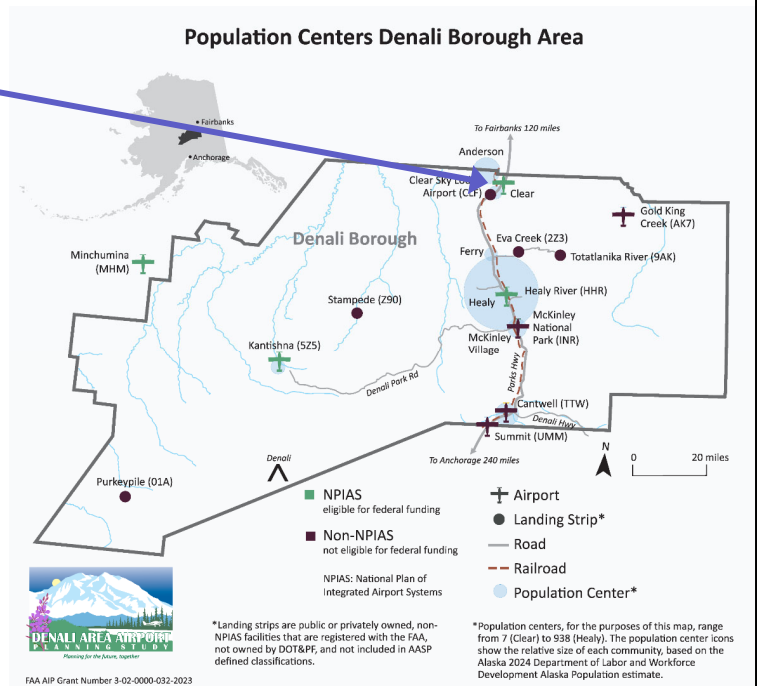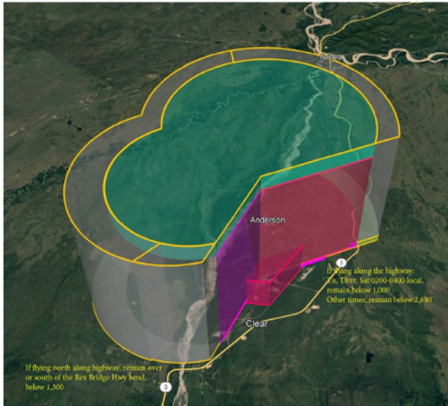
Clear Airport used to be used frequently, especially by medevac operators. It is now harder to use this airport because of the restricted airspace created by the Long-Range Discrimination Radar (LRDR) at Clear Space Force Station. The airspace is restricted because the LRDR can damage airplane electronics.

Potential Site North

► Possible location for a new airport

► No airspace obstructions
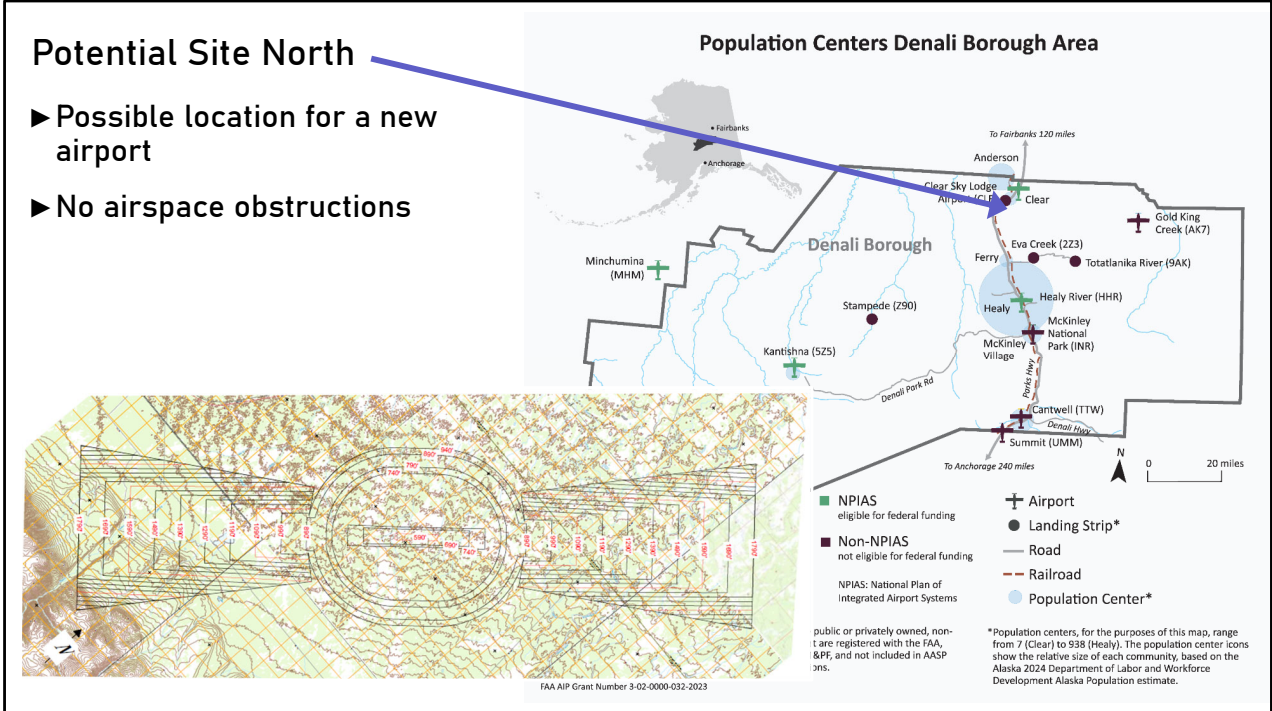
The DAAPS is also considering the possibility of constructing a new airport. One of the sites evaluated is near Clear.

The airspace analysis diagram (bottom left) shows there would be no airspace obstructions if an airport was constructed here. Slide 28 has a full-size version of the diagram.

Potential Site South

► Possible location for a new airport

► Identified in Denali Borough plans

► Some airspace obstructions

► Swampy ground

A site near Ferry was also considered for a new airport. This location was identified in Denali Borough plans as a possible site for a regional airport. The ground here is swampy and may have permafrost.

The airspace analysis diagram (bottom left) shows there would be some airspace obstructions if an airport was constructed here, but an approach would still be possible. Slide 29 has a full-size version of the diagram.

Healy River Airport

► Most used airport
► Many airspace obstructions
► No room for expansion
► ARRC owns the land
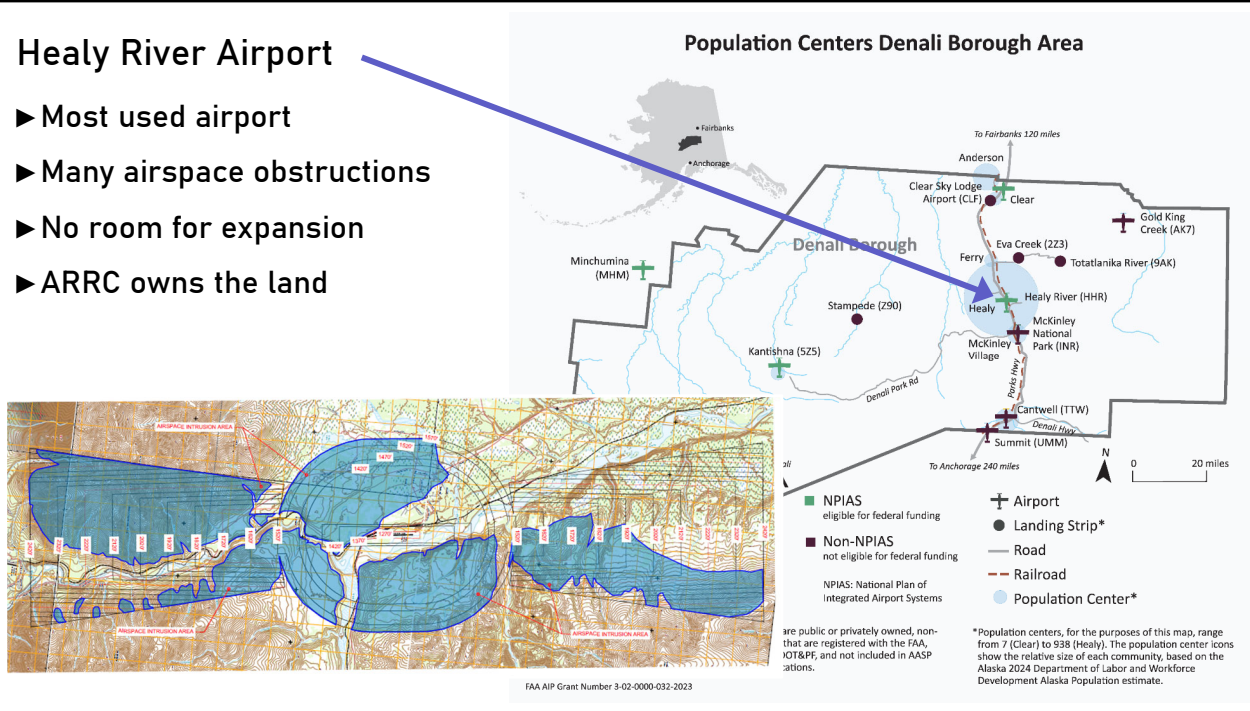
Healy River Airport is the most used airport in the Denali Area. It has significant airspace obstructions (bottom left diagram) and no certified weather reporting, which makes aircraft approaches difficult. DOT&PF does not own the land and there is little to no space for expansion of the airport.

Slide 30 has a full-size version of the airspace analysis diagram (bottom left).

Summit Airport

► Minimal airspace obstructions

► Room for more lease lots, longer runway
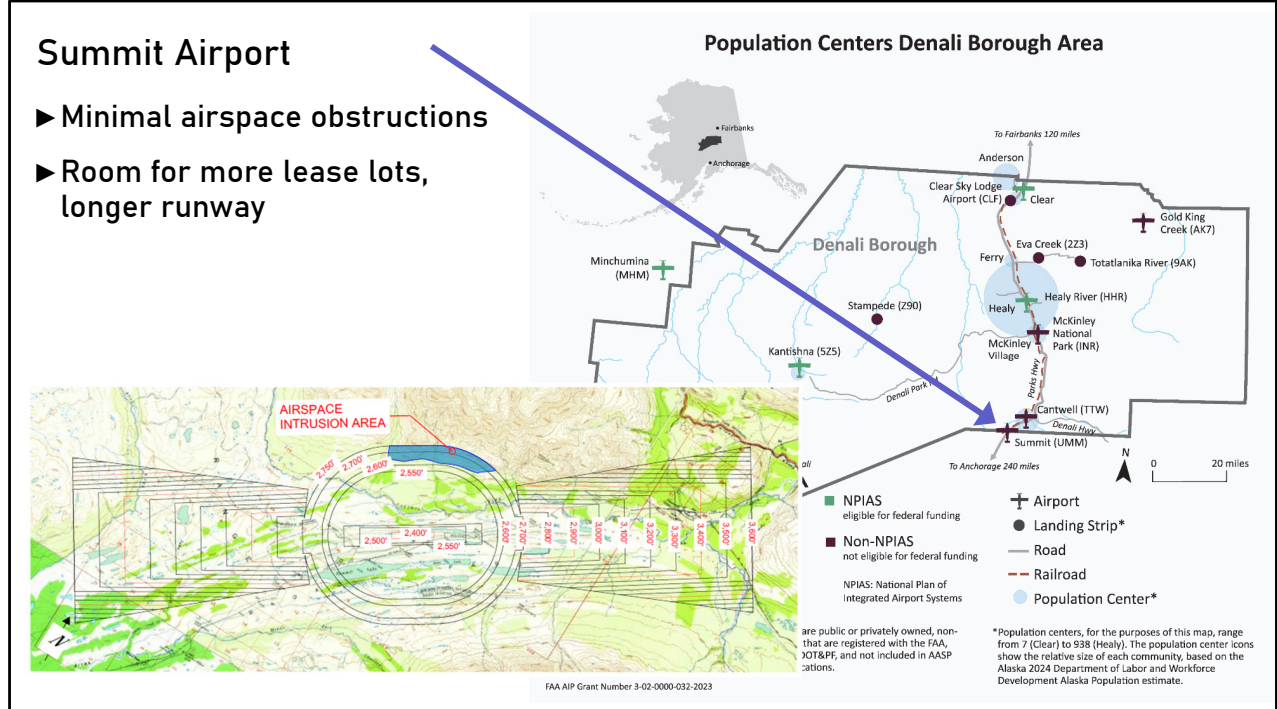
Summit Airport is located just south of the Denali Borough boundary. It is not used frequently. It has very minor airspace obstructions (bottom left diagram) but does not have certified weather reporting.

Slide 31 has a full-size version of the airspace analysis diagram (bottom left).

Potential Scenarios

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This section explains the three scenarios DOT&PF needs input on. There are tradeoffs with every scenario, and we want to understand the priorities of residents and airport users.

The scenarios focus on how to address the challenges at Healy River Airport, but the final report will include recommendations for the other airports, too. If you have comments about other airports in the Denali area, please send them to DenaliAirportStudy@respec.com.

Scenario 1: Commit to Healy River

Establish long-term solution to land ownership challenges and maintain Healy River as primary airport in the area

► DOT&PF and ARRC must come to an agreement
► Limited room for future growth (all lease lots occupied)
► Little to no change for airport users & community

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PLANNING STUDY
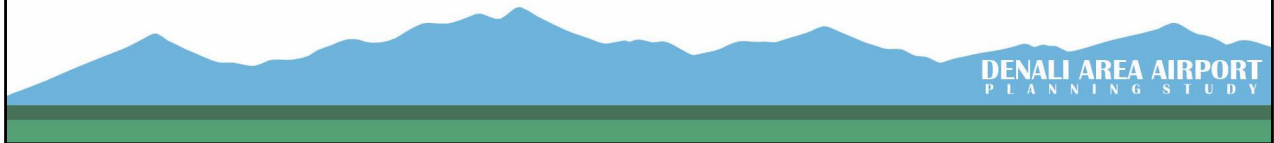
If this scenario is selected, DOT&PF will need to find a way to address the land ownership challenges. This could mean a new long-term lease or a land swap with the Alaska Railroad Company (ARRC). Because Healy River Airport is surrounded by the road, bluff, and railroad, there is very little room for expansion if a longer runway or more lease lots are needed.

Scenario 2: Invest in Different Airport

Choose an airport to replace Healy River's role in the region

►Likely farther from the Park entrance & population center in Healy

►Potential to choose an airport with better approaches & room for expansion

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Healy River Airport would remain in operation until the alternative airport is equipped to take on Healy River's role. The most likely replacement airport is Summit (near Cantwell) because it is a DOT&PF-owned facility with room for growth and good approaches.

Scenario 3: Develop a New Airport

Select a site to develop a new airport

►Opportunity to select a site with a cleaner approach than HRR

►Much longer implementation timeline

►Can design airport according to forecasted needs

DENALI AREA AIRPORT
PLANNING STUDY

Healy River Airport would remain in operation until the alternative airport is equipped to take on Healy River's role. If this scenario is selected, DOT&PF would need to conduct further study to select the location of the new airport.
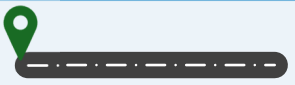
Based on the aviation demand forecast, the optimal airport for the Denali area would be 4,000–4,500 feet long by 75–100 feet wide.

Evaluation Criteria Categories

- ►Ability to accommodate emergency response
- ►Economic development opportunities
- ►Economic feasibility
- ►Environmental impact
- ►Future expansion capabilities

- ►Implementation timeline
- ►Land use compatibility
- ►Operational efficiency
- ►Proximity to population centers & user groups
- ►Safety

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We will consider the feedback we collect at today's meeting alongside FAA requirements and guidelines to assess those three scenarios more thoroughly. These are the topics we have identified as being critical to the decision-making process; they are listed in alphabetical order and are not ranked or weighted.

	Scenario 1: Keep Healy River	Scenario 2: Invest in Different Airport	Scenario 3: Develop a New Airport
Distance to Healy	📍	📍 (long road)	?
Distance to Park entrance	📍	📍 (long road)	?
Airspace/Approach	😕	😊	😊
Room for runway or lease lot expansion	✗	✓	✓
Cost	💵	💵	💵
Timeline	⏱	⏱	⏱

This table shows a quick comparison of the three scenarios based on currently available information.

Healy River Airport is 3 min from Healy, 18 min from Park Road entrance
Summit Airport is 52 min from Healy, 38 min from Park Road entrance

Denali Area Airport Planning Study (DAAPS) Timeline
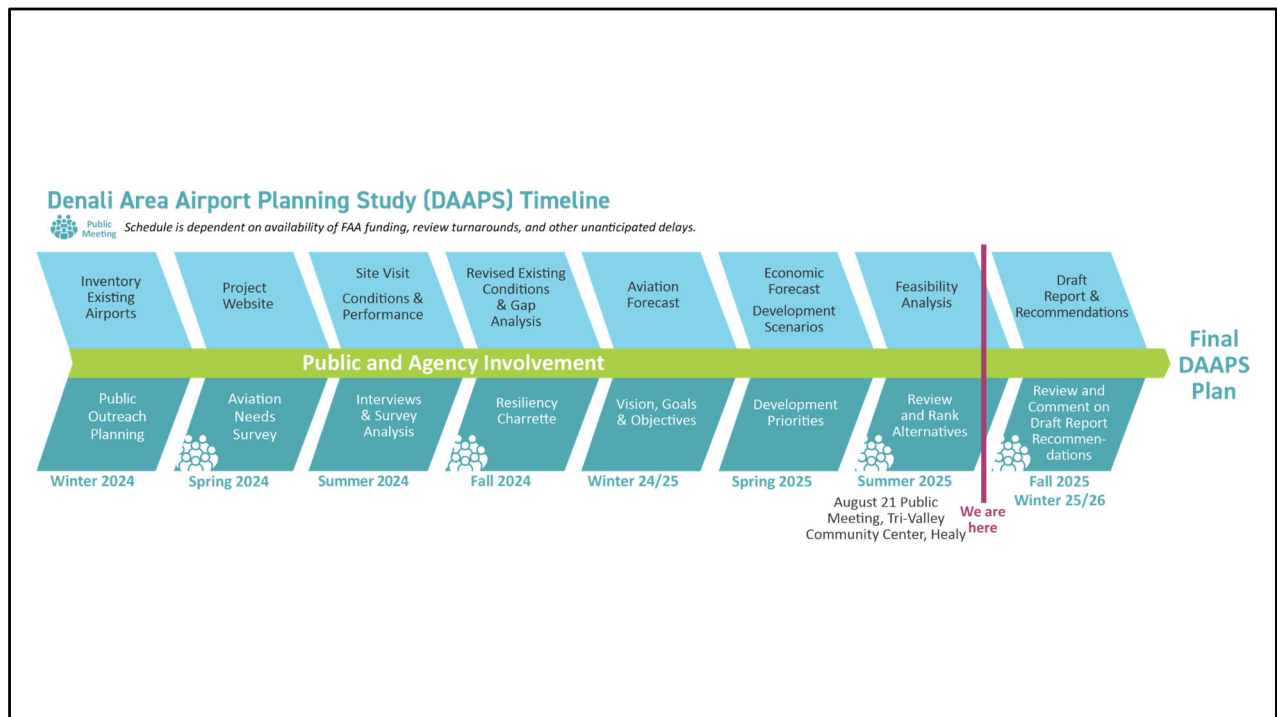
There will be one more public meeting for the DAAPS to review the draft recommendations. DOT&PF intends to complete the project in early 2026.

DENALI AREA AIRPORT
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An FAA-funded DOT&PF study

Contact Us

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Project Website

The preparation of this document was supported in part with financial assistance through the Airport Improvement Program from the Federal Aviation Administration AIP Grant Number 3-02-0000-032-2023 as provided under Title 49 USC § 47104. The contents do not necessarily reflect the official views or policy of the FAA. Acceptance of this report by the FAA does not in any way constitute a commitment on the part of the United States to participate in any development depicted therein, nor does it indicate that the proposed development is environmentally acceptable in accordance with appropriate public laws.

After reviewing these slides and the meeting Q&A, please answer the questions here: https://bit.ly/DAAPS-3
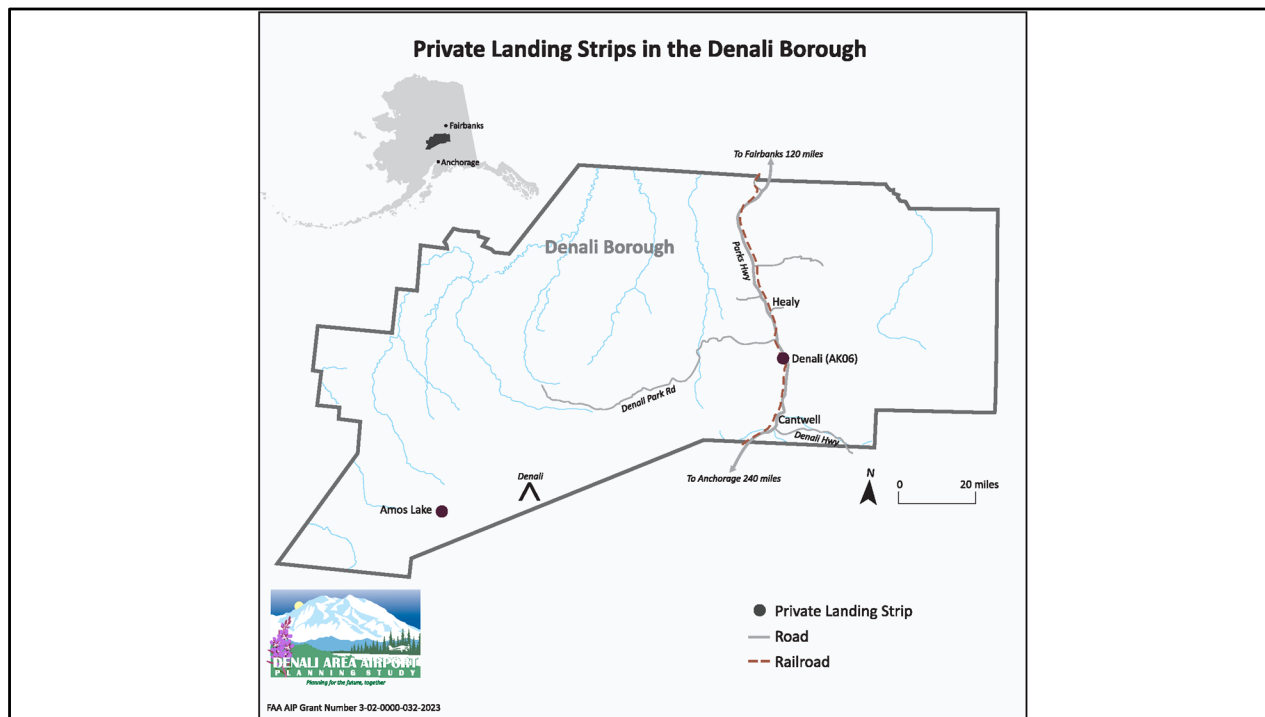
There are private landing strips in the Denali area, as well as the public-use airports.

Scenario Decision Tree

Healy River

Keep

Divest

Long-term v. short-term

Existing site

New site
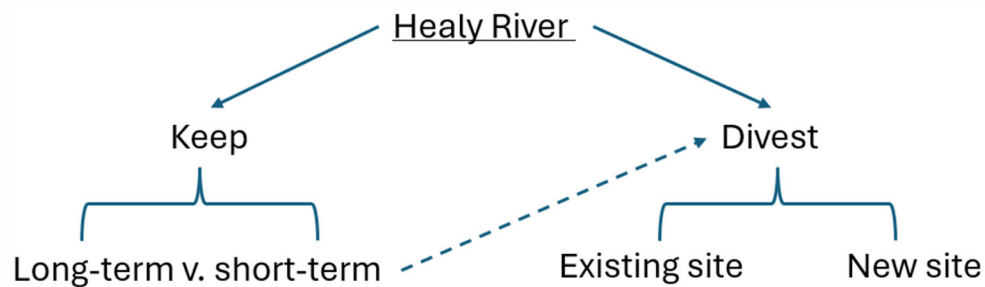
This decision tree shows the possible pathways DOT&PF could take to address the challenges of Healy River Airport. These pathways are explained in the Scenario slides.

Airspace Analysis – Potential Site North
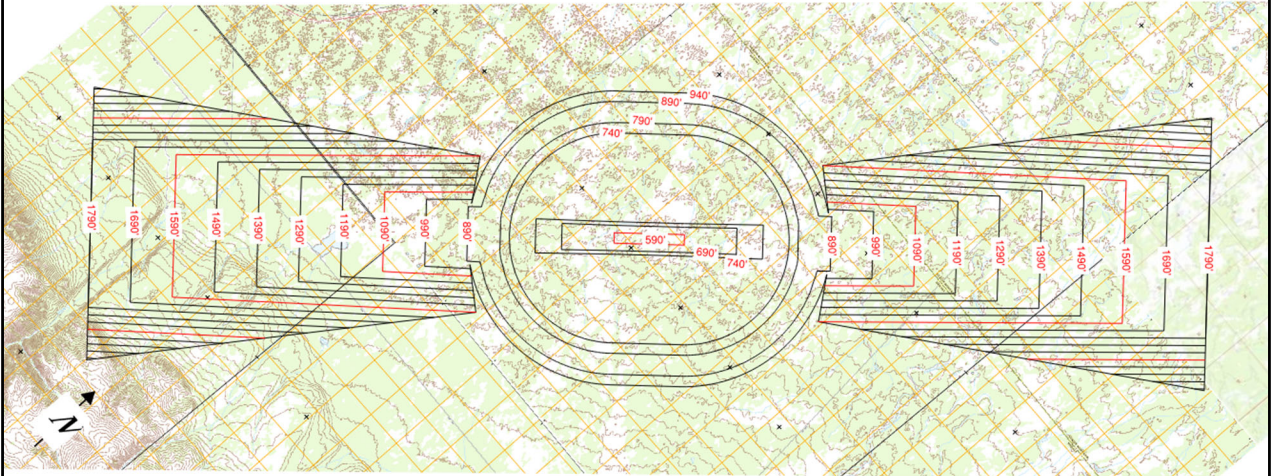
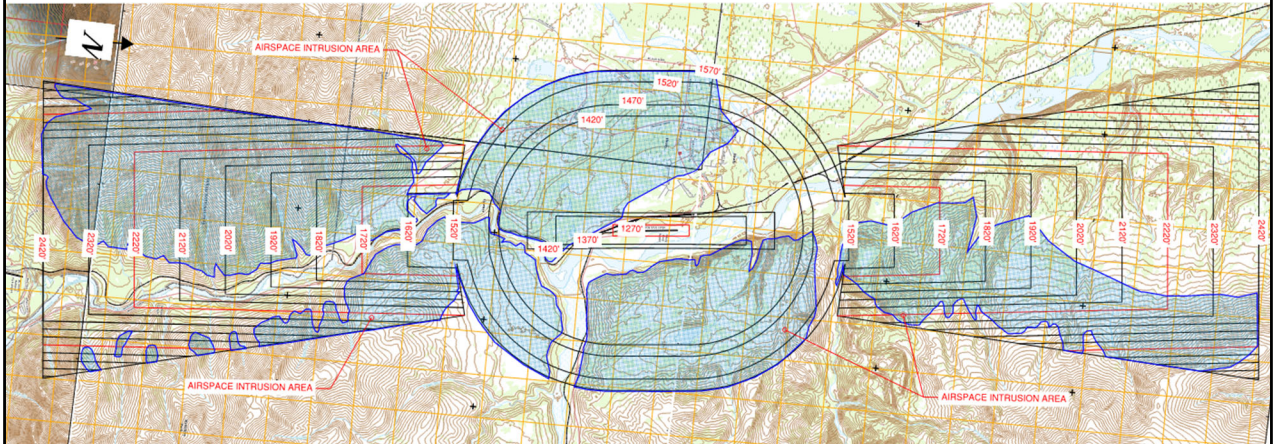*This potential airport site does not have any airspace obstructions.*

Airspace Analysis – Potential Site South
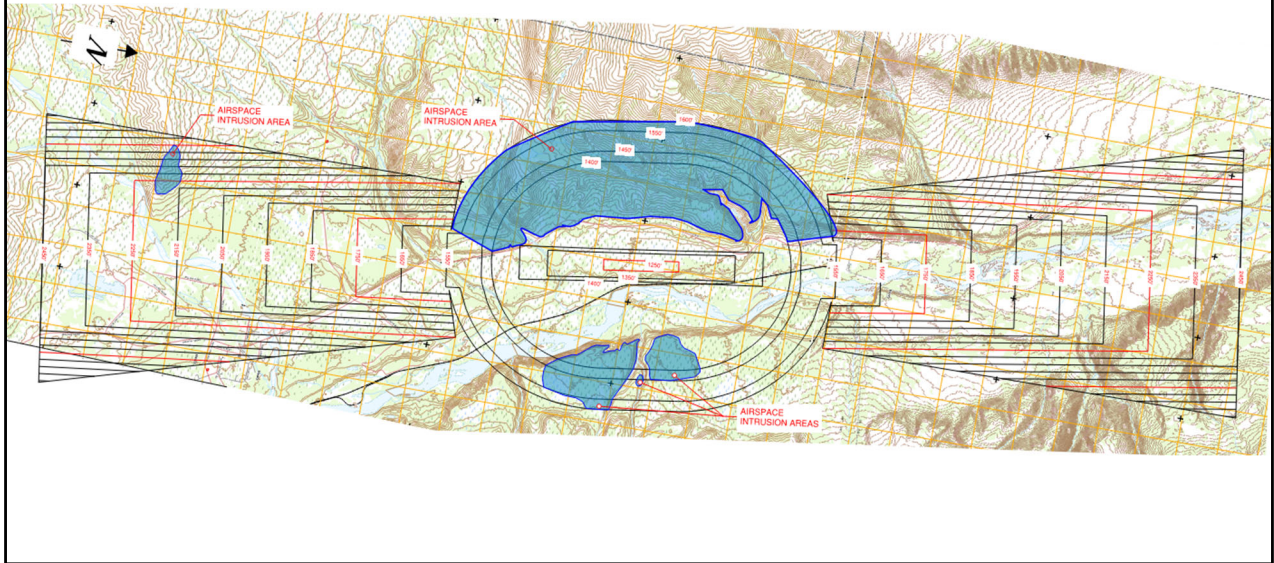
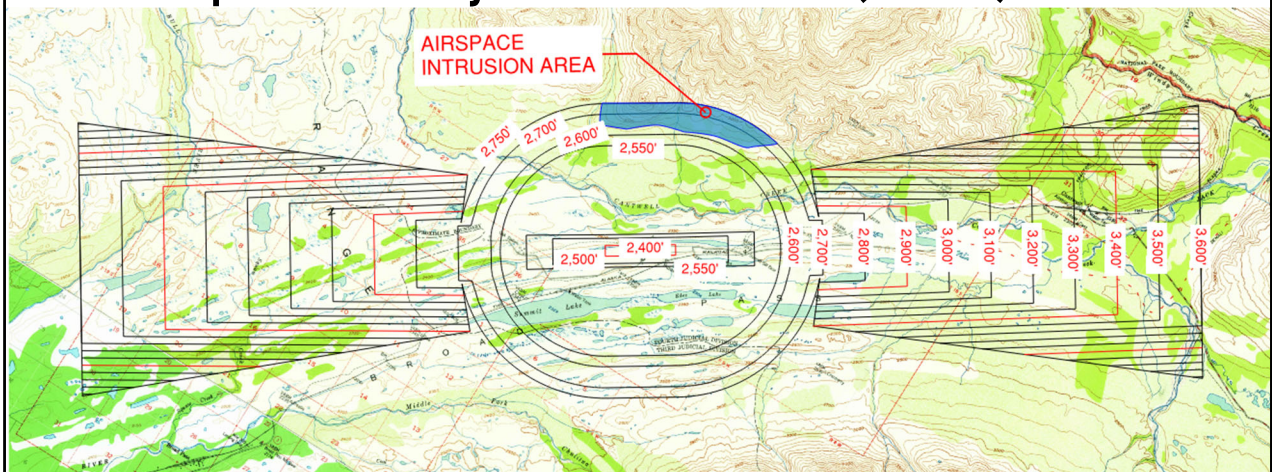*The blue shading shows the airspace obstructions at this potential airport site.*

Airspace Analysis – Healy River (HRR)

The blue shading shows the significant airspace obstructions at Healy River Airport (HRR).

Airspace Analysis – Summit (UMM)

The blue shading shows the minimal airspace obstructions at Summit Airport (UMM).