

# Project Title: South Potter Marsh Visitor Turnout - Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge

**TPS Number:** 66757

**Priority:** 1

**Agency:** Fish and Game

**FY2023 State Funding Request:** \$780,251

One-Time Need

## Brief Project Description:

To fund and construct missing elements of a South Potter Marsh parking lot to be constructed spring/summer 2022, with an addition to the North Potter Marsh Boardwalk, creating additional SAFE and enjoyable PUBLIC USES at a popular resident and visitor destination.

## Funding Plan:

Total Project Cost:	\$1,693,851
Funding Already Secured:	(\$913,600)
FY2023 State Funding Request:	(\$780,251)
Project Deficit:	\$0

### Explanation of Other Funds:

\$705,240: FHWA, ADOT&PF, and AMATS funding secured after submittal in 2014.

\$ 78,360: Conoco Phillips Grant

\$783,600: Total Phase 1 funding available 2022.

\$130,000: ConocoPhillips donation for north boardwalk upgrades

\$125,000. South parking lot double vault toilet

\$514,681. South boardwalk installation

\$110,570. North boardwalk upgrade completion

\$ 30,000. South trail and crosswalk

\$780,251. Total CAPSIS request, Phase 2

## Detailed Project Description and Justification:

### History of Use and Project Justification:

Toilets and safe pedestrian circulation are critical to PUBLIC SAFETY and HEALTH at the South Potter Marsh visitor parking site. These critical elements are missing or underfunded in the highway pull-out expansion that will occur in summer 2022. At the same time, the addition of a boardwalk would provide the opportunity to establish HEALTHY RECREATION and TOURISM use patterns, which will create ECONOMIC RETURNS and deter nuisance uses at this parking area.

Part of the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge, Potter Marsh is a popular destination for both residents and visitors to Anchorage. With about 175,000 visits annually, Potter Marsh attracts bird watchers, photographers, walkers, ice skaters, and skiers. Commercial tour bus operators and wildlife guiding companies heavily utilize the existing north side boardwalks and visitor facilities. The south end of Potter Marsh and adjoining stretches of Old Seward Highway and Potter Valley Road are regularly used by this diverse variety of non-motorized users that also includes runners, cyclists, roller skiers, and recreation groups who stage workouts, races, and outings in all seasons at the current pull-out.

Safety and traffic circulation improvements have been on the list of requested infrastructure at the south end of Potter Marsh from the Rabbit Creek Community Council since at least 1997. The South Potter Marsh parking lot currently exhibits drainage issues, inadequate size and layout, contamination from pet and human waste, and undeveloped access paths to the marsh - unbefitting and unsafe for such a popular use area.

Additional SAFETY issues result from the regular pedestrian travel to the site by neighbors who walk to get their mail, and by SCHOOL CHILDREN who walk to or from the school bus stop at this site. Currently, the school buses (six to eight buses per day) briefly stop traffic in the pullout, and then there is a random scattering of kids amid parked and moving cars, which is not safe. Nor is there a safe layout for neighborhood pedestrian or vehicle traffic to and from the mailboxes. Kids who walk to their homes must cross the Old Seward Highway with no marked crossing. This site is also a destination for visitors from across Anchorage, as well as for highway travelers who stop for pet relief (and sometimes human relief), creating an additional safety, as well as health hazard. (Ewww!) The proposed improvements will likely lead to increased use of the area with visitors drawn here providing BENEFITS TO LOCAL AND STATE ECONOMIES.

Proposed improvements/project description:

Improvements to Potter Marsh visitor facilities were proposed as long ago as 1991 in the Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge Management Plan and detailed in the Potter Marsh Interpretive Plan of 2007. The current concept for the South Potter Marsh Visitor Turn-out was developed in 2014. After submittal to the Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Solutions (AMATS), the project obtained \$705,240 in funding from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (ADOT&PF), and AMATS. A grant of \$78,360 has been contributed by ConocoPhillips, a major supporter of the Potter Marsh North Boardwalk and visitor facilities over the years, bringing the funds available for Phase 1 of the project to \$783,600.

This proposed CAPSIS project constitutes Phase 2 of Potter Marsh improvements, and is critical to ensure safety and public health from increased visitor use following Phase 1 construction. Phase 1 of the South Potter Marsh project is a parking lot reconfiguration and expansion for 45 cars and several buses. It is permitted and funded for construction in 2022, even though critical public safety elements are missing. It is being designed and administered by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR) Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Design and Construction, in coordination with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF), and in accord with management needs of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG).

The original design for the parking lot reconfiguration included toilets, a short boardwalk and observation platform, and interpretive panels as recommended in the 2007 Potter Marsh Master Interpretive Plan. These were eliminated or underfunded in the Phase 1 project that will be constructed in 2022, creating safety and health hazards and missed economic opportunities for tourism and recreation development. Most recently, the Rabbit Creek Community Council has twice voted (2020 and 2021) to support the south end improvements, and provided testimony to the Legislature in favor of this project during last year's capital budget deliberations. The boardwalk was eliminated from funding in the 2022 project because of DOT&PF funding regulations; increased costs for materials and supplies has resulted in a further shortfall with elimination of other project features, and an inability to use a \$130,000 match contributed by ConocoPhillips, a major supporter of the Potter Marsh North Boardwalk and visitor facilities over the years.

While there is a single toilet in the budget for Phase 1, it is also subject to potential elimination because of continuing rising construction costs. We are asking for additional funding in Phase 2 to ensure funding for two toilets, which is critical for public sanitation. A highway rest-stop often involves multiple passengers seeking the toilet. The boardwalk and toilets are critical to safe and sanitary use of the new pull-out and parking area. The restroom area and other visitor facilities are expected to be heavily utilized by commercial tour bus operators.

Similarly, pedestrian safety features are missing from the original ADNR design and are needed to protect walking access for neighbors to the mailbox center and school children to the school bus staging area. One of the bus parking slots should be designated for school bus use at scheduled times, and there should be a gravel path from the bus parking and from the mailboxes to a signed and painted crosswalk on Old Seward Highway (see attached site concept map).

The elimination of the boardwalk greatly reduces the visitor experience, and fails to capitalize on recreation and tourism potential of the area. Moreover, enhancing this site as a recreation hub will stimulate positive use and deter nuisance or nefarious use at the parking lot.

Design plans for Phase 2 already exist and the same agencies would oversee construction and implementation of these additional Potter Marsh improvements, including the ability to use the \$130,000 match contributed by ConocoPhillips for upgrades at the North Potter

Marsh boardwalk. With FY 2023 funding, the double vault toilet could be included in summer 2022 construction, with pilings installed in winter 2022-23 for the boardwalk extensions. Proposed Phase 2 CAPSIS funding will add back in missing project elements:

South end boardwalk: \$514,681.

A new 200-foot long boardwalk will extend from the Phase 1 expanded parking/visitor facility. It will include an Americans with Disabilities Act accessible ramp for winter access to the marsh including for ice skating. The boardwalk will include a spotting scope, interpretive panels, benches and a viewing deck approximately 10-12 feet above the marsh. This boardwalk will attract and educate visitors who are interested in the wildlife resources of Potter Marsh, so that there will be steady, POSITIVE USE of this parking area, which will deter nuisance behavior.

Single or double concrete vaulted toilet (as described above, \$65,000 for a single): \$125,000.

This will PREVENT A SERIOUS HEALTH RISK from the deposition of human and animal waste when this pullout is upgraded and serves as a highway rest stop as well as a wildlife interpretive stop.

Pedestrian safety features (see notes added to site concept map): \$ 30,000.

Painted traffic markings and crossing signs at Old Seward Highway crossing  
Gravel pedestrian path with weed barrier underlay, 6 feet wide along east edge of project and to mailboxes, extending about 80 yards  
Signage at one of the bus pullouts to reserve it for school bus use at certain times

North Boardwalk upgrade: \$110,570.

A new 68-foot-long extension with viewing deck, bench, spotting scope, and interpretive panels will be added to the end of the original Potter Marsh boardwalk along the New Seward Highway. The extension will be oriented into the marsh for better wildlife viewing.

TOTAL CAPSIS REQUEST: \$780,251.

This project will result in immediate safety and recreation benefits for neighbors, for all Anchorage constituents, and for the traveling public.

#### Project Timeline:

Spring/Summer 2022 - Phase 1: ADOT&PF/AMATS funding (\$705,240) plus ConocoPhillips match (\$78,360).

Late Summer 2022 - Phase 2 construction begins with FY2023 capital funds (\$780,251) and Conoco Phillips match for north boardwalk (\$130,000). All construction completed by end of calendar year 2023.

TOTAL PROJECT COST, PHASE 1 (already funded) and 2 (\$780,251 CAPSIS request + \$130,000 grant) = \$1,693,851.

#### Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

#### Grant Recipient Contact Information:

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This project has been through a public review process at the local level and it is a community priority.

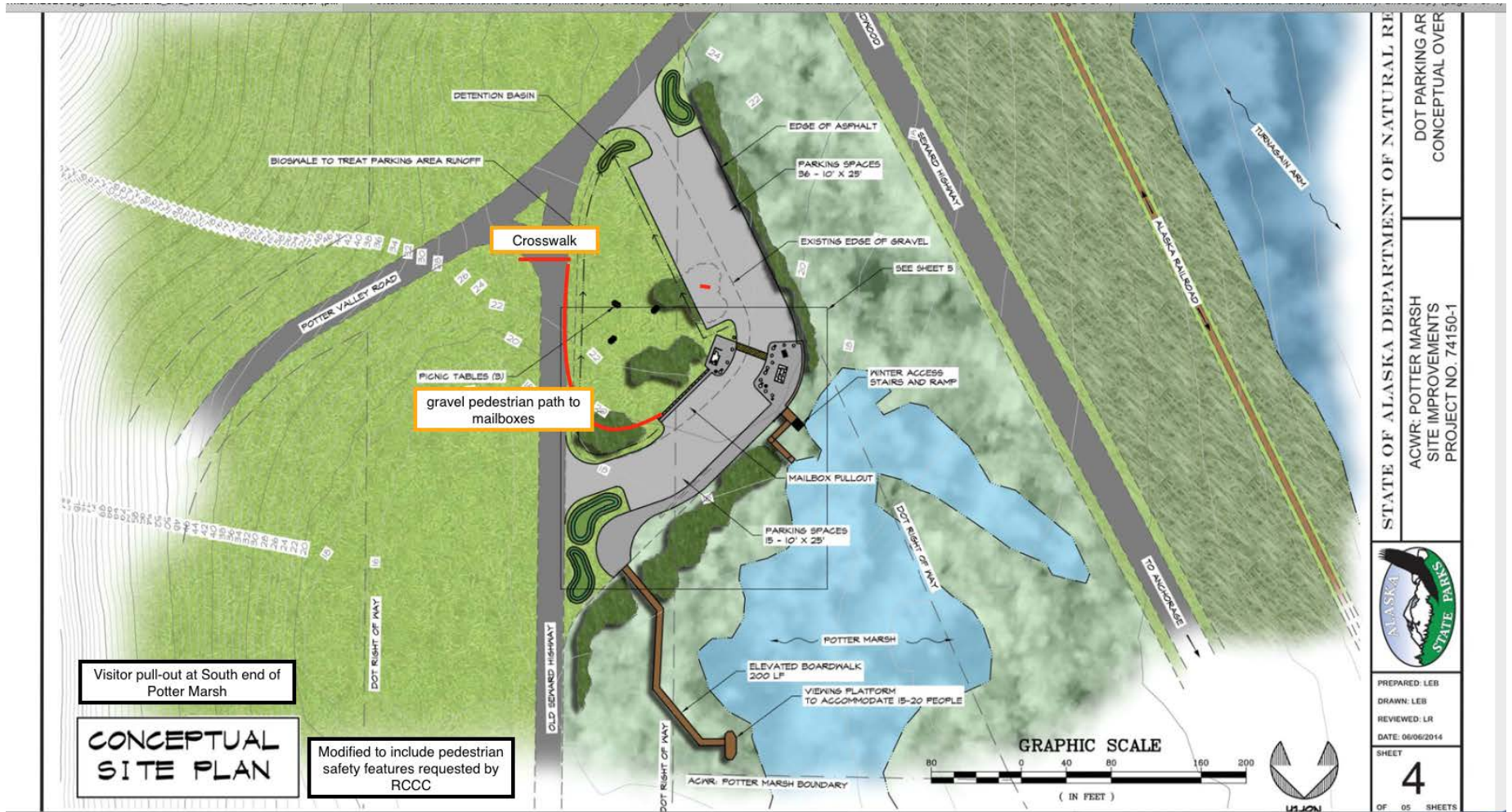
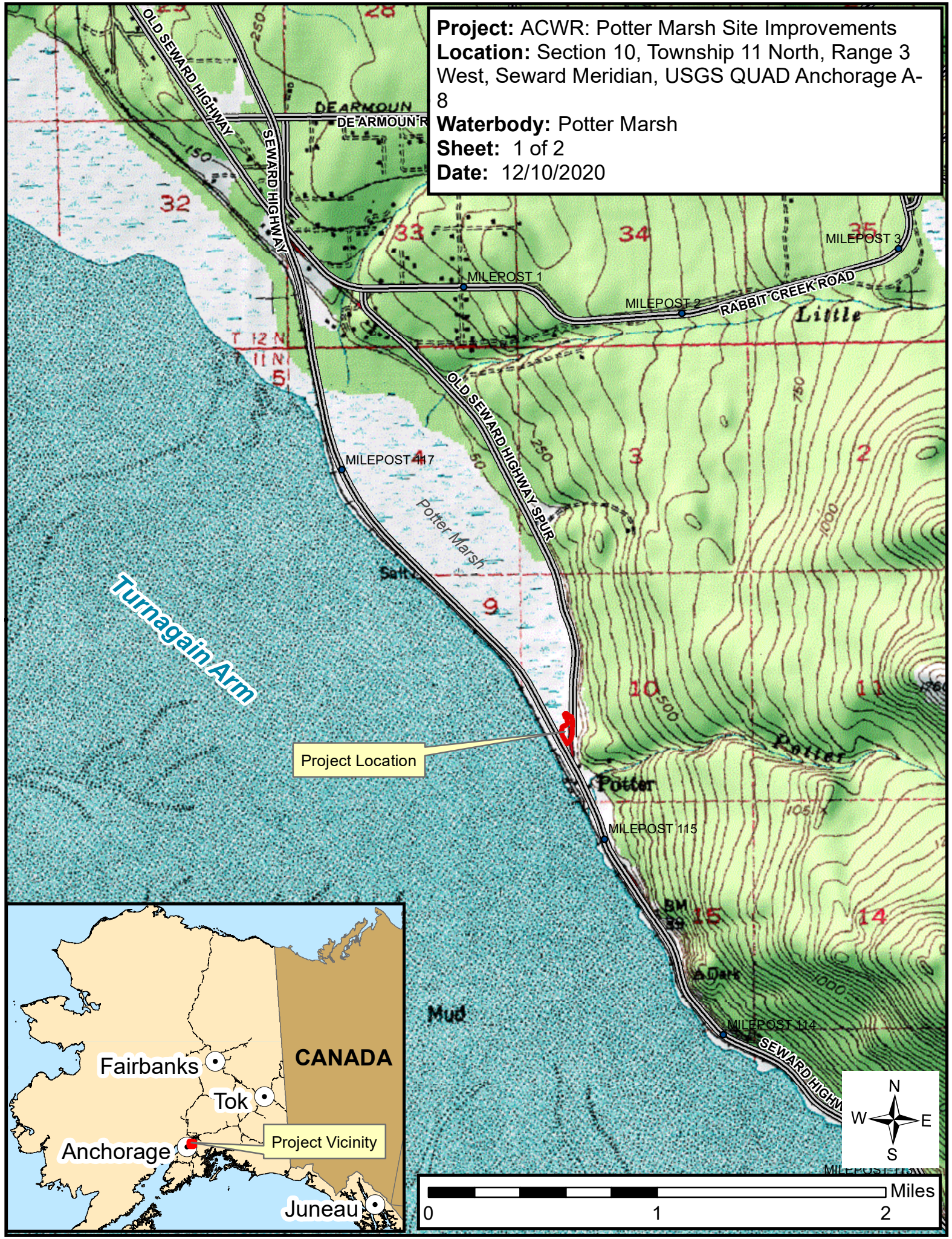


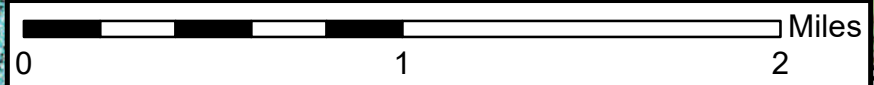
Figure 1. South Potter Marsh Turn-Out with Pedestrian Features, Anchorage Coastal Wildlife Refuge



**Project:** ACWR: Potter Marsh Site Improvements  
**Location:** Section 10, Township 11 North, Range 3 West, Seward Meridian, USGS QUAD Anchorage A-8  
**Waterbody:** Potter Marsh  
**Sheet:** 1 of 2  
**Date:** 12/10/2020



Project Location







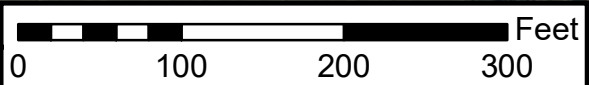
Potter Marsh

OLD SEWARD HIGHWAY SPUR

SEWARD HIGHWAY

POTTER DRIVE

Project Boundary



**Project:** ACWR: Potter Marsh Site Improvements  
**Location:** Sections 4 and 10, Township 11 North, Range 3 West, Seward Meridian, USGS QUAD Anchorage A-8  
**Waterbody:** Potter Marsh  
**Sheet:** 2 of 2  
**Date:** 12/10/2020  
**Satellite Imagery Map**