



August 18, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator for Alaska
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski,

As the City Manager for the City of Dillingham, I write to urge your office's immediate intervention regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' stated intention not to exercise the 2027 and 2028 option years of Contract W911KB26B0001 the active three-year maintenance dredging contract for Dillingham Harbor despite Congress having appropriated \$1,391,000 for this project in the enacted FY2026 Civil Works Work Plan.

The Dillingham Small Boat Harbor is a critical piece of federally authorized infrastructure that serves as the primary marine access point for the Nushagak District commercial fishing fleet and the economic engine of our community. The harbor supports commercial fishermen, seafood processors, fuel distributors, freight carriers, marine service businesses, emergency responders, and thousands of seasonal workers who contribute to one of the world's most productive wild salmon fisheries.

Dillingham Harbor was authorized by Congress in the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1958 and has been maintained by USACE for 57 consecutive years, representing over \$27 million in federal O&M investment. The enacted FY2026 USACE Civil Works Work Plan specifically notes that this project supports access by Native American tribes to their legally recognized historic fishing areas a federal acknowledgment that the harbor's function is inseparable from the subsistence and cultural rights of the Yup'ik and Dena'ina peoples of the Bristol Bay region.

Unlike many navigation projects, annual maintenance dredging in Dillingham is not discretionary, it is essential. The harbor is in a dynamic tidal and river environment where approximately 90,000 to 110,000 cubic yards of sediment accumulate each year. Without annual dredging, the entrance channel and harbor basin rapidly lose navigable depth, restricting vessel access, increasing the risk of groundings, delaying commercial fishing operations, and threatening public safety.

The economic consequences of deferring this maintenance extend well beyond the City of Dillingham. During the past decade, the Bristol Bay commercial salmon fishery has generated more than \$2.5 billion in ex-vessel value for Alaska's commercial fishermen. The Dillingham Harbor provides the infrastructure that supports a significant portion of the Nushagak District fleet and the businesses that depend upon it. Every year, hundreds of commercial fishing vessels rely on this harbor for safe moorage, fueling, repairs, loading supplies, and accessing the fishing grounds. Continued, reliable access is fundamental to the success of the fishery and the regional economy.

Failure to fund maintenance dredging does not eliminate the need for dredging it merely postpones it while allowing sediment to accumulate, increasing future project costs and reducing the reliability of a federal navigation project that has been maintained for decades. Delayed maintenance also places commercial operators, emergency response agencies, and maritime commerce at unnecessary risk.

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We wish to bring to your attention that USACE Alaska District solicited this work competitively (Solicitation W911KB26B0001), received bids by January 13, 2026, awarded the contract, and performed Year 1 dredging operations in June 2026 just weeks ago. The decision not to proceed with Years 2 and 3 of this active contract is therefore not a budget omission. It is an administrative decision to not obligate enacted congressional appropriations, made without formal notification to the City and without the rescission process required under the Impoundment Control Act of 1974. We respectfully ask that your office formally inquire with USACE Alaska District as to the legal basis for this decision.

For the City of Dillingham, this issue is about more than harbor maintenance. It is about protecting jobs, sustaining Alaska's seafood industry, maintaining safe navigation, and preserving infrastructure that supports one of the nation's most valuable renewable natural resources. The harbor is indispensable to our community and to the continued success of the Bristol Bay fishery.

On behalf of the City of Dillingham, we respectfully request that Congress restore FY2027 funding for the Dillingham Small Boat Harbor annual maintenance dredging project. Continued federal investment in this project is essential to maintaining safe navigation, protecting a nationally significant commercial fishery, and ensuring the long-term economic vitality of our region.

Specifically, we ask that your office: (1) formally inquire with the USACE Alaska District Commanding Officer and the Engineer Division Pacific Ocean as to why the 2027 option year of Contract W911KB26B0001 has not been exercised and on what legal authority; (2) request written confirmation of whether the \$1,391,000 FY2026 Civil Works Work Plan allocation for Dillingham Harbor was fully obligated; and (3) intervene to ensure the 2027 option is exercised before the dredging window opens in May 2027. We are available to provide any additional documentation your office requires and welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter directly.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued support of Alaska's coastal communities and maritime infrastructure.

Sincerely,

Jack Savo Jr.
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