

Appendix 4: Land Use Background

Land Use: What Exists Today

Introduction and Setting

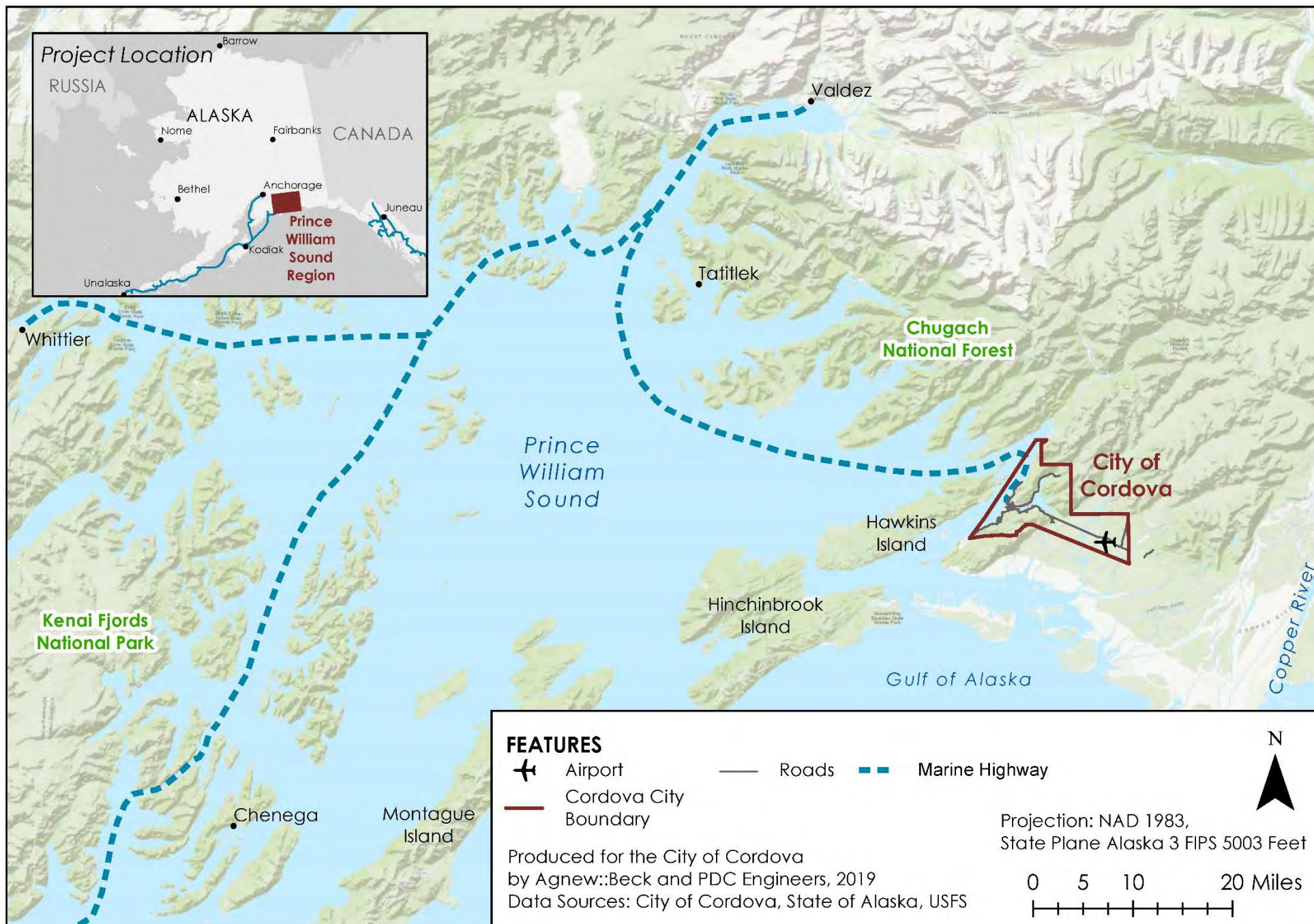
Cordova is located on the eastern side of Prince William Sound, along Alaska's southern coastline (Figure 8). Cordova was named Puerto Cordova by Spanish explorer Salvador Fidalgo in 1790, adding a Spanish place name to the English, Russian, and French names applied to the other coves, waterways and islands of Prince William Sound.

The history of settlement and current life of Cordova reflect the area's strategic location, with access to the robust marine resources of Prince William to the west, the Copper River and its delta to the east, and the surrounding Chugach Mountains. The Copper River opens one of very few corridors through the Chugach Mountains from the Gulf Coast into Alaska's interior. This set of attributes was the basis for the Eyak people settling in this area many thousands of years ago, the pathway for tradeable goods from Alaska's interior, and the modern commercial fishing industry that remains a defining feature of the community today.

Modern Cordova sprang into existence as the terminus of the railroad transporting copper ore from the Kennecott Copper Mines. The rail connection was completed in 1908. The town was incorporated in 1909 and quickly grew to over 2,400 people, making it the largest town in Alaska at that time.¹ The original township plan laid out during this initial period of rapid growth established a framework of roads and parcels that still guides land use in Cordova today.

¹ Cordova Chamber of Commerce, available here: <https://www.cordovachamber.com/history-culture>

Figure 8: Regional Setting – Map of Cordova and Prince William Sound



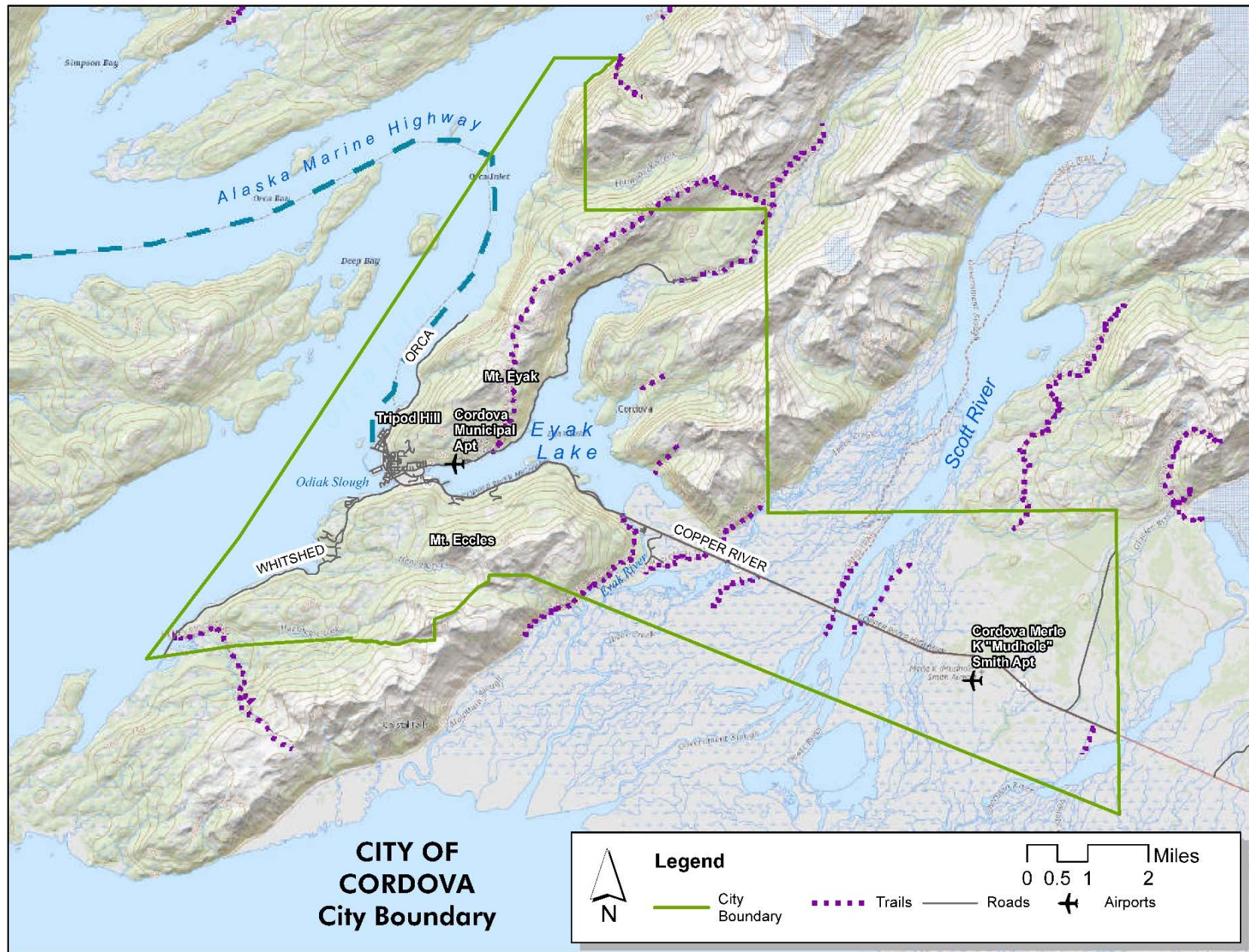
The City of Cordova occupies 75.66 square miles of diverse terrain. As Figure 9 shows, the developed portion of town occupies a small footprint just north of the mouth of Odiak Slough, where the railroad reached tidewater. Today's Copper River Highway travels over the bed of the original rail line.

Eyak Lake divides an arm of the mountains that separates Cordova from the delta and Orca Inlet. The terrain rises rapidly above Eyak Lake and the core of town. The ridge line and peaks south of the lake are named the Heney Mountains, commemorating the engineer who successfully brought the railroad to what became Cordova. To the north rise the rugged ridges, peaks and glaciers of the Chugach Mountains.

The 35-mile Copper River Delta is one the largest and most important coastal wetland areas in Alaska. This broad wetland complex provides a critical stop for millions of migratory birds traveling the Pacific Flyway.² Figure 10 provides a more complete picture of the Copper River Delta, and the mouth of the Copper River. The State of Alaska has designated this area as a Critical Habitat Area. As shown, there are barrier islands running along the delta's coastline. World-famous Copper River salmon are caught by gill netters working the challenging, shallow and unpredictable waters around this set of low lying, sandbar islands.

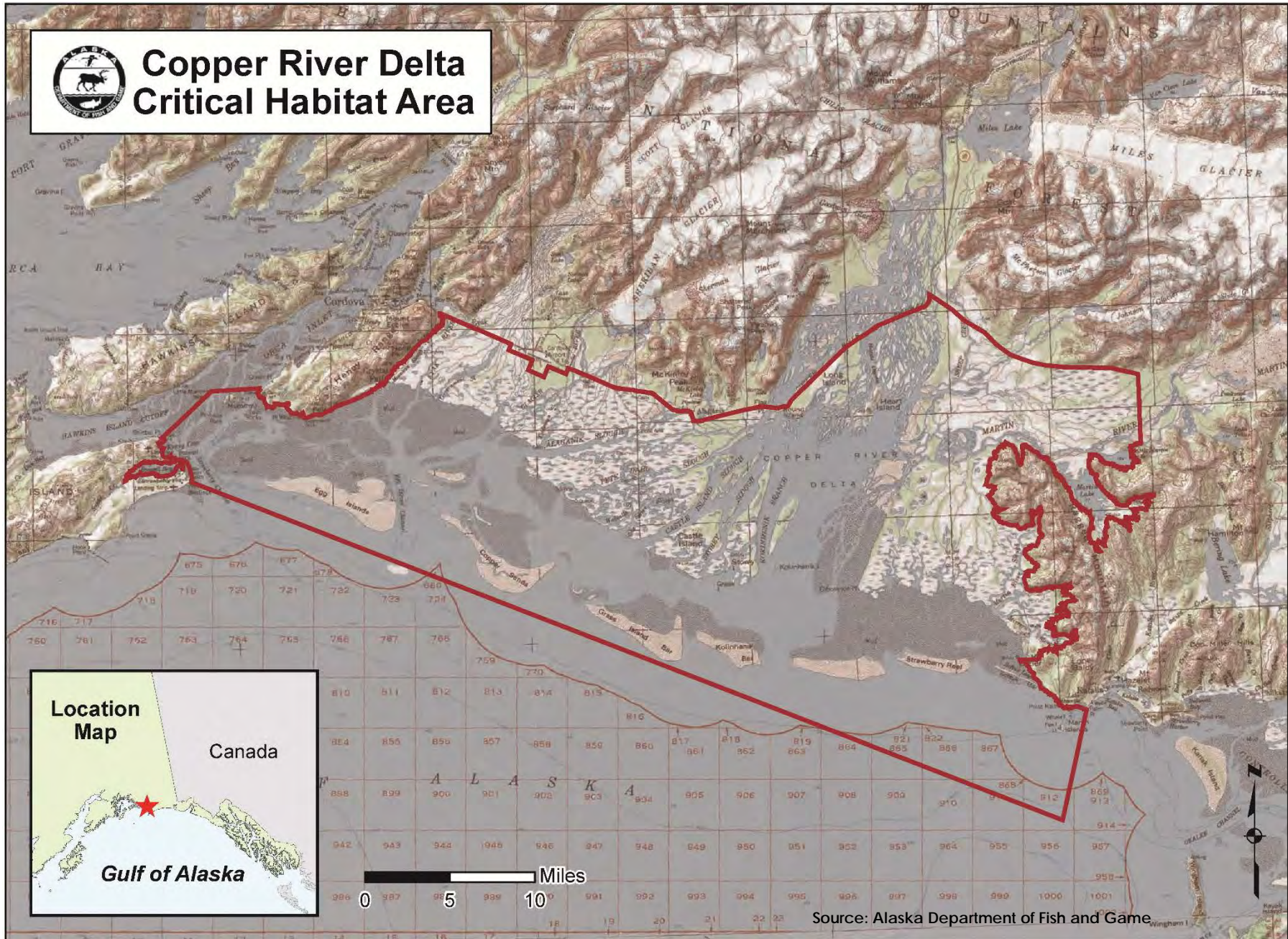
² Alaska Department of Fish and Game: <https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=copperriverdelta.main>

Figure 9: City of Cordova Boundaries



Produced for the City of Cordova by Agnew::Beck and PDC Engineers, 2019; Data sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS

Figure 10: Copper River Delta Critical Habitat Area Boundaries



Land Ownership

Figure 11, Figure 12 and Figure 13 show land ownership in the City of Cordova and adjacent areas. Like many Alaska coastal communities, the supply of private land in Cordova (other than Native Corporation land) is limited. The community is surrounded by public land – primarily federal land of the Chugach National Forest.

Land management decisions by the public and corporate landowners in the area have a significant impact on Cordova’s economic and daily life. For example, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land management policies directly impact options for use of off-highway vehicles, trail construction and maintenance, and areas open or closed to activities such as heli-skiing. Decisions by Eyak Corporation could substantially affect the supply of land open for residential or other uses, and options for recreation and tourism use. For these reasons, it is important to develop partnerships with all owners and coordinate plans for land use, economic development and other topics.

Federal Land

The USFS Chugach National Forest was established in 1907. The forest is divided into three districts, including the Cordova Ranger District, based in Cordova. Most land surrounding the City of Cordova is part of the Chugach National Forest and employs many area residents.

The USFS is currently revising the 2002 Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan following the requirements of the 2012 National Forest System Planning Rule. The process of revising the 2002 plan is nearing a conclusion after a five-plus year process.³ Land is primarily managed for habitat protection and recreation, with tourism and recreation-related uses the only permitted commercial activities.

State of Alaska Land

The State of Alaska is another major public landowner in the area. As shown in Figure 11, state lands are concentrated in three large blocks. Two of these are mountainous areas that provide open space and recreation, where topographic limitations minimize options for other uses. The third is the land supporting the Cordova airport. A state-owned area north of the Copper River Highway across from the airport has potential for various forms of development.

The state’s airport-area land is managed by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Remaining state-owned lands in Cordova are managed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR’s Prince William Sound Area Plan provides the framework for managing state lands; the plan was created in 1988 and needs to be updated.⁴

Eyak Corporation Land

Eyak Corporation is the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANSCA) village corporation for the Cordova area, one of three such village corporations in Prince William Sound. Chugach Corporation is the ANSCA regional corporation. Eyak Corporation is the second largest landholder in the area.

³ For more information, visit the U.S. Forest Service webpage, “Revision of the Land Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest:” <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/chugach/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5408185>

⁴ View the DNR Prince William Sound Area Plan here: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/areaplans/prince/>

Like state-owned land, Eyak Corporation land is primarily located on the outskirts of the community. In contrast to state land, portions of Eyak Corporation holdings include lands with physical capability for development. This includes several large, contiguous tracts along Whitshed Road in the Hartney Bay area, and land north of the airport. Eyak Corporation has a general policy of limiting sales of their property and has indicated they intend to hold land in corporate ownership to maintain the integrity of the corporation and protect the area's cultural heritage.

In the past, Eyak Corporation has conducted substantial timber harvests on properties north of the airport. One legacy of those harvests is a set of mostly unmaintained timber access roads crossing through that area. In the past, Eyak Corporation has used a special use permit process to allow shareholders to secure 100-year leases on corporation land. This process has led to the leasing of a few small parcels near the airport and in the Hartney Bay area, for residential purposes. More recently, Eyak Corporation has announced their intention to again open up certain lands to these special use permits.

Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Habitat Protection Program

In the wake of the 1989 oil spill and subsequent civil settlement, the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) Trustee Council was formed, with the goal of applying \$1 billion in settlement funds to help restore resources impacted by the spill.⁵ About half of these funds went to "habitat protection," the term applied to the purchase of Native Corporation lands that were seen as otherwise having the potential for development. Many of the resulting actions were "less than fee" acquisitions; specified rights were acquired by the state or federal government without the full purchase of the property.⁶

City of Cordova

The City of Cordova is another major landowner in the area. City-owned properties can be broadly placed into two categories:

- Lands designated for public uses like schools, parks or public safety facilities, on relatively accessible, buildable lands interspersed in developed areas.
- Large tracts of undeveloped lands, mostly in locations with limited access and significant physical constraints for development.

The city has a land sales program whereby interested parties can purchase or lease city lands that have been identified as available.⁷ There is a limited supply of city-owned land that is both accessible and with site characteristics that can be affordably developed for residential or other purposes. In addition, some areas on the ownership maps are depicted as being in city ownership but are technically owned by the state. These lands are managed by the city, and the city has the ability to dispose of the land after it is surveyed and conveyed through Alaska's municipal land entitlement program.

⁵ For more information see the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Habitat Protection and Acquisition Catalog, available here: http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/opmp/evos/pdfs/habitat_catalog.pdf

⁶ To see a map of EVOS Trustee Council lands, acquisitions and habitat protections, view page 13 of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Habitat Protection and Acquisition Atlas, available here: http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/opmp/evos/pdfs/EVOS_atlas_web.pdf

⁷ The City of Cordova offers a website summarizing the status of all city-owned land, including areas currently available for lease or purchase: <https://cityofcordova.net/government/planning/lease-or-purchase-city-land>

Figure 11: Map of Land Ownership (Full City Extent)

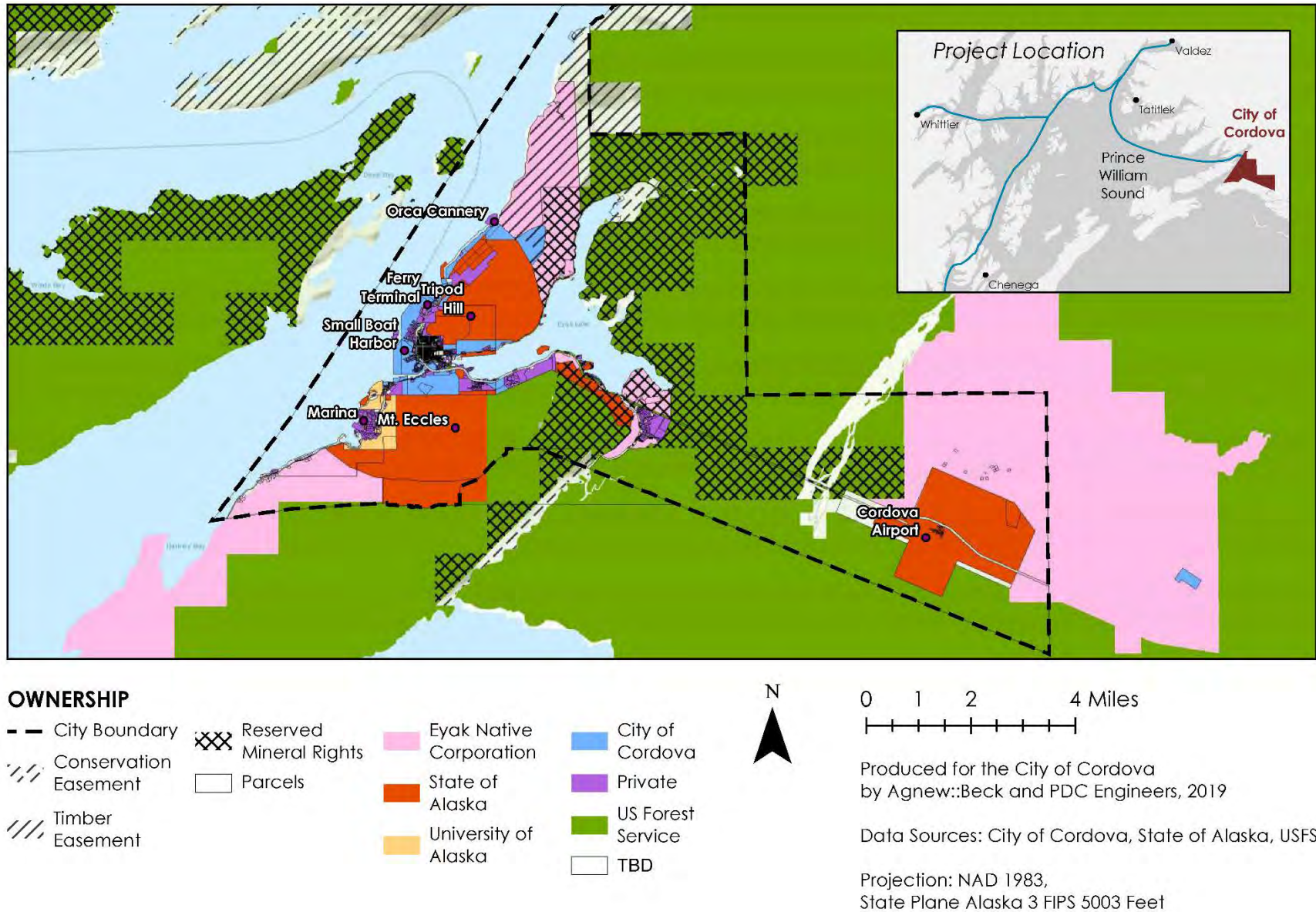
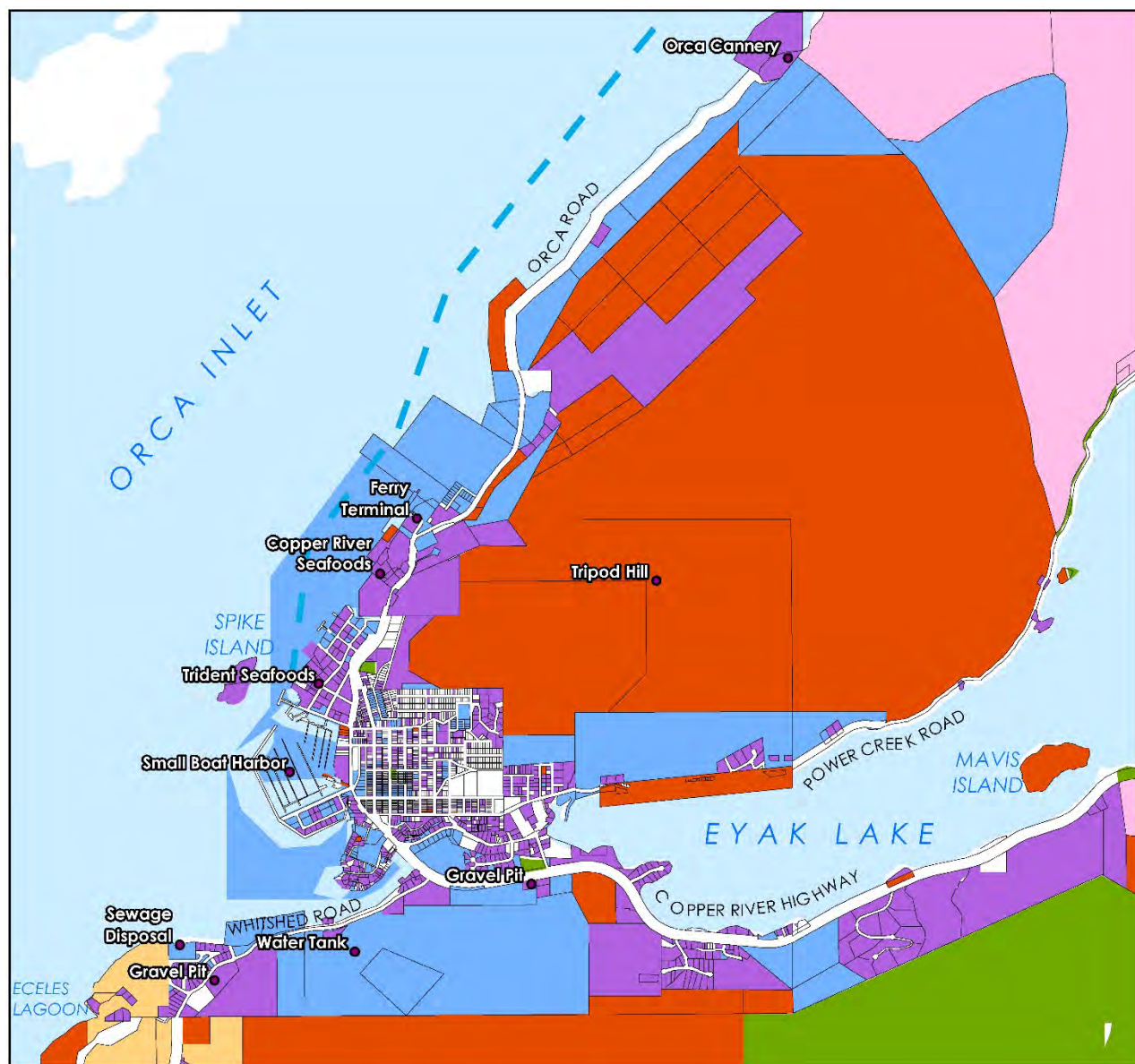


Figure 12: Map of Land Ownership (Local Extent)



Parcels Marine Highway Water

OWNERSHIP

 Eyak Native Corporation	 City of Cordova
 State of Alaska	 Private
 University of Alaska	 US Forest Service

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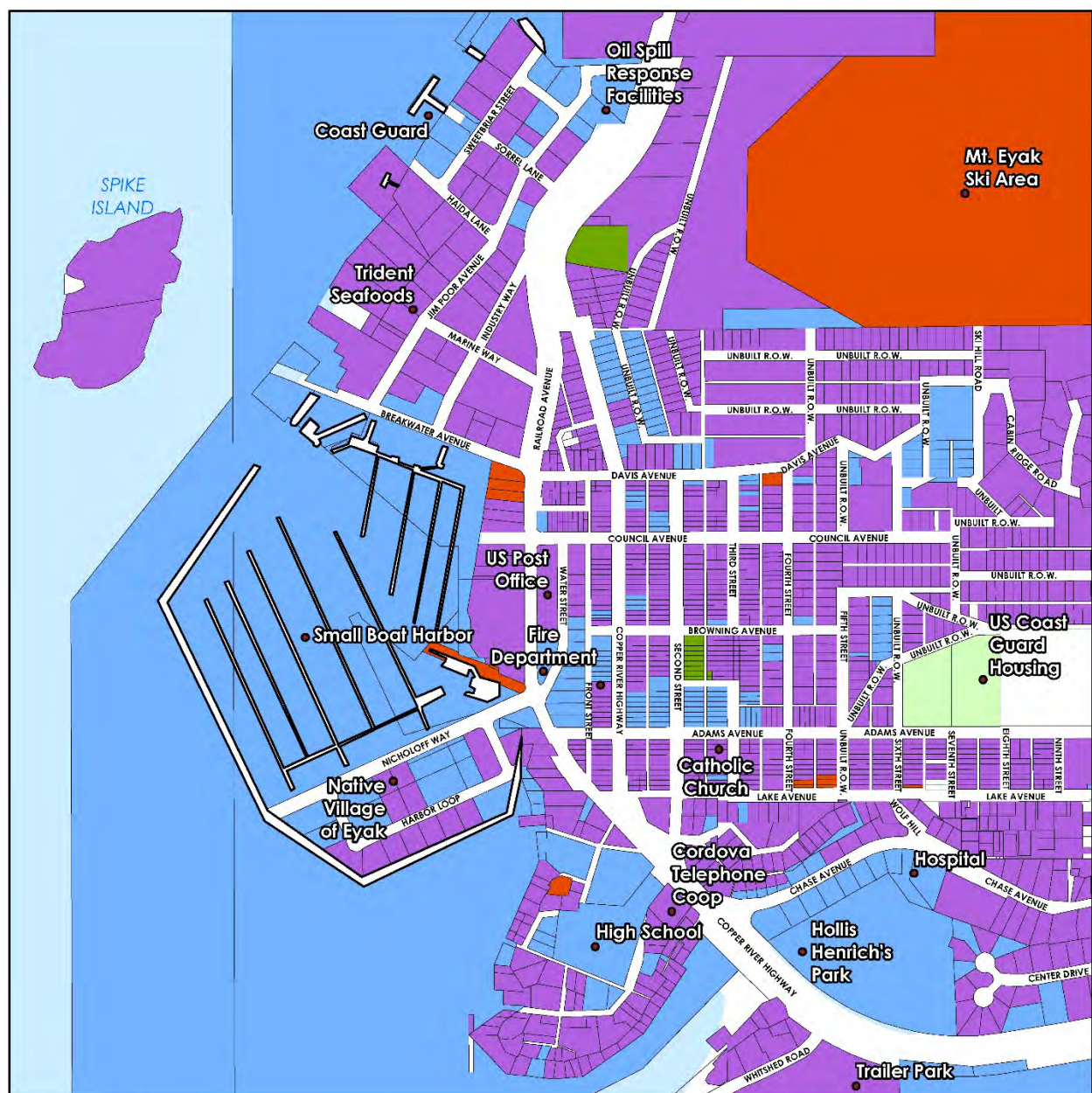
Data Sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS



0 1,500 3,000 6,000 Feet

Projection: NAD 1983,
State Plane Alaska 3 FIPS 5003 Feet

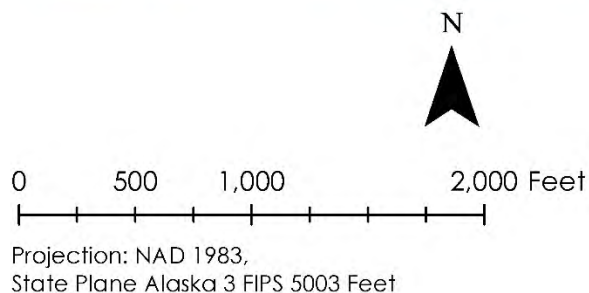
Figure 13: Map of Land Ownership (Core Extent)



OWNERSHIP

US Coast Guard	City of Cordova
Eyak Native Corporation	Private
State of Alaska	US Forest Service
University of Alaska	TBD

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Data Sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS

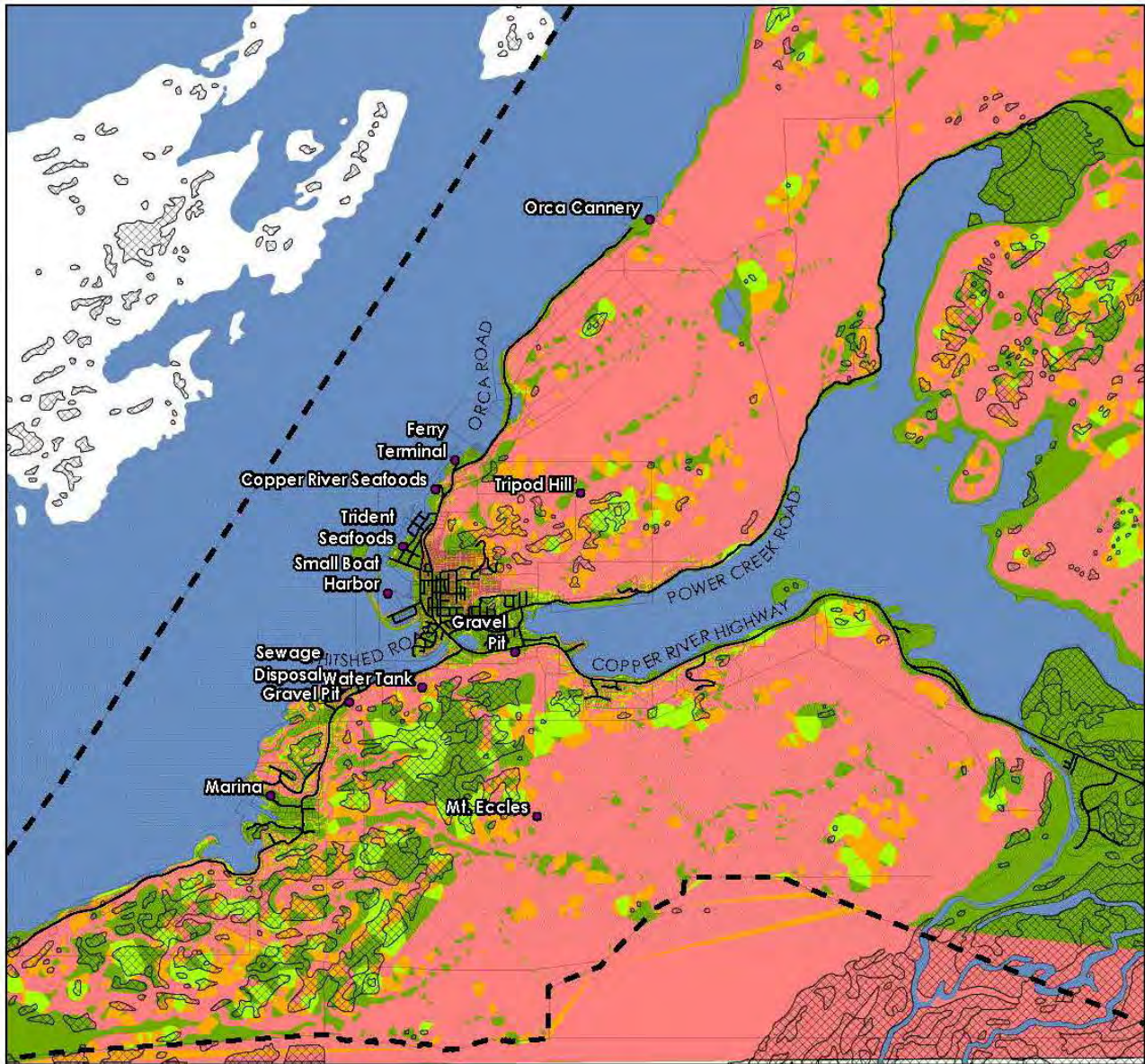


Physical Character – Opportunities and Constraints for Development

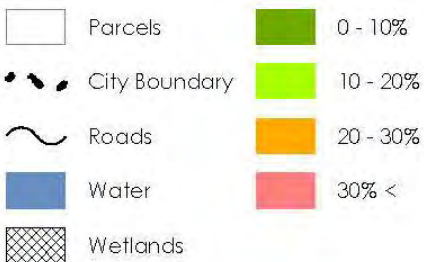
Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16 show the range of physical constraints for development in and surrounding Cordova, including the area's topography and wetlands. As the maps show, developable land is limited. The boundary separating where development is currently found and areas that are undeveloped closely corresponds to the point where flatter land ends and steeper slopes begin, regardless of land ownership. Many of the pockets of less steep land in upper elevation areas are perched wetlands. In addition to no road access, many of these areas face physical and regulatory constraints associated with wetlands.

Conditions such as steep slopes or wetlands do not make development impossible but do increase the cost of development. One indicator of this challenge is shown in Figure 19. The original 1908 Cordova townsite plat created residential parcels along the northern side of town, including parcels along the hillside. Many of these properties were sold into private ownership. Despite over one hundred years of opportunities to build, almost none of the steeper parcels have been developed.

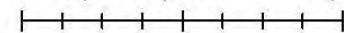
Figure 14: Map of Slopes and Wetlands (Local Extent)



SLOPE CONSTRAINTS AND WETLANDS



0 2,500 5,000 10,000 Feet



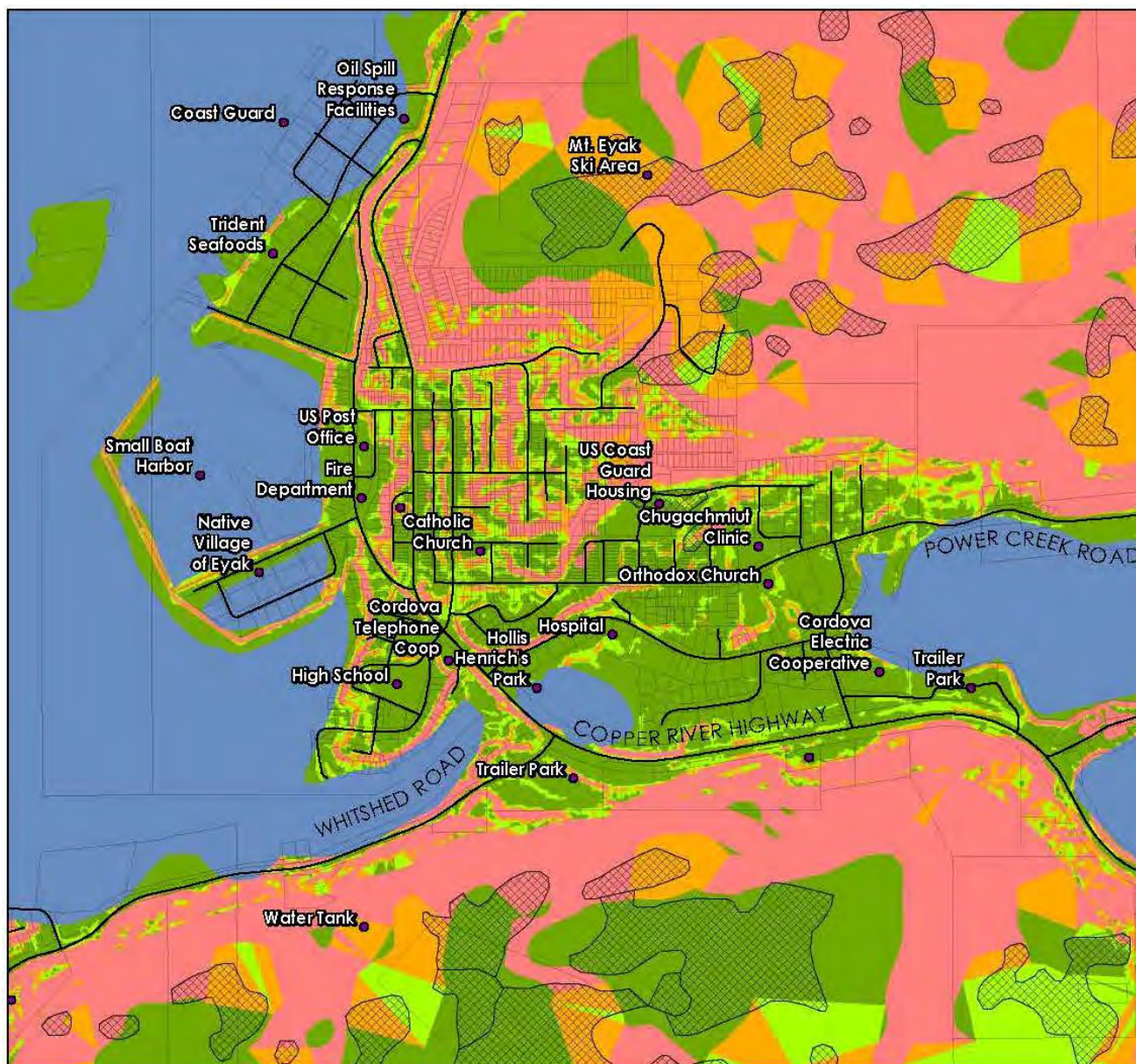
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Data Sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS

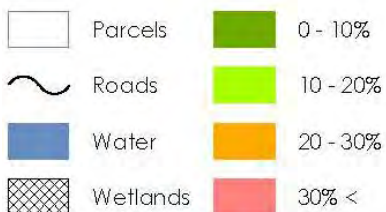
Projection: NAD 1983,
State Plane Alaska 3 FIPS 5003 Feet

Note: this map is based on older topographic data and does not accurately depict South Fill, North Fill or the Breakwater Fill lots. These areas are not visible on the map.

Figure 15: Map of Slope and Wetlands (Core Extent)



SLOPE CONSTRAINTS AND WETLANDS



0 500 1,000 2,000 Feet

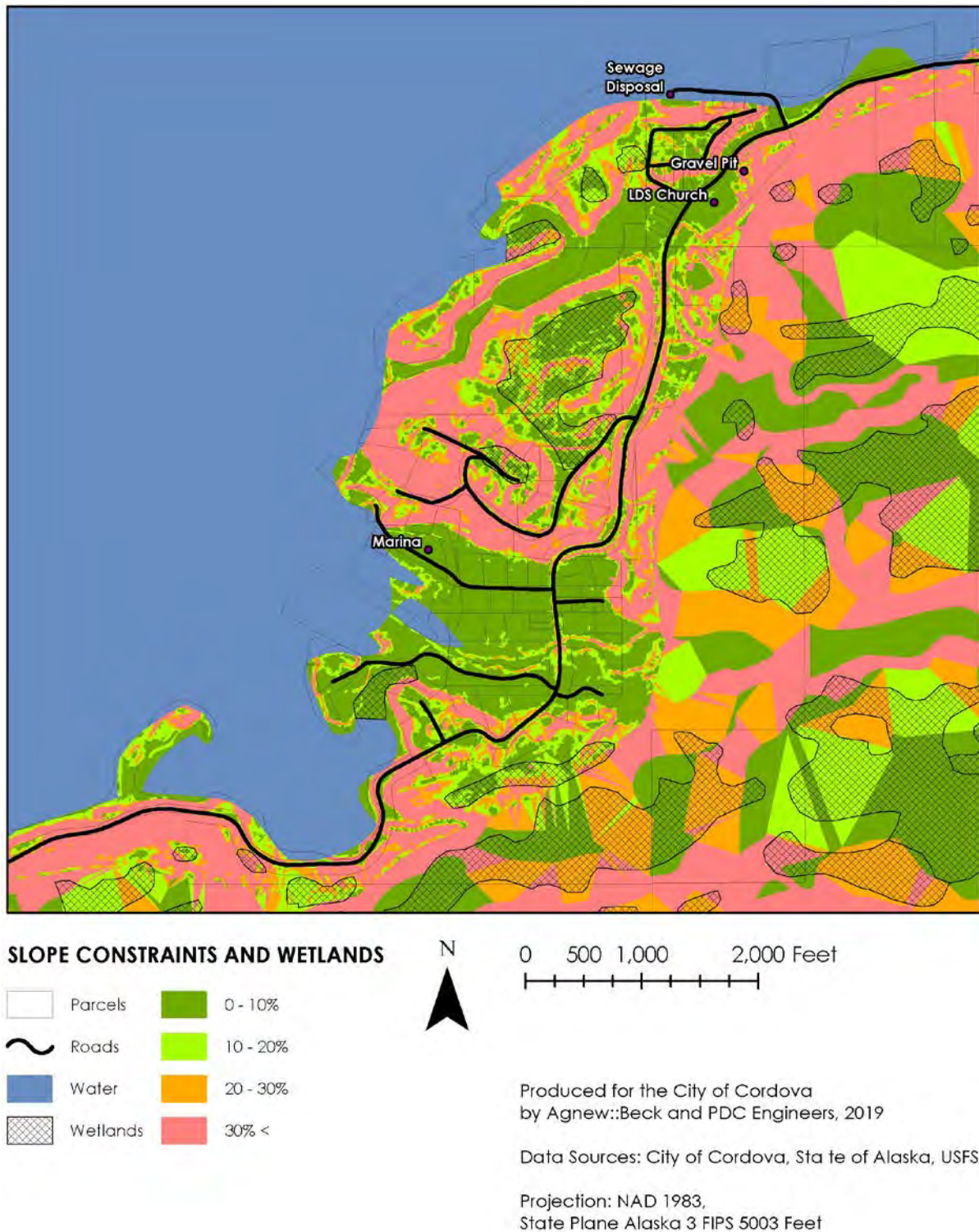
Produced for the City of Cordova
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Data Sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS

Projection: NAD 1983,
State Plane Alaska 3 FIPS 5003 Feet

Note: this map is based on older topographic data and does not accurately depict South Fill, North Fill or the Breakwater Fill lots. These areas are not visible on the map.

Figure 16: Map of Slope and Wetlands (Three Mile Bay)



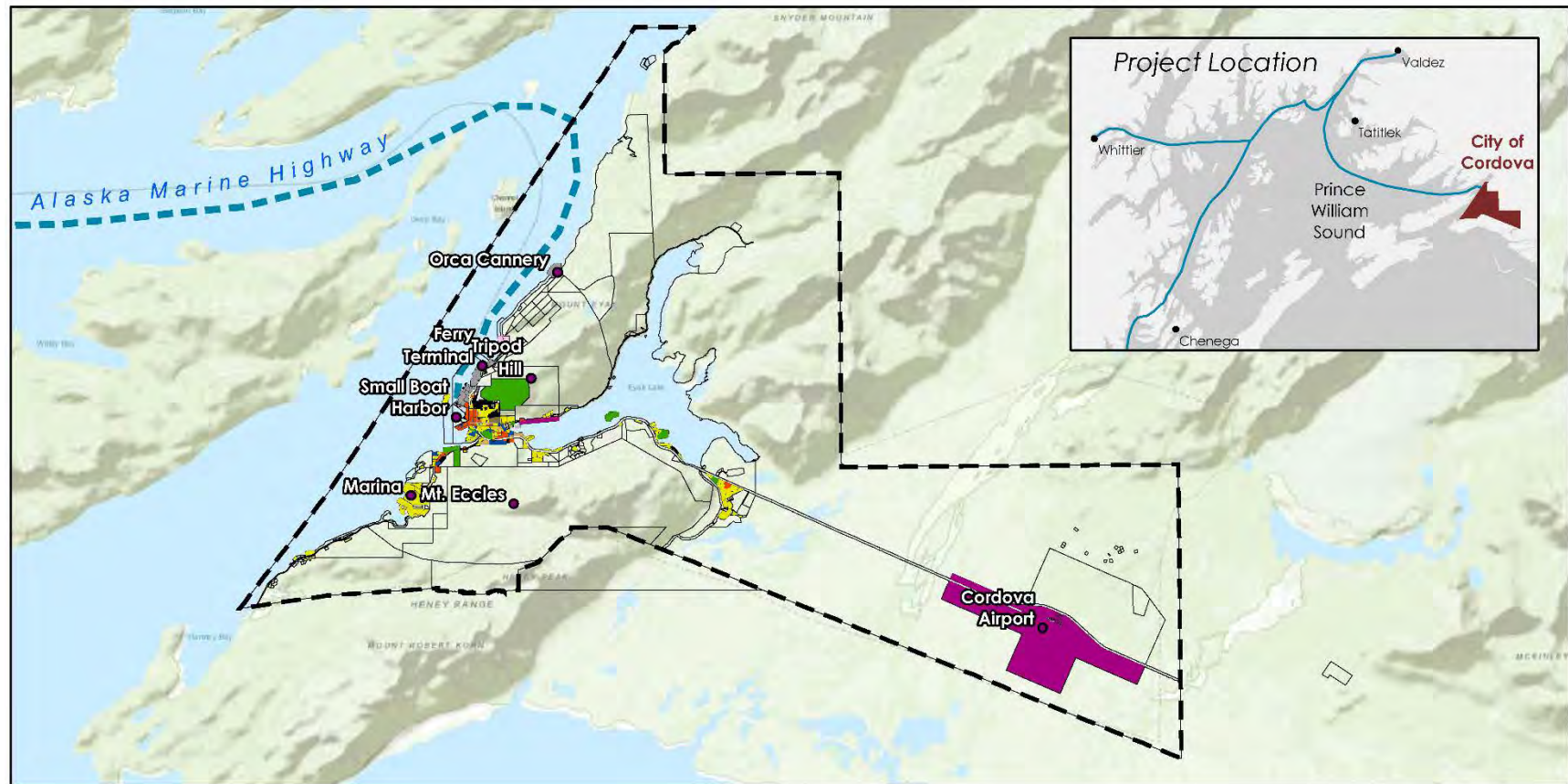
Land Use Today

Figure 17, Figure 18, and Figure 19 show current land use in the City of Cordova.⁸ Major types and locations of uses are summarized below:

- **Residential** – Most residential uses are concentrated on lots in the original Cordova townsite. Blocks are laid out in grid with relatively small lot sizes, typically under a quarter acre. Cordova’s multifamily dwelling units are generally concentrated in the southern/southeastern portion of this downtown residential district. Smaller numbers of residences are located farther from the center of town, including:
 - Out Whitshed Road and into the 3 Mile and Hartney Bay area
 - Along the western shores of Eyak Lake
 - In the Six-Mile area, south of Copper River Highway
- **Commercial** – these uses are concentrated on streets and lots within the original townsite, primarily on First (Main) and Second Street. Cordova’s businesses cover most basic needs, including groceries, hardware, drug store, coffee, banking and personal services. Visitor/hospitality services include hotels and restaurants, also concentrated in the core townsite. A few commercial services are located a short distance out of this core area, most notably on both sides of the harbor.
- **Industrial** – Industrial uses concentrate along the ocean edge, adjoining and just north of the harbor, and extending up to the ferry terminal. Most of these uses are linked to commercial fishing and related maritime activities.
- **Public Services and Facilities** – A diverse range of public and non-profit uses operate in Cordova. Most are clustered in and around the center of Cordova’s residential and commercial districts, except for transportation facilities such as the airport, the Eyak Lake airstrip and the ferry terminal.
- **Recreation and Open Space** – most land within city boundaries is undeveloped. Select portions of this area receive recreational use where trails provide access. The ocean, lakes and rivers receive regular recreational use and in season, for commercial, subsistence and sport hunting and fishing.

⁸The City of Cordova does not keep detailed, parcel-by parcel land use records. The maps were generated through an interpretation of aerial photos and city tax assessor records. These maps are intended to provide a broad picture of land use in Cordova and likely contain minor inaccuracies and omissions at the parcel level.

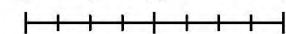
Figure 17: Map of Current Land Use (Full City Extent)



EXISTING LAND USE



0 1 2 4 Miles

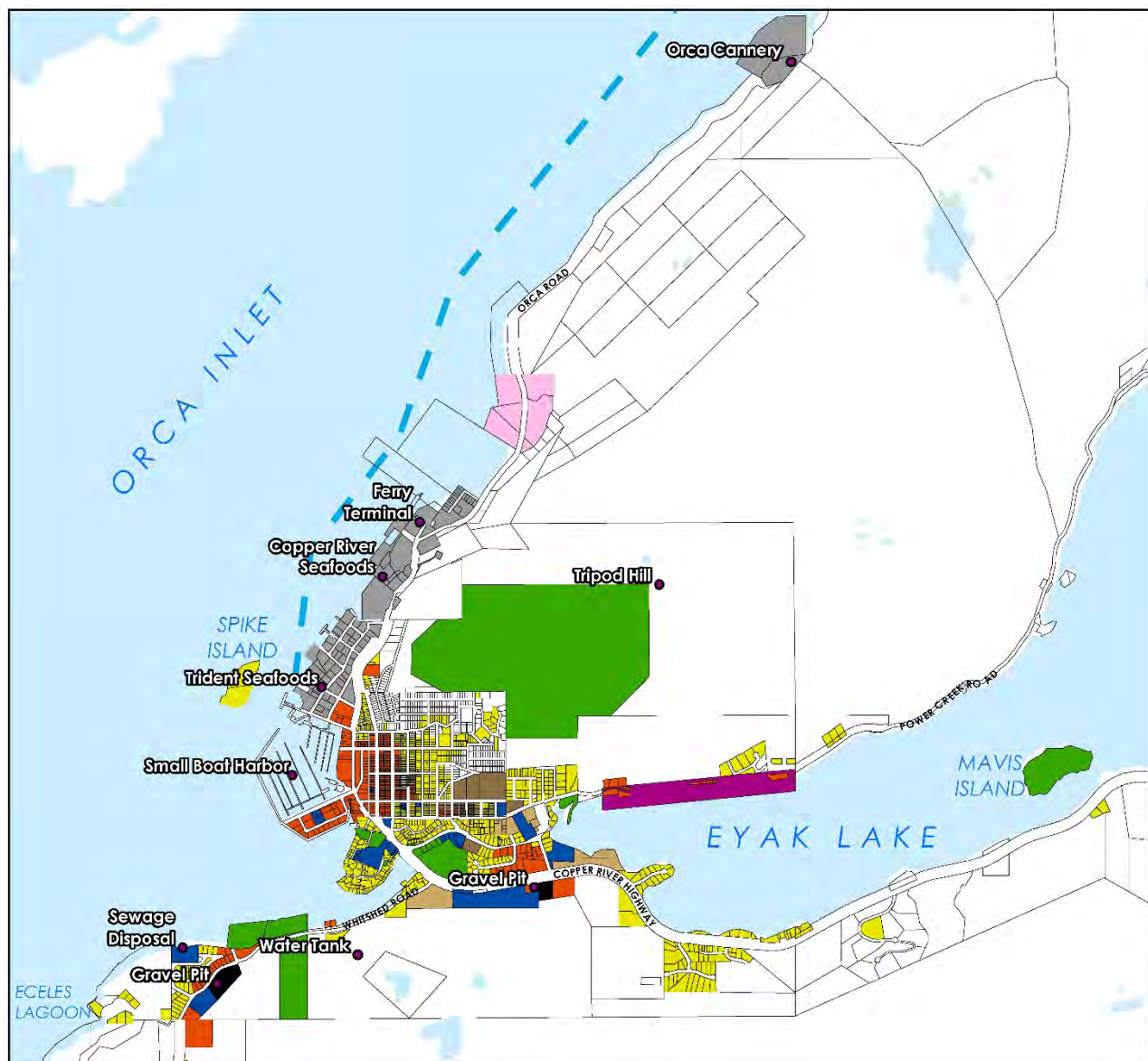


Produced for the City of Cordova
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Data Sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS

Projection: NAD 1983,
State Plane Alaska 3 FIPS 5003 Feet

Figure 18: Map of Current Land Use (Local Extent)



Parcels Marine Highway Water

EXISTING LAND USE

SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL	TRANSPORTATION
MULTI-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	INDUSTRIAL	CONSERVATION
MANUFACTURED HOUSING	INSTITUTIONAL	EXTRACTIVE
	PARK AND OPEN SPACE	UNDEVELOPED LAND

Produced for the City of Cordova
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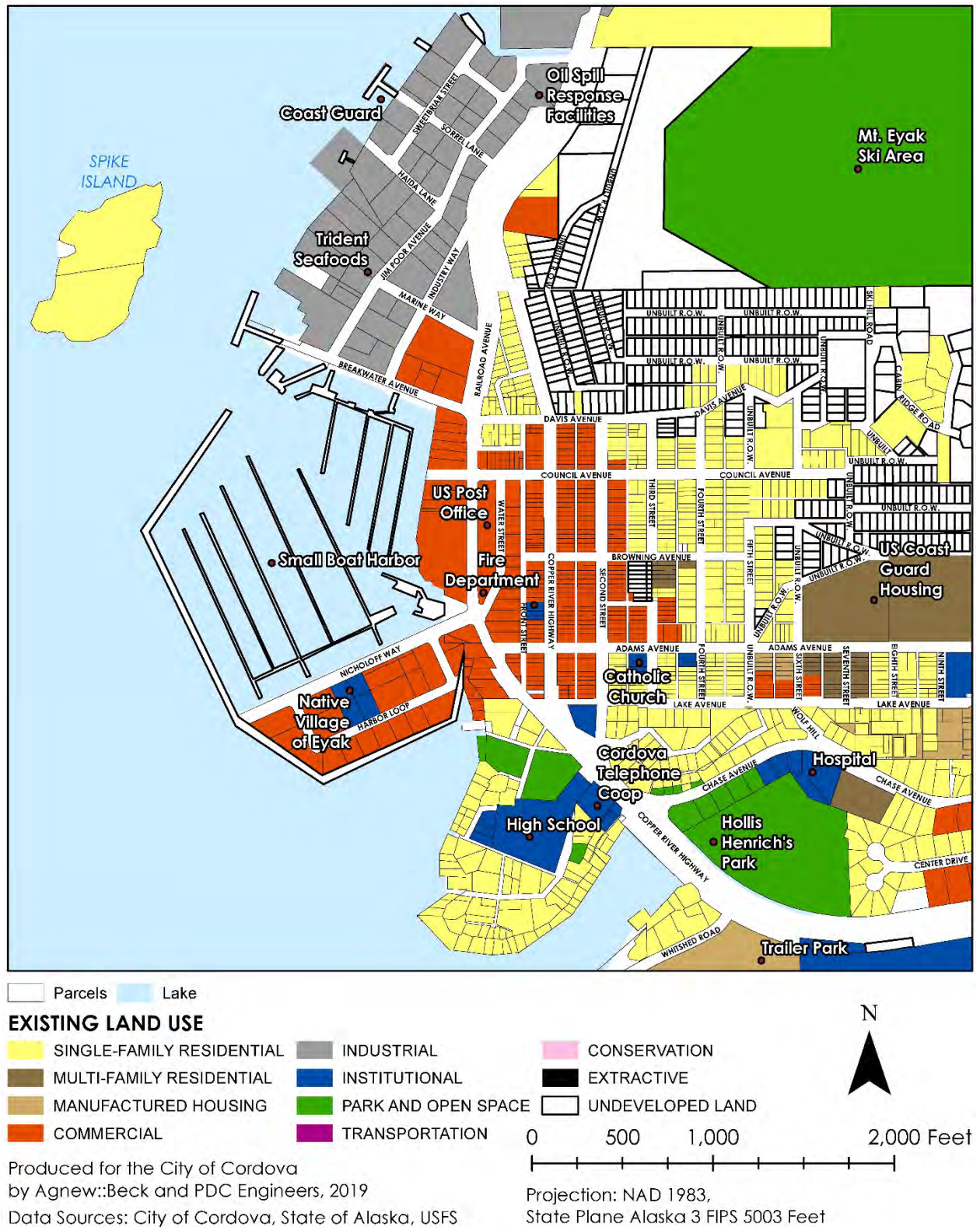
Data Sources: City of Cordova, State of Alaska, USFS



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Projection: NAD 1983,
State Plane Alaska 3 FIPS 5003 Feet

Figure 19: Map of Current Land Use (Core Extent)



Existing Zoning

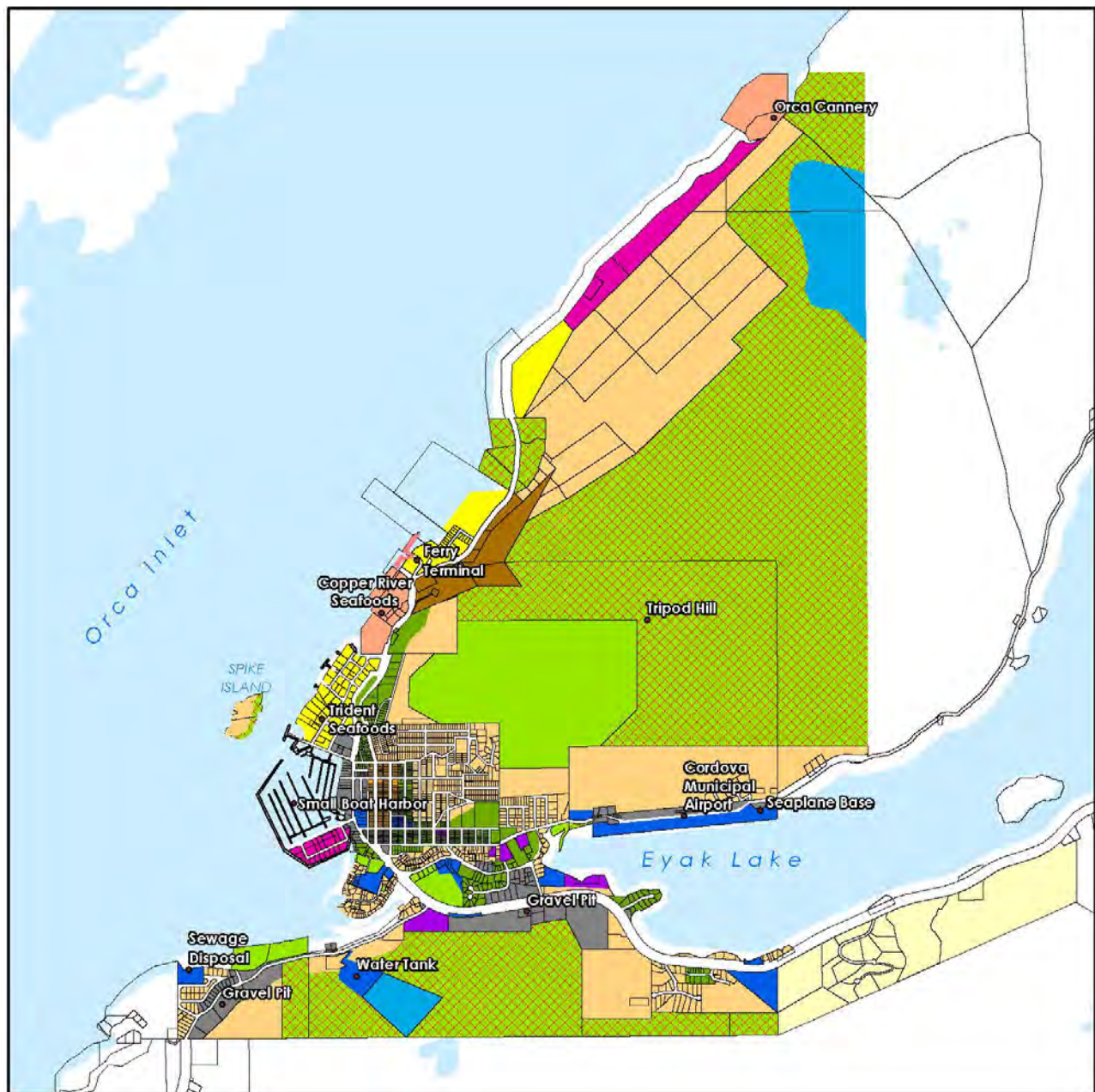
Figure 20 and Figure 21 show current zoning in Cordova.⁹ The City of Cordova has a long-established zoning code, presented in Chapter 18 of the city’s municipal code. The code establishes basic rules for uses in each of these zones, including permitted uses, building height limits, lot area and guidelines on front, rear and side lots.

As the maps show, there is a correlation between existing and allowed uses under the zoning code. For example, the low-density residence district is largely used for single family and duplex housing; areas zoned waterfront commercial are currently primarily used for commercial waterfront activities.

While the current zoning code offers the benefit of simplicity, it has several inconsistencies, dated material and omissions that should be addressed. In addition to the policy recommendations in the core plan, this appendix offers specific areas where revisions to the city’s zoning code would better guide land use and growth to meet community needs.

⁹ White areas and land not shown on zoning maps – the southern, northern and eastern portions of the city and majority of the area inside city boundaries – is in the “Unrestricted District.” No restrictions on use are applied in these areas.

Figure 20: Current Zoning (Local Extent)



ZONING DISTRICTS

Business	Industrial	Public Lands and Institutions
Central Business	Low Density Residential	Parks and Open Space
Waterfront Commercial Park	Medium Density	Watershed Protection
Waterfront Industrial	Rural Residential	Conservation
Waterfront Historic	Planned Mobile Home	

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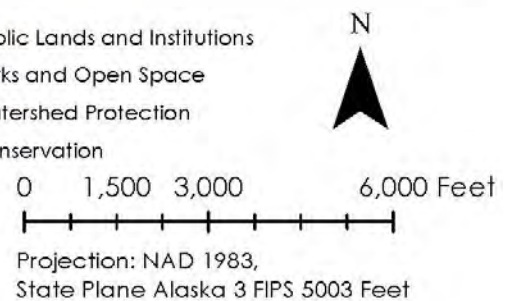
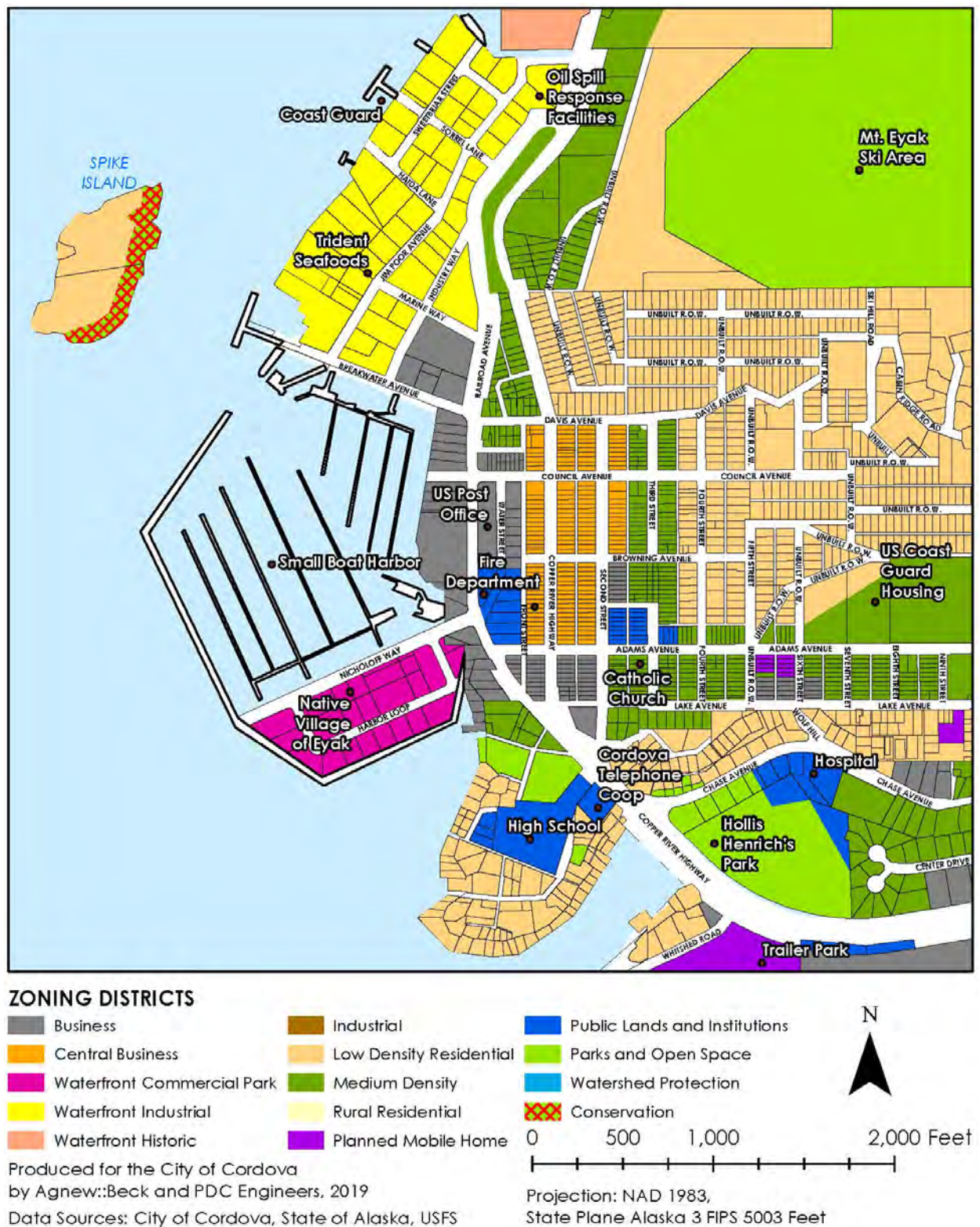


Figure 21: Current Zoning (Core Extent)



Additional Details and Example Actions to Implement Plan Strategies

This section shares background and suggestions to implement land use strategies in the plan. The strategies and example action items referenced here match the numbers and letters in the main body of the plan.

Strategy #1: *Implement a future land use map that guides future decisions about land use and growth.*

No details or background information added.

Strategy #2: *Update and improve the city's Title 18 zoning and Title 17 subdivision codes to better respond to existing and future issues and opportunities.*

Specific implementation suggestions for “action b” include:

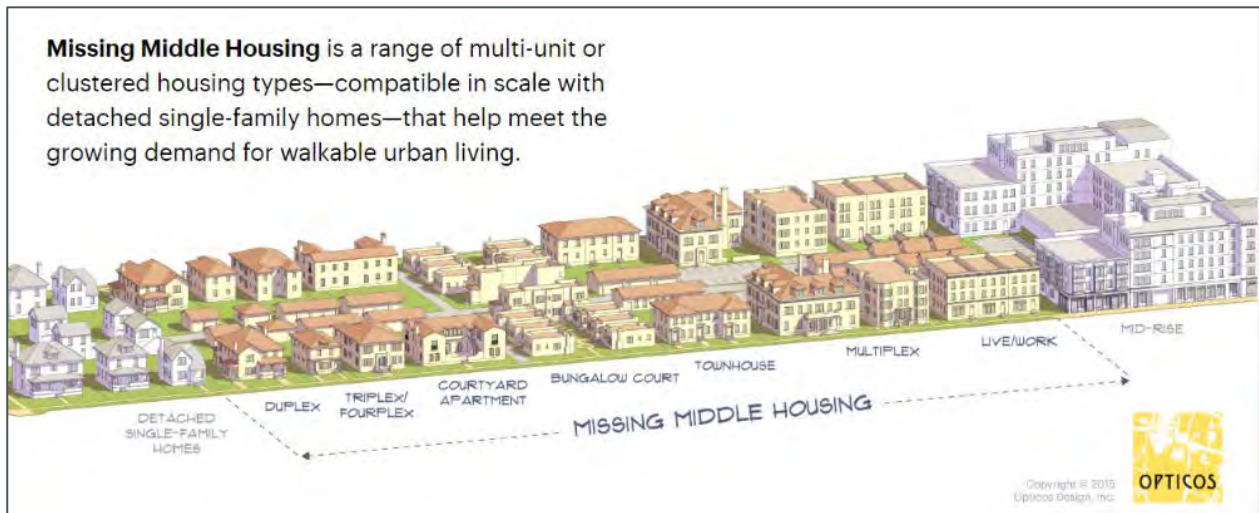
Modify the city code to require a conditional use process in areas currently in the Unrestricted District. This change would ensure certain uses with the potential for substantial off-site impacts would be required to go through a Planning Commission and public review process. Examples uses include:

- Commercial gravel operations over a specified size
- Industrial activities
- Large scale subdivisions
- Large scale tourism accommodations

Additional background information on this strategy:

The term “affordable housing” is used broadly in this strategy and refers to housing that is within the reach of people with modest incomes. This could include younger first-time home buyers, older people on fixed incomes or others who want to live in Cordova, but whose incomes make it difficult to rent or buy a home. While “affordable housing” could include housing that is subsidized at below market rates, in Cordova the general goal is lower cost, market rate housing.

Communities around the U.S. are focusing on “missing middle housing,” the term used for providing type of housing that is most needed in many communities. The specific objective is to promote housing at densities between single family attached and high-density apartments. As the following diagram shows, this refers to a range of types of housing, from duplexes and triplexes, through bungalow courts, cottage housing, and townhouse.



Source: Opticos Design, "Missing Middle Housing." More information at <https://missingmiddlehousing.com/>

This approach builds on two foundations. First, it responds to the realities of the market place and changing demographics.¹⁰ Today, traditional single-family homes are not affordable or otherwise do not meet the needs of many households, households that more likely than in the past to be single parents, unmarried adults and single seniors. The second foundation addresses the need to find a way to construct new more affordable and higher density forms of housing, but in ways that are compatible with traditional single-family settings. The implication and the growing practice around the country is to adjust zoning codes to focus more on the design standards that produce quality housing, including aesthetically compatible developments, than on the metric of units per acre.

Strategy #3: *Update local zoning maps to better align with the future land use map, using the established public review process.*

No details or background information added.

Strategy #4: *Work with private landowners to explore options to expand the supply of land available for residential development.*

No details or background information added.

Strategy #5: *Develop and apply land use policy tools to promote economic development priorities.*

Specific implementation suggestions for "action d" include:

- Develop a detailed plan with priorities for redevelopment, circulation and land use in the Cordova Core area.
 - Establish explicit city policies and incentives for redevelopment of projects that bring important public benefits and would not otherwise be possible.
 - Identify a specific area where these incentives are available to all properties, focused on First Street (Main Street).
 - Identify and invest in public infrastructure that can promote redevelopment, with a focus on circulation issues, including reducing congestion at the boat launch, and

¹⁰ AARP Livable Communities, "Bring Back Missing Middle Housing," Available here: <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/housing/info-2019/bring-back-missing-middle-housing.html>

providing a safe pedestrian linkage from Main Street to the harbor and continuing to the breakwater.

Strategy #6: Maintain the quality of Cordova's natural environment.

Specific implementation suggestions for "action c" include:

- Stormwater management - identify opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure filtration into stormwater discharge channels to filter stormwater runoff entering salmon habitat waterbodies. Integrate stormwater filtration and snow/sediment storage best management practices into municipal building code and street maintenance practices.
- Small spills - establish clear procedures for notification of and response to small fuel spills (e.g., home heating tank leak or fuel tank disturbance from flooding, earthquake).
- Stream setbacks - establish a standard setback from documented salmon habitat waterbodies in Cordova municipal code to protect water quality by allowing for vegetative buffers along streams and lakes.
- Invasive plant management - promote best practices for managing invasive plants on public and private lands.

Strategy #7: Establish incentives to encourage property owners to clean up lots and reduce junk yards.

No details or background information added.

Strategy #8: Encourage property owners to learn about the historic significance of lands and buildings and, as appropriate, work with the Cordova Historic Preservation Commission to recognize and preserve cultural resources.

No details or background information added.