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### **Group forms to support the West Susitna Access Project**

*Friends of West Susitna will advocate for Alaskans to have road access to the area*

**SKWENTNA, AK** – July 21, 2022 – Today, a coalition representing local Alaska business owners, current and former policy makers, outdoor recreation advocates, and other interests announces the formation of “Friends of West Susitna,” an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to advocate for the West Susitna Access Project.

“It’s time for this expansive part of the state to become accessible to more Alaskans,” said Friends of West Susitna Board Chair Cindi Herman, owner of the Skwentna Roadhouse and year-round Skwentna resident. “The West Susitna Access Project represents the first step in allowing more Alaskans to access this part of the Mat-Su Borough for good jobs, year-round recreation, settlement, and economic development. Greater access will help unlock Alaska’s abundant resources for more than just a handful of people, and that’s a good thing.”

Additional Friends of West Susitna Board members include:

- **Rod Arno**, Palmer: Policy director and former executive director for the Alaska Outdoor Council, wilderness guide.
- **Colleen Sullivan-Leonard**, Wasilla: Former Mat-Su legislator, current Wasilla City Council member, fourth-generation Alaskan.
- **Calvin Flanigan**, Skwentna (Onestone Lake): Assistant hunting guide, bear guard, trapper.
- **John Lamborn**, Wasilla: Former exploration geologist, Mat-Su business owner.
- **Christy Moore**, Anchorage: Former dog musher, organizer of Iditaski and Iditasport events, remote property owner at Derf Lake (near Mount Susitna.)
- **Mark Tope**, Wasilla: Mat-Su business owner; trucker; pilot.

The group formed recently to participate in the public process that is currently underway and being led by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), the state corporation leading the West Susitna Access Project’s permitting efforts. “We look forward to lending a supportive voice in the weeks and months ahead,” said Herman. “It is critical all sides are represented and heard as regulators analyze the options for the road.”

The group’s highest priority is year-round road access to the lands and resources west of the Susitna River. “Currently, the area is accessible to only a small group of people with access to private planes or watercraft,” said Rod Arno. “Friends of West Susitna leadership believes a road moves us closer to opening the area for outdoor recreation like fishing, hunting, snowmachine travel, hiking, and boating without unduly impacting the environment. It could also create economic opportunities tied to tourism, resource development, agriculture, and timber harvest.”

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In the coming days, Friends of West Susitna plans to take its positive message about access for all Alaskans to residents using social media and grassroots efforts like talking face-to-face with neighbors in the region. “We live here year-round, and are confident the community supports this road project, especially when they learn more about the benefits it offers to the entire Mat-Su Borough and beyond,” said Sullivan-Leonard. “This area should be accessible to more residents, not fewer. The road project will make that possible, which means progress for people who live here.”

“The majority of comments we hear from people or read online support the road,” said Herman. “Most Mat-Su residents, and, indeed, most Alaskans, seem to support the project if it can be done responsibly. To us, doing it right means Alaskans will enjoy some form of managed or scheduled access, and that AIDEA will establish a toll system so that industry users of the road will help fund its construction and maintenance like they successfully did for Red Dog Mine’s transportation corridor. And, of course, Alaskans expect to be first in line for the jobs that result from building this road.”

Alaskans can find more information about the organization at [friendsofwestsusitna.org](http://friendsofwestsusitna.org). In addition, the group has created a public [Facebook page](#).

Financial support for Friends of West Susitna is being provided by supportive businesses, community partners, and board members. Donations are being accepted; persons or parties interested in supporting the organization should contact the group at [info@friendsofwestsusitna.org](mailto:info@friendsofwestsusitna.org).

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