



## Conditional Use Permit – Proposed Findings and Proposed Conditions

Date: February 11, 2026  
File: CUP 25-03  
To: Planning & Zoning Commission  
From: Bruce Wall, Senior Planner  
Conditional Use: Helipad

### General Information

Applicant: Pulseline Adventures, LLC  
Property Owner: State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources  
Street Address: Near MP 11.5 Richardson Highway  
Legal Description: A portion of the Southwest ¼, Northwest ¼, Section 28, Township 9 South, Range 4 West, Copper River Meridian  
Zoning District: Public Lands (P)  
Existing Land Use: Vacant Land  
Access: Gravel pit access road via Richardson Highway

### VMC 17.08

“Conditional use” means a provision which allows for flexibility within this chapter by permitting certain specified uses in zoning districts where such uses are generally considered appropriate, but only after additional conditions and safeguards are applied to ensure their compatibility with permitted principal uses.

"Helipad" means a facility without the logistical support provided by a heliport where helicopters take off and land. Helipads do not include facilities for maintenance, repair, or storage of helicopters.

### **Project Description**

Pulseline Adventures is proposing a short-term, seasonal landing zone/ staging area to support their heli-skiing operations adjacent to the access road to the state-owned gravel pits near MP 11.5 of the Richardson Highway. In their application, they state:

Pulseline has a need for a limited-use staging area (day use only) in this location to support and streamline our heli-skiing operations during March and April annually. This is an ideal location to support Pulseline's operations on certain days and during specific circumstances. Pulseline does not intend to utilize this site daily. There are only several days per season (approximately 5-10 days out of our eight-week season) when we may use the site to support our operations. Typically, these are days when weather conditions prevent us from accessing other terrain and/or utilized other staging areas.

In 2025, Pulseline Adventures obtained a five-year land use permit from Alaska Department of Natural Resources for the helipad at this location (LAS 34927).

## Proposed Findings

### Procedural Findings

- a) On December 28, 2025, the Community Development Department received a conditional use permit application from Pulseline Adventures, LLC.
- b) The Community Development Department reviewed the application and determined that it was complete, in accordance with VMC 17.12.090(E)(1).
- c) A public hearing was scheduled for January 28, 2026, to consider the Conditional Use Permit.
- d) The public hearing was rescheduled to February 11, 2026 because the notice requirement had not been met for the January meeting.
- e) Notice of the publication was published in KVAK's e-blast newspaper on January 26, 2026 and February 2, 2026.
- f) Notice of the meeting was published on the City of Valdez website on January 21, 2026, in accordance with VMC 17.12.090(E)(5) and 17.12.160(C)(1).
- g) Notice of the meeting was mailed on January 23, 2026 to the 10 property owners within 500 feet of the proposed helipad and within 500 feet of the requested flight paths, in accordance with VMC 17.12.090(E)(5), 17.12.160(C)(2), and 17.80.130(F).
- h) A document holder with public notice flyers was posted near mile 11.5 of the Richardson Highway and at the helipad site on January 23, 2026, in accordance with VMC 17.12.090(E)(5) and 17.12.160(C)(3).

1. **Criterion 1: Site Suitability.** The subject site shall be suitable to support the proposed conditional use and its associated structure(s) and site improvements. The Planning and Zoning Commission shall consider topography, slope and soil stability, geophysical hazards, surface and subsurface drainage, and water quality conditions on and around the subject site and the probable effects of the proposed conditional use upon these factors. VMC 17.12.090(C)(1)

- a) The narrative submitted by the applicant states, "*we believe the subject site is suitable to support the proposed conditional use (seasonal limited support of heli-*

*skiing operations as described above). There will be no structures or site improvements. Our conditional use will have no adverse environmental effects.”*

- b) The proposed helipad is located within the historic braided channels of the Lowe River, other than the historic channels, the surrounding area has less than a 2% slope to the west.
- c) There are not any known geophysical hazards on the property.
- d) It is not anticipated that the proposed use will have any affect on drainage or water quality.
- e) The geography of the site is suitable for the proposed use.

2. **Criterion 2: Utility, Sanitation, and Public Service Needs.** The conditional use and the associated site improvements shall be adequately served by utilities, emergency responders, and a sanitation facility to ensure long-term safety for its occupants and surrounding populations. The planning and zoning commission shall consider whether adequate sewer/sanitation, storm drainage, potable water, fire protection, public safety, access, and electrical power exist to serve the proposed use and associated structures/site improvements. VMC 17.12.090(C)(2)

- a) The narrative submitted by the applicant states, *“our conditional use of this site requires no structures or site improvements including utilities, sewer/sanitation, or potable water. As noted above, we desire to utilize this site as a day-use helicopter staging area during March and April annually on approximately 5-10 days out of eight weeks per season.”*
- b) Notice of the application was provided to the following city departments: Fire, Police, Public Works, and the Building Official.
- c) The application materials demonstrate that the utility, sanitation, and public service needs will be met.

3. **Criterion 3: Zoning District Standards.** With the exception of Planned Unit Developments (PUDs), the proposed conditional use and its associated site improvement(s) shall comply with the dimensional standards of the zone in which it is located. Notwithstanding, those zoning standards may be adjusted pursuant to a separate variance and/or administrative adjustment application. VMC 17.12.090 (C)(3)

- a) The narrative submitted by the applicant states, *“we do not believe that this criterion is relevant to our proposed conditional use of this site.”*
- b) The subject property is in the Public Lands (P) district.
- c) No structures are planned with the approval of the conditional use permit.

4. **Criterion 4: Specific Use Standards.** The proposed conditional use and its associated site improvement(s) shall comply with the applicable specific use standards pursuant to Chapter 17.80. VMC 17.12.090(C)(4)

- Helipads must demonstrate conformance with current FAA requirements for heliport and helipad design including touchdown and lift areas (*TLOF*), final

approach and takeoff areas (FATO), safety areas, and design for the weight and size of the helicopter.

- a) The narrative submitted by the applicant states, "*Pulseline operates with AS350 B2/B3 (Class A - small) helicopters that require a minimum 40' x 40' helipad with a clear area of 30' x 30' - the proposed site area exceeds the minimum helipad and clear area requirements for this aircraft. Pulseline Adventure ground personnel prepare appropriate touchdown areas on the snowpack for AS350 B2/B3 aircraft that are level, smooth, and compacted to safely support the weight of the aircraft. Additionally, the helipad and surrounding areas are free of debris, obstacles and obstructions. Helipads are marked with visual references for pilots with alder wands tied with biodegradable ribbon. The lift area exceeds the minimum of 100' x 100' required for Class A aircraft and exceeds the minimum width of 100' for the approach and departure paths.*"
- b) FAA heliport design guidance (AC 150/5390-2D) applies to the planning and design of heliports and helipads as facilities. The proposed use is a temporary, seasonal helicopter landing area on compacted snow, with no permanent construction. FAA regulations allow helicopter operations from temporary or unimproved landing areas provided operations are conducted safely and do not create hazards to persons or property. As such, strict heliport dimensional standards are not required for FAA compliance.
- c) Staff reviewed FAA heliport design guidance for reference; however, because the proposal is for a temporary seasonal landing area rather than a constructed heliport facility, FAA operational safety principles, not permanent heliport design standards, are the appropriate benchmark.
- d) The proposed helipad will not conform to FAA's heliport design guidance applicable to permanent heliport facilities.
- e) Although the proposed helipad does not conform to FAA heliport design guidance for permanent facilities, staff determined that such standards are not applicable to a temporary, seasonal landing area on compacted snow. FAA requirements for such operations are operational rather than dimensional, and the applicant has demonstrated that the landing area will be prepared, managed, and operated in a manner that does not create a hazard to nearby people or property.
- f) The proposed helipad satisfies the intent of this specific use requirement.
- The helipad must not create noise or winds that negatively impact pedestrians.
- g) The proposed helipad is not in an area typically used by pedestrians in the winter months.
- h) Condition of approval number 3 requires that the use of the helipad must not create noise or winds that negatively impact pedestrians.
- Helicopter landing hours may be restricted as a condition of a conditional use permit depending on the location of the helipad in relation to other uses.

- i) Because of its distance from other land uses, no restrictions are being placed on the operating hours.
  - The number of landings may be restricted as a condition of a conditional use permit depending on the location of the helipad in relation to other uses.
    - j) Because of its distance from other land uses, no restrictions are being placed on the number of landings at the helipad.
  - Additional public notice is required to be provided to properties within five hundred feet of the proposed helipad and requested flight paths.
    - k) Staff provided this additional notice as described above.
5. **Criterion 5: Comprehensive Plan Consistency.** The proposed conditional use and its associated site improvement(s) shall be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan's goals, policies, and maps in terms of land uses, development character, and scale. VMC 17.12.090(C)(5)
- a) The Future Land Use Map in Plan Valdez, the comprehensive plan for the City of Valdez does not designate a place type for the proposed helipad location.
  - b) Goal 3.3 of Plan Valdez states, "*Promote the community as a year-round visitor and recreation destination while effectively balancing the benefits with possible impacts.*"
  - c) In reviewing Plan Valdez, it does not appear that the proposed helipad will be inconsistent with its goals and policies in terms of land uses, development character, and scale.
6. **Criterion 6: Nuisance Mitigation.** The proposed conditional use and its associated site improvement(s) shall provide mitigation measures to address potential nuisances relating to excessive noise, lighting, vibration, traffic, debris and litter, and outdoor material storage. VMC 17.12.090(C)(6)
- a) The narrative submitted by the applicant states, "*We believe that our proposed use will not have detrimental effects. Due to its location, there will not be excessive noise, lightning, vibration, or traffic; there will be no debris or litter or material storage.*"
  - b) Because of its distance from other land uses, it is not anticipated that the proposed use will create any nuisances related to excessive noise, lighting, vibration, traffic, debris and litter, or outdoor material storage beyond what can be expected by similar operations operating in the community.
7. **Criterion 7: Access and Circulation.** The proposed conditional use and its associated site improvement(s) shall provide adequate site access for motor vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists. Applications shall not be approved where the proposed use would create undue traffic congestion or pose a safety hazard to motorists, pedestrians, and/or cyclists. VMC 17.12.090(C)(7)

- a) The narrative submitted by the applicant states, “*This criterion is not relevant for our conditional use which will not create undue traffic congestion or pose a safety hazard to motorists, pedestrians, and/or cyclists.*”
- b) The proposed helipad will be located approximately 350 feet from the Richardson Highway along an access road that is otherwise not used in the winter months.
- c) The proposed use and its associated site improvements will provide adequate site access for motor vehicles, pedestrians, and cyclists, as appropriate.
- d) Due to its remote location, the proposed use will not create undue traffic congestion or pose a safety hazard to motorists, pedestrians, and/or cyclists.

#### VMC 17.12.090(E)(7)

The Planning and Zoning Commission shall conduct a public hearing to review the conditional use application, review the staff report, hear staff, applicant, and public testimony, discuss the proposal, adopt findings of fact (from staff or establishing their own), and take action on the application. The Commission may approve, approve with conditions, or deny the application.

#### Conditions

1. The conditional use permit is for a portion of the Southwest ¼, Northwest ¼, Section 28, Township 9 South, Range 4 West, Copper River Meridian to be used as a helipad.
2. The conditional use permit is effective upon approval.
3. The use of the helipad shall not create noise or winds that negatively impact pedestrians
4. The conditional use permit must be utilized within twelve months after the effective date of approval.
5. The use must be consistent with the submitted application, narrative, and site plan. Any substantial change to the use requires approval pursuant to VMC 17.12.090(F).

#### Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that CUP 25-03 be approved by the Planning & Zoning Commission with the conditions recommended by staff.