

AVALANCHE AND MASS-WASTING POSITION – 2024

The safety of lives and property is the goal of the avalanche and mass-wasting position of the League of Women Voters Juneau. The League believes that hazard areas should be a permanent part of local planning.

The League believes studies requested and received by the City and Borough of Juneau (CBJ) from avalanche, mass-wasting and debris experts are a valuable baseline for information and decision making, as are relevant CBJ plans.

The League urges all parties to recognize the range of hazards presented by avalanches¹ and mass wasting² and urges regulators to prohibit new building in severe avalanche and severe mass-wasting areas. The League recognizes that there are different tools available to the CBJ for monitoring avalanche danger and for monitoring mass-wasting danger, and that thus the usefulness and success of each will differ.

The League encourages the use of a full public process in efforts to implement the following items and to consider additional methods to ensure the safest possible use of properties impacted by potential avalanches and mass wasting in the borough. The League recognizes the difficulty in determining how best to use and mitigate hazard areas in Juneau especially in balancing the rights of property owners, the housing supply, insurance challenges, and public health, safety, and welfare.

The League believes the City and Borough of Juneau has a responsibility to:

1. Educate the public regularly about local avalanche and mass-wasting hazards;
2. Regulate use of structures and new building in the hazard areas;
3. Notify those who own or might buy, lease or rent in a moderate and higher hazard area;
4. Prevent or reduce existing hazard danger to private or City-owned lands and properties;
5. Explore how to remedy existing situations of buildings located in severe hazard areas.

Amplification

1. Educating the public should include:
 - a. Determining clear and coordinated boundaries of the moderate and higher avalanche and mass-wasting areas with publication of appropriate designations.
 - b. Indicating on all CBJ land use planning maps clear designation of moderate and higher avalanche and mass-wasting areas.
 - c. Making available to the general public the studies commissioned and any plans adopted by the CBJ.

¹ **Avalanche is a mass of snow, ice, and rocks falling rapidly down a mountainside.**

² **Mass wasting is a geologic term describing all downhill rock and soil movement due to gravity, and can include trees and debris.**

- d. Making greater use of the city-commissioned studies.
 - e. Updating the building codes to include hazard specifications.
 - f. Obtaining and designating funding for further area-wide hazard assessments.
2. Regulating use of structures and new building in the hazard areas should include:
- a. Regulating building and modifications of existing buildings, construction on steep slopes, and building in run-out zones of gullies.
 - b. Developing engineering standards for structures.
 - c. Identifying on all affected building permit plans and subdivision plats the appropriate hazard designation.
3. Notifying those who own or might buy, lease or rent in moderate and higher hazard areas should include:
- a. Written notification by each real estate agent/salesperson/broker/private party upon first inquiry.
 - b. Requiring notice on deeds.
 - c. Requiring owners or person responsible to provide renter/tenant/subtenant/leaser with written notice.
 - d. Posting signs in the public right-of-way to reasonably identify boundaries.
4. Preventing or reducing existing hazard to private or City-owned moderate and higher hazard lands and properties should include:
- a. Preventing clear cuts.
 - b. Selling no CBJ land in moderate and higher hazard areas for construction purposes.
 - c. Ensuring ongoing rescue planning, training and coordination.
 - d. Alerting the public to conditions of moderate and higher hazard for avalanches and mass wasting using comprehensive communication tools.
5. Exploring remedies for existing situations where buildings are in a severe hazard area should include:
- a. Using a full and open public process.
 - b. Researching strategies such as mitigation, constructing protective structures, and buyouts.

REFERENCES

To see the Reference Documents, go to: <https://juneau.org/community-development/plans-studies>

also see: <https://juneau.org/community-development/special-projects/landslide-avalanche-assessment>

Adopted CBJ Studies:

- 1967: “Report on the Behrends Avenue Avalanche Path” prepared by Keith Hart
- 1972: “Geophysical Hazards Investigation For the City and Borough of Juneau” prepared by Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall
- 1992: “Juneau Area Mass-Wasting and Snow Avalanche Hazard Analysis” prepared by Doug Fesler, Jill Fredston, and Art Mears.
- 2003: “Urban Avalanche Response Plan”(Appendix to CBJ Emergency Operations Plan) prepared by Bill Glude.
- 2011 “Avalanche Mitigation Study: Behrends Avenue Avalanche Path and White Subdivision Avalanche Path, Juneau, Alaska.” Prepared by SLF The Swiss Snow Institutes Senior Consultant Stefan Margreth.

Adopted CBJ Plans:

2012 FINAL City and Borough of Juneau All-Hazards Mitigation Plan, Revised August 20, 2012

CBJ TITLE 49.70.300-LANDSLIDE AND AVALANCHE AREAS

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN of the CITY AND BOROUGH OF JUNEAU, Adopted Nov 2013 by Ordinance 2013-26, Chapter 7 Natural Resources and Hazards, Landslide and Avalanche Hazards, Pages 97-98.

For Information:

Tetra Tech Technical Memo #4, April 27, 2022

REP-Downtown Juneau Landslide and Avalanche Assessment – IFU April 27, 2022

Maps: Landslide Hazard Designation Mapping; Avalanche Path Mapping