

## Correspondence



### **RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC)** A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations



**1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503**

March 30, 2023

Dear House & Senate Natural Resource Finance Committee Members:

The Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) has reviewed a request you received from the Chugach State Park Citizens' Advisory Board to adopt an increase of \$346,000 for the park's operating budget. This request has been formally recommended in a recent amendment to the state operating budget (HB39/HB41). In a vote of 19 yays, 1 nay, and 2 abstentions, the RCCC endorsed this increase at our March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023 meeting.

This is an excellent opportunity for the Chugach State Park (CSP) to obtain a much needed increase in funds to support necessary park sanitation, maintenance, and management activities, using a funding source dedicated for tourism development: the vehicle rental tax (Code 1200). Because the vehicle rental tax cannot be used for purposes such as education and social services, it will not compete with such other priorities.

Several factors add to the urgency of this request. We are concerned that CSP has not received all the fee receipts it should: CSP generated \$1.68 million in General Fund Program Receipts in Fiscal Year 2022 but was only provided with an operating budget of \$1.36 million for FY 2023. This seems grossly unfair and can be remedied with the \$346,000 increase from the vehicle rental tax. As Alaska's most visited and profitable public recreation destination, CSP provides a variety of recreation pursuits, including hiking, skiing, biking, and hunting in the most densely populated area of Alaska.

With public use in the park increasing 47% between 2019 and 2021 and revenue from park fees growing 78% between FY2018 and FY2022, CSP is in desperate need of additional staff, funding for waste removal/outhouse pumping, and supplies for staff and trail crews. This increase can begin to address these needs. Compared to federally managed areas, such as the Chugach National Forest and Denali National Park, CSP hosts twice as many visitors – many from our RCCC area – on one-fifth of the budget and a tenth of the staff. CSP's staff has diligently worked for years on a shoe-string budget.

As you know, tourism is one of Alaska's most important economic engines. If we cannot provide quality and safety for our visitors, and residents at CSP, we will harm that engine. Please support this proposal to increase CSP's operating budget and support a healthier, more economically vibrant Alaska.

Sincerely,

Ann Rappoport, Co-chair

John Riley, Co-chair

cc: Laddie Shaw [Representative.Laddie.Shaw@akleg.gov](mailto:Representative.Laddie.Shaw@akleg.gov)