

Resolution 24-33

HANDOUT



Talkeetna Community Council, Inc.

A non-profit, community service organization

Dec 5, 2024

Re: Resolution 24-33 A Conditional Use Permit In Accordance With MSB 17.17 – Denali State Park Special Land Use District For The Construction And Operation Of An RV Campground Resort Within The Park's Boundaries. The Site Is Located At Milepost 135.7, 4852 North Parks Highway, Tax ID #U04998000L02-4 (Staff: Peggy Horton, Current Planner)

Submitted via email to: Lacie Olivieri, msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us
Alex Strawn, Planning and Land Use Director: Alex.Strawn@matsugov.us

To Planning Commission Members Glenn, Allen, Koan, Shane, McCabe, Fernandez, and Scoggin:

The Talkeetna Community Council, Inc., met on Monday, December 2, and learned about Resolution 24-33 A Conditional Use Permit for the construction and operation of an RV Campground Resort within the boundaries of Denali State Park. TCCI submits the following comment to the Planning Commission.

TCCI requests that the Planning Commission extend the deadline for public comment on Resolution 24-33 and delay a vote until the next Planning Commission meeting in January. This Council and community stakeholders would like more time to review the packet containing the CUP application by ARK@Denali RV Campground Resort. This development has the potential to impact our community and business members who use and do business in Denali State Park.

The Talkeetna Community Council, Inc. has not been adequately notified about this CUP to learn about the project and submit comments before the Dec. 16 deadline. Ideally, we would bring up a resolution such as this during a meeting so the community is aware and can submit comments at their discretion. Our next meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 6, 2024.

Thank you for hearing our concern and considering an additional month for public comments so this project may be properly vetted and understood by the communities it potentially impacts.

We appreciate your service,

Jodi Rodwell
Co-Chair, Talkeetna Community Council
jodi@talkeetnacouncil.org
(907) 388-6217

Talkeetna Community Council, Inc.
P.O. Box 608, Talkeetna AK 99676

MSB Rcvd 12-6-24

From: [J Stras](#)
To: [Alex Strawn](#); [Peggy Horton](#)
Subject: msb code and precedent re public notice ARK CUP
Date: Thursday, December 12, 2024 11:51:10 AM
Attachments: [CUP2007-0029 Mile 135 Parks Highway LLC notice.pdf](#)

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

December 12, 2024

Dear Alex and Peggy,

This is an addendum to my comment letter dated December 7, 2024, regarding ARK CUP (file 10248, PC Reso 24-33). This CUP would be on an inholding within Denali State Park, with the most popular feature of the Park being the nearby Kesugi Ken and trail to Curry Ridge.

I make a strong case in my comment letter that the Borough's public notice for this proposed action was insufficient and improper. Below is hard support for my argument.

My argument is made much stronger because of Borough code at **17.17.120(A)(3)**, wherein the Director is given wide latitude for "determining whether or not to mail notices to an extended area." Given the fact the proposed development would have wide and adverse impact on the users of Denali State Park, as described in my December 7, 2024 letter, and given the fact that the public notice regimen employed by Planning staff yielded zero public comments, and given the fact that Planning received no public comments from people who use the Denali State Parks, and given the fact that the CUP Application states that helicopter tours would be part of the ARK development, given that helicopter noise reaches off the property and into the Park, it would be expected that the Director would exercise his discretion and authority to extend the notice recipients to include at least the Talkeetna Community Council, Inc. and the Trapper Creek Community Council.

There is **precedent** for the Borough Planning Division to do exactly that. In 2007, the Borough received and adjudicated an CUP request from Dale Van Doren to build a "Tourism Hotel" within Denali State Park on the parcel that is immediately adjacent to the present subject parcel where ARK@Denali requests a CUP to build and operate an RV Resort Campground. As far as noticing is concerned, this is an apples to apples comparison.

As you can see, from page two of the attached, under "Facts and Circumstances" and "Notification," in 2007, both the Talkeetna and Trapper Creek Community Councils were noticed by the Borough, thus providing the citizens in those communities an opportunity to participate and be heard on the proposed "Tourism Hotel" in Denali State Park.

In the present case, the Planning Division erred in depriving those members of the northern valley communities and the users of Denali State Park with the opportunity to participate in

this CUP decision, which materially affects them.

I recommend that the Planning Commission hold open the Public Hearing until its first meeting in February, which would give time for Staff to notice the upper valley Community Councils, for the Councils to get the word out, and for residents to digest the information and prepare comments. And sufficient time for Staff to consider comments and make changes, if any, to the Staff Report.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John Strassenburgh
jstras@mtaonline.net



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Planning and Land Use Department Planning Division

350 East Dahlia Avenue • Palmer, AK 99645
Phone (907) 745-9833 • Fax (907) 745-9876
Email: planning@matsugov.us

PLANNING DIVISION STAFF REPORT

File Number: CUP2007-0029

Applicant: Mile 135 Parks Highway, LLC

Request: Planning Commission Resolution 08-08
Request for a Conditional Use Permit in accordance with MSB 17.17 for construction of a lodge within the Denali State Park Special Land Use District

Location: U.S. Survey 4998, Lot 1, within Township 29 North, Range 5 West, Section 16, Seward Meridian; 4142 N. Parks Highway

Public Hearing Date: March 17, 2008

Reviewed By: Eileen Probasco, Chief of Planning *E. Probasco*

Staff: Susan Lee, Planner II *Susan Lee*

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Attachments

1. Vicinity Map
2. Site Plan
3. Applicant's Supporting Material
4. Comments from MSB Planning Division dated July 3, 2007
5. Comments from MSB Community Development dated July 3, 2007

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6. Comments from MSB Collections Division dated July 10, 2007
 7. Comments from MSB Code Compliance Division dated July 5, 2007
 8. Comments from MSB Planning Division dated August 1, 2007
 9. Comments from Department of Environmental Conservation dated July 10, 2007
 10. Comments from Department of Natural Resources, Water Resources Section dated July 26, 2007
 11. Comments from Department of Fish & Game dated August 1, 2007
 12. Comments from Department of Transportation & Public Facilities dated July 31, 2007 and February 27, 2008
 13. Comments from Office of Habitat Management & Permitting dated July 31, 2007
 14. Comments from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dated July 24, 2007 and February 23, 2008
 15. Comments from DNR, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, dated February 27, 2008
 16. Public comments
 17. Planning Commission Resolution No. 08-08

1. Executive Summary

Description of Applicant's Request:

The applicant is proposing to construct a 60 room hotel/lodge building, restaurant, employee housing, maintenance building, outdoor hot tub pool and spa. The facility will be open year round. The proposed facility is located at mile 135.5 of the Parks Highway. The name of the facility will be South Denali Park Lodge.

Summary Analysis:

A conditional use permit has been submitted for the construction of a 60 room hotel/lodge with related support facilities within the Denali State Park Special Land Use District. Any commercial development within the Denali State Park Special Land Use District requires a conditional use permit. The conditional use permit procedure is intended to allow planning commission consideration of the impact of the proposed conditional use on surrounding property and the application of controls and safeguards to assure that the conditional use will be compatible with the surrounding area and in keeping with the character and integrity of the Denali State park. The Denali State Park Management Plan, 2006 specifically addresses the adverse impacts of development between miles 135 – 136 of the Parks Highway.

2. Facts and Circumstances

Notification:

Newspaper notification was published in The Frontiersman on February 19, 2008. Notices were mailed to the closest property owners within a mile of the site. Notices were also sent to the Talkeetna and Trapper Creek Community Councils.

Applicant:

Mile 135.5 Parks Highway LLC (Dale Van Doren)
509 W. Third Avenue #102
Anchorage, AK 99501

December 7, 2024

PO Box 766
Talkeetna, AK 99676

TO: MSB Planning Commission

FROM: John Strassenburgh

RE: Public Comments regarding Planning Commission ("PC") Resolution 24-33,
ARK@Denali Conditional Use Permit ("ARK") within Denali State Park ("DSP")

Dear Planning Commissioners,

I write as a resident of the northern Susitna Valley, frequent user of Denali State Park, and past member of the Mat-Su State Parks Citizen's Advisory Board. I am writing at the 11th hour because I did not learn about this proposed action until the evening of December 2, 2024.

I have reviewed the Staff Report and the PC Packet ("Packet") for its December 16, 2024 meeting. I am not surprised that Staff recommends approval of the CUP, after all, the subject property is within an area designated by the Denali State Park Management Plan (2006) Recreation Development. Within this designation, "large scale public recreation and tourism facility development" is allowed, **"provided that potential management problems are addressed."**

And there is the rub. Although Staff did a reasonably thorough job of addressing the technical aspects of the CUP application, it failed to consider the practical effect of the development on the users of DSP, particularly the multitudes of visitors to Kesugi Ken and hiking to Curry Ridge in the vicinity of Rocky Knob and beyond. It also failed to establish clear, enforceable conditions of approval. I explain below.

Page 145 of the Packet indicates "Staff did not receive any public comments for this Conditional Use Permit." Similar language appears on page 2 of the Staff Report. The reason for no public comments was not apathy among the public; it was because nobody knew about it. The Borough's public notices were sent out as follows:

- 2 notices went to adjacent landowner, Gladys Traversie, Anchorage owner of 2 lots
- 1 notice went to UCI LLC, Anchorage
- 1 notice went to the owner of the subject property Yolanda D'Oyen, Covina, CA
- 1 notice went to State of Alaska DNR Division of Lands, Anchorage
- 1 notice went to State of Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation ("DPOR"), Anchorage

Five notices went to an Anchorage address, and one went to a Covina, CA address.

Zero notices went to the northern valley Community Councils, and zero to northern Susitna Valley residents, business (not even those with concessions within DSP), or organizations. State Parks are not located in residential neighborhoods. Normal distances for required notice don't apply, but Planning Department surely has the authority to send to the northern Community Councils, it did not do so.

It is implausible that the Planning Staff would receive NO PUBLIC COMMENTS regarding an action within a popular State Park, especially considering the nearby heavily used Kesugi Ken facility and trail to Curry Ridge, with expansive views of the Chulitna River with a back drop of the Alaska Range and Denali. It is especially implausible when helicopter tour operations is part of the development plan. In these circumstances, one would expect a cascade of public comments. And yet nothing.

The lack of public response is a crystal clear indication that the public was unaware that this was going on, and, by extension, an indication that the Planning Department's noticing regimen was sorely deficient.

I cite from MSB Code for the Denali State Park Special Use District:

"17.17.140 INTENT

"It is recognized that there are certain uses which are generally considered appropriate in this district, provided that controls and safeguards are applied to ensure their compatibility with permitted principal uses. The conditional use permit procedure is intended to allow planning commission consideration of the impact of the proposed conditional use on surrounding property and the application of controls and safeguards to assure that the conditional use will be compatible with the surrounding area and in keeping with the character and integrity of the Denali State Park."

It is simply impossible for the Borough to comply with this stipulation of Borough Code without hearing from the people who use and are knowledgeable of the park and are directly affected by a development of this complexity and scale.

Helicopter Tours

I expect that had the public known about this ARK development, that Staff would have received a boatload of comments objecting to the helicopter tours. The September 12, 2024 5 page plan letter entitled "ARK@Denali – Application for Conditional use" ("ARK letter" or "letter") describes plans to offer helicopter tours (page 2) :

"Helicopter tours will be conducted by a third party operator from the onsite helipad.... Helicopter tours will be conducted within the hours of 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM from May 15 to September 30.... Tours may initiate from other locations with a stop to pick up additional passengers at ARK... Tours will be approximately 1 hour in length.... It is

estimated that no more than 1 tour per hour on average will be conducted from the site.... “

If a helicopter tour is initiated from another location, each tour will involve four operations: a landing and takeoff to pick up ARK customers and a landing and takeoff to drop off those customers at the end of their tour. If a helicopter is stationed at ARK, there would be two operations, one take off and one landing per tour. This means that each tour will involve either two or four operations per hour, between 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM, 7 days a week from May 15th to September 30th. The language of the ARK letter is general, vague, and open ended. There is no mention of number of helicopters that could be put into use, and the “1 tour per hour on average” is “estimated.” In short, there is no cap on the number of flights.

This potentially very high level of helicopter operations would be a continual disruption and annoyance to users of Denali State Park, particularly (but not exclusively) to those visiting Kesugi Ken and trying to enjoy a quiet hike to Curry Ridge and Rocky Knob. Helicopter operations would severely degrade the quality of the visitor experience of Denali State Park.

The MSB Denali State Park Special Land Use District states that a conditional use may be approved only if such use “will not detract from the value, character, or integrity of Denali State Park” (MSB 17.17.180(A)(1)). **Helicopter tour operations are a compelling example of a use that DOES IN FACT detract from the value, character, or integrity of the Park.** Staff is incorrect in concluding otherwise.

Bears

Another aspect of the ARK Plan that deserves mention is the management of bears. A first area of concern is the storage and handling of trash. The ARK letter notes that bear proof trash receptacles would be located throughout the site and the trash moved regularly to dumpsters. The ARK letter does not note whether or not the dumpsters would be bear proof. The Staff Report does not mention bear issues at all. Food conditioned bears usually end up being shot or hurting someone, or worse.

I recommend that any approval of the ARK CUP be conditioned on a requirement that bear management processes be put in place, and this would include not only the exclusive use of bear proof trash/garbage containers throughout the site, but also requiring that DUMPSTERS also be bear proof. It is very important that bears be prevented from getting into the trash and food waste. If not, then we would have problems with food conditioned bears not only in the ARK site but also throughout the Park, putting people at risk.

Approval of the ARK CUP should also be conditioned on proper management of bears and salmon. The stream that runs through the subject property and a bridge over said stream leads to the tent camping area. This stream is anadromous, and bear will be feeding there when the salmon are running. The ARK tent camp is placed in an area which bears are bound to use to access their salmon food source. It’s a bad idea to displace bears or get in their way, especially

when they are on the march to food. I don't see anything in the Staff Report or the ARK Plan letter that considers the use of the area by the bears, or suggests a Bear Aware program, or even provides bear proof storage containers or lockers for campers' food. This lack of consideration puts people at risk, and bears as well, because poor planning and no provision for educating humans allows bears to become problem bears and then shot.

The MSB Denali State Park SPUD states that a conditional use may be approved only if such use "will not be harmful to the public health, safety, convenience and welfare" (MSB 17.17.180(A)(3))." This is an example of how the CUP would in fact be harmful to the public health, safety, convenience and welfare. Again, contrary to staff's conclusions.

Personal Watercraft

Another way that the CUP WOULD BE "harmful to the public health, safety, convenience and welfare" is ARK's plan to provide a launching site for "personal watercraft" (PWC). This term is generally applied to jet ski type watercraft of various manufacturers. The context of the ARK letter does not fit with this definition, so I am unsure what type of water conveyance ARK has in mind. In any event, Staff and ARK should recognize that the Chulitna River is a cold, silty river with shifting channels and strong currents, sometimes with floating debris. It is no place for a person who doesn't know what they are doing. The developer's promotion of this without adequate forethought represents a public health and safety risk, again contrary to CUP approval requirements set forth in MSB 17.17.180(A)(3), and contrary to staff's conclusions.

Standards for Approval of ARK CUP

The Staff Report at Page 10 (p 18 of the Packet) under STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS, number 3. states:

3. "All aspects of the operation shall comply with the description detailed in the application material and with the conditions of this permit..... "

As illustrated under Helicopter Tours above, the "description detailed in the application material...." states the numbers of helicopter tours are "estimated." Estimates are just that, educated guesses; they are not hard limits, and they are unenforceable. Even if the Borough had in hand the flight records that repeatedly showed more than one tour and hour (on average) it would not be enforceable because estimates aren't enforceable. And if it's not enforceable, the Borough has no way to hold ARK accountable. As noted above, there is effectively no cap on the number of helicopter flights.

Denali State Park Management Plan (2006)

I am also concerned that the Denali State Park Management Plan (2006), except for the Recreational Development land use designation, wasn't broadly consulted. For example, the DSP Plan specifically focuses on MP 135-136 of the Parks Highway (proposed Development is at

mile 135.7) and recommends protection of “the natural setting and viewshed integrity from the Parks Highway Visitor Center” because “the viewshed integrity is very important to the proposed Parks Highway Visitor Center.”

The Denali State Park Management Plan (2006) lists Management Objectives to “avoid non-compatible development within and adjacent to the Park” and “prevent the proliferation of roadside development.”

Neither of these recommendations or objectives were mentioned in the Staff Report. I realize that the Denali State Park Management Plan (2006) is not Borough Code, but DSP Plan should have been consulted as a standard by which to measure whether or not the ARK development detracted from the value, character and integrity of Denali State Park.

DSP Plan should have been referenced by Borough Staff and DPOR should have weighted in to protect the integrity of the Park and the quality of the visitor experience.

One of my concerns is that if DSP inholdings continue to be developed, and DPOR and Borough Staff don't step in to protect the integrity of the Park, we are going to have what the Denali State Management Plan (2006) recommends to avoid, that is to prevent proliferation of roadside development. Think, GLITTER GULCH SOUTH.

It is long past the time¹ for the Borough, in cooperation with DPOR, to maintain the value, character and integrity of Denali State Park and the quality of the visitor experience.

The Borough can start right now by removing helicopter tours from the ARK Plan and only issue the CUP on the condition that there be NO HELICOPTER TOURS, as well as address bear safety and other issues I have described in this letter.

The lack of public notice in this matter is egregious, and deprived those most affected, the park users, of the opportunity to be heard and it deprived Staff and the Planning Commission from receiving important, relevant information to better inform its decision.

Accordingly, I ask that the Planning Commission extend the public hearing until its February 3, 2025 meeting, and, furthermore, I ask the Planning Commission to immediately notice the Northern Valley Community Councils and accept comment until its February meeting.

Sincerely,
/s/
John Strassenburgh

¹ See Dale Van Doren file number CUP2007-0029, which was a CUP application to build a tourism hotel on a parcel that adjoins the Subject Parcel (i.e., ARK) on its south. The Planning Commission denial was upheld by BOAA case 08-04. The Van Doren case raised enough issues that a DSP SPUD process was begun via a committee with MSB, DNR, DPOR, Princess, NPS, Mat-Su State Parks Citizen's Advisory Board, Talkeetna Community Council, and several northern Sunitna residents. For reasons unknown to me, the project fizzled near the end.

Denali State Park Conditional Use Permit

From joe page <joepage52@gmail.com>

Date Sun 12/8/2024 3:49 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Commissioners:

As you well know, Denali State Park is one of the gems of the Matanuska Susitna Borough. I have enjoyed all aspects of the park for over 45 years including camping, hiking, canoeing, rafting, fishing, and introducing young people to outdoor leadership skills backpacking the park's great trail system.

While other details of this development need to be carefully examined, I am especially concerned about the proposed helicopter tours. This particular activity would seriously alter the quality of Denali State Park visitor experience.

I urge you to keep the Public Hearing process open and to give people adequate time to read and review the 158 page packet and give the Commission adequate time to determine whether additional conditions of approval should be added to the CUP.

Thank you,

Joe Page
Talkeetna, Alaska

Denali State Park Development Proposal CUP

From Patricia Fisher <psfisherak49@gmail.com>

Date Mon 12/9/2024 10:45 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Regarding this CUP, there was insufficient public notice of this conditional use permit application. Only 6 notices were mailed out; none were to Community Councils or other organizations in the Northern Susitna Valley (5 went to Anchorage and 1 to the developer in California.)

You need to correct this notification failure before you take action on this CUP.

Comments: Resolution 24-33, December 16, 2024 Regular Meeting

From Ralph <rbaldwin@mtaonline.net>

Date Mon 12/9/2024 10:58 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

RE: December 16, 2024 Regular Meeting, Resolution 24-33

Members of the Mat-Su Borough Planning Commission:

I write you with concerns regarding the Conditional Use Permit application for an RV Campground Resort within the boundaries of Denali State Park at MP 135.7 North Parks highway. The applicant is Tim Alley, P.E. for First Colony Developers..

My name is Ralph Baldwin, I have lived in Wasilla for more than 30 years and lived and worked in the small villages in western Alaska before that. I have been a resident of the state for 45 years. I raised my family in these areas and have enjoyed camping and hiking in the northern Susitna Valley. I was a member of the State Parks Citizens Advisory Committee for the Mat-Su Valley and Copper River Basin for seven years, 2002-2009, and hiked the Kesugi Ridge with the planning group of the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation during the early planning stages of the K'esugi Ken Campground.

My first concern is for what I hear is an extremely limited public notification of this proposed development, an inholding within Denali State Park. Is it true that only six public notices have been sent out? Five to Anchorage addresses and one to a California address, the address of the owner of the inholding? This is not acceptable. Notifications should be sent out to Northern Valley residents and businesses especially to those currently holding Denali State Park concessions. Please make wider notification and extend the comment period so that those most directly affected can weigh in on this project.

My second concern is for the proposed helicopter pad adjacent to the RV campground. The description estimates as many as one helicopter departure every hour? The sound and visual impact across the valley and on those on those hiking and camping in Denali State Park would be significant and detrimental to the very reason they come to admire the beauty and solitude of this magnificent State Park. Please reconsider the allowance of this feature of the proposed RV campground. It is not appropriate for this site.

My third concern is for the developer to have all necessary permits in hand before the Planning Commission grants conditional use. In particular, permits from the Alaska Department of Fish & Game for building a bridge across the stream to the tent camping area and a permit from ADF&G to build a boat launch on the Chulitna River. Are there salmon seasonally in this stream? If so, this could pose a serious hazard to tent campers if bears come to this area. What sort of watercraft would be launched from the Chulitna boat launch? The river can be a challenging experience. Also, Alaska DOT's required traffic impact analysis (TIA) should be completed and considered before issuing a conditional use permit. The proposed inholding development is located essentially across the street from the K'esugi Ken driveway entrance and traffic is high speed in that area.

Most importantly, please make a greater effort to notify concerned parties and extend the public hearing comment time frame. Thank you for consideration of my concerns.

Sincerely,
Ralph Baldwin
3850 Wickersham Way
Wasilla, AK 99654

Property owner comment re: proposed helicopter tours near K'esugi Ken

From Will Elliott <elliott.will@gmail.com>

Date Mon 12/9/2024 5:09 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Dear Mat-Su Planning Commission members,

I own property roughly in line with the proposed RV park and helicopter development that would be located just north of K'esugi Ken, on the agenda for your Dec. 16th meeting. I am also a user of Denali State Park and familiar with that area in particular having worked there as a State Parks employee in college, and traveling through there each fall for hunting; I am also familiar with helicopter tours as a former guide and have participated in helicopter tourism.

I oppose the helicopter part of this proposal for the following reasons. The owners of the prospective project have a right to develop their property, but they do not have a right to degrade adjacent public lands for all other users, with increased noise, wildlife disturbance, and other well-documented consequences of helicopter traffic.

First, I ask that you keep the rest of us users of the area in mind and require concrete, measurable, enforceable rules for any helicopter tour traffic if the project is to go forward; I urge you not to expect the developer to 'self-regulate.' It should be defined where helicopters will go, when, and how many. Please do not allow for general, vague, or non-binding language that allows a larger area, more flights, or more time than expected. If conflicts arise between the tour operator and other user groups— who will intervene? What is the process? We have all seen examples of waiting for problems to occur, putting the burden on other users to complain, and then concluding that there aren't enough resources to monitor or enforce... the Denali State Park area is too important to let that happen.

Second, there are few areas with tundra access within a reasonable drive of Anchorage that are not now heavily impacted by increased foot and air traffic. A helicopter popping up above K'esugi ridge to show clients the fall colors, etc., will be visible and audible all the way over into the Susitna Valley, where people live and recreate along the railroad corridor. This isn't a case of a few people saying 'not in my backyard'; this is a case of one very small user group— helicopter clients —participating in a luxury activity that visually and audibly impacts everyone else within miles. People use the area for pursuits like hunting, hiking, and experiencing public lands in a relatively natural state; helicopter presence impacts all of those.

I would point the commission to the evidence that has already been gathered on this topic in communities like Haines, Skagway, and Juneau, where helicopters are contentious, impacting quality of life and having well-established, measurable, harmful effects on wildlife.

Finally, I am concerned about the lack of public notice. I learned of this project from a neighbor, less than

one week before the hearing. Comments collected on such short notice do not give an accurate picture of stakeholders, potential problems, or the detailed, objective questions all participants need to be asking regarding such a potentially impactful development.

Overall, Denali State Park offers residents and visitors more opportunities and value than most people will ever explore, top to bottom, in a lifetime. I speak from experience when I caution you that helicopter tours don't add to that value; they detract from it, for everyone other than the few people involved.

Thank you for taking my comments into consideration,

Will Elliott
907-957-2347
Anchorage / Talkeetna

Ark@Denali Conditional Use Permit comment letter

From Brian Okonek <brianokonek@gmail.com>

Date Mon 12/9/2024 9:54 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>; Alex Strawn <Alex.Strawn@matsugov.us>

 1 attachment (348 KB)

MSB CUP Ark@ Denali comment letter.pages;

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Dec. 9, 2024

Brian Okonek
P.O. Box 583
Talkeetna, AK 99676

To:
Planning Commission
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
350 E. Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, AK 99645

Email: msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us
Cc: Alex.Strawn@matsugov.us

Ref: Ark@Denali Conditional Use Permit Application,

Dear MSB Planning Commission,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on a proposed development on private land within Denali State Park at mile 135.7 of the George Parks Highway. As you are well aware Ark@Denali proposes to construct a RV campground, convenience store, rental cabins, a walk-in campground and a heliport at an area where gravel was extracted in the past or near the materials site.

I am pleased that the development of a private campground and the other facilities on private land within Denali State Park must receive a Conditional Use Permit from the Matanuska-Susitna Borough. The Planning Commission has an important duty to, as the DSP CUP language reads “assure that the conditional use will be compatible with the surrounding area and keeping with the character and integrity of Denali State Park.” Denali State Park is a gem in the Alaska State Park’s system for its Denali views and recreational opportunities. The George Parks Highway bisects it making it highly accessible. On the west side of the highway is the Chulitna River that offers rafters and kayakers scenic boating experiences on a wild, braided glacier fed river. To the east are Curry and Kesugi Ridges that offer residents and visitors remarkable alpine tundra hiking with exceptional panoramic views of the Alaska Range. With a system of trails that allow for day hiking and multi day backpacking, rivers to float, state park campgrounds and lodges all easily accessed from the George Parks Highway the park is very popular. There are also a number of private inholdings in the park and therefore this necessity for there to be a permitting system to preserve “the integrity and character of Denali State Park.” The entire impact of future development along the highway corridor and how each will affect the scenic corridor of the highway and the experience and safety of all users of the park, both front and back country, must be considered to retain the quality of Denali State Park.

I learned about this proposal only a few days ago. I am disappointed that the Trapper Creek and Talkeetna Community Councils were not notified. There should have also been notification in the Anchorage paper. Denali State Park is used and enjoyed by many people. The public should have the opportunity to express their views on proposed plans in the initial phase of the planning process. To allow for the public to have the opportunity to comment on this development proposal I request that you keep the public hearing period open.

There is no doubt that the site that Ark@Denali proposes to develop offers splendid views of Denali and other peaks of the Alaska Range that would be enjoyed by all that camp or rent a cabin there during clear weather. This is the view that the park is renowned for. I would like to bring to your attention a few things that would help protect visitors and the character and wildlife of Denali State Park.

The developer stated that they would install bear resistant trash receptacles. This is a must. The MSB staff report on Page 16, #6 mentions trash cans, but does not state that they should be bear resistant. Denali State Park is excellent habitat for both brown and black bears and there is an unnamed salmon stream that crosses the property. The South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement 2005 produced by the National Park Service in cooperation with the Matanuska-Susitna Borough and the State of Alaska states on page 69: “Both brown and black bears inhabit the South Denali area.....From late June through early August, spawning concentrations of anadromous fish attract bears to the smaller streams in the lowlands.” The 2006 Denali State Park Management Plan page 26 states that: “ Grizzly bear and black bear overlap in Denali State Park. Salmon streams and berry patches provide a good food source for both species. Most salmon streams are located at the southern end of the park, and probably explain the higher concentrations of bear observed here.” The unnamed stream that crosses the property in question for development is one of these smaller streams at the south end of Denali State Park. This is the area on the south side of Denali that the Ark@Denali is proposing to build a campground. The 2006 Denali State Park Management Plan on page 110 states: “Measures will be taken to reduce the potential for bear/human encounters.....Use of bear-proof

garbage containers will continue to be required around visitor centers, picnic areas, trails, interpretive waysides, and camping facilities in Denali State Park, and use of these containers may be required on private lands within and adjacent to Denali State Park.” One of the most common problems contributing to bear/human conflicts is trash and human food that bears have access to. It is imperative that the MSB emphasize the requirement for there to be bear resistant trash receptacles and bear resistant dumpsters. Dumpsters must be closed and secured when employees are not putting trash into them. It is all too common for bear resistant dumpster lids to be left open. It is also critical for there to be bear resistant food storage bins available to be used in the tent campground and that campers are required to store their food and other bear attractants in them. RV campers will need to be instructed not to leave food outside their vehicle when they are not at their vehicle or overnight. When there is no human food available to bears they may pass through the campground, but will not hang around endangering visitors or themselves. Habituated bears that have gotten into trash and food left unattended can endanger the public for a large area including the DSP facilities and other private facilities in Denali State Park.

The Ark@Denali plan includes a bridge to be built over an unnamed stream to access a walk-in campground. The stream is classified as an anadromous stream by ADF&G. Having a trail and a bridge to access a tent campground along a salmon stream is inviting bear/human problems. Bears utilize most of the salmon streams along the Chulitna River. A tent campground near the salmon stream is a recipe for problems. Bears will pass through the tent campground while coming and going to the salmon stream. Someone could easily encounter a bear at close quarters. It would be much safer for the tent campground to be in a different location away from the salmon stream. If the area near the creek is left undeveloped without a bridge or campground the bears could fish for salmon without human disturbance and there would be far fewer opportunities for there to be bear /human conflicts keeping visitors safe and maintaining the character of Denali State Park by avoiding displacing bears from the stream. Relocating the tent campground to a safer location where the potential for bear/human conflicts is much more unlikely should be a part of approving this conditional use permit.

It is unclear if the proposed Chulitna River access ramp for personal watercraft, but not boats on trailers, means that it is for launching rafts, kayaks and other non motorized boats. It should be for the launching of non motorized boats only. Most boating activity on the Chulitna River in the summer are boaters floating down river in non motorized boats.

I am surprised that Ark@Denali is proposing developing a heliport for a third party to operate helicopter scenic flights from. A heliport, campground and rental cabins are a poor mix of activities. Helicopters are noisy aircraft and will “detract from the character and integrity of Denali State Park” in a major way. This is true for the visitors who are camping or renting a cabin at Ark@Denali and those that are in the backcountry hiking and boating or in the front country at park campgrounds and waysides. Ark@Denali states that the heliport would be in operation May 15-Sept. 15 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm daily. When the weather is flyable there could be a large number of noise disturbances each day as helicopters land and take off. The take off decibels for three common helicopters being used are: Robinson 44 - 90 dB, Bell 206 - 100 dB and the Astar 350 - 108 dB. 90 dB's is like a gas powered lawn mower. Hearing a normal conversation is difficult or impossible when something nearby, like a helicopter taking off, is producing 90 dB's. This level of noise is disruptive to people and wildlife and will “detract from the character and integrity of Denali State Park.” Helicopter noise will not be confined to the heliport.

Trees along the George Parks Highway and topography of the terrain will help screen the RV campground and convenience store from the road. The Ark@Denali development will however, be squarely in the viewshed for those hiking the Curry Ridge trail. This is the most popular trail to the alpine country in the Denali State Park. It is hard to hide a RV park.

As I have stated above there are other things that the Planning Commission can do to mitigate the impacts of the proposed development. In short:

- 1 - Make it absolutely clear how trash and food must be handled. Both must be stored in bear resistant and latched containers or inside the store or RV's. Trash and food can not be available to bears. This is a safety issue for people.
- 2 - The tent campground should not be located by the unnamed salmon stream. This is encouraging bear/human encounters and is not safe for people.
- 3 - A heliport is not appropriate at this location. It will “detract from the character and integrity of Denali State Park” for many visitors.
4. - Keep the public hearing period open.

Sincerely,

Brian Okonek

To: Mat-Su Planning Commission
Date: December 10, 2024
VIA Email To: msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us.

Re: Comments MSB Planning Commission Resolution No. 24-33
Resolution of MSB Planning Commission Approving a Condition Use Permit for a commercial use (Recreational Vehicle (RV) Campground Resort) within the Denali State Par Special Use District

Dear Mat-Su Borough Planning Commissioners:

I am writing today because Denali State Park is one of my favorite places in the whole world. Many of you may not have hiked the trails that go up to K'esugi Ridge and Curry Ridge. The views of the Alaska Range, the glaciers, and the Chulitna River from the ridges is spectacular and unmatched from anywhere including from the national park. As you walk the trail towards the ridge, you soon leave the busy and noisy Parks Highway behind and ascend into the real Alaska. Whether day hiking or backpacking, it is wonderful! And, I understand why ARK has chosen this site for their development, but there are things that you need to consider that are not included in the staff report and staff recommendation for approval.

First, the public notice for this CUP consideration was not close to being adequate even if it technically met the borough's requirements. Only six notices were sent out— 1 went to the owner/developer, 2 went to the State, and the other 3 to addresses in Anchorage. Not one notice was sent to any of the Borough's community councils in the northern valley (Trapper Creek, Chase, Talkeetna, Susitna,) or to other community councils along the Parks Highway (WACO, Big Lake, Meadow Lakes.) The trails and campgrounds in Denali State Park are extremely popular for northern valley residents, all borough residents, many Alaska residents from Fairbanks to Anchorage, and, of course to tourists who visit Alaska and fuel our economic engines. While we need developments to accommodate visitors, it is critical that developments, especially developments on inholdings in the State Park, are approved and constructed and operated such that they do not detract from the park experience. We only learned of this application when a local news reporter mentioned it was introduced to the PC on December 2nd for public hearing on the 16th. We are trying to spread the word, but that takes time, and reviewing the materials takes more time. **Thus, I call on you, first, to keep this public hearing open and give yourselves more time to hear from others and to consider the conditions for this permit.**

Second, and my biggest concern, is that **the development includes a Helipad and the intention to conduct helicopter tours from the southwestern portion of the parcel, which is right below the K'esugi Ken campground and trails.** The application says that the intention is for a third party operator to conduct an 'estimated' one tour per hour 'on average.' Sometimes the

tour might start from ARK other times it might start somewhere else with a pick up at ARK. So, that could be as many as 2 takeoffs and 2 landings an hour. Or, the operator(s) might be using 2 helicopters and generate more takeoffs and landings. While the recommended condition says, **“All aspects of the operation shall comply with the description detailed in the application material and with the conditions of this permit.”** how do you enforce ‘on average’ and ‘estimated’— you cannot. This is a noise issue as well as an enforcement issue. Regardless of how many decibels are generated noise travels up and helicopters are noisy. They will detract from the experience of hikers and campers on K’esugi Ridge. **The helipad and helicopter tours should not be allowed in the CUP.** Even better, ARK should remove it from the application and their plan altogether.

Third, there is **inadequate consideration of bear safety provisions.** While the application materials mention bear-proof trash cans, they do not mention bear-proof dumpsters. Both are critical for this location and should be listed as conditions of approval. Furthermore, some bear-proof containers are better than others. The borough should include **standards for bear-proof containers** and require **borough approval of the containers** that will be installed.

The application includes plans to to build **a bridge crossing the unnamed anadromous stream to the tent camping area:** Tent camping next to a salmon stream can be dangerous both for visitors and for bears. There is not enough information in the drawings to determine whether the proximity to the stream makes it an inappropriate (i.e., unsafe) location for tent camping. While ADF&G will require a permit for the bridge, both ADF&G and the borough should address that question and at a minimum **include a condition that the tent camping area be enclosed with an electric fence (such as is done at Katmai National Park,) and a condition for bear-proof food storage** at the tent campground.

Fourth, ARK plans to build a gravel **access ramp and launch to the Chulitna River** with access limited to foot traffic only, at least initially. The Chulitna is sometimes described as ‘gnarly.’ It is not a river for inexperienced boaters. The applicant uses the term ‘personal watercraft’ but does not define that term. Depending on the exact location it might be an appropriate place to launch rafts or pack rafts, but it certainly is not appropriate for SUPs (stand up paddle boards) or for jet skis (though these would use a trailer.) The **CUP should should be explicit in what water crafts can use the launch— for the Borough’s own protection as well as for public safety.**

Fifth, it is **critical that the entrance to the ARK development be sited such as it does not hinder traffic entering the Parks Highway** to travel either north or south. From the packet, it appears that Alaska DOT has requirements, and the applicant may have already adjusted the driveway location. It is not clear whether the site plan included in the packet is the original or a revised entrance. I ask the Planning Commission to **direct staff to engage with DOT and the applicant to ensure a safe design and share the final design with the PC.**

Sixth, The Applicant lists 6 agency permits that will be required. While the applicant wishes the ‘use’ to be approved before the permits are obtained, **the CUP should include a condition that all required agency permits are obtained** and list them. These agency permits are extremely important, and **the Borough should weigh in during the permit processes with specific suggestions relating to public health, safety, and welfare.**

Seventh, Staff recommends that the Conditions of Approval of the CUP include what’s in the **Applicant Package**. Some of the wording is **vague or too general and, thus, not enforceable**. It’s a long, long application, but it needs to be reviewed before a CUP is issued in terms of what is or isn’t enforceable and changes made or conditions added accordingly.

Eighth, Both the Public Works and the Planning Department (Code Compliance) should monitor the project during construction and **final approval by both Public Works and Planning should be listed as a condition before the development can be opened for business.**

Finally, MSB code for the Denali State Park has 2 very important stipulations: **“The commercial use does not detract from the value, character, or integrity of Denali State Park (MSB 17.17.180(A)(1)).”** and **“ The commercial use will not be harmful to public health, safety, convenience, and welfare (MSB 17.17.180(A)(3)).”** Neither of these requirements can be met until the Heliport is removed, and until bear safety, water safety, and traffic safety are ensured.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,
Ruth D. Wood
Talkeetna, Alaska

Denali State Park CUP phase 1 and 2

From Pam & Roger Robinson <7332ski@gmail.com>

Date Tue 12/10/2024 5:49 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

My wife and I are long time users of Denali State Park and 45 year residents of the Talkeetna/Trapper Creek Area. I was on the first Denali State Parks Advisory Board where our decisions were based on major south side development alternatives (mid 80's). Smaller well planned and phased in developments was our preference at that time. This CUP fits this category except for the helicopter's base of operations. I would prefer the helicopter to use the Boro's Mile 131 parking lot as its base since this is further from many of the recreational opportunities found at the K'esugi Ken recreation area. This 131 site is a former large gravel extraction location, located outside the State Park and has been used occasionally by federal and private helicopters in the past. It is currently maintained by the Boro as a winter parking location for residents and the winter trail system with the Boro (Trapper Creek/Petersville Winter Trails). Deputy Borough Manager George Hays can provide more information about this location and winter status maintained by the Boro.

Thank you for our consideration,
Roger and Pam Robinson
907-315-0501

Planning Commission Resolution 24

From Greg Campbell <gregsdevice@gmail.com>

Date Wed 12/11/2024 7:16 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

I am commenting on Planning Commission Resolution 24, Conditional Use Permit to operate a commercial use (Recreational

Vehicle (RV) campground resort) in accordance with MSB Chapter

17.17 – Denali State Park Special Land Use District

Location: 4852 N Parks Highway, Tax ID#s U04998000L002-4;

1. Public comment time should be extended and the hearing on the issue should be delayed. Insufficient notice was given to interested parties. This is why there was no public comment, the public did not know about it. Kesugi Ken campground and Denali State park are used by a large number of people in the Matsu borough, and this development impacts their use. No notice was given to residents of the upper Susitna Valley. The Frontiersman is a mostly Wasilla paper, and no notice was sent to local radio stations or community councils in the areas nearest to this development. Please extend the comment period, and give notice to those of us impacted.

2. My main objective is the construction of a helipad and the helicopter tours. This is inappropriate for this area, close to a state park campground and world class hiking trails that attract people from all of the Matsu borough, Alaska, and all over the world.

Thank you,

Greg Campbell

Talkeetna, AK 99676

December 10, 2024

Dear Planning Commission,

My name is Sue Deyoe and I would like to address the recent CUP application for Denali State Park from the Boutet Co. I've lived on both the north and south side of Denali State Park for 34 years, near the entrance of Denali National Park and in Talkeetna. I've hiked the trail system in the state park many times over the years and spent time in public use cabins in the park. I heard about this application on a news story and was astounded that there was little comment period and only 6 notices were mailed.

I realize that by the letter of the law/regulations perhaps that was the minimal requirement, but this is a state park. There are hundreds of people and businesses this might affect. Generally, a campground seems like it would be in keeping with the soundscape of the park, but there is a helicopter pad in the plan and one that calls for hourly helicopter use all day.

According to 17.17.140 of the Denali State Park Special Use District, conditional uses must be compatible with the surrounding area. I would disagree that continuous decibel level likely exceeding 90db is in keeping with the hiking and camping areas in the park.

I could comment on the fact that there are already 4 campgrounds within 10 miles of this application, but that just means this business venture has a lot to compete with. There is also a gift shop and restaurant within a mile. The one comment I would make is although the owner says that there will be reclamation of a gravel pit, this area is in the middle of the area devastated by beetle kill spruce and it could be chance to ask that some trees be replaced?

There are a number of questions I have, but would like more time to read through all 158 pages. I ask that you delay a decision and open up a comment period to allow people that live within a radius affected by helicopter overflights to comment. Construction rarely happens in winter, so there is a bit of time before the owner would start in on development. Also, the applicant lists 6 agency permits required and perhaps the CUP should include the condition that all agency permits are obtained, THEN the CUP is obtained. This CUP isn't in a busy downtown area, it is within an Alaska state park and it seems that Alaskans should have a chance to comment.

At the least, remove the helicopter use in the CUP since it does not comply with uses in the state park. It seems that the helicopter use would be suited to the state airport in Talkeetna, about 20 air miles away (could it be that there is air traffic confliction, too?)

Thank you for your attention in this matter and I hope to hear of an extended public comment period soon.

Sincerely,

Sue Deyoe
Talkeetna, Alaska

Kasugi Ken area proposals

From Barbara Mannix <bmannix77@gmail.com>

Date Thu 12/12/2024 7:59 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a long time Alaskan and a frequent user of the Kasugi Ken trail and campground.

What always impresses me is the diversity of the user groups that use this trail. There are so many families with small children, there are groups of teens, young couples, elderly people, runners and people visiting from all over the world.

The Kasugi Ken trail is the most accessible trail in Denali State Park for people who aren't going to be able to use some of the more difficult trails to access the backcountry. The trail is well used enough that people feel more comfortable getting away from the road corridor. For many, this may be the only opportunity that they will have to experience Alaska's backcountry wilderness and beauty. It would be a travesty for people in this park to have to hear helicopters taking off and landing continuously.

Please act in the favor of this immense user group of resident Alaskans and tourists that use and love this beautiful area and deny the helicopter aspect of this proposal. Noise pollution should not be an option.

Also, in considering a tent camping area near a salmon stream, it makes me wonder who the people are coming up with such an idea. This concept is a recipe for very bad outcomes.

Please reconsider this location and respect the resident bears that fish along this waterway.

Thank you for your time,

Barbara Mannix

Po Box 402
Talkeetna,AK 99676

Public comments for Ark@Denali CUP in Denali State Park

From Howard Carbone <tkahmc@gmail.com>

Date Thu 12/12/2024 9:50 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <MSB.Planning.Commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

To the Mat-Su Borough Planning Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Ark@Denali development in Denali State Park.

From a business perspective, I strongly object to having a helicopter tour operation and helipad at that particular location. The associated noise would be in direct conflict with the current tourism activity at the adjacent state facilities of Denali View South, Kesugi Ken Campground, and the Curry Ridge Trail. The State of Alaska has spent many millions of dollars developing these facilities, the tourism industry relies on them, and this use would be a serious detriment to the experience of Alaskans and the tourism companies that rely on these facilities.

My family tourism business has operated in Denali State Park for 20 years. We take guests of the Mt. McKinley Princess Lodge and many other tour companies for guided hikes every day on the Curry Ridge Trail, which is directly across from this proposed development. It is a unique world-class trail system featuring spectacular views of Denali with easy access. It is a great asset to the State of Alaska, the Mat-Su Borough, the tourism industry, and to us Alaskans. However, allowing this particular use in this particular place would undermine all of that, including my own business. Due to how close this is, the lay of the land, and how loud helicopters are, this the worst imaginable place for frequent helicopter landings. There are alternative locations for this use where it would not cause these problems.

I am a proponent of economic development in Denali State Park. It has tremendous potential to be a thriving economic engine. This is exactly the reason there is a CUP process in the state park, so that we don't shoot ourselves in the foot with an incomparable use.

Please delay the consideration of this particular use until the proposed campground can demonstrate that they are a sound business, that the campground needs a heliport, and that there are no alternative locations that would not cause such serious conflicts.

Sincerely,

Howard Carbone
Alaska Nature Guides
(907) 355-6538

comments for Monday Planning Commission mtg.

From KimAdelia Leff <kadelia7591@gmail.com>

Date Thu 12/12/2024 9:24 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

My name is KimAdelia Leff. I live in Talkeetna, off the Spur Rd and am writing to share concerns I have about the proposed large recreational development on an inholding in Denali State Park, across the Parks Highway and very close to the north entrance of the K'esugi Ken trail. My family and friends here, as well as friends in the interior (Fairbanks) consider the K'esugi Ken one of the most beautiful and best hiking and camping spots in the park.

I am very concerned with what a helipad and helicopter tour operation would mean for the area. The noise would be disruptive to people and wildlife alike. I believe to the point of ruining the experience for Alaskans and tourists alike. And then there are the bears and what it would mean for them. In the end, I feel like the bears would lose out. I am probably most bothered by HOW this is all happening. What is the general standard or protocol for implementing public notice for a proposal such as this? How is it that only 6 notices went out and none of them were to organizations such as community councils, KTNA, Denali Ed Center, or other groups that could help to get the word out across the Northern Su valley?

You can remedy this gross oversight by a few things, at least.

1. Give people time they need and deserve to look at your 158 page packet.
2. Be diligent in notifying the entire borough, including Northern Su residents.
3. After you've shared this information, take the insight and the feedback you've received, and give yourselves more time to determine what else may need to be considered.

Most sincerely,

KimAdelia Leff

907-378-9163

kadelia7591@gmail.com

Ark@Denali RV Campground Resort

From Laura Wright <lauraw@mtaonline.net>

Date Fri 12/13/2024 12:05 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Hello,

I just heard about proposed development at a site very close to the Kesugi Ken Campground. I am a big user of the Denali State Park. I love to hike and for people like myself, who live in Talkeetna, this is the closest, real hiking in tundra that we have.

I do not want to hear helicopters hourly. I can already hear the highway from the ridge.

I find the entrance to Kesugi Ken a bit of a blind curve with a hill and adding more traffic to that area; especially slow moving vehicles who are not familiar with the area, to be hazardous. A traffic study needs to be done.

I have concerns of a boat launch on the Chulitna river. This needs to be looked at in detail. There are salmon, there are bears. I want to make sure that what is built doesn't interfere with either and is safe for humans as well.

Please do not offer a blanket CUP to this organization without several stipulations that will make it a safer and environmentally sound project.

Using code compliance as an enforcement tool DOES NOT WORK! The damage is already done.

Laura Wright
HC 89 Box 8129
Talkeetna, AK 99676

Ark@Denali development in Denali State Park

From Joe Richardson <judassteer@yahoo.com>

Date Fri 12/13/2024 11:29 AM

To MSB Planning Commission <msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Mat-Su Borough Planning Commission

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed development of the Ark@Denali in Denali state Park.

My name is Joe Richardson. I have lived sine 1997 on the homestead my Grandmother, Mary Carey, established here in the mid-1960's. I'm also the operator of our business, Mary's McKinley View Lodge, located at 3013 N. Parks highway.

I'm not writing to oppose development of the campground and related operations at Ark@Denali, rather to oppose a specific part of that plan, the helicopter operations. I don't think anyone wants helicopters buzzing around their homes, and certainly that's not a part of the normal background noise in a place like this. It would be a severe degradation to the quality of life for myself and the handful of other people in this area. We have all worked hard and paid our dues to be residents of this amazing, and difficult, place to live, but the price paid in toil and isolation is tiny compared to the rewards of being so connected to wild lands. Please deny the CUP until some kind of rationality is applied, and consideration of long-existing residents taken into account. Outside developers coming into this area with pie-in-the-sky types of ideas is nothing new, and I have no impression that this latest attempt to exploit this place, by people who do not live here or have any connection to the land is any different.

I also do not think the work done so far at this site has been done in good faith. There are a great many problems with the site, and environmental concerns unaddressed.

As a gravel pit, the main area was stripped of all vegetation, and because the slopes were graded improperly there was a massive landslide during one of our rainy falls. At that time, an entire John Deere 450 bulldozer was buried in gravel and mud at the bottom of the hill. I do not know if it's ever been removed. There's no telling what kinds of contaminants went into the river. The access to Chulitna river is also problematic, as fragile wetlands and waterfowl habitat is prominent in the area below this blown-out slope, and this development would also put them at risk.

Thank you for your time and considering these remarks. We residents of Denali State Park look forward to any opportunity for public comment on this issue.

Joe Richardson

CUP for proposed development in Denali State Park

From Douglas Smith <dougseabird@gmail.com>

Date Thu 12/12/2024 8:11 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Hello Folks,

I'd like to make a couple points about the proposed RV Campground and Resort by K'sugi Ken. I am a long-time (40 year) user of the area. I am not opposed to an RV campground. I think the conditional use permit should take a couple things into consideration.

1. There are many bears in the area the campground occupies. Mitigation measures to separate bears and people, and especially bears from people food, (such as those used in Katmai and Denali National Park) should be implemented and enforced. Out-of-state campers may not be aware of good practices in bear country and signage, bear-proof garbage cans, and fencing must be in place to avoid tragic consequences for people and bears. Salmon-run times are especially problematic.

2. **This is no place for a helicopter concession.** Hundreds of tourists and locals alike hike the area, and the noise of helicopters taking off, landing and flying around would severely compromise the wilderness experience so many are here to enjoy. For all these people to have their Alaska adventure ruined by noise (in a park no less), just so one outfit can profit, is a poor trade-off. And poor public policy. Keep the helicopter concessions at the airports. They have no place adjacent to one of the State Park's most popular campgrounds and trail systems.

That's my two cents' worth! If the plan was more widely available and there was more time for the local communities to comment, you'd probably get some more good ideas!

Thanks for your time,

Doug Smith
Talkeetna, AK
907-414-9850

Denali State Park Development Proposal CUP

From maryostermick <maryostermick@gmail.com>

Date Thu 12/12/2024 7:18 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Hello,

I am writing to encourage the Planning Commission to strengthen conditions for the development of the proposed RV Campground Resort in Denali State Park. I have been a DSP user for over 35 years, hiking and camping in the park. During most of those years I owned an inholding further north in the park. The south end of the park contains a number of in-holders. Why weren't they notified of this proposal?? It's important to contact them as well as local community councils and to keep the public hearing process open so people have time to read and digest this.

As a current recreational user, I want to speak to the negative impact this development would have. Any helicopter use would create unacceptably loud and obnoxious noise which would easily carry to any of the K'esugi Ken trails, negatively impacting any users camping or hiking the trails there. It would also negatively impact any nearby wildlife.

Denali State Park is home to a number of wildlife species, including bears. Putting a campground near a salmon stream, which provides prime bear food, is a recipe for disaster. It is ill thought out and short-sighted.

This is just a sampling of reasons a conditional use permit needs to be strengthened and the public hearing process extended.

Thank you.

Mary Ostermick
PO Box 827
Talkeetna, AK 99676
maryostermick@gmail.com
907 795-6720

K'esugi Ken Development

From Krister Bowman <kriste.bowman@gmail.com>

Date Thu 12/12/2024 2:57 PM

To MSB Planning Commission <msb.planning.commission@matsugov.us>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

I'm writing in regards to the proposed 40 space RV development located near the K'esugi Ken recreational area near mile 135 on the Parks Highway. I've been a long-time resident in Trapper Creek and Talkeetna, and I've explored and enjoyed the area of this proposed development since first moving to the area in 1987. The unadulterated view across the Chulitna into the range is one of the best in the state and a draw for tourism.

This development proposal will profoundly impact that area, and I'm concerned that there's been inadequate time for public comment. I sit on the Community Council in Talkeetna and only heard about this via our local radio station. No notices were sent to my council or others in the valley.

The addition of a helipad raises concerns about noise disrupting the quiet that makes this area special, especially for those using nearby trails. Increased traffic in an already busy corridor could also create safety issues if not carefully planned.

Given the scale of this development and its potential impacts, I urge the Planning Commission to keep the public hearing open. This will allow more time for residents and stakeholders to review the application packet and provide informed feedback.

Thank you,

-Krister Bowman

FW: MSB 17.17 -- Denali State Park Special Land Use District

From Peggy Horton <peggy.horton@matsugov.us>

Date Fri 12/13/2024 1:55 PM

To Lacie Olivieri <Lacie.Olivieri@matsugov.us>

Lacie,

Below is another comment for the public hearing handouts.

Peggy Horton
Current Planner
907-861-7862

-----Original Message-----

From: Trisha <costellotrisha@gmail.com>

Sent: Friday, December 13, 2024 12:01 PM

To: Peggy Horton <peggy.horton@matsugov.us>

Subject: MSB 17.17 -- Denali State Park Special Land Use District

[EXTERNAL EMAIL - CAUTION: Do not open unexpected attachments or links.]

Under the wire....

Am writing to express my concern about this project and what feels like little public notice. Even though initial public notice was given Oct. 26 it did not feel that it was adequately brought to the attention of most the general public.

My concern is that I'm unable to read any guidelines provided by the Denali State Park Special Land Use District itself. Where does that document live?

I would request a delay in considering allowing this CUP. It's my concern that without real knowledge of what is in the existing SpUD we may be looking at the beginning of another Glitter Gulch.

Trisha Costello
Talkeetna, Alaska