



# Denali Citizens Council

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January 3, 2025

RE: Conditional Use Permit in Denali State Park, milepost 135.7, 4852 North Parks Highway

To the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Planning Commission:

The Denali Citizens Council Board of Directors opposes the granting of a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) that would allow construction of a helipad and associated helicopter usage as part of the development proposed by the Boutet Company.

As you know – and have recognized in code by creating the Denali State Park Special Land Use District – the state park is incredibly important for outdoor recreation, particularly for Alaskans and residents of local communities who value the chance to camp, hike, fish, paddle, and float in a natural setting. Ease of access by road, incredible scenery, chances to explore a variety of terrain by foot, both flatwater and swift water boating opportunities, wonderful places to camp – these are all features that help make Denali State Park uniquely beloved.

It is unfortunate that the development proposal includes provision for a helicopter landing pad with multiple flights per day. There are few more disruptive activities for non-motorized recreational users than helicopter flights. Particularly in such close proximity to K'esugi Ken Campground, Troublesome Creek, and associated trails, the flights represent a noisy disturbance that benefits only a few people at the expense of the many. Impacts are likely to reach beyond the immediate area to include people camping and paddling at Byers Lake, hiking Kesugi Ridge, and certainly floating on the Chulitna River. It would be worth the Commission's time to understand better how extensive an area may be impacted by the noise from a single helicopter. We suggest that you contact National Park Service soundscape monitoring staff at Denali National Park where they have conducted extensive and authoritative research on this topic.

Helicopter use seems to fall through a gap in the Borough code for the Denali State Park Special Land Use District. While the proposed RV park is clearly identified under permitted conditional uses in the code at 17.17.060, helicopter use or aircraft facilities are unmentioned. We would argue that the level of noise created by helicopters fits best under the "prohibited uses" described in 17.17.070, as it is closer to an industrial use in terms of its impact than any of the conditionally permitted recreational uses. At the very least, the helipad and associated helicopter activity do not meet the general standard articulated in 17.17.180 for conditional use permits, that "(1) the conditional use will not detract from the value, character or integrity of Denali State Park." This use definitely will detract from the value, character AND integrity of the park.

Meanwhile, there is no shortage of opportunities for flightseeing experiences in the area that don't affect the State Park, with flights originating in Talkeetna, Healy, and outside the Denali National



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Park entrance. No one who wants such an experience – and can afford it – is likely to be displaced by disallowing helicopter flights from this location.

Please support the many over the few. We hope that you will deny the portion of the CUP application for helipads and helicopter flights.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

DCC Board of Directors

Scott Richardson

Steve Carwile

Nancy Bale

Nancy Russell

Charlie Loeb