

October 26, 2008

Comments Re: BSA Deed Modification

Mat-Su Borough
Land and Resource Management Division
lmb@matsugov.us

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the request by Boy Scouts of America for modification of their deed in order that 20 acres of their property can be sold to Alaska Hotel Properties and 10 acres can be leased to an unnamed equestrian operation. The approximately 350 members of the Denali Citizens Council have a profound and ongoing interest in this request by virtue of their historic involvement in cooperative planning for tourism activities at South Denali. We have members who live in Talkeetna and other parts of South Denali and who have a direct interest in appropriate development there. In addition, DCC has a history of involvement with the National Park Service and with the State of Alaska in a number of public processes, including the Denali National Park Backcountry Management Plan, the South Denali Development Concept Plan, the recently established Aircraft Overflights Advisory Council, the Denali Task Force and several ongoing activities at the northern entrance to Denali National Park and Preserve.

We have a few concerns and suggestions:

1. **Any development on private land this close to Denali State Park must be done with park goals and purposes as a guiding principle.** This was certainly part of the reason that there were deed restrictions on the original sale of the 2,200 parcel to the Boy Scouts. It is integral to their goal of providing a truly wilderness experience for their scouts.
2. **Subdivision and sale of the Boy Scout parcel, at this early stage of ownership, sets a bad precedent.** The plan for 20 acres to be sold to a for-profit entity (who will most likely develop it for commercial purposes) is in direct contradiction to the terms of the deed restriction.

DCC Board

Nancy Bale
Anne Beaulaurier
Jean Balay
Cass Ray

Jenna Hamm
Joan Frankevich
Nan Eagleson
Jared Zimmerman

Julia Potter, Community Organizer

3. **More information is needed on the potential land conveyances.**

- a. There is little in the Public Notice to enlighten the public on how Alaska Hotel Properties plans to use the 20 acres it will own if the deed restriction is lifted. We can assume, however that hotel expansion is likely. It would appear prudent for the Mat-Su Borough to ask for more information on intended uses of this property before granting the sale. The Borough should consider requiring the potential owner to go through a permitting process prior to any sale being made. This course of action would protect both the potential owner and the Borough, should the Borough conclude that the intended uses cannot be permitted.
- b. The horse operation, although a lease, is likely to change permanently the condition of the land on which it is sited. In addition, the lessee has not, to our knowledge, come forward to explain how the business will operate. Will it be for the Boy Scouts only, for tourists at the nearby hotel only, or both? What trails will be used by the horse operation, if any, outside the boundaries of the 10 acres? Will horses be riding up into Denali State Park? This operation could have several spinoff impacts.

4. **There may be other ways to gain an easement over private lands abutting this property.**

The Mat-Su Borough, which has an interest in maintaining its original intent for the 2,200 acres, could provide its expertise in dealing with easement issues, and sit down at the table with the current owners to come up with another solution. Cash purchase of the easement is another way of obtaining it, and may be preferable to questionable land schemes.

5. **Damage to both sides of the Chulitna River during prior investigation of a bridge route must be rehabilitated.** This should be a condition of any negotiated agreement under this request.

A Boy Scout wilderness camp in the Blair Lakes area could provide wonderful opportunities for young people to visit Alaska and learn important wilderness skills. However, every step in the development of this site will directly affect the development of South Denali tourism as a whole. We laud the Boy Scouts for their mission and work with youth. We hope our suggestions will assist the Borough in finding a way to protect Denali State Park and the Boy Scouts' nonprofit intent for their lands, while providing reasonable access.

Sincerely,



Nancy Bale

President, Denali Citizens Council

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