



CITY AND BOROUGH OF WRANGELL

INCORPORATED MAY 30, 2008

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November 23, 2022

Ray Born
District Ranger
Attn: Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts New Cabins Project
P. O. Box 1328
Petersburg, AK 99833

Subject: Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts New Cabins Project

Dear District Ranger Born:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Petersburg and Wrangell New Cabin project.

The Wrangell Borough is pleased to continue its participation in the New Cabins Project as a Cooperating Agency. We support the construction of the new more easily accessible recreation cabins identified in the October 2022 New Cabins Project scoping document.

These cabins will provide additional recreational and economic opportunities, as well as improve the quality of life for the residents of Wrangell. The additional recreational infrastructure will also be a draw to visitors seeking unique recreational opportunities and Borough will work with the USFS to promote these opportunities.

The Borough has general comments regarding the project. We would like to see a section in the EA document that addresses how this project meets the direction in the Forest Plan to support both recreation and the tourism industry. We think this is important in light of Wrangell's growing tourism economy.

High maintenance costs have been a burden to the District's recreation program. We would like a commitment in the Decision to use durable low maintenance materials in the construction of these cabins to reduce future maintenance costs. This includes the construction of gravel trails rather than boardwalk. We also want to make sure that the construction not only uses durable materials but also is constructed to address the weather, wind direction, drainage, etc for the specific location so as not to face the same issue that the Middle Ridge Cabin is facing so soon after its construction.

Wrangell is also concerned that the Forest Service intends to continue the use of primitive turd burner baskets to deal with human waste at these new cabin sites. This system puts raw human waste into the natural environment and is hazardous to the health and well-being of employees who have to come into contact with this waste. We would like the Forest Service to build road accessible vault toilets which can be safely pumped and the waste removed from the

environment for proper treatment. There is opportunity for the Borough and the Forest Service to work together on human waste management in the future.

As you begin implementation of this project, we would like the Forest Service to think out-of-the-box in ways to reduce the staggering costs of recent cabin construction. We urge you to work with the local Tribal Government, potential partners, and local contractors to reduce these costs.

In our previous scoping letter, we requested that you hold a well-publicized general public in-person meeting with maps to allow for a more open dialog. Unfortunately, that did not occur. A recent request was also denied. The District's multiple scoping start/stop efforts combined with the overlapping Forest Service Regional Office cabin project scoping this year have been confusing. Interacting with the public remotely through the internet is not an effective way to communicate with the general public in Wrangell. We urge you to get back to in-person public meetings.

The Cabins proposed within the Wrangell Borough are all in great locations. However, because funding for new cabins is minimal, at least in our district, we encourage construction of cabins that can be accessed easily by the most people. For example, While Mustang Lake on Zarembo is a great location, its priority should be lower, as access is limited primarily to those individuals that have or have access to vehicles on Zarembo – which is a limited number of individuals in Wrangell and Petersburg. Proposed cabins on Wrangell Island should be considered a higher priority because of vehicular access by more individuals. In order to encourage the public and visitors to utilize these cabins, parking close to the cabin is helpful for the older generation that still want to enjoy camping in the remote areas of the Tongass. Fools Inlet cabin, is also in a great location, but a trail to the water should be planned and budgeted and be a part of the development plan. Our understanding is that it is not currently. The trail is critical to provide not only more recreation opportunity, but access from the water as well as the road. This cabin with a trail, will provide additional opportunity for the kayak trail around Wrangell Island that is being developed and a dry/safe location to rest by canoers and kayakers. It can become a safe haven during times of inclement weather if access from the water is available.

The Borough, as a Cooperating Agency, will continue to provide input and support to the project and assist in the public outreach efforts.

As we stated in our previous scoping letter, we request that you also move forward on the other cabin replacement projects on the Wrangell District, outside of this project, including the Berg Bay Cabin which we understand is "shovel ready". Improving the other recreation cabins on the Wrangell Ranger District is a key component in developing the independent traveler component of our struggling tourism economy as well as providing high quality recreation experiences for the visitors and residents of Wrangell.

Sincerely,



Jeff Good
Borough Manager