

RE: HB 304 CHUGACH STATE PARK/EAGLE RIVER LIONS LAND TRANSFER Eagle River Elks Lodge #2682

Letter of support

Representatives Kelly Merrick, Zack Fields and Ken McCarty; HB 304 Sponsors

Thank you for leadership in sponsoring HB 304. To all members of the Alaska Legislature, thank you for your consideration, and hopefully your support, of this important legislation. Eagle River Elks Lodge #2682 supports HB 304 to, once and for all, formalize ownership and permanent management and stewardship of the parcel known as Eagle River Lions Park. This parcel, and all the amenities and facilities that have been developed over the past fifty years represent a great deal of community history and are very important community assets. We support continued stewardship by the Eagle River Lions, it has worked for half a century! A significant percentage of our membership are also Lions, many past and present officers and leaders.

This parcel (Eagle River Lions Park) is the home of numerous community assets including a softball and baseball complex with fields to accommodate various skill and age levels, football fields, soccer fields, tennis courts as well as picnic and playground areas. The ball fields are home to Knik Little League (formed in 1963) The site is also houses a large building which provides the meeting area for local Lions Clubs. With a large room and commercial kitchen, it is the biggest venue in the Chugiak-Eagle River area. It is the site of countless community events, the annual Chamber fundraiser and Ducks Unlimited to name just a couple. Throughout a calendar year, the building will be used for multiple benefit s including raising funds for medical costs, disaster victims, and to raise funds for youth in our community. The Lions have been managing these assets for nearly fifty years without any annual operating assistance from state or local government!

The Lions host many community events, the biggest being the July 3rd Independence Day Extraganza with all events free, including a fireworks display at 12:00 am July 4th, the first Independence Day celebration in the state. The Lions Club building is a building very critical to the residents of the community. It is the venue of annual free community Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners. The Boy Scout troop which is sponsored by the Lions routinely provide youthful volunteers for these holiday dinners. It is also a venue for celebrations; landmark anniversaries, weddings and memorials to say goodbye to friends and community pioneers.

The previous leases, especially the recent longer leases, have been adequate to this point, but unfortunately this option will not be available after 2024 because of a recent court decision. We appreciate the proactive efforts of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Director Ricky Gease, and the support of Governor Dunleavy's Administration, as well as the legislative sponsors.

It would be a real tragedy if a half century of effective and efficient management by the Eagle River Lions was not allowed to continue. This parcel and the tremendous assets located on the acreage is a true jewel of recreational opportunities, operated without cost to government. We appreciate your consideration, and ultimately support of HB 304 to allow this half century success story to continue, and for recreational opportunities to not only continue, but to expand and improve!

Approved by Eagle River Elks Lodge #2682 membership on March 15, 2022

Deena Sessler, Exalted Ruler _____