CHUGACH STATE PARK-

HELICOPTERS

REPRESENTATIVE
SAM COTTEN
DISTRICT 15

P.O. BOX 296, EAGLE RIVER, AK 99577
POUCH V, JUNEAU, AK 99811

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

September 17, 1987

Al Meiners
Chugach State Park Master Plan
Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
P.O. Box 107001
Anchorage, AK 99510-7001

Dear Mr. Meiners:

I am writing to offer my comments on the proposed amendments to the Chugach State Park Master Plan.

Ski area development

I support Alternative C, allowing eventual development of more than one ski site within the Park in accordance with environmental and land use protections.

While I am primarily interested in the proposed ski resort in Eagle River, I hesitate to recommend limiting development to one area. In my view ski development -- providing important recreational and economic benefits for the community -- is consistent with the statutory management principles for the Park.

At this time the Master Plan should begin to establish standards for ski development without foreclosing future development possibilities. If other sites are suggested in the future, the Division will be able to measure proposals against established standards. The Master Plan should prohibit ski development only in select areas where the Division determines that development would be inappropriate, such as the Wilderness zone or any other area identified in a thorough planning process. Future development should be allowed, when the standards are met, without amendment of the Master Plan. Expansion of existing ski facilities in Chugach State Park should be allowed as long as environmental and land use conditions are met.

The Master Plan should also establish the nature of the ski development permit. Although the permit should be issued with conditions requiring compliance with other state, federal, and local laws and ordinances, acquisition of other permits should not be a precondition for consideration or issuance of the park use permit or lease.

Any lease or permit issued for ski development on state park land should include provisions requiring compliance with stated conservation measures protecting air and water quality, other park uses, aesthetics, and wildlife. It might be appropriate to consider bonding requirements for completion of the project and rehabilitation of the project site.

Greenbelt management

I support Alternative B (moderate use and management) in the Greenbelt, except that snowmachine access should not be prohibited. If sensible management conditions are laid out now, there is probably room enough in the Greenbelt to accommodate many types of winter access without conflict.

I also would like to see the development of public access sites throughout the Greenbelt, which would improve public opportunities to enjoy this prime recreational land.

Helicopter access

I support Alternative C, allowing helicopter landings in select areas of the park, although I am not convinced that the number of sites should be permanently limited to three.

With planning and seasonal and geographical restrictions, helicopter landings can improve access and use of the park without harming the park's resources or existing recreational use. This has been shown in national parks and forests in Alaska and elsewhere in the United States. The major concern should be protecting the quality of the recreational experience and preventing hazardous air traffic conditions. The Master Plan should prohibit helicopter landings only in those areas where planning or the original park statute indicate that helicopter access would be inappropriate.

Thank you for your attention to these comments. I appreciate the hard work that the Division is putting into the Master Plan amendments, and I look forward to working with you in the implementation of the revised Master Plan.

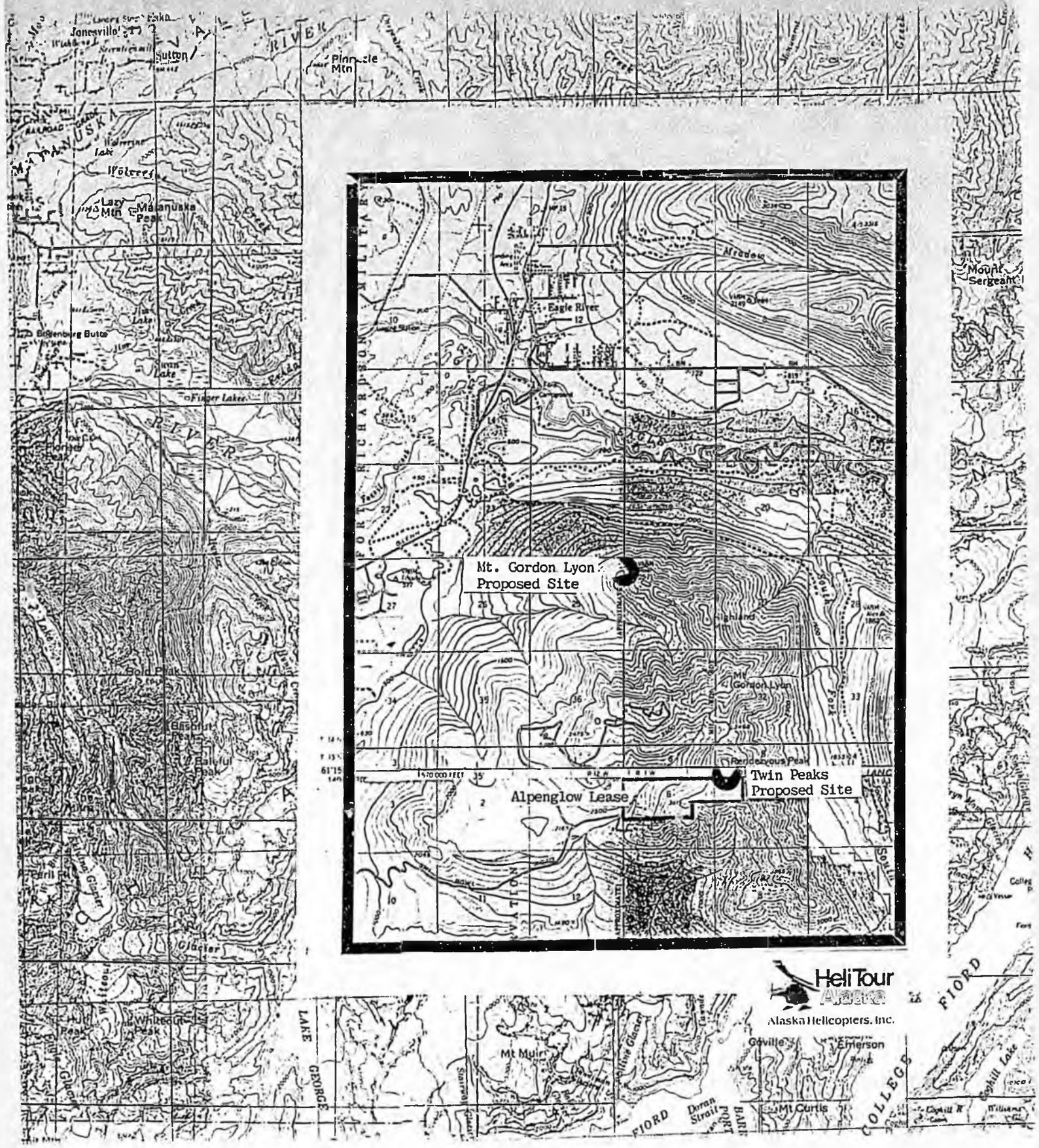
Sincerely,

Sam Cotten

Rep. Sam Cotten
Co-Chair, House Resources Committee

cc: Governor Steve Cowper
Commissioner Judy Brady

THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENT HAS NOT BEEN FILMED BUT IS AVAILABLE IN THE ORIGINAL FILE


Mt. Gordon Lyon
Proposed Site
Twin Peaks
Proposed Site
Alpenglow Lease
Eagle River
Highland
Mt Gordon Lyon
Rendezvous Peak
Mt Muir
Mt Curtis
Emerson
Goville
Mount Sergeant
Pinnacle Mtn
Sutton
Jonesville
Matanuska Peak
Lazy Mtn
Finger Lakes
Bold Peak
Whiteout Peak
Doran Strait
FIORD
COLLEGE
LAKE GEORGE
RIVER
Glacier
HeliTour
Alaska
Alaska Helicopters, Inc.

Our Ref.:

Your Ref.:

(907) 243-3404 **HELICOPTERS, Inc.** P.O. BOX 190283 • ANCHORAGE, AK 99519-0283

TELEX: 25372 Subsidiary of COLUMBIA HELICOPTERS, INC. • P.O. BOX 3500, PORTLAND, OREGON 97208 • (503) 678-1222

October 23, 1987

Alaska Department of Natural Resources
Ms. Judy Brady, Commissioner
P.O. Box M
Juneau, AK 99811

Dear Commissioner Brady;

We wish this letter to serve as a "Formal Request for Reconsideration" of the prohibition of helicopter landings on the edge of Chugach State Park for the purpose of helicopter flight-seeing. We offer two site-specific areas for consideration we feel could be utilized without effecting the environment, the park or its users.

TWIN PEAKS

This site is located on Chugach State Park land on the periphery of the park adjacent to a military reserve. The land is on a long term lease to the Anchorage Ski Club and is known as Arctic Valley or Alpenglow. The site is depicted on the map (see attached) is 3900' above sea level. Helicopter access to the area would be over the military reserve where no hikers or skiiers are permitted. Over flights of the military area are permitted. We have flown over this exact area well over 400 times this past summer and have received no complaints.

MT. GORDON LYON

This site was our original choice. The area, as quoted by Chugach State Park officials has little if any impact upon the environment. The area is 400' inside the park. It has been proven by Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board members particularly Fish and Game, that there would be little or no impact on wildlife in the area as long as flight restrictions were adhered to. The site is adjacent to a known aircraft entry/exit corridor from the Anchorage Area. It would be under strict control with regard to flight altitudes and approach/departure routes and, again, has no over flight of park land since it is adjacent to the military reserve.

The State of Alaska Attorney Generals Office advised the Department on May 1, 1987 that the Director has discretion to issue permits for the helicopter access (see enclosed). As a matter of policy, the directors office has chosen not to do this.

The Park has evolved from an area that "at one time you could apply for a permit" to "Directors Discretion" to "Prohibition". The negative attitude of the majority of the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board is paralleled by the Attorney General's letter. It appears more time and effort is being spent to keep helicopters from this activity than is being spent to see if it is a compatable use or even discuss it.

It is our desire during Re-evaluation that you take into consideration the non-negative impact this will have on the park since we would be landing only on the exterior edge of the periphery and the flight paths involved would have a zero impact and no park overflight.

In your master plan amendments you mention "flightseeing over-flights should be minotored." "This information should be retained to help provide an improved information base for policy development and decision making concerning helicopter activities in the park.' We feel this can be accomplished immediately. Allow us to form an Advisory Council, reporting to the director. The council would be made up of two members from the Aviation Industry and two members of the Concerned Public. Their goal would be to investigate the possibility of using the above sites as landing areas and setting strict guidelines that would need to be followed. Our position is, and has been, to find a method of performing helitour flightseeing safely and use-compatible with regards to <u>all</u> concerned. If we can, at least, try to see if it will work by setting guidelines ahead of time, then testing them for a season then we will know for sure if the helitour landings are feasable. If they are not, then we can say <u>we tried</u> every avenue and used all available input to determine the feasability of such landings.

We urgently request a meeting in Juneau or Anchorage at your earliest convenience to discuss our request for reconsideration.

Sincerely,

ALASKA HELICOPTERS, INC.

Steven R. Smith
Director of Operations

SRS/ah

Enclosures

cc: Steve Cowper
Governor
Third Floor State Capitol
P.O. Box A
Juneau, AK 99811

Mr. Sam Cotten
Chairman House Resources Committee
3111 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99503

Ms. Adelheid Herrmann
Chairwoman House Resources Committee
3111 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99503

Mr. Jack Coghill
Chairman Senate Resources Committee
P.O. Box 55028
North Pole, AK 99705

Senator Lloyd Jones
Chairman Senate Transportation Committee
352 Front Street
Ketchican, AK 99901

Representative Bette Cato
Chairwoman House Transportation Committee
3111 C Street
Anchorage, AK 99503

** With one exception (Girdwood -- where support still exceeds opposition by 15%) there is at least 2:1 support for development and utilization of public lands for a wide variety of visitor and local usage...

	Percentage Generally/ Strongly Support	Percentage Generally/ Strongly Oppose
Waterfront development/ cruise ship docking.....	87%	10%
Playing fields and grassy areas.....	74%	22%
Develop Eagle River ski resort.....	73%	21%
Complete Coastal Trail..	69%	21%
'Copter tours and landing pad in Chugach State Park	61%	31%
Golf course and summer recreation in Girdwood...	53%	38%

"Individual Comments - Written Testimony"

19 persons wrote individual letters regarding Alternatives for Helicopter Use.

Alternatives:	A	B	C
Responses:	15	2	2
Percentage:	79%	10.5%	10.5%

66 persons signed form letters regarding Alternatives for Helicopter Use.

Alternatives:	A	B	C
Responses:	0	0	66
Percentage:	0%	0%	100%

85 persons commented on Alternatives for Helicopter Use by either an individually written letter or by signing a form letter.

Alternatives:	A	B	C
Responses:	15	2	68
Percentage:	18%	2%	80%

(Alternatives for Helicopter Use continued)

"Grand Total" - All responses received on Alternatives for Helicopter Use"

(121) responses received regarding Alternatives for Helicopter Use

Alternatives:	A	B	C
Responses:	39	10	74
Percentage:	32%	8%	60%

Reasons FOR Helicopter landing site(s) included:

- Does not fly over private homes
- Potential economic returns for the Park
- Gives the handicapped and elderly access to the park
- Could allow locals to cheaply get into the park

Reasons AGAINST Helicopter landing site(s) included:

- Irreversible effect on wildlife
- Low stimulus to economy
- Benefits few people
- Elderly and handicapped can drive to areas and get similar views
- Integrity of the park is threatened
- Does not fit in with Park philosophy
- Helicopters can hover outside Park boundary for same view
- Negative effect on other visitors in the Park

(3) Alternatives for Eagle River Greenbelt

"Group Response"

7 individual wrote and/or testified on behalf of groups regarding Alternatives for Eagle River Greenbelt.

(Eagle River Greenbelt - Group response continued)

Alternatives:	A	B	C
Responses:	1	4	2