



INTERIOR TRAILS PRESERVATION COALITION

ITPC

Friday, March 22, 2019

Governor Mike Dunleavy
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 110001
Juneau, AK 99811-0001

Dear Gov. Dunleavy,

We urge you to reconsider the cuts to trails programs you have recommended in your budget. The cuts are miniscule in regard to the entire state budget, but they will have a huge impact on trails and will likely cost the state far more in lost federal funds. We are most concerned about three areas: the Recreational Trails Program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and the Snowmobile Trails Program.

RECREATIONAL TRAILS PROGRAM

The RTP brings Alaska about \$1.5 million per year in federal money derived from the estimated portion of fuel taxes used by off-highway vehicles. The state pays about \$300,000 a year to administer this program, but about \$100,000 of those funds come from the program. So, it costs the state only about \$200,000 to accept and distribute these funds. Your budget would cut one of the two main administrators of the RTP program.

Currently about half of RTP funds go to the state and the rest go to other entities, such as local governments and nonprofit groups. But if only one person is left to administer the funds, then that person will look for extreme efficiencies. That will likely mean that all funds go to the state.

Besides being damaging to local entities, we are concerned that the state does not have the capacity—personnel, equipment, etc.—to take on that many more projects. If not, some of the RTP money will go back to the federal government. This does not make financial sense. Please reconsider and fund the other RTP administrative position.

LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND

The LWCF, another federal program, has brought about \$40 million to the state since the program began in 1965. It provides grants for projects featuring “close-to-home” outdoor recreational opportunities for the public, including trails. LWCF grants require a 50-50 match and are open only to state agencies and regional and local governments.

ITPC

P.O. Box 74263, Fairbanks, AK 99707

Phone: (907) 458-7968

This is another situation in which a minor amount of administration cost (a few hundred thousand dollars) results in millions of dollars coming into the state. But administration of these funds appears to have been zeroed out in your budget. Is this a mistake? Without this minor administration cost we could lose millions of dollars. Those funds will go back to the federal government. Please reconsider and fund administration of the LWCF so that we can continue getting our fair share of those funds.

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS PROGRAM

This program is arguably a user fee. While the Alaska Constitution does not allow dedicated funds, for years governors and legislators have agreed to fund the STP the same amount as is collected each year from snowmachine registration fees (about \$160,000 per year). The STP provides funds for groomed trails, signage and safety programs. The trail grooming and signage of the STP benefits anyone who uses these trails, which also includes mushers, bikers, skiers, and even hikers.

The STP helps boost the economy of many local communities through winter tourism, especially important during a time of the year when tourism dollars are hard to come by. It also helps cut down on search and rescue operations by the Alaska State Troopers since trails that are well signed and groomed reduce the number of lost winter trail users. Please reconsider and reinstate the Snowmobile Trails Program.

TRAILS ARE IMPORTANT

At first glance trails may seem like a nice extra that should be funded only during times of plenty. But on closer look, trails are clearly essential in many ways. Trails do many things, such as:

- Allow people access to our natural resources
- Offer people a safe and healthy place to exercise
- Help provide social glue by providing a place for active people to recreate
- Provide jobs for small businesses
- Reduce pressure on our roads

Please reconsider the cuts you have made to these essential trail programs. In the end, they will harm the state far more than the few hundred thousand dollars saved.

Sincerely,
Stan Justice, president
Interior Trails Preservation Coalition