

March 29, 2019



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

Re: Maintaining the Outdoor Recreation Economic Engine

Dear Gov. Dunleavy,

I listened with interest to your "Talk of Alaska" interview with Lori Townsend on March 26 and understand your approach to grow the private sector and keep Alaska "open for business". Outdoor recreation is a huge component of our state's economy, one that supports a multi-faceted, growing and sustainable private sector industry on an increasingly year-round basis.

As indicated in the March 2019 "Outdoor Recreation: Impacts and Opportunities" analysis prepared by the University of Alaska Center for Economic Development, outdoor recreation accounts for:

- \$3.2 billion in spending annually in Alaska
- 29,000 direct and 38,100 total jobs created in Alaska
- 61% participation by visitors in recreational activity
- 81% participation by Alaska residents in recreational activity

A similar 2017 nation-wide analysis by the Outdoor Industry Association documents that outdoor recreation is one of the most powerful economic engines in the nation, with \$887 billion in consumer spending annually, providing 7.6 million American jobs, and notably, \$59.2 billion in state and local tax revenue.

Considering these social and economic benefits, we urge you to reevaluate the budgetary cuts that have been recommended to the *Recreational Trails Program* and other programs that support the growth of the outdoor recreation industry. Alaska's trails and recreational assets are located principally on public sector lands and form a *vital infrastructure* for recreation that serves both our residents and visitors.

Funding by the state of Alaska for developing and maintaining our recreational assets will return initial investment by providing opportunities for the private sector to grow the outdoor recreation industry and contribute to the state's economy. The historical state funding levels under the *Recreational Trails Program* (26 projects equaling \$1,409,590 in 2018) are miniscule in relation to both the proposed state budget, and importantly, to the amount of spending on outdoor recreation in Alaska. As indicated in the aforementioned documents, these grants are paying back economically while contributing to the outdoor focused life style enjoyed by Alaskans and our many visitors who come here to the last frontier.

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Runners, hikers, cyclists, skiers, snowshoers, dog mushers and skijorers enjoy many non-motorized trails in the Fairbanks area that have benefited from the *Recreational Trails Program* including the Happy Valley Single-track trails on Ester Dome and trails at other areas, such as at Isberg and Tanana Lakes recreation areas, and Skyline Ridge Park.

In addition, there are also many multi-use trails which are shared on a highly cooperative basis between motorized and non-motorized users. We have learned that the proposed budget cuts the *Snowmobile Trails Program (STP)* and administration of the *Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)*. Both of those funds have benefited a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities. Non-motorized users appreciate trails that are groomed for snowmachine use through the STP, especially in the Chena River State Recreation Area. And multi-use trails maintained by the FNSB at the Tanana Lakes Recreation Area have benefited via funding from the LWCF.

Outdoor recreation in interior Alaska is important to residents and visitors. The trails infrastructure provides the gateways to our wild and scenic places, which are a huge and renewable natural resource for our state. Investment in outdoor recreation infrastructure will pay back through the continued growth of this important economic engine for Alaska.

Running Club North, established for over 40 years, and with over 350 members is the sponsor of numerous trails runs, including the 56-year-old Equinox Marathon, the 53-year-old Gold Discovery Run and the eight event Northern Trails Series. On behalf of our organization, I am requesting that you please reconsider the cuts in the proposed budget that would hurt the *Recreational Trails Program*, the *Land and Water Conservation Fund*, and the *Snowmobile Trails Program*. Let's keep the portal to the growing outdoor recreation economy open for business as wide as possible.

Sincerely,

Gary H. Pohl, President
Running Club North