

Ron Swanson, Director
Community Development Department
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, AK 99645

June 10th, 2006

Re: Willow Community Development/Wood-chipping-Willow Kashwitna Area

Dear Mr. Swanson:

We received your letter in regard to logging/wood-chipping the Willer-Kash area in Willow. Your suggestion that the Community of Willow and our economy need not worry about the consequences of wood-chipping this area is unacceptable. To sit back and let the State and Borough follow a course of action that adversely effects our community and its residents certainly is not community development.

The Community of Willow as Borough residents and taxpayers want a more balanced and a better resource regime that protects and develops Willow's forests producing a far higher economic return to a far larger segment of the population. This will not occur with the proposed timber sale and harvest that, as we all know, will lead to wood-chipping by NPI. You stated in your letter "no one user should have exclusive use of our public resources" yet this is exactly what is about to happen. Willow is reduced to nothing more than a resource colony for an outside interest.

Wood-chipping in the Susitna Valley is a new phenomenon, one that was not anticipated by communities, and one that is highly objected to by a majority of residents especially in the effected communities. For you to say there was adequate public input-both from communities and individuals in the formation of Area Plans that you say support wood-chipping is a sham. These Area Plans were based on small scale logging operations that were owned and operated by Alaskans marketing saw logs, lumber, house logs and firewood to the Valley and Anchorage.

Area Management Plans-the Kashwitna Plan, the Willow Sub basin Plan, the Susitna Plan and others are outdated. These plans are fifteen to twenty-five years old. Since then the Susitna Valley has seen rapid and significant change. Willow is now situated on the edge of the most developed area in Alaska-Anchorage and the Borough core area. Rapidly growing demands on Willow and our local habitat are in stark contrast to the shrinking area available to sustain and support our economy, livelihood and jobs. Our economy and needs have changed with this new environment.

It is of great importance that our forest resource be managed according to the mandate of the Alaska constitution: to maximize the benefit of resource development for all Alaskans, today and for future generations. Timber sales that lead to a sweetheart deal for one company do not meet this mandate and in fact frustrate the intent of the constitution and frustrate the highest and best use of our local forest.

The Area Plans used to justify wood-chipping not only are outdated and lack honest public input they have fundamental flaws that will adversely impact Willow. The resource regimes given priority: farming, grazing and forestry no longer are valid priorities and produce very little economic gain for the public and residents yet these same regimes when implemented have a very high tendency to alter the habitat so the more valuable resource regimes for our community are set

back.

Willow area residents and Borough residents want our areas' valuable forest resource managed to better develop the resource regimes we rely on. These are fish and wildlife, trails, and recreation. We want these to be the primary designations for management.

In addition, maintaining and managing a larger natural forest and wilderness area situated on the cusp of large population centers is a must for the future of the Susitna Valley. We submit this is a valuable key concept that needs to be implemented in our State and Borough Plans. This supports Willow's Community Development and history of this area.

And of great importance, mushing is an economic force in our Community and the Valley and this logging area encompasses a Critical Area for the Future of Mushing. As we all know growth and congestion south of Willow in the core areas has made it all but impossible for kennels to survive. Logging starts that same process here, the slow irreversible decline of the habitat combined with easier access and population growth and mushing loses out.

A significant aspect of Willow is its trails and habitat combined with kennels that sustain the Iditarod Trail Sleddog Race. Mushers and the Iditarod produce three to four million at the Start in Anchorage. Mushers and the Iditarod produce more in one day at the Iditarod Restart than logging will in five years. The other 364 days, Mushers and the Iditarod produce the local jobs and livelihood that support property taxes that pay for the schools and roads. To blindly go forward with wood-chipping when it supports so few and potentially harms so many is not prudent management, it is mis-management. The Willow Trails Committee is completing a detailed Trail Plan and Habitat analysis. We ask that it be given careful consideration and that it be implemented. This is the right direction for our community development. It will have a lasting impact for generations to come.

Willow area residents reject the idea that wood-chips are a value-added product for Alaskans. Our forest land will be opened, road-bedded, altered and whole trees in their prime ground into postage-sized chips. Later in a foreign country they are reduced in caustic chemicals to make pulp or paper. The value added products that were part of the Area Plans for forestry management were lumber, house logs, veneers and firewood. That was the intent of those plans. That intent is now being ignored and local producers are being priced out of the market. It is next to impossible for small operators to bid against NPI with current Borough and State policies.

The politics of Port justification and the politics of driving up Port use through shipping wood-chips is clearly a factor in government policies and current forest management and this is wrong. The economics supporting wood-chips is also very suspect. The revenue produced for the State from timber leases is ridiculously low, and the revenue produced from Port use to the Borough is likewise low. In 2005, the public received \$223,000 for six ships loaded and seven log barges unloaded. To ignore community needs for Willow, to suppress community input and to recommend going forward with wood-chipping our local forest is certainly contrary to good management and economics yet this is what you said in your letter was your preferred course of action.

The after effect of logging and wood-chipping is of great concern for the Community of Willow. This is when the unanticipated consequences of logging and wood-chipping set in. This forest area is a young forest in its prime. In its natural state it supports both the aquatic life and wildlife habitat that are fast disappearing in the Susitna Valley. The Willow drainages flowing into the Susitna are already under intense pressure and salmon and trout runs are showing the effect. Our

community interest is to insure this areas fishing habitat does not decline like so many other developed areas do. This area abuts the Willow Mountain Critical habitat Area. Moose populations are high and hunting is a way of life in Willow. Our community interest is to continue protecting the best moose habitat there is. This area is just south of the Hatcher Pass Recreation Area and our community interests parallel developing this area for recreation. This area is east and across the Parks Highway away from the rapid development of housing and subdivisions that are common there. Our community interests are in maintaining this areas wilderness appeal for future generations. To the north across the Kashwitna River is probably the largest subdivision in the State. It blocks trails that were RS 2477 trails. Our community interest is protecting trails, habitat, and wilderness that supports Mushers and the Iditarod. It is easy to say the managers will protect these important community interests but we all know in reality the opposite occurs.

It is hard to imagine an oil company or any other private company operating effectively based on fifteen or twenty year old data and assumptions yet this is exactly the case here. To argue Area Plans that designate grazing, agriculture and forestry as workable resource and economic plans for todays changed Valley is questionable. We know for sure grazing and Ag are totally outdated designations that are not sustainable. And Willow strongly questions the need to log such and area that has far more value for other designations.

To take the time to reevaluate our Communities future in the face of changed circumstances, changed values and changed economies is not too much to ask of our managers and government officials. It is never too late to make the correct decision when so many people are adversely impacted if you do not.

Sincerely,

Linda Oxley, Chair

cc:

Tim Anderson, Mayor

Assembly Members

John Duffy

Senator Huggins

Representative Neuman

Mike Menge, Commissioner-DNR

Martha Freeman, DOF

Rick Jandreau, DOF