



December 12, 2023

NOAA Office for Coastal Management
Stennis Space Center
1021 Balch Blvd. Suite 1003
Stennis, MS 39529 Address
ocm.nerrs.infrastructure@noaa.gov

To Whom it May Concern,

Please accept this letter of support on behalf of the **Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Community Council** for funding the proposal entitled, *Beluga Peatlands Acquisition and Conservation to Ensure Community Resiliency of Kachemak Bay*. The conservation actions presented in this proposal will further the ongoing efforts to steward the land by protecting peatland wetlands, a significant and highly important landscape feature in the watershed ecosystems of the lower Kenai Peninsula. Employing an extensive network of community relationships through the chief partnership between the City of Homer, the Kachemak Heritage Land Trust, and the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (KBNERR), this project will foster long-lasting collaborations and resilience projects through monitoring, training, and education programs.

The KBNERR Community Council has been actively involved in discussions over the past two years regarding the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) competitive funding opportunities. The Council established the new Lands and Facilities Committee in order to identify and select high-priority lands for conservation and restoration. The entire KBNERR Community Council membership, made up of nine community members and nine agency representatives unanimously voted this project as high community priority in addressing the changes to our environment due to a changing climate. Additionally, peatlands are incredibly valuable in their contribution to salmon and moose habitat and as carbon stores; however locally, this value is not well understood. With this project, there is an incredible opportunity for KBNERR to convey this message and support our local communities.

Established in 2002, the Council's primary purpose is to provide an organized structure for substantive and meaningful dialogue and recommendations between agencies, local governments, researchers,

environmental educators, conservation groups, and others interested in natural science research and education and Research Reserve staff. To that end, the Council has actively been that link between local communities and KBNERR over the past 8 years, bringing a wide range of issues and questions to the Reserve for consideration and investigation.

The properties that would be acquired with this grant have been identified by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game as an important wetlands area for winter-stressed moose, and are near other parcels that have already been preserved in perpetuity for their value as wildlife habitat. If successfully acquired, this property's proximity to the existing State of Alaska's Homer Airport Critical Habitat and the Kachemak Drive peatlands, would add substantial acreage to protected lands in an area that is under constant pressure for development.

We strongly support this important project as a partner of KBNERR in order to help address the impacts of a changing climate on our bay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George Matz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right from the end of the name.

George Matz
Council Chair
KBNERR Community Council
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