



January 16, 2024

Mr. Matthew Chasse
Coastal Management Specialist & Federal Program Officer
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office for Coastal Management
1305 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Chasse,

Please accept this letter of support on behalf of the **Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Community Council** for funding the following proposals:

Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve and Kachemak Bay Campus Shared Facilities Planning & Design Project

Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Truck and Boat Engine Acquisition

The planning and design project will fund the first phase in shared facilities by University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) entities: Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (KBNERR) and Kachemak Bay Campus (KBC) of the Kenai Peninsula College. It is a standalone project that requires a significant investment to ensure partner facilities needs are met and new buildings are energy efficient. This project will also incorporate office space for the NOAA Kasitsna Bay Lab (KBL) staff based in Homer, who have been a collaborative partner with the Reserve for the past two decades. Currently, the Reserve's administrative offices and bunkhouse are in an aging modular building that is not energy efficient, requires constant repair, is in need of renovation, and lacks public educational space and laboratories.

Furthermore, the Reserve has two vehicles (a truck and Chevy Traverse) that are both unreliable and require ongoing expensive mechanical repairs. A new field truck for accessing remote project sites in the Kachemak Bay watershed is very much needed, along with new engines for the Reserve's boat – a 30-foot Koffler vessel – which was purchased just a few years ago. The Mercury brand engines that came with the vessel are no longer operational, and since learning that these engines have an approximate life span of 10 years, the Reserve would like to upgrade to a more reliable engine brand (e.g., Yamaha) that will last much longer. As of right now, the vessel is not in the water because it lacks safe, functional engines, and the Reserve has had to turn down some partner programming with the Kachemak Bay Campus' marine mammal research program. An investment in these engines is also an investment in the long-term partnership with KBC, and attracts partner research projects when the Reserve can offer access to Kachemak Bay and the Gulf of Alaska through a reliable vessel.

Established in 2002, the KBNERR 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 20 years, bringing a wide range of issues and questions to the Reserve for consideration and investigation.

Over the past five years, the KBNERR Council Lands and Facilities Committee has discussed the Reserves needs at-length and explored numerous options for new facilities. The current modular building is on a leased lot from the AK Department of Transportation, and permanent structures are not allowed. The modular building is not a long-term facilities solution, and other property and real estate is very expensive in the City of Homer. With the Kenai Peninsula College's purchase of the Young's Restaurant parcel, adjacent to the existing Kachemak Bay Campus, there is a golden opportunity to build new facilities that meet the shared needs of both the College and the Reserve. Student housing, educational spaces, and offices along with a public space that can hold more than 100 people in the audience are critical for maintaining the Reserve's programs, expanding researcher and student collaboration, and ensuring there is a public facility associated with the Reserve in the community.

Having previously designed shared facilities with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), when the Reserve was part of the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G), the KBNERR staff and council are careful to consider the pros and cons of investing in shared facilities. Given that both the Reserve and the KBC are part of the University of AK Anchorage, the access to state capital funds and the long-term memorandum of understanding (MOU) for shared facilities is of a different flavor than the previous MOU between USFWS and ADF&G. The Council is confident this planning and design is one of the best options available to secure long-term facilities for KBNERR that also benefit the community.

We strongly support this important project as a partner of KBNERR in order to help address the operational needs of the Reserve, and continue supporting resilient coastal communities of Alaska.

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.

George Matz

Council Chair

KBNERR Community Council

geomatz41@gmail.com

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