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Planning Commission Chairman
144 N. Binkley,
Soldotna, AK 99669

April 16, 2002

Dear Mr. Chairman,

As a Wildlife Biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I transferred from Anchorage to Homer in April 1995. I had some choices where to live, and I chose Anchor Point instead of Homer for several reasons. I rented in Anchor Point first and liked the community feel. I enjoyed the rural feel and undeveloped landscape of the North Fork area. I chose a secluded, quiet home and lot overlooking muskeg and a stand of black spruce adjacent to the North Fork of the Anchor River. Adjoining to the south of my property was large stand of old growth black spruce. Today most of the spruce are gone, cleared and salvaged from the spruce bark beetle. That is regrettable, but a major change in landscape my neighbors and I have to live with. Adjoining my property to the west is 40 acres of State land that is mostly muskeg.

On winter nights when the wind is from the west, I can hear the surf fall on the Anchor Point beach 2 1/2 miles away. The North Fork of the Anchor River is a corridor that brings moose, eagles, and bears to share my property. The bull moose brazenly walk across the muskeg, the cows with calves usually skirt the edge in the alders and birch. Every spring since I have lived here a cow and calf have used the uncleared spruce, alder and willow patch that lies between my deck and the State muskeg. Common snipe, a genuine bird whose name is borrowed by pranksters, perform their mating rituals as dusk and dawn. Their calls and those of the varied thrush are the dominant sounds of spring.

Every fall migrating sandhill cranes (identified as a Species of Special Concern by the US Fish and Wildlife Service) land in the muskeg to feed before continuing their migration. Juveniles are easily identified by their gray feathers and inefficient feeding efforts when compared with the adults. The sandhills land in the muskeg because they can feed in the open, without disturbance, in the wetland. Eagles fly up from the river bottom and perch in my tallest remaining trees as long as I remain quiet while outside. The slamming of a door, or barking of dogs, or a chain saw causes them to leave their perch.

I write this letter because I own the land immediately north of the proposed Cecil Jones Gravel Pit. If this pit is approved, the resulting noise and disturbance to the landscape will change my quality of life at my home long after the pit is abandoned. I have practical objections to the stripping of native vegetation on the adjacent property, the endangering of water quality and quantity from two of my two wells, the reduction of air quality because of blowing dust, the din of machinery and vehicles at the owner's

discretion or greed, the depreciation of property value, and the loss of pride in the place I call home for eight years. My emotional objections however must be vented first.

My well is 40 feet from the property line and the proposed Cecil Jones Gravel Pit. I have another well 115' foot from the same property line and proposed gravel pit. I have certified water rights to both wells. Because of the gravel pit proposal, I fear for the quality and quantity of water for my home. One of the reasons I chose to live in Anchor Point was because of the quiet rural community, natural setting, and excellent water. I use water not only for typical residential use, but also for soaking areas around brush piles prior to burning. I am prepared, with a gas-operated pump, to soak my property from this outside well in case of approaching fire, like I did during the March 11 fire. My neighbor has a spring that runs out on the ground year-round to the level of the adjacent muskeg. And he is better prepared than I to protect his property from wildfire. He demonstrated his concern and ability to protect his property and the neighborhood by soaking a firebreak with his pump drawing from this spring. Bill Bache is a retired wildfire fighter from Montana. A change in water table would diminish our ability to protect our properties in case of fire.

I question some statements in the application for a Conditional Land Use Permit. For instance, the application states the water table is 16 foot below ground level, but my well 40 feet north of his property line has water only 6 foot below ground level. The removal of an estimated 4 feet of over burden would yield only two feet of sand and gravel at best before the water table is reached. I suspect water would flow in the hole even higher, inhibiting the ability to mine gravel without dewatering. The potential gravel that could be economically recovered is slight, in my opinion.

Not the entire parcel is usable for gravel because of the presence of natural wetlands, as stated in the application. However a much greater percent of the parcel is wetlands than is depicted on the site plan. The wetlands are readily distinguishable by vegetation cover, and could be easily classified by the Kachemak Bay Research and Reserve. Such a map is in preparation, and soon will be published. The wetlands exist because of close proximity of the water table. I believe a permit from the Corps of Engineers is necessary to disturb wetlands. If the pit were reclaimed using less organic and more porous soil, a less appealing shrubby land cover would result, increasing fire hazard.

Adjacent resident property values will decline, followed by assessed values meaning less property tax income for the Kenai Peninsula Borough. It is true that gravel mining near Anchor Point provides some income for residents, but the proposed pit has minor potential compared with other pits already in operation. Despite the wetlands, the highest and best use of the tract is residential homes. At least three homes could be built on the tract and still maintain the rural appearance and lifestyle Anchor Point residents appreciate. The long-term annual income to the Borough from three homes on this tract far exceeds the income from a 20-acre gravel pit for 10 years followed by a deserted pit or sterile pond for decades.

The Kenai Peninsula has lost so much scenic land cover to the bark beetle kill in the past 6 years. Anchor Point residents recently have watched dramatic changes in landscape because of logging and development. It seems a shame to scrape the remaining standing live spruce, wetland and grassland from another parcel for only marginal returns.

Thank you for considering my opinion on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Ebbert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped "S" and "E".

Steve Ebbert
Anchor Point Resident