

**South Denali Visitor's Center**

**FY2020 Request: \$25,000,000**

**Reference No: 62703**

**AP/AL:** Appropriation

**Project Type:** Parks / Recreation

**Category:** Natural Resources

**Location:** Statewide

**House District:** Statewide (HD 1-40)

**Impact House District:** Statewide (HD 1-40)

**Contact:** Fabienne Peter-Contesse

**Estimated Project Dates:** 07/01/2019 - 06/30/2024

**Contact Phone:** (907)465-2422

**Brief Summary and Statement of Need:**

The South Denali Visitor Center is a critical piece of state park and visitor industry infrastructure. This facility will provide a gateway to Denali State Park that services all demographics of park patrons, while providing a reliable revenue source for this facility and other park operations.

| <b>Funding:</b>    | <u>FY2020</u>       | <u>FY2021</u> | <u>FY2022</u> | <u>FY2023</u> | <u>FY2024</u> | <u>FY2025</u> | <u>Total</u>        |
|--------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1102 AIDEA<br>Rcpt | \$10,200,000        |               |               |               |               |               | \$10,200,000        |
| 1139 AHFC<br>Div   | \$4,500,000         |               |               |               |               |               | \$4,500,000         |
| 1140 AIDEA<br>Div  | \$10,300,000        |               |               |               |               |               | \$10,300,000        |
| <b>Total:</b>      | <b>\$25,000,000</b> | <b>\$0</b>    | <b>\$0</b>    | <b>\$0</b>    | <b>\$0</b>    | <b>\$0</b>    | <b>\$25,000,000</b> |

|   |   |                                       |   |  |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> State Match Required | <input type="checkbox"/> One-Time Project | <input type="checkbox"/> Phased - new | <input type="checkbox"/> Phased - underway  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On-Going |
| 0% = Minimum State Match % Required           |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Amendment    | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Bill |  |

**Operating & Maintenance Costs:**

|                      | <u>Amount</u> | <u>Staff</u> |
|----------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Project Development: | 0             | 0            |
| Ongoing Operating:   | 0             | 0            |
| One-Time Startup:    | 0             | 0            |
| <b>Totals:</b>       | <b>0</b>      | <b>0</b>     |

**Prior Funding History / Additional Information:**

- Sec1 Ch16 SLA2013 P72 L27 SB18 \$7,000,000
- Sec1 Ch17 SLA2012 P125 L32 SB160 \$1,500,000
- Sec1 Ch5 SLA2011 P93 L21 SB46 \$3,000,000
- Sec13 Ch29 SLA2008 P153 L28 SB221 \$8,900,000
- Sec4 Ch30 SLA2007 P100 L9 53 \$1,000,000

**Other Secured Project Funds**

- \$950,000 (Scenic Byway Funds) - Interpretive Center Construction
- \$1,000,000 (Holland America/Princess Cruises donation) - Electrical Extension
- \$49,800 (Recreational Trails Grant) – Curry Ridge Trail
- \$168,300 (Land Water Conservation Fund) – Trails

**Project Description/Justification:**

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Since the 1960s, there has been a shared vision among public land managers in the South Denali region that the area had potential for greater use and development for visitors. The designation of

Denali State Park in 1970 was intended to provide the land base and protections needed for a major public visitor facility. In 2006, Curry Ridge was selected as the preferred site for a South Denali Visitor Center Complex. The long planning history leading to this selection is documented in the Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. The document provides the following vision of the complex:

*This destination facility will serve Alaskans and out-of-state travelers, local school groups and package tours. The vision is for a high-quality facility that offers a range of opportunities for learning and recreating. It will provide visitors of various abilities a chance to experience alpine and subarctic tundra environments and opportunities to view Denali and the Alaska Range.*

*The visitor center and trail system could engage visitors for an hour, half-day or all day. Diverse opportunities (such as interpretation of natural and cultural resources, viewing Denali, short walks, long hikes, educational programs, hands-on exhibits and viewing film) and information about the regional recreational opportunities, safety and emergency assistance will be provided to accommodate diverse visitor interests and background (Final South Denali Implementation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, April 2006).*

After consulting with Alaska Native organizations, the campground was named K'esugi Ken, a Dena'ina name for Curry Ridge where the campground is located. K'esugi Ken means "Base of the Ancient One." In naming the new campground, the state is recognizing the Dena'ina people and their connection to the land. The use of this place name will inspire visitors to learn more about Dena'ina's culture as it relates to the area.

The first new Alaska State Park campground to open in more than 20 years, K'esugi Ken campground, Phase I of the South Denali Visitor Center Complex located had its Grand Opening in May 2017. This completed phase included the design and construction of a campground with 32-RV campsites (all with electrical hookups) and 10 walk-in campsites, two public use cabins, a camp host cabin, a large group camping area, a ranger contact station, an interpretive center, trail network and a 34-mile power extension and upgrade along the Parks Highway. The project was funded with general funds, local and federal grants, and a \$1M donation from Holland America/Princess.

In 2012, the department utilized funds on hand to build the campground and related facilities in order to provide recreational opportunities for Alaskans and guests while creating a revenue stream that could offset the need for general fund dollars to operate the facilities.

Revenue generated from Phase I (RV and tent camping, public use cabins and day use parking) doubled from 2017 to 2018 and is expected to increase each year.

The second phase of the South Denali Visitor Center Complex is the actual visitor's center. The center will be 15,000-16,000 square feet, state-of-the-art visitor center; additional trail infrastructure; and additional road to the existing K'segugi Ken campground and maintenance facility.

Along with providing needed park and visitor industry infrastructure, the visitor center's revenues are projected to pay for the operation of the center and provide net operating revenue to the park system of over \$2 million once the facility is up and running. Infrastructure like this provides significant economic impact to the area as well, by providing direct jobs to those staffing the center, and creating

opportunity for private sector operators in the park to increase their business.

**Completed Work**

**Lower Access Road and Campground** – Construction of the lower access road, the RV campground, the 32 RV sites, day-use parking/trailhead and a one-half-mile loop interpretive hiking trail is complete. The access road and campgrounds have been paved.

**Electrical Extension** - The MEA main line extension and upgrade project is complete. MEA has also completed the service line from the main line extension running up to the ranger contact station. The service line was constructed underground following the general alignment of the access road. The final cost of all the electrical work was approximately \$5.2M, which was \$950k less than original estimates. That amount has been refunded back to the project.

**Ranger Contact Station/Maintenance Shop** – Construction is complete for the nearly 3,900 square foot building which will serve as the operational headquarters for Denali State Park.

**Walk-In Campground and Group Area** – The 10-site walk-in campground and group use area is complete and in use.

**Public Use Cabins and Camp Host Cabin** – Two public use cabins and a camp host cabin (also a public use cabin during shoulder seasons) have been constructed and are in operation. The cabins are log construction with two measuring 16-feet by 20-feet and the third at 19-feet by 30-feet.

**Trails** – Approximately five miles of trails have been completed throughout the facility. The connector trails around the campgrounds, ranger contact station, and public use cabins are 6’ to 8’ wide with gravel surface. The trail heading up to Curry Ridge is bare earth trail with tread width ranging between 2 and 6 feet.

**Interpretive Pavilion** – The 3,300-square foot open air interpretive pavilion was completed and opened to the public in spring of 2017. The open-concept structure showcases interpretive panels that highlight the natural and cultural resources of the area, as well as the recreational opportunities available at Denali State Park. Interpretive talks at the center are conducted in partnership with the National Park Service.

| Line Item              | Amount            |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1000-Personal Services | 2,300,000         |
| 2000 – Travel          | 100,000           |
| 3000 - Services        | 22,500,000        |
| 4000 - Commodities     | 100,000           |
| 7000 - Grants          | 0                 |
| <b>Total Request</b>   | <b>25,000,000</b> |

Project will fund existing positions:

- 10-5153 – Engineer/Architect IV
- 10-5128 – Environmental Impact Analyst III
- 10-5045 – Engineer/Architect II

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- 10-5273 – Engineer/Architect II
- 10-5263 – Engineer Assistant II
- 10-5032 – Engineer Assistant II
- 10-5123 – Engineer Assistant III
- 10-5030 – Engineer Assistant I
- 10-5245 – Engineer Assistant I
- 10-5056 – Natural Resource Manager II
- 10-5250 – Publications Specialist II
- 10-5261 – Natural Resource Specialist II
- 10-5266 - Publications Specialist I