

PO Box 85
Gustavus, AK 99826
January 7, 2024

Ms. Ivy Spohnholz
Director
The Nature Conservancy in Alaska
By email: : ivy.spohnholz@tnc.org

Dear Ms. Spohnholz:

Subject: Assuring the future of the Gustavus Forelands Preserve Safely under TNC Ownership

We write to you today to express our great appreciation for the partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the community of Gustavus Alaska over two decades in securing the superb natural biological resources of the Gustavus Forelands Preserve. Two decades after we worked with our neighbors to effect the transfer of lands from the Alaska Mental Health Trust to a robust and sustainable conservation status, it is time to rededicate ourselves to the continuing shared vision and partnership with TNC that made it all possible. On countless occasions we as a couple have remarked with pride that in Gustavus TNC chose to make their largest land purchase in Alaska—over 4000 acres. (It’s one of the reasons we have continued to be proud members of TNC.) It happened because Gustavus residents understood and appreciated the unique character of our wild shorelines and uplands with their abundant biodiversity and recreational opportunities. We all realized that when large tracts of State land here were transferred to the reconstituted Alaska Mental Health Trust that those lands were at risk of development or logging to fulfill the mission of the Trust. We shared the vision that they should instead remain wild, free, and publically accessible long into the future. To our enduring benefit, TNC believed in our commitment and partnered with us to achieve our vision through the 2004 conservation purchase and continuing stewardship since then. We are especially grateful for the hard work and dedication of TNC’s local Preserve Manager, Hank Lentfer for building support and assuring protection of the natural resources under TNC management here.

Our community vision statement, read at the opening of each City Council meeting, begins: “We envision a distinctive community that prospers while and by protecting our natural resources.” How similar it is to TNC’s *Strategy for Alaska* beginning with “We envision a future Alaska in which people and nature thrive.” The lands now under TNC protection as the Gustavus Forelands Preserve demonstrate both visions. They are material to the fabric of our community and individual lives. They are a landscape-level expression of our community’s appreciation for the natural capital that sustains our lifestyles and economy. The Preserve is a

priceless legacy to be conveyed intact to the stewardship of future generations for whom these lands will be ever more exceptional in a challenged world.

The Conservancy's April 2004 Real Estate Project Abstract and Resolution document for the Gustavus Forelands details the outstanding nature of the lands and clearly records the major involvement of Gustavus Community members, many of whom are qualified scientists, in documenting the biological resources and securing the land transfer. We need not detail those years of work but suffice to say that Gustavus residents are heavily invested in the Preserve and continue to be strong partners with TNC in their continuing stewardship. The document clearly states that the community, through the Gustavus Community Association and its successor the incorporated (2004) City of Gustavus, are to have a strong continuing role in that stewardship. If there is to be any transfer of the lands from TNC ownership the City of Gustavus is best qualified and positioned to take ownership to reinforce the original intents of the conservation purchase.

Since incorporation in April 2004, just as the Preserve purchase was being finalized, the City of Gustavus has matured and is now more qualified as a partner, or co-manager, with TNC in assuring the sustained protection of the unique resources here. In line with our vision statement environmental quality and performance are ever-present features of City of Gustavus programs and land management. The City helped finance the Nagoonberry Trail on TNC property. The City upgraded the road to the trail head and improved the parking area. The trail is popular with residents and visitors year round. The City operates a Disposal and Recycling Center and Class 3 permitted landfill considered a model for small towns in Alaska. We worked with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources to co-manage over 30 acres of state lands on both sides of the State dock as a community beach park. Those lands are central to the TNC shoreline tracts important for wildlife and other values. City management of the Beach Park has ended off-road motor vehicle use along the shore that connected to the TNC tracts. The City partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife service to eliminate fish passage barriers at culverts under eight City Roads replacing them with timber bridges over salmon streams in Gustavus. The City advocates with the Alaska Legislature to complete the transfer of the Foreland Parcels 1 and 2 to formal inclusion in the Dude Creek Critical Habitat area as intended by the TNC purchase. The City Public Library offers environmental programs and displays. Upon entering the library visitors are immediately drawn to the overhead articulated orca skeleton swimming in front of a newly-completed background marine mural. Our school emphasizes field environmental education on TNC lands. The Gustavus Community Center each summer features field outings on TNC lands educating the public on subjects from lichens to bears. We are proudly a community with outstanding environmental skills and sensitivities and a deep relationship to the place that is our home.

We, the undersigned, having supported protection of the Gustavus Forelands Preserve since it was first envisioned, feel that the future of the lands, as intended in the original purchase, is best assured with

continuing ownership by The Nature Conservancy. The model of the Conservancy as a private owner of conservation lands is a proven alternative to governmental ownership. It contributes vitally to retention of a significant portion of the Earth in natural condition. To those ends, the protected lands here must never be transferred to ownership by a non-conservation entity outside Gustavus. However if TNC ever finds it necessary to make a transfer, the City of Gustavus is the most capable and best-positioned entity now to assume responsibility for the conservation unit. Regardless of the specific path, it's time for the Conservancy and the City of Gustavus to revisit the intents of the 2004 Real Estate Project Abstract and Resolution document and rededicate our organizations to a management partnership that will assure protection of the lands for many decades into the future. Fortunately many of the ecological specialists who worked on the original purchase are still with us in the community. The intervening years have brought many more with expertise and perspective who are ready for the work. We hope the Conservancy will be our partner in managing the Gustavus Forelands Preserve for many decades to come.

With gratitude,

Karen R. Colligan-Taylor, PhD
Former Gustavus Mayor

Michael S. Taylor, MS
Former Mayor and Current Councilmember

[Signed copy to follow in the US mail.]