

MAKE YOUR COMMENTS COUNT!

Public comments are an essential part of the planning process. Planners depend on public comments for information about state lands and resources, and about how Alaskans want to see state lands used. Planners seek out public comments to help develop and revise each stage of the plan. As a result of public meetings and requests for public comments, however, there often are several hundred letters, calls, and comments to review. Here are some suggestions of how to make your comments stand out and get full consideration.

1. Be brief. More of your comments will be recorded as you've written or spoken them if there are not a lot of extra words between important statements. Reviewers are better able to respond to your concerns if they are well-organized and briefly stated.

2. Be specific. Make it clear what you want. It is more effective to say "change the proposed park at Green Lake to a subdivision" than to say "Sell more land." A specific request also forces a direct response to your proposal and is therefore more likely to produce results.

3. Explain your request. Giving support for your opinions increases the likelihood to having some or all of your concerns met. For example, instead of saying, "Drop this disposal," it is more effective to say "The disposal in Unit 6 should be dropped because 1) residents nearby use this area for

firewood and they already use as much timber as can be harvested on a sustained yield basis; 2) the little lake in the south half is an important recreation area and 3) the view from the ridge is unique, is used by local residents, and should be kept in public ownership."

4. Make it easy for the reviewer. Give the reviewer the information needed to understand your comment. Include dates and locations if they are relevant. If you are referring to a written document, include the page and paragraph your comments refer to so the reviewer can locate it quickly and accurately.

5. Know your subject. If you are commenting on part of a document, make sure you have read that part of the document so that your comments are relevant and accurate.

6. Use your own words. If numerous letters come in with the same text, it is easy to pass them off as copies of a standard letter rather than considering each message individually. Letters and comments are not tallied as votes. A letter in your words shows more effort and thought, so it appears to the reviewer that you have a greater level of concern about the issue.

7. Be honest and realistic. Distortions of facts or intentional misstatements are easily dismissed and may cause the reviewer to question the accuracy of your other statements. Requests that are not legal or feasible also reduce the credibility of your comments.

8. Be pleasant. Reviewers are human too. If a statement begins with a positive

comment or a note of some action you can support, it makes the reviewer *want* to listen.

9. Write legibly or type. Your comment won't be effective if it can't be read.

10. Make personal contact. If the reviewer can identify a face with a comment, he/she is more likely to remember it. The reviewer also may be more likely to keep in contact with the commenter, for example, if a point needs clarification.

11. Participate! Above all, your concerns will only be known if you speak up at meetings or write or call the staff. Letters or a written copy of oral testimony are often the best way to ensure that there is a written record of your comment and that your ideas are recorded exactly as you intended them. In addition, higher-level decision makers often attend public meetings, especially meetings on controversial issues, so it is a good way to tell them your concerns directly. Finally, the press often covers public meetings, so your views may get additional publicity.

For more information, please contact:

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