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COMMENTS ON JPARC DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Modernization and Enhancement of Ranges, Airspace, and Training Areas in the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex Alaska (JPARC). The DEIS presents a comprehensive look at the environmental effects of expanding and modernizing JPARC to address technological advances in military equipment and systems, advances in combat tactics and techniques, a continued need for diversified, efficient and realistic training and the need to maximize scarce resources by maximizing joint training in difficult financial times. I have heard from key stakeholders that the DEIS is a high quality environmental document and the DEIS team is to be commended for their efforts.

As the comment period on the DEIS closes my office has not been given the opportunity to review the comments submitted by stakeholders. Accordingly I will reserve judgment on the various alternatives presented by the DEIS at this time. I do believe, however, that the "No Action" alternative should not be adopted. The world class JPARC is a key attribute of Alaska's value to the military in the 21st Century. No place else in America does the military have the opportunity to conduct state of the art training in diverse terrains without risk of encumbrance.

Alaska has been proud to share its lands and airspace with the military for generations. However, it is important for our military leaders to appreciate that this is an earned privilege rather than a right. Military operations must be conducted in harmony with the needs of other uses and users of Alaska's lands and airspace. General aviation is particularly important in Alaska as a means of commerce, subsistence, recreation and emergency transportation. In preparing the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) every effort should be undertaken to harmonize mission requirements and community needs in order that user conflicts be avoided or mitigated to the maximum extent feasible.

Alaskans stand among the most patriotic people in America and have long been willing to sacrifice personal convenience in order to ensure that our military is the best trained and best equipped fighting force in the world. Alaskans have a long track record of supporting our military families like none other.

For decades the military has proven to be a good partner through its significant year-round contributions to Alaska's economy. In recent months, as the Interior Alaska community has been forced to come to grips with the prospect of a devastating possible downsizing of Eielson Air Force Base, this longstanding trust has been tested.

I fully expect that the people of Alaska will once again rise to support the military's needs in JPARC. However it is also appropriate that the military provide Alaskans with a modicum of certainty that in return our Armed Forces will continue to be good stewards of Alaska's economy.

Over the next few months, as the DEIS team reviews stakeholder comments and formulates a FEIS leading to a Record of Decision the opportunity to rebuild the critical social contract between Alaskans and their Armed Forces presents anew. I sincerely hope that our military leaders take advantage of the upcoming opportunity to expand and modernize JPARC in harmony with Alaska's values and the way of life we hold dear.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator