

**SUBJECT:** INFORMING THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH ASSEMBLY OF THE INTENT OF ADMINISTRATION TO HIRE A SEASONAL CREW OF SAWYERS TO CUT DOWN HAZARD TREES ON BOROUGH-OWNED LAND.

**AGENDA OF:** December 1, 2020

**ASSEMBLY ACTION:**

*presented to the Assembly 12-1-20*  
*(Signature)*

**MANAGER RECOMMENDATION:** For information only.

**APPROVED BY** GEORGE HAYS, <sup>for</sup> ACTING BOROUGH MANAGER: *(Signature)*

| Route To: | Department/Individual          | Initials           | Remarks                              |
|-----------|--------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|
|           | Originator                     | <i>EK</i>          |                                      |
|           | Community Development Director | <i>EP</i>          |                                      |
|           | Planning & Land Use Director   | <i>(Signature)</i> | <i>A. Strawn</i><br><i>11/9/2020</i> |
|           | Emergency Services Director    | <i>KB</i>          |                                      |
|           | Finance Director               | <i>(Signature)</i> |                                      |
|           | Borough Attorney               | <i>(Signature)</i> |                                      |
|           | Borough Clerk                  | <i>(Signature)</i> |                                      |

**ATTACHMENT (S) :** None

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:**

Borough administration intends to hire four, 1000-hour employees to form a saw crew that will focus on clearing firebreaks and addressing hazard trees on borough-owned land. The saw crew will construct firebreaks on borough property with dense stands of beetle-kill spruce in residential areas. The firebreaks will consist of a gap in the trees to create a barrier to slow or stop a fire.

In addition, borough property used for recreation, such as the Alcantra Sports Complex, have an increasing number of hazard trees that pose a threat to public safety. Hazard trees include beetle-

kill spruce as well as over-mature or dead birch and cottonwood. These trees have a tendency to fall in unpredictable directions and present a threat to public safety. Hazard trees near trails, parking lots, and neighboring residential property will be targeted by the saw crew.

Downed trees will be cut to manageable lengths, both to comply with the Alaska Forest Resources Protection Act, as well as to make the wood available for use as firewood.

Saw crew will prioritize their work on properties with high concentrations of beetle-kill spruce and hazard trees, in close proximity to populated areas, and high levels of public use.

Over-mature birch and beetle-kill spruce are not always a good source of firewood due to rot and decomposition. Given the unknown quantity, value, and proximity of public access to firewood produced by the saw crew's work, administration recommends waiving the permit and fee requirements for the public to collect the trees cut down by the saw crew as firewood. Administration will present the Assembly with legislation to waive the permit and fee for one year to allow the public to gather firewood after the saw crew is finished working.

The Community Development Department solicited quotes from local tree service companies to address the public safety threat and fire hazard posed by the beetle-kill and over-mature trees at Alcantra Sports Complex. The cost for a contractor to address the beetle-kill and hazard trees at the Alcantra Sports Complex is \$175,000.

The Borough Saw Crew wages and equipment are estimated to cost \$110,000. This initial crew and effort will be paid for primarily with personnel funds that came available due to vacancies and staff turnover. Cutting down the hazard trees at the Alcantra Sports Complex is estimated to take a couple weeks. That will leave the majority of the winter season for the saw crew to work on other borough land such as the Crevasse Moraine area, Government Peak Recreation Area, and Settlers Bay Coastal Park. In other words, for far less money, a much greater acreage can be treated by hiring a seasonal saw crew as opposed to hiring a contractor.