



## **MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** March 24, 2025

**TO:** Assembly Finance Committee

**FROM:** Alexandra Pierce, Visitor Industry Director

**SUBJECT:** Supplemental Funding to Support Mendenhall Services

On February 14, thirty-one federal employees were laid off at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) leaving one staffer dedicated to the Mendenhall Visitor's Center remaining. Since that time, local U.S. Forest Service (USFS) leadership have scrambled to develop and implement a backup plan. CBJ, USFS, and organizations with operating agreements at the MGRA (Tlingit & Haida and Discovery Southeast) settled on a plan that would keep the Visitor's Center open half time (7 hours/day) and maintain a small staff presence during the remaining "normal" operational hours to accommodate tour operations without the Visitor's Center by pulling staff from other areas of the USFS to cover shifts. This would have required external funding to supplement staff time by providing funds to organizations with operating agreements.

Fortunately, on March 20, CBJ staff received confirmation that the thirty-one positions connected to Mendenhall operations have been reinstated. As of the writing of this memo, roughly half have agreed to return. We do not know if the USFS will be permitted to recruit for the unfilled positions. The current staffing will allow the MGRA to open on a full schedule this summer. Employees will still be pulled from other areas of the local USFS, and other services may be impacted. USFS staff have been notified that additional cuts may be coming over the next several months.

Due to the tumultuous and uncertain nature of this situation, staff requests a \$200,000 appropriation of State Commercial Passenger Vessel fees to the Manager's Office to be used as or if needed to support local organizations currently staffing the MGRA in the event of additional cuts or other unforeseen circumstances. Ideally, these funds could be used to fill existing positions by allowing partner organizations to hire terminated employees.

Staff remains hopeful that we will not need to spend these funds and that the MGRA will operate consistently and successfully all year. However, with a full summer tourism season expected, and so many local businesses dependent on the MGRA, it is important that we have a secure backup plan that can be implemented quickly.

### **Recommended Committee Action:**

Forward a \$200,000 appropriation of State Commercial Passenger Vessel fees to the Manager's Office for supplementary services at the Mendenhall Glacier for introduction at the April 7 full Assembly meeting.