

## Correspondence



### **RABBIT CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCCC)**

A Forum for Respectful Communication & Community Relations

**1057 West Fireweed Lane, Suite 100 / Anchorage, AK 99503**



February 13, 2026

Dear Mayor LaFrance, Chief Schrage, and Operations Manager McDonald:

As you know, the Rabbit Creek Community Council (RCCC) has been deeply concerned about the devastating threats that wildfire poses to our area, as well as numerous other Hillside and forested areas in our Municipality. We have previously written to request swift funding and implementation of several wildfire prevention, protection, and response measures (e.g., March 3, 2025, letter to Chief Schrage; November 17, 2025, letter to Mayor LaFrance). We appreciated participating in development of the 2025 Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) and the access that provides to qualify for grants. Now it is time to put that plan into action with prompt implementation of prevention, protection, and response measures that we and others have been recommending, as follows.

Wildfire danger in 2026 will continue to be most concerning, if not quite as much as it was in 2025, for the Municipality of Anchorage (Muni) (according to current US Weather Service models). Regrettably, the Muni's recent CWPP does not adequately address or call for three essential protection, prevention, and response elements requested by RCCC and others:

- 1) Evacuation Notification Systems: Those identified in the CWPP are not adequate, and the CWPP calls for no action in the near future to remedy that situation. Numerous avenues and equipment to correct this deficiency are currently available and readily accessed. For example, systems using *free* apps, such as [Watch Duty](#), are now in effective use in Orange County, California.
- 2) Community Evacuation Training: The CWPP provides no coordinated plan for when or how residents should evacuate when a dangerous wildfire is nearby. Years ago, Anchorage localized community training efforts, but these unplanned and uncoordinated efforts proved inadequate. Without community-wide Anchorage Fire Department (AFD) and Office of Emergency Management (OEM) pre-planning and coordination of training, such localized efforts will not be successful - even with involvement of a nearby AFD station.
- 3) Fire Detection and Alert Systems: The CWPP relies on happenstance observation and 911 calls which will result in critical delays in dispatch and arrival at fire scenes by both ground-based forces and State Department of Forestry (DOF) aerial support. Detection systems exist and have been effectively used in the Lower 48 and can be integrated

with drone suppression equipment. Purveyors are ready and able to contract to provide such to the Municipality ahead of the fire season, given *adequate lead time*.

We are also concerned about crucial deficits in State DOF Aerial Fire Suppression capacity, including ones which have emerged since the 2025 fire season. We recommend that these deficits be addressed:

- 1) Limited Fixed-Wing Craft: There is only one *assigned* and *Palmer-based* fixed-wing craft; historically, there have been two. Purchasing a new craft through normal State procurement channels and procedures will delay delivery until about July of the 2027 fire season. Note – this is a new deficit.
- 2) Low Numbers of Contracted Rotary Craft: DOF rental funding for rotary craft currently allows for only a small number of craft, to be moved around in Southcentral Alaska as fires break out and need support.
- 3) DOF Funding for Muni-Dedicated Rotary Craft: Is currently not available. This means all DOF in-state rented craft could be hours away from Anchorage if an urgent need arises. Pre-season contracted rental for a Muni-dedicated craft is infinitely less expensive, as well as *far more* effective, than relying on out-of-state, perhaps days-away or unavailable contracted craft, given use and the trends in extended wildfire seasons in the lower 48 and Alaska. (Out-of-state contracted craft would cost about \$50,000 per day.)
- 4) Drone Systems for Early Fire Suppression: These have not been included in wildfire prevention packages or the CWPP as they should be. Such systems (which can include integral fire detection) are available at a much lower cost to either the DOF or AFD than fixed wing or rotary craft.

A response issue which needs to be addressed is ensuring there is adequate water for ground-based fire suppression. The Anchorage, Eagle River, and Girdwood hillside areas are plagued with both inadequate hydrants and lack of hydrants or remote water sources.

Hydrant Inadequacy: The CWPP mentions that hydrant water pressure and supply have proven to be inadequate, but there is no citation regarding a systematic review of hydrant supply lines, which could be used to identify water needs. The CWPP suggested solution is for the Muni to enlarge water supply lines to provide more capacity. We are concerned that the cost and feasibility for such a project are unaffordable and unrealistic. The first step to solving this problem would be a review of the adequacy of hydrant supply lines.

Remote Area Water Inadequacy: The CWPP calls for use of “water tenders” to supply water for ground-based firefighting in areas lacking water hydrants. This approach by itself simply does not work:

- 1) Tenders have sometimes proven-unsuccessful in extinguishing fires due to:

- a. Often time-consuming set-up for their use.
  - b. Insufficient tender-supplied water, hydrants that are too far away for resupplies, or limited above ground water storage supplies.
  - c. Lack of adequate water pressure in tenders or portable water tanks.
- 2) Tenders Cannot be Adequately and Safely Deployed:
- a. Remote Area Access—roadless areas do not allow access for either tenders or accessory equipment access.
  - b. Narrow, Steep and Serpentine Roads—Use of Ground-Based Equipment
    - \* Is unsafe for fire-fighters; and
    - \* Blocks emergency egress for residents.

We are also concerned about the liability risks to State and Muni governments and local utilities. These entities can be *held liable* for damages and deaths (e.g., recent judgements against California’s Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas & Electric), if known deficits are not corrected before the 2026 wildfire season. Certainly Anchorage, with its major economic, social, health care, utility, and tourism assets and services, must not be allowed to be ravaged by even a “small” wildfire. We believe that immediate and effective Detection and Dedicated Aerial Suppression Support would be critical to preventing such a catastrophic event. Such support for Anchorage is *crucial* to avoid all the massive “costs” of any fire that could “go wild.”

## Requests

The RCCC recognizes the limitations in Muni and State budgets that complicate their ability to satisfy Anchorage’s critical needs in the areas of wildfire prevention, protection, and response. Therefore, in addition to whatever relief they can provide for our requests below, we ask that the Muni and State work with our Alaska Congressional Delegation to provide the funding and resources we outline below.

- 1) Evacuation Notification Systems: Address and correct deficits in early and effective evacuation, education, and notice procedures, with preseason drills led by OEM and AFD, for both:
  - a. Multi-Agency Coordinated Tabletop Evacuation Drills, and
  - b. Agency Led On-Site Drills engaging involved communities in hands-on education and “practice exercises” in all aspects of a “real” evacuation.
- 2) Fire Detection, and Alert Systems: Access and put into place effective Muni-wide early fire detection and alert systems. Tie the detection system into alert systems that will immediately dispatch to accurately located fire sites by Muni Ground Forces, Drone Suppression Equipment, and DOF Aerial Suppression Equipment, as appropriate.
- 3) DOF Wildfire-Fighting Aircraft:

- a. Provide immediate funding for 2026 DOF replacement or repair of Fixed Wing Aerial Support Equipment.
  - b. Immediately begin DOF procurement of Dedicated Aerial Suppression Equipment for use in the 2026 wildfire season.
- 4) Inadequate Water for Ground-Based Fire Fighting: Initiate a review of water supplies with the goal of identifying and constructing new, or augmenting existing, water supply locations and storage systems. This should cover both areas where there are hydrants as well as areas lacking hydrants where tenders and other water sources would be used. Consider extension of water lines to supply new hydrants in areas where they do not exist. The need to assess and plan for the strategic addition of water sources could be complimentary to a CAPSIS request to the Legislature that RCCC will submit this year, in coordination with other Community Councils.
- 5) Time Consuming Set-Up for Tender Based Fire-Fighting Water Supply: *Immediately* institute *rigorous training* in the set-up and use of continuous and uninterrupted water supply systems in areas lacking hydrants.

We believe that liability risks, and the associated devastating costs, for State and Municipal Governments would be limited by placing paramount importance on implementing the five actions recommended above, ahead of the 2026 wildfire season. At a minimum, working with our Alaska Congressional Delegation to obtain support for these actions could help both ensure they occur and reduce some liability. While recommendation three, above, would require extensive funding, the others should be more readily available for implementation now.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and recommendations. We would be happy to meet with you and others involved in protecting our city and our people from the devastating impacts of wildfires.

Sincerely,

Tim Alderson, Chair

cc: Amanda Loach, Emergency Management Director  
Alaska Congressional Delegation  
Cathy Giessel and James Kaufman, State Senate  
Ky Holland, State House  
Julie Coulombe and Calvin Schrage, State House  
Zac Johnson and Keith McCormick, Anchorage Assembly  
Susanne Fleek-Green, Chief of Staff, Anchorage Mayor  
Troy Weiss, WUI CAT