

September 9, 2013

To: Haines Borough Planning Commission
From: Ral West, Trustee, West Family Trust
Re: Conditional Use Permit Application for Paradise West

For your consideration in determining your approval of our application for a Conditional Use Permit, to allow vacation rentals at Paradise West on Mud Bay Road, I would like to offer the following historical perspective regarding this property.

My father, Charles B. (Chuck) West, purchased the property known as "Paradise West" on Paradise Cove (Mud Bay Road) in the early 1960's. My father owned a cruise-tour company (Westours) which brought thousands of visitors to Haines via small cruise ships and highway motorcoaches. He was a well-known pioneer of the Alaska tourism industry, and in fact is commonly referred to as the "father of Alaska tourism" or "Mr. Alaska".

While my father loved all of Alaska with a passion, Haines held a very special place in his heart. In fact, it was his favorite place in the world. Because he wanted to spend more time at his property, he hired John Carlson to build a log cabin at Paradise West. Chuck's vision was to create a wilderness retreat, a place where he could relax and soak up the peace and scenic beauty of Paradise Cove. The cabin site was carefully chosen to enjoy the best views of Davidson and Rainbow Glaciers across Chilkat Inlet, and be as inconspicuous as possible from Paradise Cove, as well as from Mud Bay Road. He wanted seclusion and privacy. He also wanted to preserve as much as possible of the natural environment around the cabin, choosing to build around trees rather than cut them down. The cabin was completed in 1983.

In the beginning there was no running water, only a "2-holer" outhouse (no toilet), and no electricity. A wood stove was used for heat and cooking, and water was hauled in via 5-gallon jugs. The driveway stopped 200 yards short of the cabin, so vehicles could not drive right to it. It was remote, rustic, and natural, and that's the way he wanted it. This was his own "paradise".

Over the years, gradual improvements were made, and John Carlson was involved with every aspect of the cabin's evolution. A small generator supplied power during certain times of the day (or night). A wooden water tank was built to store rain and run-off water, and its non-potable water was piped to the cabin via a hose and pump. An electric composting toilet was added, as well as a shower. The driveway was extended to reach the front door. Eventually, phone and power lines brought "civilization" to the cabin. My father resisted this "progress", but as he was getting older, it was important for him to have the communication and the conveniences. Finally, as he approached his late 80's, and walking was quite difficult for him, he directed John Carlson to add a "real" plumbed toilet and a septic system. This was around 2003.

Over the years, my father brought many friends and family members to the cabin. He loved sharing his love of this spot with others. He was so proud of his "Paradise West" and he wanted others to appreciate it, as well. The hand-made log dining table was his guest book; visitors signed it with a permanent felt marker. Many members of the Haines community have added their names to this table.

In 2005, at nearly 91 years of age, my father's health was failing. He spent 5 weeks in a hospital in Seattle. He knew his end was near, and he wanted only one thing to go to Haines, to his Paradise West. A dear family friend supplied the use of a private jet to take him to Juneau, where we chartered a plane to take him the rest of the way to Haines. Most of our family accompanied him to Paradise West, where we witnessed him "come back to life" as he relished the place that gave him the most joy. Within a few days of his arrival, he passed away, in his cabin, surrounded by his family. The community of Haines was most helpful and gracious to us during this difficult time.

My father established the West Family Trust in his Will, for the purpose of holding this property for the enjoyment of several more generations of the West family. The trust was set to be implemented upon the death of my mother, Marguerite West. She passed away in November of 2010. I was named the Trustee, and it became my job to care for and maintain this property for the benefit of the family. It has become apparent to me that the maintenance needs of the property will soon exceed the resources supplied by my father. The West Family Trust has no source of income other than interest income, which has dropped to next to nothing in recent years. My father never anticipated that.

As Trustee, I recognize the need for some income to allow the Trust to continue to care for the property, and I also know how important it is to keep this property in our family. I have decided to turn to the industry that my father helped create, fueled by his desire to share the majesty and wonder of Alaska with the "outside world". I know that he would be proud to share Paradise West with others, so that they may enjoy and appreciate its special scenic and natural beauty. Allowing Paradise West to become a vacation rental property will thus not only be in keeping with my father's passion for this place, it will also provide a revenue stream that we will use to maintain and care for this gem of a property, so that it retains its wilderness character and charm.

I think it is important that you know that the revenue generated by a vacation rental program at Paradise West will stay right here in Haines... it will be used exclusively to ensure the property receives the proper maintenance and care, and provide for improved amenities for visitors (and our family) during the years to come. Having been raised in the visitor industry, I fully appreciate how important it is to provide a quality product that will meet the needs of the market, as well as the safety and comfort of the guests. Our future plans will take into account measures designed to minimize fire danger, protect the environment, and increase comfort and convenience, while still retaining the wilderness retreat nature of the property.

I hope that you will grant the Conditional Use Permit so that we may share Paradise West with visitors, and protect and preserve it long into the future. Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ral T. West". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ral T. West

