



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES

October 20th, 2022

The Honorable Chris Magnus
Commissioner, U.S. Customs & Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C., 20004

Dear Commissioner Magnus,

We write to seek restoration of the operating hours for U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) of the Porthill Port of Entry (Porthill) on Idaho State Highway 1 from 5:00 PM PST to 11:00 PM PST. This port of entry serves as a vital economic, social, and cultural passage for North Idaho and the Canadian provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. During the pandemic, many services requiring cross-border travel were curtailed due to COVID-19. However, as of October 1, 2022, Canada no longer requires proof of COVID-19 vaccination, pre-entry testing, or quarantine upon entering the country. These changes will undoubtedly increase traffic across the border in the coming months.

For almost three years, COVID-19 related restrictions hampered businesses, particularly those on or near the U.S. border. Businesses in Boundary County, Idaho, British Columbia, and Alberta depend on the Porthill Port of Entry to ensure that cross-border employment, trade, and commerce can occur without interruption. Now that Canada has removed all COVID-19 entry restrictions, CBP should consider restoring the pre-pandemic operating hours for the Porthill Port of Entry to ensure the regional economy can continue its recovery.

Today, Canadians who work on the U.S. side of the border must end their work prematurely to return home. Canadian shoppers visiting north Idaho are discouraged from fully engaging in commerce, and companies that utilize resources from Canadian mills have had to reduce production. Canadian and American companies in the region, many of which are small businesses, depend on the cross-border travel of employees and goods. The reduced hours at Porthill have forced these firms to drastically alter their business models, making it harder for them to operate in an already difficult economic climate.

Troublingly, there is not a viable alternative border crossing for travelers in the Porthill region. Driving to the Eastport Port of Entry from Porthill adds 1.5 hours to a round trip. The additional travel time and fuel costs suppress recreational travel and are particularly harmful to the small businesses that drive north Idaho's economy. More importantly, the hours at Porthill are making it difficult for Boundary Community Hospital to employ Canadians, further exacerbating their employee shortages, and affect patient appointments that occur later in the day.

Beyond justified fears of economic and commercial disruption, the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho has expressed concerns that the reduced hours will restrict meaningful access to their sister tribe, the Lower Kootenay Band, in British Columbia. Shorter hours impose a hardship on Tribal members planning and attending family events, such as weddings and funerals. It also hurts efforts to participate in cultural events that involve Tribal members on both sides of the border. Given the efforts of President Biden's Administration to address Tribal concerns, CBP should consider restoring the 11:00 PM closure time at the Porthill Port of Entry.

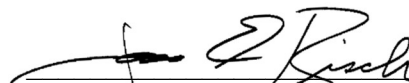
As the country recovers from the effects of COVID-19 and related restrictions, Idaho, Boundary County, and the surrounding communities must be able to rely on the pre-pandemic operating hours for Porthill. Even in Fiscal Year 2019, Boundary County noted that 20,000 trips occurred through the port of entry, demonstrating consistent traffic through the site. It is imperative to restore normal relations with our neighbors to the north, both to provide economic value to Idaho and Canadian businesses and to restore cultural ties to the Kootenai Tribe and Lower Kootenay Band.

With the responsibilities delegated to Customs & Border Protection, we appreciate your reevaluation of the hours at the Porthill Port of Entry site. In April 2020, CBP pledged to return to previous operating hours at Porthill once the COVID-19 emergency subsided. Now that Canada has eliminated its pandemic-related restrictions, we strongly encourage you to restore a closure time of 11:00 PM at Porthill to provide consistency for the communities and businesses in the United States that depend on this site for travel, commerce, cultural purposes, and more.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,


Senator Mike Crapo, ID


Senator James E. Risch, ID


Congressman Russ Fulcher, ID-01