

EAGLE RIVER PLANNING UNIT

SETTING

Dominated by the broad U-shaped valley of Eagle River, this planning unit spans the park from east to west. Composed of Eagle River and its main tributaries, the South Fork of Eagle River, and Meadow, Raven, and Camp creeks, the area contains landscapes ranging from broad flat valley bottoms to rugged mountains and glaciers. Eagle River meanders back and forth across its broad flood plain leaving numerous old channels and gravel bars. Above the flood plain, generally 500 feet (150 meters) in elevation, the area is heavily forested with white spruce-birch forests. Steep-sided mountains rise abruptly from the valley floor, and a definite brush line of willow and alder grows above the forested areas. Yet, at higher elevations, tundra, bare rock and ice dominate.

At the far end of the valley, about 24 miles (38.5 kilometers) upstream from the community of Eagle River (population approximately 15,000), one of the park's major valley glaciers winds downhill to an elevation of about 900 feet (270 meters). At the glacier's terminus lies a lake formed about 30 years ago, referred to locally as Glacier Lake. The glacier itself is part of the park's larger glacial system to the south and east where higher elevations and dramatically increased levels of precipitation feed snow into the system which sustains the lower-lying portions of the glaciers.

Approximately 4 miles (23.5 kilometers) upstream from Eagle River and the Glenn Highway, the site of an 800 acre (325 hectares) fire which burned in 1976 has created the opportunity for interpretive programs focusing on plant succession and moose browse.

From Anchorage, this unit of the park is reached by traveling approximately 10 miles (16 kilometers) north on the Glenn Highway. Access to the South Fork of Eagle River is gained by turning onto Hiland Drive and proceeding up the valley. The main fork of Eagle River and its tributaries are reached by turning into the community of Eagle River and then continuing along the Eagle River Road into the park.

In the South Fork a controversy exists over the legal status of the road as a public access through private lands. Prior to this controversy the valley was used as a regular hiking and cross country skiing area. Limited numbers of snowmachiners also used the area when there was sufficient snow depth.

Adjacent to Eagle River lie numerous tributaries, many of them coming out of hanging valleys whose waters fall precipitously into the main drainage. During breakup and after periods of heavy rains, several waterfalls burst into short-lived action. Field observations note that many of these high, remote side drainages provide shelter for the Dall sheep found within the area. A small mountain goat population inhabits the more precipitous terrain of the upper drainage.

Eagle River's South Fork valley represents significant opportunities within the unit due to its large size and numerous attractions. At the end of the valley lie Eagle and Symphony Lakes. Eagle Lake is milky colored while Symphony Lake has a clear deep crystal blue color creating a striking contrast. Also within the valley are several rock glaciers which are geologic forms composed of a moving unit of rock and ice.

Within the unit the one item of historic significance is the well-known Iditarod Trail. Used primarily during the gold rush era of Alaska, some 21 miles (34.7 kilometers) of trail winds through the park. In the area of Crow Pass, at the park's southern

edge, many remnants of gold mining activities can be easily seen by hikers and skiers. Winter use of the Crow Pass area is dangerous, as it is susceptible to avalanches.

EXISTING USES AND TRENDS

Recreational use in the main Eagle River valley is considered heavy although exact figures are difficult to establish because of the lack of defined access points along the 12 miles (20 kilometers) of road. Throughout its length, people regularly stop to seek out the nearby woods, the river, and ponds. Many residents of Eagle River merely have to walk across the road to do so.

Paradise Haven, a privately owned and operated establishment, provides parking for hikers, skiers, and snow machiners who use the park. During the summer months, people seek out areas along the river for launching their canoes and kayaks. Field observations by park rangers indicate the possibility of locating several launch and take-out points along the river to facilitate this use.

The only park facility in the unit is the Eagle River Campground located adjacent to the river and the Glenn Highway. There are 42 developed campsites and 12 developed picnic sites. Trails totalling approximately 42.5 miles (67 kilometers) lead out of Eagle River drainage.

The newest use occurring in the area is hang gliding. Several launch points within the area are considered suitable by the "sky sailors." This use is generally acceptable within the park as long as basic safety precautions are followed, conflicts with Dall sheep lambing areas are avoided, and mode of access to the launch area does not conflict with other established recreational forms or park regulations.

Recreational use in the Eagle River valley and its tributaries is increasing. As the population of Eagle River continues to increase so will use. Virtually every form of activity is experiencing increased participation.

Use Conflicts

- * Although hang gliding is a compatible use in many areas of the park the potential for conflict arises in Dall sheep lambing areas.
- * Game poaching is a serious problem throughout the area.
- * Unsurveyed park boundaries create recurrent enforcement problems.
- * The desire to hunt in proximity to populated areas along public roads and trails, and near active recreation areas is sometimes at odds with wildlife viewing and other recreational experiences.
- * The unauthorized and unjudicious use of off-road vehicles in the park creates problems for users and managers in areas where such use is damaging to the soil and vegetation and in areas that may be more suited to non-motorized recreation.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Existing Management Areas

Snowmachines are allowed in the main drainage of the Eagle River valley up to the terminus of the glacier.

Currently, Eagle River drainage, which includes Meadow Creek and the South Fork of Eagle River, is closed to all trapping and to moose and black bear hunting. Small game may be hunted with shotgun or bow. This area is being considered for an additional wildlife viewing area. The Eagle River drainage above the gorge (beginning approximately five miles beyond Paradise Haven Lodge on the Iditarod Trail) is open to Dall sheep hunting.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

This unit contains approximately 6,000 (2,430 hectares) of land which have been selected by Eklutna, Inc. These lands are almost wholly within the flood plain area of Eagle River, beginning at the Glenn Highway and continuing almost 8 miles (13 kilometers) up the valley. When these land selections are patented to the Native corporation, numerous recreational opportunities now available to the public will be lost.

Private Lands (inholdings)

Approximately 2,900 acres (1,175 hectares) of private land exist within this unit, a majority of which is in the South Fork of Eagle River where residential subdivision is occurring. Primary access to the land is via Hiland Drive which turns south off the Glenn Highway. During winter and spring a four wheel drive vehicle is necessary to gain access to much of the private land.

Adjoining the private lands in the South Fork is another large block of private land on Eagle River. Two jeep roads lead to this area. During all seasons a four-wheel drive vehicle is necessary to reach the area.

Also on the main fork of Eagle River are two smaller parcels located at the end of Eagle River Road. These, like many other parcels in the park are owned by individuals who are developing the land for residential purposes. One exception is the Paradise Haven Lodge, a commercial establishment serving food and beverages. A trailhead for a portion of the Iditarod Trail begins at this commercial establishment.

Federal Lands

Eagle River Power Reserve extends along the river approximately one quarter of a mile wide from Eagle Glacier to the park boundary at the Glenn Highway. This federally administered reserve also includes an application by the Municipality of Anchorage for power site designation. Pending the conclusion of the current "Metropolitan Anchorage Urban Study" being carried out by the Anchorage Municipality and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, recommendations will be made by these agencies for this area of the park.

Public Concerns

At the public workshop held in Eagle River in April 1977, citizens of the area put forth their concerns for the park, summarized below:

- The need to develop a suitable access point for the Iditarod Trail near the Paradise Haven Lodge.

- The State should maintain access roads to the park.
- Trails should be developed along both sides of Eagle River.
- The Eagle River basin should be closed to hunting to allow the area to become a wildlife viewing area.
- Open the park to mineral prospecting, especially around Organ Mountain and Mt. Magnificent areas.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Based upon the unit's resources, current and anticipated use and public input, the following unit objectives have been developed to guide formulation of development recommendations for the Eagle River unit:

1. Establishment of a visitor center/ranger station to provide necessary visitor services in the Eagle River valley.
2. Designation of riverside access points with provisions for parking to facilitate use of Eagle River.
3. Provide for the interpretation of unique natural features.
4. Establishment of trailheads and trails for hiking, cross country skiing and snow machining and other recreational pursuits.
5. Establishment of a wildlife viewing area in the Eagle River drainage.
6. Provide state contribution toward maintenance of privately maintained roads leading to established park access points as appropriate to the amount of traffic generated.



*EAGLE RIVER VALLEY is the largest valley
that originates within Chugach State Park..* ▶

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
24	C3	Meadow Creek Trailhead	Meadow Creek	Construct a 10 car parking area, bulletin board and trailhead sign. Annual contribution by State would be provided for privately maintained roads.	Cars now park in the road and cause congestion problems. Parking area will eliminate the problem and provide an access point to this hard-to-reach valley.
24	C3	Meadow Creek Trail	Meadow Creek	Brushing and signing of 6 miles (9½ kilometers) of trail.	This will improve cross-country skiing opportunity in this vicinity.
15	A2	Eagle River Campground picnic area	Eagle River and Glenn Highway	Enlarge existing campground up to 50 sites with separate tent and vehicle camping. Remove existing units which are too close to river and highway. Provide wood storage bin, fire pits, tables, dumpsters, water pump and an outdoor program area.	Serve the growing demand for overnight and day use areas in close proximity to the community of Eagle River. This project was approved by the passage of the 1976 Parks and Heritage bond issue.
15	A2	Canoe take-out	Several hundred meters upstream from the Eagle River Campground/Picnic area at gauging station	Enlarge picnic area up to 50 sites, mostly in vicinity of canoe takeout area. Provide toilets, tables, fire pits, 2 picnic shelters and parking for 50-75 cars and one half mile of road.	
15	A2	Canoe take-out	Several hundred meters upstream from the Eagle River Campground/Picnic area at gauging station	Construct boat ramp, 50 feet (15 meters) of trail to parking area, special signs.	This represents the lower limit of safe travel and the terminus of the canoe trail on Eagle River.
15	D1	Trailhead	Eagle River Campground	Construct parking area for 10-20 cars, bulletin board, trailhead sign.	Trailhead necessary to mark trail's beginning along Eagle River's south side.
15	D1	Trail	South side of Eagle River beginning at Campground	10 miles (16 kilometers) of trail, signing and maintenance.	To provide interpretive and scenic trail for the Eagle River Campground and picnic area visitors.

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16	B	Cross-country ski trails	Adjacent to Lions Club Park	Construct 10 kilometers of cross country ski trails, bulletin boards, special signs, toilets, dumpster. Close 80 acres (32 hectares) to snow machine use.	Recognize an area already used by skiers into a safe, well-marked trail system. Parking already exists at the Lions Park. This area will help avoid a growing conflict between snow machines and skiers in the Eagle River Valley.
17	A2	Canoe trail access and 1 mile of road	Road: between Eagle River landfill on Hifand Drive and the powerline crossing on Eagle River. River Access: west bank of Eagle River at powerline crossing	Road: Grade and gravel approximately 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) of existing road. River Access: Construct parking for 10 cars, trail and boat ramp.	River is heavily used now. By providing this access, inexperienced canoers can take out of the river before getting into class III white-water which starts immediately below this point. There is presently no public vehicular access to this point.
18	C	Canoe trail access and picnic area	Mile 7.4 Eagle River Road near junction of East and West Channels	Construct parking area for 20-30 cars, 10-20 picnic tables, latrines, bulletin board, trailhead signs and trail to and between river channels. 600-900 feet (180-270 meters) of trail required. One trail between parking area and river where river bend is closest to road. Another section of trail connecting channels at narrowest point approximately 600 feet (180 meters) upstream.	Two channels of river merge allowing one site where canoes can be recovered from either channel. Good quality area along river bank for picnic sites and canoe launch. Last point on river for canoe launch/recovery, prior to end of canoe trail.
19	B	Canoe trail access and picnic area	Mile 8.1 Eagle River Road at Loop Road	Construct parking area for 20-30 cars, 10-20 picnic tables, toilets, bulletin board, trailhead signs, and trail to river. 100-300 feet (30-90 meters) of trail construction required between parking area and river.	An existing heavily used picnic site. Provide easy access to fishing and canoe launch/recovery. Area will need minimal additional site preparation to become most desirable picnic area along the road.
20	A2	Canoe trail access and ice skating	Mile 9.3 Eagle River Road, where river runs next to road and pond exits.	Construct parking area for 15-20 cars as an extension of roadway shoulder between existing turnout and pond. Toilets and trailhead sign. No picnic sites planned at this time. Approximately 50 feet (15 meters) of trail required to river from parking area.	This is the most easily accessible canoe launch areas along the road. There exists a small overused turnout for access to the river and the park.

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21	A ₁	Picnic area and trailhead	Mile 11.1 Eagle River Road where main road forks	Construct parking area for 15-20 cars, latrines, trailhead sign and bulletin board. Improve 5 miles (8 kilometers) of trail to and along a small creek known locally as Barclay Creek.	This area presently receiving considerable use for access to Barclay Creek for fishing, camping, hiking, picnicking and cross-country skiing. No facilities presently exist for these activities.
22	A ₁	Visitor center/ranger station	Near Mile 12 Eagle River Road	Construct a visitor center/ranger station or acquire and convert an existing building. Provide for information distribution, program room/outdoor program area, office and temporary quarters, 24 hour toilets, small unmanned food/drink concession, telephone/radio, storage of emergency medical supplies and park supplies. Parking for 50-100 cars, bus turn-around, and water pump. Annual contribution by State to help maintain private roads.	The facility has been requested by local citizens for numerous years to serve the growing demand for visitor services in the Eagle River Valley. The 1976 Parks and Heritage bond issue allocates money for this project.
22	A ₁	Picnic tables	Near Mile 12 Eagle River Road	Install 5-10 picnic tables to be located near visitor center/ranger station.	To provide outdoor picnicking opportunity.
22	A ₁	Iditarod Trail and Eagle River trailhead	Near Mile 12 Eagle River Road	Construct a trailhead area with bulletin board and trailhead signs leading toward two trails which begin here.	The site is already a trailhead for the Iditarod Trail. It will also serve as trailhead for a nature trail and canoe portage to Eagle River Canoe Trail.
22	A ₂	Nature trail and Canoe portage	Near Mile 12 Eagle River Road to River	Construct approximately 1½ miles (2½ kilometers) of boardwalk.	This site represents the beginning of the canoe trail system on Eagle River and crosses primarily wet ground with diverse vegetation and views. This is a loop-trail serving the dual role as interpretive trail for the visitor center and portage to the beginning of the Eagle River Canoe Trail.

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
22	A ₁	Iditarod Trail	Near Mile 12 Eagle River Road (Trail to Crow Pass)	Approximately 25 miles (40 kilometers) of trail, brushing and marking. Foot suspension bridge over Eagle River at a narrow point and possible 5 miles (8 kilometers) of new trail construction.	The historic Iditarod Trail is heavily used by the public and offers a cross-park trail. The bridge is considered a safety necessity because of the changing river bed.
-	A ₂	Eagle River Canoe Trail	Near Mile 12 Eagle River Road to power-crossing above Eagle River Campground	Approximately 30 miles (48 kilometers) of canoe trail. Signs and mile posts to be placed as necessary for safe use of the river and its banks.	Public demand for launch and take-out sites on Eagle River to support existing use and to improve safety.
23	C ₂	South Fork trailhead	South Fork Eagle River	Parking for 10-20 cars, bulletin board, trailhead sign, toilets.	Public request for access to the South Fork of Eagle River.
23	C ₂	South Fork trailhead	South Fork Eagle River	7 miles (11 kilometers) of maintained trail leading to Eagle and Symphony lakes.	Public request.