

EKLUTNA - PETERS CREEK PLANNING UNIT

SETTING

This northernmost area of the park contains 190,000 acres (76,950 hectares) and is composed of three major drainages and two smaller ones. On the west side of the park, Eklutna River, Thunderbird Creek, Peters Creek and Little Peters Creek flow from a series of rugged mountain peaks and glaciers. Hunter Creek flows abruptly from the northern part of the park.

All of these drainages are heavily wooded with white spruce-birch forests in the lower elevations or with dense stands of balsam poplar. Intermittent wet areas are dominated by black spruce bogs and muskeg. Between 2,000 and 3,000 feet in (600-900 meters) elevation, forest species become dwarfed and random patches of dense willow and alder grow where underground water is adequate. Above this level, tundra species and bare rock dominate the landscape. Vegetation in Peters Creek is interesting because trees grow predominantly along the north side (southern exposure) but not on the south side of the valley in its upper reaches. Wildflowers flourish through all the drainages during the summer months and are a prime attraction for many park visitors.

Particularly significant for wildlife is the existence of two natural mineral licks, one north of Eklutna Lake and the other north of Peters Creek along an unnamed tributary.

The terrain throughout this area is dominated by these five valleys and the rugged mountains which gain elevation abruptly. Most park users consider the area quite scenic during the winter. The snow-draped mountain peaks are particularly striking. To the east, a portion of the park's icefields dip into the lowlands in the form of Eklutna Glacier. It is a prime park attraction and represents a valuable interpretive feature.

Eklutna Lake is the park's largest water body. It is 7 miles (11 kilometers) in length and 1 mile (1.6 kilometers) in width. Although the surface freezes in winter, fluctuating water levels caused by the Alaska Power Administration's electrical power generation facility on the Old Palmer Highway create variations in ice thickness and cause surface irregularities which can result in unsafe ice conditions. Down-canyon winds can rise in the basin with little notice and often have sufficient force to create white-capped waves on the lake. To the unprepared boater, they can represent a hazardous situation.

Near the headwaters of Peters Creek, a uniquely scenic area, the steep-sided Mt. Rumble dominates as it rises over 5,000 feet (1500 meters) above the surrounding terrain.

The difficulty of access to Thunderbird Creek up stream of Thunderbird Waterfall has kept this area in a primarily untouched state.

Within the drainage of the Eklutna-Peters Creek planning unit, no known areas, sites or objects of historic or prehistoric significance have been identified by the Division of Parks. However, further research and exploration could reveal important findings.

EXISTING USES AND TRENDS

Hunter Creek drainage receives only light use, primarily during the summer and fall. Hunting is the main visitor attraction. It is reached by walking approximately three miles from the Knik River Road where vehicles must be left behind. No park facilities exist in this drainage.

Eklutna River drainage is one of the most heavily used areas of the park. Between July 1, 1977 and June 30, 1978, approximately 35,000 visitors were counted. Visitor statistics also indicate that 42 percent of those visitors stayed overnight at one of the Eklutna Lake campgrounds. One of the main attractions is the opportunity to observe wildlife. It is currently the only officially designated area of the park for wildlife viewing. A 9 mile (14.5 kilometer) road maintained by the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities beginning at mile 26.5 of the Glenn Highway leads to the lake. During the summer, vehicles can continue around the lake for approximately 10 miles (16 kilometers) to within ½ mile (.8 kilometers) of the Eklutna Glacier, one of the park's major valley glaciers. The lake is occasionally used by boaters even though alternating water levels (often exposing extensive mud flats) and frequent strong winds make boating difficult.

A total of 33 campsites exist in campgrounds located at both ends of the lake. Four picnic sites are also interspersed. At the present a small gravel landing strip at the northwest shore, and another near the southeast end of the lake provide access for small aircraft. Twelve trails lead from the basin, totalling 88 miles (141 kilometers) of trail. Many of these trails are considered very rugged and only people in excellent physical condition who are thoroughly equipped and knowledgeable in backcountry travel should attempt them. Glacier hiking is another popular activity which should be entered into cautiously and only by those properly equipped and experienced.

Thunderbird Creek drainage receives very heavy use, most of which occurs at the popular Thunderbird Falls picnic area. Between July 1, 1977 and June 30, 1978, this area received approximately 40,000 visitors. At mile 25.5 on the Glenn Highway are a parking lot and a 1 mile (1.6 kilometer) trail leading to Thunderbird Falls where two picnic tables are situated near the falls. Few people continue beyond this point due to rough terrain. During the fall, hunters enter the upper parts of the drainage area from adjacent valleys by crossing unnamed passes seeking Dall sheep.

Peters Creek drainage is lightly used, primarily by nearby residents of Chugiak and Birchwood. The road leading from the Glenn Highway to the valley passes through a series of private subdivisions. Once at the park's boundary, the road follows the contours of the land for ½ mile (.8 kilometers) where it enters a large block of private land within the park. Two miles (3.2 kilometers) beyond, the road re-enters the park. A sign located near Eight Mile Creek indicates that vehicles must be left at this point. A series of game trails lead the hiker to the more remote parts of the valley. Like Thunderbird Creek, the valley receives light use except during the fall when many hunters may be found in the drainage seeking Dall sheep and black bear. People who have ventured deep into the valley frequently comment on the scenic beauty of the headwaters area.

Little Peters Creek drainage is also known as Ptarmigan Valley. A road leading into the valley's high country begins at the Glenn Highway and continues into the park. Use occurs throughout the year. In the summer, people seeking a short hike find this area a good destination. In the late summer and early fall, the area abounds with berries and local residents turn out in large numbers. Winter brings cross-country skiers and snowmachiners who find the valley suited for such activities.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Existing Management Areas

Snow machines are presently allowed in Little Peters Creek, Peters Creek and the lake area of the Eklutna basin. Summer off-road vehicles are not allowed in this unit of the park because of the fragile terrain which would be damaged by such use.

Hunting and trapping are allowed throughout the unit with the exception of most of the Eklutna drainage where a wildlife viewing area has been established. The entire drainage is closed to all hunting, trapping and shooting except for the East Fork of Eklutna River and Thunderbird Creek.

Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act

Within this unit of the Park, over 40,000 acres (16,200 hectares) of land have been selected by the village corporation of Eklutna. These land selections are part of the land entitlement granted to that village as part of the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. When land is transferred under the Act, it becomes privately owned. Consequently, if all the land selections within the park are patented to the Eklutna corporation, numerous recreational opportunities now available to the public will be lost. Since the village over-selected its entitlement, some of the 40,000 acres (16,200 hectares) may not be transferred.

Existing Private Lands (inholdings)

Three large parcels of private land and three smaller ones are located within this unit, totalling approximately 1,330 acres (540 hectares). One is in the Eklutna Basin near the lake's north shore, one in Peters Creek and one above Fire Lake, known as the Swiss Alps Subdivision. Of the three, the inholding in Peters Creek is considered the most important in terms of the park's integrity. Here extensive or intensive development would change the nature of the valley where previously little use has occurred. The Swiss Alps area sits somewhat remotely on a hilltop and even if developed, would affect only the immediate area and the upper reaches of Little Peters Creek. Of the inholdings within this unit, those in the Eklutna basin (one large parcel and three smaller ones) represent the least potential conflict to existing or anticipated park use patterns. However, when some or all of the 40,000 acres (16,200 hectares) selected by Eklutna Village becomes private land, there could be extensive conflicts between recreation and development goals for the Eklutna Basin and much of the rest of this planning unit.

Adjacent Lands Outside of Park Boundaries

Lands to the west of this planning unit are primarily privately owned. East of the park lie scattered parcels of private lands, lands selected by Eklutna, Inc. and other state lands. Along the shores of Lake George and the south bank of the Knik River lies the little-known Lake George National Natural Area. To the north is a 4-mile (6.5 kilometer) by 1-mile (1.6 kilometer) corridor of land administered by the Alaska Power Administration which forms a deep indentation of federal land into the Eklutna basin. Beneath this corridor lies a tunnel which carries water from Eklutna Lake to the power generating turbines of the power house on the Old Palmer Highway below. The resulting electrical power is then distributed to Palmer and Anchorage. Access to Goat Creek on the north is blocked by the presence of private land between the northern park boundary and the Knik River Road.

Concerns Expressed at Public Meetings

As part of the planning process described in Chapter 2, a public workshop was held in April, 1977 in Chugiak. The list that follows capsulizes the concerns voiced by local residents who attended that meeting. Many of the ideas have been incorporated into this plan.

- Difficulty in reaching the park.
- Need for access to Peters Creek.
- Need for access at Goat or Hunter Creeks.
- The park's fringe area should be developed, but not the back country areas.
- Need for more exclusive cross-country ski areas.
- Need for more off-road vehicle areas in the park.
- Need to restrict the use of off-road vehicles in the park.
- Facilities to serve senior citizens.
- Need to close the park to hunting.
- Need to close the fringe areas of the park to hunting and trapping to avoid incompatible uses.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

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

1. Designation of access points and construction of facilities, including a visitor center/ranger station, campgrounds, picnic areas, parking areas, toilet facilities and informational and regulatory signs.
2. Designation of trailheads with adequate provisions for parking and the brushing and signing of trails.
3. Enhance public appreciation through the interpretation of unique natural features and Indian history.
4. Maintain the wildlife viewing area in the Eklutna Basin.
5. Provide state contribution toward maintenance of privately maintained roads leading to established park access points as appropriate to the amount of traffic generated.

36 MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
1	C6	Pioneer Peak trailhead	¼ mile (400 meters) east of Knik River bridge on Old Palmer Highway	Construct parking area for 5-10 cars, latrine, trailhead signs and bulletin board.	No existing public access to the park in this area. Current use and public request demonstrate need. Inadequate off-road parking.
1	C6	Pioneer Peak trail	Between Pioneer Peak Trailhead and timberline	Mark and maintain approximately one mile of trail from trailhead to a point at timberline where hikers can then find their own route to high valleys and peaks.	Well used route by hikers, climbers and hunters going into Pioneer Peak area. Proposed route heavily overgrown with devils club and alder.
8	D5	Old Eklutna dam site turnout	Existing overlook with guard rails. Mile 1.2 Eklutna Road.	Construct parking area for 3-5 cars. Install interpretive signs explaining dam history. Improve and extend guard railing to prevent climbing down steep slopes.	Old dam site is a valuable interpretive feature in the park. Cars need a place to stop off the roadway.
2	C5	Visitor center/ranger station	West end of Eklutna Lake in existing campground area.	Construct facilities for interpretive displays, indoor and outdoor program area, storage for emergency medical supplies and park supplies, toilets (open 24 hours), telephone, radio, office space and temporary quarters for a ranger.	The Eklutna Basin is 50 miles (80 kilometers) from park headquarters in Anchorage. This facility will provide necessary visitor services and increase capability to manage the entire basin.
2	C5	Eklutna Lake campground and picnic area	West end of Eklutna Lake	Expand existing campground to 50 units. Part or all to be open year-round. Eliminate camp sites subject to flooding. Expand picnic area to 10 sites. Parking for picnic area exists. Add wood storage bin, water, toilets, fire pits and bulletin boards.	Existing and anticipated use demonstrates the need for more facilities, which the area is capable of withstanding. Need to absorb camping units which must be removed from the east end of the lake due to flood danger. Lakeshore provides good quality picnic sites.

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2	C4	Twin Peaks trailhead	West end of Eklutna Lake	Construct parking area for 5-10 cars, bulletin board and trailhead sign.	Current parking is insufficient. Parking will keep vehicles out of campground sites.
2	C4	Twin Peaks trail	Between Twin Peaks Trailhead and East Twin Peak	Mark and maintain a loop trail with a spur to East Twin Peak. Loop allows hikers to go up one way and come down another.	Twin Peaks are destination for numerous hikers. With development of increased camping units at Eklutna Lake, this trail will receive heavy use.
3	C5	Northshore trail	Between west end campground and Bold Ridge trailhead	Construct approximately 4 miles (6.5 kilometers) of new trail several hundred feet above and parallel to existing road for summer hiking and winter cross-country skiing. Mark and maintain.	This will separate motorized and non-motorized uses year-round. Provides good berry picking and view of lake.
4	C5	Bold Ridge trailhead	East lakeshore approximately midway between ends of Eklutna Lake	Improve parking area to accommodate 5-10 cars, trailhead sign and bulletin board.	Lack of adequate off-road parking for this currently used trailhead.
4	C5	Bold Ridge trail	Between Bold Ridge Trailhead and Bold Ridge	Mark and maintain existing route. Approximately 3 miles (5 kilometers).	Popular route not maintained or marked.
5	A	Eklutna Lake Campground	East end of Eklutna Lake at existing campground	Remove camp sites prone to flooding. Redesign existing sites for walk-in tent camping only. Two picnic shelters, toilets, water, bulletin board, fire pits, wood storage bin. 20-30 campsites. Parking area for 30-40 cars.	Sites should not be in area subject to recurring flood damage such as occurred in 1977. Need for an exclusive tent camping area in the Eklutna Basin.
6	B4	East Fork trailhead	East Fork Eklutna River at existing bridge	Improve parking area to accommodate 5-10 cars, bulletin board and trailhead sign.	Lack of adequate off-road parking for this currently used trailhead.
6	B4	East Fork trail	Between East Fork trailhead and a point approximately 6 miles (9½ kilometers) up the East Fork of Eklutna River.	Mark and maintain approximately 6 miles (9½ kilometers) of trail up East Fork of Eklutna River.	Currently used. Need to improve marking and maintenance to allow access for wildlife viewing and day hiking.

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7	A	Eklutna Glacier picnic area and trailhead.	End of Eklutna Glacier road.	Five to ten picnic tables, bulletin board, trailhead signs, interpretive signs, and appropriate warning signs concerning dangers associated with the glacier.	An existing parking facility is heavily used by people visiting the glacier. Picnic tables would allow people to remain at the site using the area in additional ways.
7	A	Eklutna Glacier Trail	Between Eklutna Lake Glacier and Eklutna Glacier trailhead	Construct high standard trail to the glacier. Construct a well defined termination point on the trail with interpretive display and barriers out of danger from the glacier and falling rock.	Improve footing and safety on existing trail. Provide easy access for most people to a position close to glacier.
9	D	Viewing area	At Thunderbird Falls	Construct a viewing area in close enough proximity to falls to enable a view of the falls. Install guard rails where needed.	Views of falls are difficult to get except over steep slippery rocks. Falls would become more accessible to the many visitors who currently use that area. A good day hike for most ages and abilities.
9	D	Mt. Eklutna trail	Thunderbird Falls trailhead to Mt. Eklutna	Mark and maintain approximately 2½ miles (4 kilometers) of trail to Mt. Eklutna.	Requested by public as a good hike for northern area of park.
13	D	Peters Creek picnic area and trailhead (if private inholding at Peters Creek comes into State ownership)	On Four Mile Creek	Construct parking area for approximately 25-50 cars, approximately 15-30 picnic sites, latrines, dumpsters, bulletin board and trailhead sign.	Provide picnic facilities in Peters Creek Valley readily accessible to the nearby residents of Chugiak and Peters Creek communities. Serves to define vehicular limits and the beginning of the trail up Four Mile and Peters creeks.
12	B1	Four Mile Creek picnic area and trailhead (if development occurs on private inholding)	Picnic area and trailhead at north end of private land on Four Mile Creek.	Construct parking area for 25-50 cars, 15-30 picnic sites, latrines, dumpster, water, trailhead sign and bulletin board.	Provide picnic facilities in Peters Creek Valley readily accessible to the nearby residents of Chugiak and Peters Creek communities. Serves to define vehicular limits and the beginning of the trail up Four Mile Creek. Need for more facilities to accommodate the influx of new residents into the Peters Creek Valley.

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
14	B1	Peters Creek trailhead (if development occurs on private inholding)	Trailhead at south-east end of private land on Peters Creek	Construct parking area for 20-30 cars, trailhead sign, bulletin board, rest-room, dumpster, and 5-10 picnic sites.	Heavy use of Peters Creek Valley will demand a trailhead and related facilities to accommodate visitors and direct the use in a manageable manner.
10	B	Peters Creek Camp-ground trailhead and trail	Between Peters Creek campground and a point within the park.	Upon establishment of a Peters Creek Greenbelt, construct a trailhead within the Peters Creek Campground with bulletin board and trailhead sign. Construct a trail from this point to a point within the park which will provide destination and an easy day hike for campground visitors. Trail should be 1-2 miles (1½-3 kilometers) long.	To increase the variety of experiences available to campers. To provide a trail within sight and sound of a highly scenic creek.
11	A	Little Peters Creek trailhead	Near park boundary on road up Little Peters Creek	Parking for 25-50 cars. Latrine, dumpster, bulletin board, and trailhead sign. Annual contribution by state to help maintain privately maintained roads. Acquisition of private parcel may be required for parking area and trailhead.	Snow machine access in winter. Hiker access in summer. No present access for snow machines in this area of park. Good year-round access to high country. Considerable existing use. Road beyond this point is too steep to maintain for year-round vehicle access.