

SHIP CREEK PLANNING UNIT

SETTING

The Ship Creek planning unit encompasses an area of 46,000 acres (18,630 hectares). The unit has two main valleys surrounded by peaks and ridges of the South Fork of Eagle River and the Hillside and Turnagain Arm areas. The valleys contain numerous small lakes and tributaries. The entire unit has been zoned as "watershed" by the Municipality of Anchorage (Title 21 of the Anchorage Municipal Code). It is one of the primary sources of water for the Anchorage military and civilian population. The main fork of Ship Creek begins at Ship Lake in the extreme southwestern corner of the unit and flows northwest for 13 miles (20 kilometers) where it exits the park and eventually flows into Cook Inlet. The North Fork headwaters are in the extreme eastern corner of the unit and flow northwesterly for 9.5 miles (15 kilometers) where they join the main creek.

There are numerous areas of muskeg and bog along the course of the creek, particularly at elevations below 1,500 feet (450 meters).

Tundra and rock predominate in two-thirds of the drainage. In the remaining third, and in close proximity to the main creek bed, are heavy stands of cottonwood, birch and white and black spruce. Farther from the wet areas, there is an abundance of alder, dwarf birch and dwarf mountain hemlock. Many varieties of edible berries and wild flowers complete the transition from forest to tundra.

Wildlife is plentiful in the Ship Creek drainage, due in part to the limited number of visitors. There are frequent sightings of black and grizzly bear, moose, wolves and Dall sheep. There is evidence of beaver which previously inhabited the unit but may no longer be present. Dolly Varden and rainbow trout are present in small numbers in Ship Creek.

Of historical significance is a branch of the Iditarod Trail which passes through this unit. This was one of the routes that gold seekers used during the early 1900's enroute to the gold fields of interior Alaska. It is one of two segments of the Iditarod Trail which traverse Chugach State Park, entering the southern end of the unit at Indian Pass and following the main fork northward where it leaves the park near Arctic Valley ski area. Hundreds of people walked and mushed over this trail from 1908 to 1918. Traces of the old trail and an old telegraph line are still present along much of the route.

EXISTING USES AND TRENDS

The only existing vehicle access to this unit is the Ski Bowl Road which is owned, controlled and maintained by the U.S. Army. Arctic Valley ski area, located at the end of this road, is the only commercial sports facility in the park. It is operated by the Anchorage Ski Club through a 50-year lease from the State, and includes a ski lodge, lifts and associated downhill skiing facilities, all located on 320 acres (130 hectares). This area also serves as an access point from cross-country skiers. The lease expires in the year 2022.

The unit receives limited use by hikers and backpackers in the summer, hunters in the fall and cross-country and downhill skiers in the winter. Access to and activities within the Ship Creek drainage will continue to be carefully controlled to protect its value as watershed lands.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Management

The Ship Creek unit lies totally within the zone designated wilderness (see map on page 26). Activity within the watershed is monitored by both the Anchorage Water Utility and Chugach Park rangers to insure the purity of the Anchorage water supply. All motorized vehicles and horses are prohibited off the road within the drainage. There are no private lands within the unit.

Public Concerns

Comments pertinent to the Ship Creek planning unit gathered from public workshops are summarized below:

- The Army biathlon ski area should be brought into park management so the public can use the area.
- Water quality in the park should be protected.
- Dogs should be controlled along the ski trails.
- The trail along Ship Creek (inside the park) and the proposed Ship Creek greenbelt (outside the park) should be connected.
- Trails should be brushed and groomed in winter.
- Sanitary facilities should be located at all park access points.
- The trail system should be destination oriented.
- The trail through Ship Creek should not be developed. The area has value as a wilderness area of the park.
- The trail through Ship Creek to Indian should be further developed.
- Backcountry cabins would cause more harm than good.
- The drainage should be kept open to hunting; however, restrictions for additional public safety should be considered.
- The drainage should be closed to hunting so that more people would have an opportunity to view wildlife.
- There should be an agreement for recreational uses of military lands adjacent to the park.

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.

1. Improve vehicular parking along Ski Bowl Road and pedestrian access to and through the area with appropriate

signing and interpretation, to the extent that watershed protection and wilderness classification allow.

2. Preserve and interpret the route of the Iditarod Trail and telegraph line and related remnants which have historic value.
3. Encourage the protection of all indigenous wildlife species and reintroduce species which have been or may become lost.



ALONG TURNAGAIN ARM, a thicket of wind-shaped Sitka spruce trees has lost the battle for survival next to their kin.

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
25	B2	Ship Creek trailhead	Watershed sign on Ski Bowl Road (Fort Richardson property)	Coordinate with U.S. Army. Construct parking area for 10 cars. Small trailhead sign with park brochures. No future expansion should occur here.	Provide limited access to Ship Creek Valley and the Iditarod Trail. Alleviate existing problem of vehicles parking on roadway.
25	B2	Ship Creek trail	Ship Creek valley between Ski Bowl Road trailhead and Indian Pass	15 miles (24 kilometers) of signing and maintenance. Parallel creek and offer views and occasional access to creek. Avoid wet area whenever feasible. Coordinate with U.S. Army that portion transiting Fort Richardson.	Provide trail to direct visitors through watershed and along historic route.