

# Eagle River Nature Center

## Master Development Plan

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*Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation  
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## Overview Map



**Figure 1.** Overview map showing location of Eagle River Nature Center in relation to the Anchorage Bowl



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## Introduction

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Located 25 miles north of downtown Anchorage in the heart of Chugach State Park, the Eagle River Nature Center welcomes 40,000 visitors annually to its facility, trails, and programming. The picturesque log center is surrounded by rugged mountains that rise 6,500 vertical feet to the summits of Eagle, Polar Bear, and Yukla peaks. Out the center's back door the historic Iditarod Trail meanders toward Eagle River and Crow Pass; miles of other hiking trails, sparkling rivers, and numerous wildlife—including moose, bears, eagles, and salmon—await visitors. The facility is open year-round and provides extensive interpretive programming for the public, as well as for private and public schools.

Since opening as a state-owned and operated visitor's center in 1981, the facility has always proven popular with the public. Friends of Eagle River Nature Center, Inc. was established in 1996 with the purpose of taking over operation of the visitor center from the state Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. In 2005, the Friends of Eagle River Nature Center was awarded a 25-year contract from the division to continue operating the center. Operation includes management of the main visitor facility, three public-use overnight facilities, a classroom structure, and volunteer cabins, and maintenance of 10 miles of trails.

## Purpose and Need

Throughout the years, staff and board members have kept the organization relevant and financially stable, with major assistance from local businesses, foundations, and individuals. Adapting to programming changes and a growing audience has been a natural part of the center's evolution.

From early on, it was apparent that the nature center's buildings were becoming less and less able to accommodate the growing number of visitors and the center's programming needs. Its aging structures and utilities, plus restrictive and inefficient spaces, have been ongoing concerns.

In 2006, the Friends of Eagle River Nature Center, in partnership with Alaska State Parks, embarked on a project to identify and evaluate the center's shortcomings and needs with the intent to create a master development plan. Hundreds of visitor surveys and vehicular and pedestrian counts were collected, and the organization's operations were examined. During brainstorming sessions and public meetings, staff, board members, and community members envisioned ways that a renovated and/or new building, with adequate parking and trail access, could better serve the thousands of visitors who use the facility and trails.

This public process provided the foundation for the Master Development Plan, which:

- supports of the missions of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and Eagle River Nature Center
- illustrates the physical locations and relationship of landscape features to current and proposed facilities and forms the basis for future use and development of the Eagle River Nature Center

- recommends new facilities that provide for the daily operation of the nature center and provide a base for future growth and demands
- recommends new facilities within Chugach State Park while promoting the preservation and protection of the park’s historical, natural, and recreational resources
- recommends programming that enhances the educational and interpretive opportunities available to Chugach State Park visitors

## Mission and Vision Statements

### Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

#### ***Mission Statement***

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation provides outdoor recreation opportunities and conserves and interprets natural, cultural, and historic resources for the use, enjoyment, and welfare of the people.

#### ***Vision Statement***

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation envisions an affordable and accessible system of parks that provide diverse, safe, year-round, high-quality, family-oriented, outdoor recreation experiences; statewide programs that enhance the enjoyment and stewardship of the state’s outdoor recreation, natural, historic and cultural resources; and a dedicated, professional staff that fully meets the needs of the public.

### Friends of Eagle River Nature Center

#### ***Mission Statement***

The mission of the Eagle River Nature Center is to provide connections to nature through interpretive education, resource protection and outdoor opportunities. (To maintain this vision while accommodating growth and changes in programs and audiences is a natural part of the evolution of the organization.)

#### ***Core Values***

- stewardship
- excellence in service
- conservation
- respect for life
- excellence in education

## Goals and Parameters

- Provide *safe and adequate parking* to reduce pedestrian/vehicle/traffic conflicts and provide non-interrupted access for adjacent property owners to their homes and driveways
- Provide *trail access* for a variety of visitor groups, including hikers, skiers, program participants, school groups, and self-guided visitors
- Provide fully *accessible programs* and a trail system that complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and barrier-free standards
- Maintain the *character/atmosphere* of the existing nature center
- Maintain and enhance existing *interpretive programs*
- Address *inadequate space* and space conflicts for visitors, volunteers, and staff
- Develop a *maintenance facility* that is screened visually and audibly from neighbors, the nature center area, and entrance area/parking lots