

# Kasilof River Special Use Area

## North Side Improvement Project FAQ

1. What was the impetus for this project, why was it not feasible to leave it the way it has always been?

The impetus for this project originated from community members, several interest groups, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, legislative staff, and the Governor's Office in 2010 to address impacts to the coastal dunes and wetlands surrounding the Kasilof River mouth from intense public uses surrounding the personal use fisheries. In response, the Southcentral Region Office within the Division of Mining, Land and Water (DMLW) conducted an extensive public review process and hosted several meetings prior to adopting the Kasilof River Special Use Area (KARSUA) designation in May of 2011. Detailed information about the KARSUA and regulations adopted for this area is available on the department website at <http://dev.dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/kasilof/>.

2. The site plan appears to accommodate a large number of vehicles. Why is such a large area needed to dedicate to parking?

During the height of the fishing season the number of vehicles that access the north side is far greater than the area can handle. The DMLW has received concerns from local residents regarding cars parking along the already narrow road limiting the flow of traffic. This bottle necking limits the ability of emergency personnel to access the area. Large parking areas were designed to accommodate the large volume of cars, trucks and campers as well as to keep people parked in designated areas and off of the road way, dunes, and wetlands.

3. I read that this project was approved under a Capital Improvement Project Request. What is the total projected project cost?

The Department of Natural Resources received Capital Improvement Project funding in two phases of 1.4 million dollars each to add improvements to both sides of the Kasilof River. The current project is only focused on north side improvements. Projected costs are not available at this time since the project is at the preliminary level of design.

4. Once built, will it then be a free area to use, or will it mirror the Kenai's dip net fishery, where there are fees to enter, to park, to camp, etc. Will the facility be able to generate income for the state?

User fees are not being proposed at this time. In order to have the ability to collect user fees for the KARSUA during the personal use fisheries at some point in the future, the department would be required to adopt a fee regulation through a public process.

5. If fees are not going to be collected for the use of the parking areas, how will the maintenance fees be covered?

The DMLW has received approximately \$50,000 annually starting around 2009 to pay for sanitation facilities. The current plan for both the north and south side does not include any changes to the type or number of temporary sanitation facilities provided during the fishery. The parking areas are being created for long term sustainability and low maintenance. If in the future DMLW needs to pay for maintenance costs a user fee may be introduced or a request for funding may be submitted to the legislature.

6. Has an Environmental Assessment (EA) been completed for the project?

An EA is one of three different levels of analysis that may be required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires federal agencies or other non-federal agencies receiving federal dollars or effecting federal jurisdiction to determine if their proposed actions will have significant environmental impact. The state has not received any federal funding and currently the project will not be within the scope of federal jurisdiction; therefore an EA is not required. The department does have their own permitting review process to ensure that the appropriate agencies (federal, state, and local) that may have jurisdiction or authority are contacted, and all necessary permits are acquired, prior to any development.

7. What considerations have been taken to evaluate and protect the habitat and wildlife in the area?

The Department considered and recognized the biological diversity of the Kasilof Area in the KARSUA Final Decision; ADL 230992<sup>1</sup>. Following the issuance of the decision, on January 20, 2013, a suite of regulations were adopted. One of the regulations restricted vehicular traffic to only designated trails and the beach. This specific regulation was included in an effort to protect the wetlands and sensitive dune grass.

In a further endeavor to protect the habitat and wildlife the DMLW authorized two separate fence projects. On the south side of the mouth of the river guardrail was installed to keep vehicles from accessing the wetlands and on the north side a

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<sup>1</sup> KARSUA Final Decision; May 26, 2011; pg. 7

temporary fence was authorized around the dune beach grass to protect them from further degradation.

The north side improvement project goes a step further by creating long term sustainable parking areas that will deter the public from parking on the wetlands or entering onto the dunes. An Environmental Impact Analyst conducted a wetlands delineation to ensure these proposed parking areas will not be constructed on any of the surrounding wetlands. DMLW also plans to install interpretive signs to inform the public about the diverse habitat and wildlife in the KARSUA.

8. What considerations have been considered to evaluate and protect the archeological history of the area?

Prehistoric and cultural resources do exist in the area and was discussed in the KARSUA Final Decision<sup>2</sup>. An archaeological survey was conducted this summer on the north side and the DMLW is working closely with the Office of History and Archaeology on how to protect the discovered artifacts and educate the public about the rich history of the area.

9. Is DMLW aware of the Kasilof Boat Harbor Cemetery that was recently restored? If so will this project affect the cemetery?

DMLW is aware of the location of the cemetery and can assure you there is no plan to disturb that area. The proposed improvements will be located towards the mouth starting near the old Watchman cabin footprint.

10. It's clear that this area is growing in use, but is there any concern that this project will possibly bring even more people to the fishery?

The issues or problems to be solved with this project include addressing: degradation of sensitive coastal dunes and wetlands; unimproved parking areas; insufficient access for emergency and sanitation services; and trespass onto private property. The intense human use of this area during the popular personal use fisheries has created consequences and impacts that are socially unacceptable. This project attempts to bring order to use of the state resources by creating an organized venue for the public to participate in the personal use fisheries while protecting the resources from continued impacts.

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<sup>2</sup> DMLW, KARSUA Final Decision, May 26, 2011, pg. 8

11. Will a boat retrieval or launch be developed on the north or south side of the KARSUA?

There are currently no plans to add a boat retrieval or launch on either side of the KARSUA. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is in the planning phase for a boat retrieval system on the lower section of the Kasilof River. You can find additional information on their project at the following website:

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/kasilof/kasilofboatretrieval.htm>

12. Are there plans to host open house/community meetings to present the plans after the public comment period?

DMLW is conducting three public information meetings to present the new site concept plans. The meeting times and dates are as follows:

- Wasilla – Monday, February 29<sup>th</sup> 6:00 – 8:00pm at Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center
- Anchorage – Thursday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> 6:00 – 8:00pm at Central Middle School
- Kasilof – Tuesday, March 8<sup>th</sup> 6:00 – 8:00pm at Tustumena School

13. Will there be year round sanitation facilities?

No, there will only be portable toilets and dumpsters located on the north and south sides during the peak summer months, usually June 1<sup>st</sup> through the first week of August.