

Hatcher Pass Management Plan

Public Scoping Meeting Summary

The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land, and Water (DMLW), and Department of Outdoor Recreation, (DPOR), held two public scoping meetings April 2009, in Anchorage and Wasilla, to discuss the revision of the Hatcher Pass Management Plan (HPMP). The discussion at the meetings focused primarily on recreational use of the area. Discussion topics also included: management unit boundary revisions, plan boundary extensions, potential improvement of trails and added facilities. The public was also given an opportunity to provide public comments during the second half of the meetings. This summary focuses on highlighted information from the meetings and is not to be considered as "meeting minutes".

Attendance and Public Comments:

The meetings were well attended. Over 140 people signed in at the two meetings. The Wasilla meeting did have higher attendance. There were 51 people who signed in at the Anchorage meeting, 11 offered public comments. There were 92 people who signed in at the Wasilla meeting, 24 offered public comments. The discussions and comments offered at both meetings were consistent. Recreational users who focused on motorized and non-motorized use were equally attended and equally represented in the public comment period of each meeting.

Discussion Topics:

The discussions were guided by a questionnaire was provided to the public during the meeting that asked the following six questions:

1. Should the plan boundaries be expanded north to Kashwitna River?
2. Should the HPMP be managed mainly for recreation?
3. What specific changes, if any, need to be made for motorized and non-motorized use designations?
4. Are new parking and trail improvements needed?
5. What other facilities?
6. How should the plan treat the Government Peak unit?

General Comments:

- The HPMP should be managed primarily for recreation.
- The HPMP boundary should be extended north to the Kashwitna River.
- All management unit boundaries should be realigned according to topographic features and roads wherever possible to simplify management and public recognition of those boundaries.
- Motorized corridors should be provided for snow machine users through all non-motorized areas.
- The State should ensure the corridors are located in safe locations to avoid avalanche areas.
- Areas where safety concerns have been raised by non-motorized users should be considered as potential non-motorized recreational use areas.
- The State should develop a way for users to pay fees that could pay for trail maintenance, parking, and facilities; possibly a hut with a person taking fees and providing trail maps.
- The State should establish a fund with the income from the fees to be allocated solely for Hatcher Pass
- If the ski resort in Government Peak is developed, the State and Borough should ensure there are safe and separate areas for backcountry skiers and other recreational users.

Anchorage Meeting (04/28/2009):

Question and Answers:

Questions that were asked during the Anchorage meeting included the following:

1. Why is the State considering extending the boundary north to the Kashwitna River?
 - A1. The area north of the HPMP is being used for recreational purposes which typically generates from the Hatcher Pass Management Plan area. These uses are not fully addressed in the Susitna Area Plan, which currently guides the management of that area.
 - A2. The management boundaries in the current plan do not consistently follow topographical features, which makes discerning the boundaries more difficult in the field. The State is realigning the boundaries according to topographic features where possible.

2. Who pays for trail grooming in the HPMP area?
 - A1. Many trails are groomed on a volunteer basis.
 - A2. Many of the non-motorized trails are groomed by contractors paid from the grooming pool generated by bed tax funds to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough
 - A3. DPOR funding assists with the maintenance of the motorized trail grooming with funds designated by the legislature that are then allocated by the SnowTRAC committee.

3. Is there a way for the State to set up a fee system and fund for the Hatcher Pass area that will be allocated only for distribution for the Hatcher Pass area?
 - A1. A fee system can be established by regulation. However, it may not be a guarantee that the funds will be for exclusive use at Hatcher Pass. All funds received for fees are deposited into the general fund of the state. Only the state legislature can allocate these funds or establish a special account for these funds. Even if the funds are placed in a special account, the legislature still needs to appropriate the funds for use at Hatcher Pass.

4. Why aren't all of the areas that were indicated as "conflict areas" during the focus group meetings reflected on the maps; particularly the Marmot Mountain area?
 - A1. The current overlapping use maps are not finalized. They only depict locations where the majority of people who attended the focus group discussion meetings indicated they had experienced conflicts or had safety concerns. They are being distributed to the public for comment. Once the public comment period is over the maps will be updated accordingly.

5. There have been concerns about the safety of skiers and other non-motorized users, has the State also been considering the dangers to motorized users when considering the realignment of the boundaries?
 - A1. Yes, the State is paying attention to the prevention of safety risks for all users of the HPMP area.

6. Since the DNR faces mistrust from the public, what is the State going to do to alleviate that mistrust?
 - A1. The State is involving the public in the planning process, by providing a number of meetings and opportunity for public comments.
 - A2. The State would like for recreational user groups of all kinds, motorized, non-motorized, and multi-user groups to work together to assist and resolve their differences in the high use conflict areas.
 - A3. The State may offer additional focus group meetings to mediate that process.

Wasilla Meeting (04/29/2009):

Question and Answers:

Questions that were asked during the Wasilla meeting included the following:

1. What is the comment period for the Hatcher Pass Management Plan?
 - A1. There are several comment periods throughout the planning process that change according to the phase of the project. We are in the public scoping phase.
 - A2. The official deadline for comments is June 5, 2009 for the current scoping phase.
 - A3. The beginning date of the comment period for this phase typically begins on the date the public notice is released about the specific plan or from the date of the first public meeting.
 - A4. The comment periods will be for 30 or more days during each phase of the planning process.

2. What are some of the problems with the current management plan?
 - A1. The current management plan is very long and has conflicting information.
 - A2. The maps in the current plan are poorly drawn and the unit boundaries are not defined according to recognizable topographic features.
 - A3. The overall use patterns of the HPMP area have changed, especially the increase of recreational use and visitation.
 - A4. Land ownership with the HPMP has changed.
 - A5. There are recommendations written in the plan that were not acted on or are not pertinent today.

3. What is the ratio of motorized vs. non-motorized users who have participated during this process so far and how will that affect the State's decisions about allowable use areas and management units? For example, if there are 1500 motorized users and 6 skiers, will the State still decide in the skiers' favor?
 - A1. The ratio of users at all of the meetings has been fairly equal.
 - A2. Changes in the allowable uses of state public land, (Title 38 General Use Land) can only be made if the current uses have resulted in any of the following:
 - Endangerment to Public Safety
 - Degradation to the Environment
 - Private Development

4. If there is a process for closing areas to motorized use, is there a process for opening areas?
 - A1. Decisions about allowable uses on State land are primarily based on present existing use.
 - A2. Current research and public input we receive during public scoping helps identify those areas.
 - A3. Previously designated non-motorized areas may have potential for reconsideration as a non-restricted area if research indicates that reasons for the initial closure are no longer pertinent, the area is determined to be sustainable to motorized use, or use will not endanger public safety.

5. What are the primary areas of conflict?
 - A1. The areas of concern regarding overlapping use are located along the roadways and where motorized use is taking place in areas that are currently designated as "non-motorized".

Wasilla Meeting (04/29/2009):

Question and Answers Continued:

6. Have any areas been identified as hazardous to public safety and have any decisions been made about allowable uses because of public safety?
 - A1. No decisions have been made.
 - A2. If there are hazardous areas, they will be identified and documented after the current public review period. The public will have an additional opportunity to comment during the review period for the draft plan.

7. What is the State doing to ensure that all recreational use types and areas are taken into consideration?
 - A1. The State is having multiple public meetings.
 - A2. There is a possibility of Focus Group Discussion Workshops with representatives of local user groups to thoroughly examine the existing uses and conflict areas. The goal will be to work together to develop potential solutions and come to a mutual agreement on resolutions derived from the discussion.
 - A3. After the comment period ends, we intend to release a map for further comment, based on what we learned during public meetings and comments that have been received. This will probably be released for comment in July. That comment period will be at least 30 days.

8. There are multiple recommendations included in the 1986 HPMP that were never followed through on. How will the State make sure that recommendations in the new plan will get done?
 - A1. Although all recommendations may not be implemented, we intend to make concise, realistic recommendations.
 - A2. Some recommendations may require legislative action by the state in order to be implemented. DNR has no control on what, if any of those recommendations, the legislature will decide to act on.
 - A3. We are drafting the regulations pertaining to this management plan concurrently to address issues than can be addressed through the administrative action.

9. Where are the Mountaineering Club huts and who paid for them?
 - A1. There are three MCA huts located within and immediately surrounding the HPMP. They are located in near Mint Glacier and north of Archangel and Reed Lakes Units.
 - A2. The huts are located on state land that is leased to the Mountaineering Club. The Mint Glacier Hut is located on land within a non-motorized designated area.
 - A3. The huts were built by funds raised by the MCA, not public or government "tax" funding.

10. How will the Mat-Su Borough manage their land within the HPMP boundary?
 - A1. The borough will manage their land according to the HPMP. When completed, the plan will be adopted jointly by the ADNR and the Matanuska-Borough Assembly.