

Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board
***** Meeting Minutes*****
Thursday February 12, 2015
5:30 p.m.
Gilman River Center
Soldotna, AK

I. **CALL TO ORDER**

1. **Roll Call:** Joe Conners, Ricky Gease, Keith Baxter, Dwight Kramer, Andrew Szczesny, Ted Wellman, Andrew Carmichael, Teri Carter, Sean Wedenmeyer, Brent Johnson, Andy Loranger, Bobbie Jo Skibbo, Robert Begich, Jack Blackwell, Tim Stevens.
2. **Minutes Approval:** Approved as written.
3. **Agenda Changes:** Agenda was approved.

II. **Public Comments/Presentations:**

1. Agency and Government Reports:

A. State Parks

Jack Blackwell provided the board members with the following report:

- The new Kenai River Ranger, Melissa Smith, started on February 1, 2015, she previous worked for Parks in the Northern Area and for Fish and Game.
- The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council recently purchased the Stewart property along the Kenai River. This is 81 acres and will be co-managed by Alaska State Parks and the Department of Fish and Game. This property will be managed for habitat conservation.
- Governor Walker announced his FY15 budget. The Department of Natural Resources lost one position in the State Historic Preservation Office, but State Parks did not lose any positions. The legislature is still working on the budget and we are hopeful that we will not see any cuts.

B. DEC –Tim Stevens provided board members with the following report:

- DEC has just completed the grant solicitation for the Aqua Water grants. There were two grants solicitations for the Kenai River.
- The first one is to engage the public and agencies on how to reduce manmade turbidity in the Kenai River.
- The second one would consolidate the 14 years of water quality data that has been collected by the Kenai Watershed Forum and partners. That data would be compared to state water quality standards and a trend analysis would be required. The time frame to meet the grant requirements is July 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016.
- DEC has currently received applications for both grants.

C. ADF&G –Robert Begich provided the board members with the following report:

- The Department of Fish and Game will discontinue the use of the River Mile 9 king salmon sonar site. In an effort to better assess early and late run king salmon abundance on the Kenai River in 2015, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game will begin using sonar estimates from a site a River Mile 14 instead of sonar estimates from a site at River Mile 9. The new location allows sonar technology to span nearly the entire width of the river.



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Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, in cooperation with the Kenai Peninsula Borough



- The escapement number for 2015 will be posted on the ADF&G website sometime next week. Currently the early run Chinook salmon is similar to last year at 5200 and the Chinook salmon late run is slightly higher at 22,000. The season will be closed to sport fishing during May and June.

D. USFS/Chugach-Bobbie Jo Skibbo provided board members with the following report:

- The hydro power fish waste project is current on track, a patent has been obtained and the University is hoping to have a proto-type available by August 2015. The next big hurdle is acquiring funding.
- Chugach Forest Service has put in place a new weapon regulation. The current regulation reads that a weapon may not be discharged on the Russian River within 150 feet of a developed structure. The new regulation reads that there will be no discharge of a weapon on the Russian River. This was imposed to help close what was referred to as the donut hole and campground area. A weapon can be discharged only if it is in defense of life or property.
- At this time the Forest Service is hiring a GS5 technician to work at the Russian River Technician.
- Bobbi Jo is currently working with the Keniatic Indian Tribe to hire two technicians this summer to help with the fish water management on the Russian River. This would be the second year that the tribe has helped with this.

E. US F&WS- Andy Loranger provided board members with the following report:

- Andy introduced Ken Gates and Ken Harper of the Fish and Wildlife service located on K-Beach Road in Soldotna. Jeff Anderson is the in house manager for the subsistence use program and is currently out of state.
- The opening planned for the new Kenai National Wildlife Refuge visitor center has been postponed for a few months due to some air quality issues inside the building.
- The amendment of the public use regulation is still being work on and may have a draft run sometime in late March.

F. City of Kenai-No Report

G. City of Soldotna –Andrew Carmichael provided board members with the following report:

- The City is waiting for snow to start the hydrological study for Swiftwater campground for future improvements, such as access and bank improvements.
- The City is also currently working with Parks and Department of Fish and Game in establishing a connecting trail on the state property which is located between the Soldotna Visitor Center and Centennial Campground.
- The City is moving forward with the river information signage program. This would help with getting people to the river and to protect the habitat area. The signs would provide and develop a signage program for environmental responsible use of the river.
- Keith Baxter talked about the Kenai River Spring Cleanup. This event will be in its second year and it will be held in May. Two of the dates will be a when local schools participate in cleaning up the shore of the Kenai River. A week will be for public cleanup with an event held at the end with a barbecue and also the weighing of the trash.

H. Kenai Peninsula Borough-Brent Johnson had no report.

C. Committee Reports

- President's Report**-Ted Wellman would like to see the board take some action this year. He also asked each of the committees to identify some of the actions that they may be able to work on to accomplished this year. The board is very interested in fish habitat issue, this often times fall into a fish allocation problem. The bylaws of the Kenai River Special Management board clearly states that the board will not address fish allocation items. Ted believes the board needs to get back to basics as to looking at the comprehensive plan and some of the studies that have been completed. One study Ted referred to was the

Doug Whittaker carrying capacity study. Many of the studies identify that this resource is a finite and cannot accommodate all user. The board needs to think of ways the resource can be utilized without destroying the resource. The Whitaker study suggested that the Kenai River Guides need to be limited. Change the culture to get people to realize what a great resource they have.

- b. Guide Advisory**—Joe Connors reported that the committee met and there were approximately 20 people present. There were two items on the agenda. The first was the proposed subsistence gill net fishery on the Kenai River. Under new business Joe will present a resolution of reconsideration of the subsistence fishery. In order for this to occur the subsistence board will need to take another vote on the proposal. At this time the Ninilchik Traditional Council will need to submit an operational plan for approval before the fishery would occur.

The second item on the agenda was behavior by all users of the Kenai River. The committee determined that the behavior on the river appears to be getting worse with the more people that use it. To start making some changes the committee proposed to change the commercial operator stipulations and to also look at changes to the regulations for all user on the Kenai River.

The committee felt the number one issue on the Kenai was finding a place to fish. Other issues include guides holding bank fishing spots all day for several hours throughout the day, people running on top of shore fishery to get them to move out of the way and people not paying the user fees such as parking or boat launching fees

- c. Habitat** – Brent Johnson reported on the Habitat Committee. Keith Baxter gave a short summary of the Kenai River Clean up that will be held in May. Additional information will be provided once all the details have been addressed. The second item was an update that the Fish and Game king salmon juvenile studies that were proposed have been cut from the budget. Brent Johnson is going to try to find funding that will help in moving these studies forward. The third item was a presentation by Mary King, a retired Fish and Game Habitat Biologist, in response to Lisa Gabriel's question: What happened to the reports of the habitat studies that were conducted along the Kenai River? Some of the highlights were the significant relationship between high boat use and bank lost. Natural bank vegetation provides bank stability. A copy of this report is available upon request.

Clayton Holland gave three suggestions for the Habitat committee to work on this year.

- Work to prevent camping on the banks of the middle river during the month of July
- Work to implement a sockeye stamp for the Kenai/Kasilof River in order to provide capital improvement project.
- Support the enforcements of existing habitat protection laws for land owners on the Kenai.

The committee will look at these recommendations at the next meeting.

A few items that were recommended for the Habitat Committee are:

Andy Szczesny recommends that Fish and Game and State Parks should get together and review the signage along the river. The agencies should coordinate where these signs should be placed and what should be stated on the sign.

Ricky commented that the board should look at the Right of Way/Access easement study. To look at the possibility to see if some of these easements can be vacated.

- d. River Use** – Dwight Kramer reported that the guide advisory and river use committee met to review the proposed plan for the Bing's Landing boat launch. . The current design was from past recommendations to place the floating dock downstream of the existing walkway. Many participants agreed that this may be close and dangerous to Naptown Rapids. The committee unanimously opposed the current plan and recommended placing the floating dock upstream of the existing boat launch and to place articulate matting in front of the area just upstream of the existing boat ramp. This would also include adding a new trail to the parking area to help with boaters to access their vehicles. In March a new plan will be presented to the committees. Improvements at the Izaak Walton State Recreation Area were also presented to the



committee; the improvements included lengthening the boat launch and expanding the walkway. The committee agreed that this is a great improvement to the existing area.

Dwight reported that the River Use Committee developed a list of problems and concerns on the river and

- The first one was to find a fair and equitable way to limit number guides on the river so in the future the board could accommodate a way to limit public user.
- Bank crowding during the Sockeye season.
- Safety, increase traffic on the river. Mandatory PFD for all boat users.
- Expand the boating traffic in the personal use fishery.
- Conflict with the Monday drift boat only and using power boats people transporting client or accessing the personal use fishery.
- Camping regulation in the middle river. Permit camping or limit it to certain days.
- Kenai River ranch response to scoping meeting. The committee would like to have the opportunity to comment on the project.
- Boating safety courses on the Kenai River. First voluntary then mandatory.
- Sockeye Stamp
- Eagle Rock boat launch repairs.

Andy Szczesny recommends that Fish and Game and State Parks should get together and access the signage along the river. The agencies should coordinate where these signs should be placed and what should be stated on the sign.

Ricky commented that the board should look at the Right of Way/Access easement study. To look at the possibility to see if some of these easements can be vacated.

e. Legislative/Government Activities – Ricky Gease reported that the idea of the sockeye stamp was discussed with the chairs of the house and senate. It was their recommendation that this board get something in place by December 2015, for the 2016 legislative session. The current session is focused on cost cutting so a recommendation of a sockeye stamp would not go very far through the process.

f. Board Development/ Nomination – No Report

g. Agenda/Board Structure/Housekeeping – No Report

III. OLD BUSINESS:

1. River Ranch Planning-Jack Blackwell reported that the comment period for the River Ranch property has closed. There Department had two scoping meetings, one in Soldotna where there were approximately 40 people in attendance and the other in Anchorage where there were about 18 people present. The next step is to find a common ground and come up with several concepts. Some of the more popular comments were no camping and no boat or river access. The next meeting is March 24th at the Gilman River Center and the Department should have 2 or 3 concepts for people to comment on.
2. Board Recruitment- Jack reported that based on the working committee for the hiring process, the hiring process was changed from January until February 15th. The announcement was sent to a list of agencies, communities and people and it was posted in the newspaper, state park web-page, and also on the radio. The process was open for four weeks. Approximately 5 applications have been received. Three seats are available.
3. Sockeye Stamp-Ted Wellman assigned this project to the Legislative committee; Joe Connors, Keith Baxter volunteer to help Ricky Gease. Brent Johnson volunteered to run a resolution through the borough assembly. Bobbi Jo has the information from last year when this process first started and will work with the committee on the process. The committee will work on the details of a conceptual plan and then bring it back to the board for approval.

IV. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Federal Subsistence board updates: Andy Loranger reported the federal subsistence board has passed a proposal to allow for a community single gill net fishery on the Kenai River. This fishery would only occur in the federally managed areas of the Kenai River. During this process the Refuge had concerns that this fishery may already add to the conservation issues occurring on the Kenai. This proposal was submitted by the Ninilchik Traditional Council and one of the requirements is to have an operational plan submitted for approval before the fishery would occur. At this time no such plan has been submitted.

It was recommended that the board request a reconsideration of this fishery to the subsistence board.

Joe Connors made a motion on behalf of the Guide Advisory Committee, due to conservation for anadromous and residential fish species and potential conflicts with existing users the KRSMA; the advisory board requests the federal subsistence board to reconsider their authorization of a subsistence gill net fishery in the Kenai River.

Andy Szczesny seconds the motion.

Andy commented that the federal subsistence board has more power than many realize. There was no public opposition on this proposal. Andy did not believe this would move forward. In a triangle the federal board is on top and they have power.

Joe commented that this does not mean you are opposed to subsistence but just this proposal. Brent commented that there is a Ninilchik three education fishery in Ninilchik on the beach. Andy said this is a fishery that occurs only on federal lands, which include the Chugach National Forest and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge is the only places this can occur.

Andy Loranger said there are many unanswered question that need clarification. The Ninilchik Traditional Council is responsible to develop the operational plan for this fishery.

The motion passed unanimously.

Ricky Gease and Monte Roberts, Andrew Carmichael, Andy Szczesny, Ted Wellman, and Joe Connors will help in the reconsideration for this proposal.

V. CORRESPONDENCE:

- VI. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** Tim Stevens commented there were some great committee meetings and was glad he could participate. Joe Connors was glad that the board seems to have some direction. Ted commented at the level of participation in all the committee meetings.

VII. ADJOURNMENT:

