



KENAI RIVER

Special Management Area

"Working together...for the river"

ADVISORY BOARD

Kenai Region Office
PO Box 1247
Soldotna, AK 99669
907-262-5581

Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board

*** Meeting Minutes***

Thursday,

December 10th, 2020

5:30 p.m. via Microsoft Teams

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Roll Call-Joe Connors, Ben Mohr, Ron Rogalsky, Jeff Dolifka, William Tappan, Glenn Arundell, Monte Roberts, Ted Wellman, Branden Bornemann, Andrew Carmichael, Matt Connors, Marion Nelson, Colton Lipka, Jack Blackwell and Sarah Aspens.
- B. Minutes Approval- Minutes were approved as written
- C. Agenda Changes- Agenda was approved as written
- D. Public Comment-A resident of Funny River commented that when a group of agencies and board members conducted the site inspection on the 10 sites for the Funny River Boat launch that the local residents should have been invited to participate. There was also concern that the River Ranch property is not even being considered, when it is the best location for the launch. The launch is not going to be built any time soon do to lack of funding. So why not as least design the launch on the River Ranch property and then when the time comes the launch can be built. When the resident on the property is no longer living there.
- E. Presentations

II. REPORTS

- A. Agency and Government Reports
 - a. ADNR - State Parks – Jack Blackwell provided the following update:
 - Boat launches are now closed on the lower Kenai River.
 - Staff are working with the Dept. of Transportation on establishing a right-of-way for the Sterling Highway mile 45-60 project that is on land that Parks currently manages under a land agreement and proposed additions to the Kenai River Special Management Area.
 - This summer three fishing guides were cited for violations while guiding in KRSMA. The director's office is currently reviewing the cases for potential suspensions of their permits next season.
 - b. ADEC – Sarah Aspens provided the following update:
 - The solicitation for water quality data for inclusion in the 2022 integrated report is currently open. Agencies and NGOs are welcome to submit water quality data they've collected in the past two years. This solicitation closes next Tuesday, December 15th. If you have questions, contact Amber Bethe (amber.bethe@alaska.gov).
 - We're currently reviewing the project proposals for the 2021-2023 ACWA grant cycle. Successful applicants will be notified in January 2021. If you're interested in the ACWA grant program or have ideas for projects you'd like to do in the future, please reach out to myself or other DEC WQSAR staff. ACWA grants are funded for up to two years, and the next call for proposals will be in late 2022.

- The 2020 Integrated Report is under agency review. A public notice and comment period are planned for late spring 2021.
- c. ADF&G – Colton Lipka provided the following update:
- Projections for 2021 should be out in January.
 - Staff is currently having conversation on 2021 proposed projects and working on 2020 reports summarizing last summer project on the Kenai River.
- d. USF&WS - Matt Conner provided the following update.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), intends to begin a public scoping period followed by the preparation of an environmental assessment. The Service will prepare an environmental assessment to evaluate the impacts on the environment related to the Jim’s Landing Boat Launch Access and Parking Improvements, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska. The draft environmental assessment is scheduled to be released for public comment February 2021 and the final environmental assessment, and a Notice of Intent to publish an Environmental Impact Statement or a Finding of No Significant Impact, is scheduled for April 2021.
 - Three options have been developed that address the project scope for the boat launch and adjacent facilities. Through the overall planning and design process, we will move toward a single preferred alternative that reflects the preferred design criteria. The Fish and Wildlife Service requests comments concerning the scope of the analysis, and identification of relevant information, studies, and analyses. All comments must be received by January 8th, 2021. At the following website: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6H7BPVL>. This link will take you to a separate website (Survey Monkey) where you can provide project comments.
 - The current boat launch improvements at the end of Keystone Drive (Salmatof) construction is moving ahead on schedule.
 - The new multi-use trail on Ski Hill road is getting a lot on use. The Refuge is currently working on a plan on how to best maintain the trail in the winter.
- e. USFS - Marion Glaser provided the following update:
- Work continues on the design on the Sterling Highway. The agency and contractors are refining plans for rec sites as well as wildlife crossings.
 - There was a forest-wide climate change adaptation workshop that was well-attended.
 - NEPA work continues on the Vagt Lake Trailhead. We will be soliciting comments on the new proposed designs.
 - I have been working on refining information pertaining to winter motorized access for the website.
 - Currently hiring for a 13:13 trails position. There will be one each in Cordova, Girdwood and Moose Pass. The position will be open for 5 days.
- f. City of Kenai – No report
- g. City of Soldotna - Andrew Carmichael provided the board with the following:
- The city is currently working on expanding some of the trail opportunity in the City of Soldotna. This includes Swiftwater, Centennial and Soldotna Creek Park.
- h. Kenai Peninsula Borough – No report

B. Committee Reports

- a. President’s Report-No report
- b. Guide Advisory-Monte Robert provided the board with the following:
- The committee is planning on having a Teams meeting in January to discuss The three guide citations.
- c. Habitat-No report

- d. River Use-Bill Tappan provided the board with the following:
The committees primary focus has been on the Funny River boat launch site selection.
- e. Legislative/Government Activities-Ben Mohr provided the board with the following:
Ben was task in drafting a letter regarding the Land and Water Conversation funds and providing receipt and administrative authority for DNR. Ben is waiting on the legislature to organize and see who is appointed to the Senate finance committee when addressing the letter. Jack Blackwell also added there is a Statewide effort through the Alaska Trail program to coordinate a statewide response and messaging to the legislature.

III. OLD BUSINESS:

- a. Funny River Boat Launch Selection

Jack provided the following update on this project.

In 2015 – 2016, there was a planning process for the River Ranch unit which is part of the Kenai River Special Management Area and is co-managed by DNR/DFG. The site plan that was adopted through the public process calls for no development and habitat restoration on the parcel. DNR recognizes there is no developed public access for boaters to the Kenai River off the Funny River road system. There is an access issue for the community and part of DNR’s mission is to provide access to our state public lands and waters.

In 2019 the borough passed a resolution requesting the state Departments of Natural Resources, Fish & Game, and Transportation collaborate with the Kenai River Sportfishing Association on this lack of access issue.

The KRSMA Advisory Board is established by statute to provide DNR with input on the management of the Kenai River Special Management Area and currently include representatives from DNR, DFG and KRSA so it was practical for this board to work on this issue. In 2019 the KRSMA Advisory Board began working on the Funny River Road boat launch issues. The board formed a committee which recently completed a review of public land along the Funny River road system. The committee was tasked with identifying two locations suitable for a boat launch one below the Naptowne Rapids and one above.

In summary, the committee recommends that the DNR land at the end of Fisherman’s Road (very end of Funny River Road) is suitable developing a boat launch, the borough should improve the Mykiss Street Right-of-Way which currently serves as a boat launch and could be improved for access/egress for the community if there were a natural disaster, and that once these two items were completed it should reevaluate the boater access needs below the rapids.

Due to COVID the committee was unable to have representatives from the community participate in person during the field trip, but there are opportunities for providing input. A work session will be hosted by the KRSMA Advisory Board next Tuesday (5:30 – 7:30 pm via Microsoft Teams) for the public to offer input on this issue and written comments are also accepted through January 8th.

Now it is up to the KRSMA Advisory Board on whether to endorse any of these suggestions. Funding has not been secured for design and construction and ultimately it will be up to the stakeholders, state, and the borough to fund any improvements.

Ted said that access to the Kenai River Special Management Area is precisely the type of issue that this advisory board is established for. The advisory board provides DNR with recommendations only.

- b. Update on Guide Academy-Jack provided the board with the following update:
The Kenai River Guide Academy has been a successful program that trains fishing guides about the Kenai River. The Academy is a cooperative venture with the Kenai River Professional Guide Association, University of Alaska Kenai Peninsula College, and DNR that includes guest instructors from the Refuge, DFG, and US Coast Guard. Typically, there are two classes offered each year, one in March and one in April. Last spring, the April class was cancelled due to COVID. Because of COVID restrictions, this spring the Academy will be offered on-line. The UA-KPC has teamed with the Office of Boating Safety to offer the class on-line and efforts are currently underway to film each instructor's presentation. This partnership with the OBS could be a model for developing and offering a specific boating education program for the Kenai River.

Brandon asked how the cultural history would be covered, since this was offered by Dr. Alan Boras who has since passed. Monte said that Dr. Boras' presentation had been filmed and this will be included in the Academy.

There was interest from those attending the advisory board meeting about attending the Academy, just to learn about the topics and not necessarily to become a guide. Jack said he would share this with the Academy Board.

- IV. NEW BUSINESS**-Ben Mohr commented that the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council voted this week to close down a large area in Alaska's Upper Cook Inlet to commercial fishing, Fishermen would still be able to operate in state waters, including the shoreline and up to three nautical miles offshore, but the closure area would be closed to all gear types. According to council analysis, about 20 percent of the total salmon caught in Cook Inlet come from that area, and a little less than half of the total drift fleet salmon catch.

V. CORRESPONDENCE

- VI. PUBLIC COMMENT**-Jim Harpring gave a comment regarding the Funny River boat launch selection process. He was very disappointed that the group had a meeting visiting all the proposed sites for the boat launch and did not invite any members of the public. Other points included the amount of time and organization can give for a public notice and comments regarding Mykiss avenue ROW/section line easement. Jim had several other points that will be submitted to the board by written comment.

- VII. BOARD MEMBERS COMMENTS**-Bill Tappan wished everyone a Happy Holiday. Bill also commented that the KRSMA board advertises all the meetings and does a great job doing so. Richard Galloway thank the board for all the board work.

- VIII. ADJOURNMENT:** Next Meeting: January 14th, 2020