

SLIKOK CREEK UNIT, KENAI RIVER SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREA CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLAN



DIVISION OF PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

October 2008

OFFICE OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY REPORT NUMBER 128



Alaska Department of
**NATURAL
RESOURCES**



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Cover: Slikok Creek flood plain and the Kenai River, looking southeast. Photo by R. VanderHoek, August 6, 2008.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Slikok Creek Unit of the Kenai River Special Management Area (KRSMA) is a 37.14 acre land unit administered by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (State Parks), located on the northern edge of the city of Soldotna on the Kenai Peninsula. The Slikok Creek Unit is centered on the confluence of Slikok Creek and the Kenai River approximately 19 miles upstream from the river's mouth (Figure 1). The unit includes the floodplain of lower Slikok Creek and the terrace bluff tops on each side of the creek. The unit is primarily used by the public as a fishing destination, though it is also a recognized wildlife viewing location¹.

The purpose of this plan is to develop guidelines for the management of the cultural resources on KEN-429² in the Slikok Creek Unit. This plan sets forth land management and land use information, areas of concern, and management guidelines for cultural resources on park lands.

II. REGIONAL LAND MANAGEMENT

Management Authority and Responsibility

State Parks has statutory authority and responsibility for managing resources on designated state lands, including the KRSMA. It is charged with making the area available to the public for a variety of uses while protecting aspects of the area that have been deemed important to preserve.

The Alaska Historic Preservation Act establishes state policy to "preserve and protect the historic, prehistoric and archaeological resources in Alaska from desecration and destruction so that the scientific, historic and cultural heritage embodied in these resources may pass undiminished to future generations."³ The Slikok Creek Unit managed by the State contains significant cultural resources, including a prehistoric Dena'ina village site. It is important that this Dena'ina site is on public land and has been reserved from the public domain through the KRSMA designation. The Kenaitze Indian Tribe and members of the general public have expressed interest and concern regarding the management of cultural resources at Slikok Creek. It is the responsibility of State Parks to insure that these concerns are addressed in unit management.

The Slikok Creek Unit exists to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Slikok Creek area. It is the responsibility of State Parks to weigh the public use needs of the unit against the protection of the unit's natural and cultural resources. A balanced management of the unit will allow access to fishing and other public use while still preserving the natural and cultural environment for future generations.

¹ The Slikok Creek Unit is listed in "Alaska's Kenai Peninsula Wildlife Viewing Trail Guide".

² KEN-429 is the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey (AHRS) number given to the Slikok Creek Village Site. The AHRS is a statewide inventory of all reported prehistoric and historic sites, maintained by the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology.

³ (Alaska Statutes, 41.35.010)

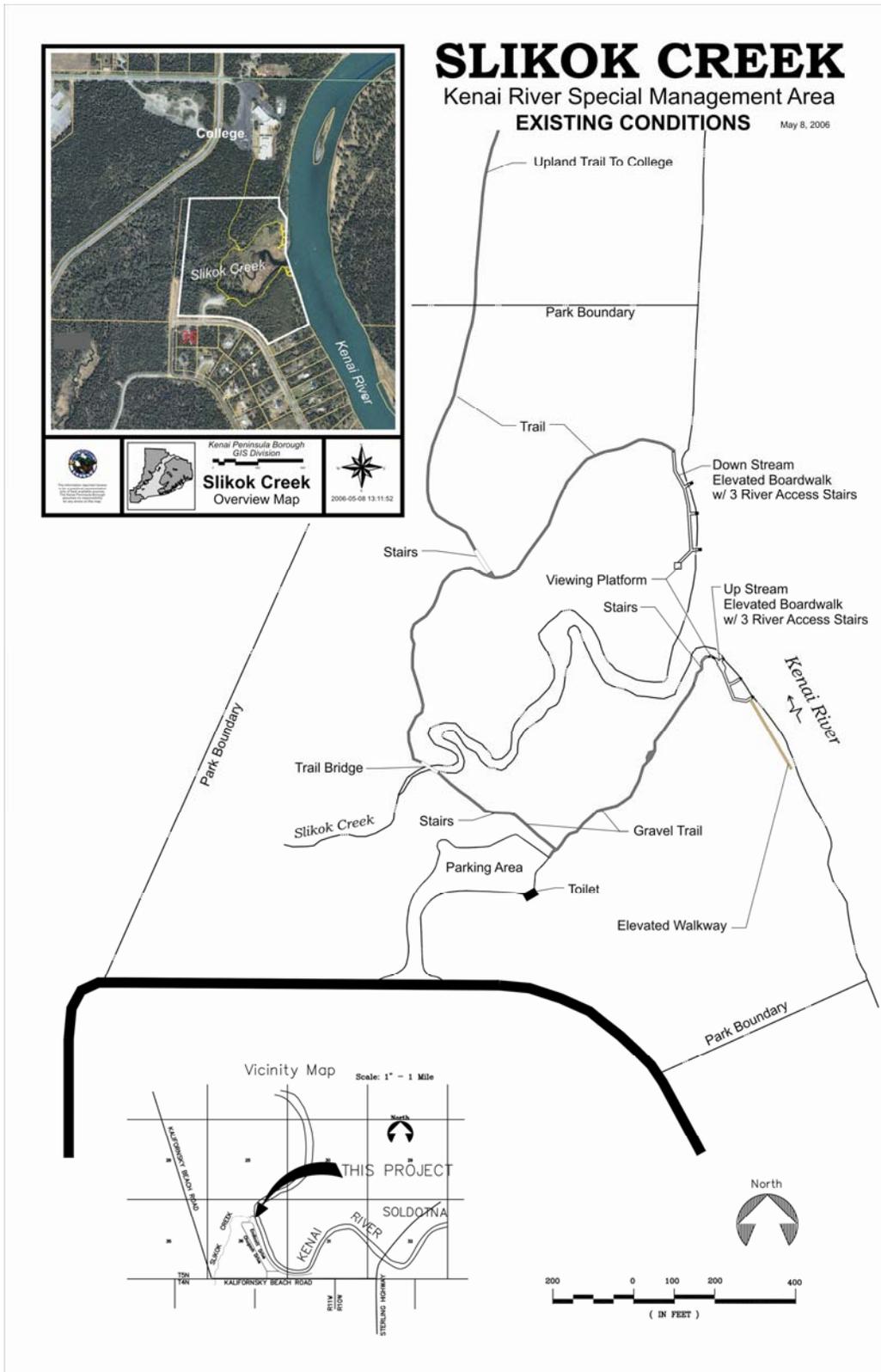


Figure 1. Slikok Creek Unit of the Kenai River Special Management Area.

Kenai River Special Management Area

Slikok Creek is one unit of the KRSMA. The KRSMA was designated in 1984 by the Alaska Legislature to "...protect and perpetuate the fishery and wildlife resources and habitat in the unit and adjacent area; and to manage recreational uses and development activities in the unit and adjacent area."⁴ The KRSMA consists of more than 105 linear miles of rivers and lakes, including Kenai Lake, Skilak Lake, and the Kenai River from river mile 82 downstream to four miles above the river's mouth on Cook Inlet. Adjacent to these waters are fifteen state park sub-units and land owned by cities, the borough and the federal government, as well as private and native lands.

AS 41.21.506 directs the DNR Commissioner to develop and adopt a comprehensive plan for the KRSMA and to adopt regulations under the Administrative Procedures Act to implement the plan. The regulations must: "designate incompatible uses and prohibit or restrict them" and, "establish a registration, licensing or comparable procedure for professional fishing guides and additional fishing guide controls as the commissioner considers necessary."⁵

DNR Resource Management Plans for Slikok Creek

Planning efforts for Slikok Creek started prior to the legislative creation of the KRSMA in 1984. The Slikok Creek area had been identified in a State Parks 1983 planning document, the Kenai River State Park Units Master Plan as being a site for shore fishing and tent camping; river boaters use it for camping and day activities such as picnicking. In the analysis section of the document it reported "that land access to the site is via residential roads. Because of its physical configuration, the site is capable of only a moderate level of activity."⁶ When the KRSMA was legislatively designated in June of 1984, 37.14 acres of land surrounding the mouth of Slikok Creek was officially designated to be managed and administered by State Parks. The gravel pit on the south side of the creek was converted into a parking area and a single vault latrine installed in the fall of 1985.

In 1986 the first Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan was completed after two years of planning and public process. This fulfilled the requirements mandated by Alaska Statutes 41.21.500-514 when the Special Management Area was created. The plan provided an overall recommendation for Slikok Creek to be managed and developed for shore fishing. The plan concurred with the 1983 Master Plan that the site could only accommodate a moderate level of activity. Three specific facility recommendations were also made for Slikok Creek:

⁴ Appendix B Plan Units, Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan, November 1998, Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources

⁵ Alaska Statutes 41.21.500- 41.21.514

⁶P. 67, Kenai River State Park Units Master Plan, March 1983, Park Planning Section, Division of Parks, Department of Natural Resources

1. Access Facilities, South Side

The Division of Parks should construct access facilities on the south side of Slikok Creek in the vicinity of the old gravel pit. These facilities should include 20 parking spaces, a single vault latrine, water well, and signs. A trailhead should tie into the existing foot trail to the Kenai River fishing area. A pedestrian bridge should be built over Slikok Creek to allow access between the north and south shores.

2. Fishing facilities

The Division of Parks should construct fishing platforms and boardwalk in heavily used shore fishing areas intended to improve access to fishing water and protect (or re-establish) riparian vegetation.

3. Shore Fishing Designation

The Alaska Board of Fisheries should enact a special regulation prohibiting fishing from boats in front of Slikok Creek. The designation should include the entire length of the Slikok Creek Site, but only extend to the mid-channel of the river. The regulations would improve bank fishing by reducing conflicts with boat anglers.

In 1997 the Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan was revised, and for the first time, a component was added to the recommendations that addressed the cultural resources of each park unit within the Special Management Area, including Slikok Creek. The 1997 cultural resources recommendations for Slikok Creek consisted of two items: first, that DNR should conduct a detailed survey of the site's cultural resources; and second, that State Parks should, in conjunction with interested community groups, develop a site stewardship program for this site.⁷

In 1998 and 1999 State Parks installed a steel pedestrian walkway on the north side of the Slikok Creek floodplain. Archaeologists monitored the work. The pedestrian walkway construction plans avoided known cultural features and minimized ground disturbance. Archaeologists excavated construction locations requiring ground disturbance to sterile soil before construction took place. This approach needs to be continued in any future facility upgrades conducted at the Slikok Creek Unit.

In 1999 and 2000 State Parks upgraded the boardwalks and stairways on the south side of Slikok Creek, and added interpretive panels to enhance the visitor's experience.

⁷ Appendix B Plan Units, Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan, November 1998, Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources

III. CULTURAL HERITAGE OF SLIKOK CREEK

Dena'ina Occupation of the Upper Kenai Peninsula

Dena'ina Athabaskan populations have lived on the upper Kenai Peninsula for approximately 1000 years. During that time the Dena'ina developed salmon harvesting and storage techniques that led to sedentism for regional populations. The Dena'ina located their villages along rivers, lake shores or the Cook Inlet bluff for distances of up to three or four kilometers. Fish weirs were constructed across tributary creeks like Slikok Creek to harvest chinook, sockeye and coho salmon, with late run coho salmon targeted in particular. The coho salmon were harvested, cleaned, dried, and stored in underground cold storage pits referred to by the Kenai Dena'ina as *elnen tugh*. These storage pits were excavated into the well-drained soil of river terraces along the Kenai River and its tributaries. The food inside froze during the fall, preserving the stored salmon for the village during the winter. The process of salmon collection, storage and distribution was overseen by the Qeshqa, a village coordinator with chief-like responsibilities. This system allowed the Dena'ina to sustainably utilize the region's salmon resources.

Significance of Slikok Creek Archaeological Site

The Slikok Creek Unit contains KEN-429, the Slikok Creek Village Site. KEN-429 is one of a small number of Dena'ina sites known along the lower Kenai River (Figure 2). It consists of 5 late prehistoric Dena'ina houses and over 90 salmon cold storage pits, located on park and college land along a 2 kilometer section of Slikok Creek. The five hundred year old site has produced stone tools and hearths located both inside and outside of houses.

The site documents house styles and subsistence practices that allowed the Dena'ina in the last millennium to shift from a mobile to a sedentary lifeway through the use of cold storage technology. The site is located in one of the few areas of the state where specific climatic and soil conditions in association with a late salmon run made such a technological adaptation possible. The site includes the locations where the fish were caught, processed, stored, and eventually eaten. It allows the analysis of the relationship between house locations to cold storage pits, and their relation to processing locations and to the creek where the weir fishing was conducted.

The Dena'ina pattern of extended villages and cold storage system appear to be a cultural evolution limited to the last thousand years in south-central Alaska. This pattern of Dena'ina land use has only been understood in the last few years, mainly through the work of Alan Boraas and the anthropology program of the Kenai Peninsula College. Our understanding of Dena'ina land use can only continue to increase with further study.

The Slikok Creek Unit is unique because it contains all the major components that made the Dena'ina ecological adaptation possible. KEN-429 has not been heavily impacted by road construction, building construction, or foot traffic along the river. The site has good integrity, with intact subsurface deposits across much of the site's lower terrace. These

intact deposits have a high potential to yield further information on subsistence and settlement of the late prehistoric Dena'ina. The Office of History and Archaeology has



Figure 2. Patterned areas denote location of features for the prehistoric Dena'ina village at Slikok Creek.

determined that Slikok Creek is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because of the potential the site has to give a greater understanding of Dena'ina regional prehistory.

The extended nature of Dena'ina village sites creates a challenge for land managers. To have a picture of the Dena'ina lifeway we need to have preserved examples of entire villages with their houses and related features in association with the resource areas used by their inhabitants. The small size of the village at KEN-429 and the size of the state land parcels that contain the village allow preservation of this set of human and natural features at Slikok Creek. The Slikok Creek Unit, in conjunction with adjacent college land, contains the only Dena'ina site of this importance on the lower Kenai River

reserved from public domain. As more land along the Kenai River becomes developed, this site becomes even more important.

IV. MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

The management guidelines below will be followed for any future development at Slikok Creek. These include:

- 1.1 Any development at the Slikok Creek Unit should be compatible with the unit's site stewardship plan.
- 1.2 Any development at the Slikok Creek Unit should go through a review process, including input from the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and other interested parties.
- 1.3 Development of the bluff top on the north side of the unit should be restricted, with no additional access-related disturbances allowed. Access to the culturally sensitive north bluff should only be allowed for educational (biological, cultural) purposes. The only improvements appropriate for the north bluff would be interpretive signage or other additions that focus on the historic and prehistoric use of the area.

An expedient way to avoid impacts to the cultural resources at Slikok Creek is to avoid locations of known resources. Survey and limited subsurface testing has shown that the highest concentrations of known cultural materials are located along the bluff on the north side of the unit. This landform also has high potential for the presence of human remains, which are difficult to locate without extensive testing.
- 1.4 Avoid surface and subsurface impacts to the flood plain north of the creek, when possible, as it contains multiple buried hearths and evidence of intensive use. Avoiding these and other areas of known cultural resources are the best and least expensive way of protecting these resources.
- 1.5 An archaeologist should be on-site to monitor any ground disturbance.
- 1.6 Focus public access to the parking lot on the unit's southern bluff top, where latrines and designated trails already exist. Access to the waters of lower Slikok Creek and to the trails and platforms accessing the Kenai River SMA should only be allowed from the current parking area established off Endicott Drive. A single point of land access to Slikok Creek provides several management

benefits. It allows the State to present visitors with management information as they first enter the park. Users can view interpretive panels as they move from their vehicles to the river. They can be channeled to existing trails and raised boardwalks, which protect the archaeological site from direct and indirect user impacts while providing good recreational access to fishing on the Kenai River.

- 1.7 The Boyd Schaffer Trail should be abandoned, and not be signed for public use.
- 1.8 Consideration should be given to the seasonal installation of a fence between the Slikok Creek Unit and college lands to discourage bluff top access to the park unit.
- 1.9 Future trails or other site improvements should be routed away from known features, with a buffer space placed around features.
- 1.10 Consideration should be given to the design and installation of raised boardwalks which do not disturb cultural resources. Raised boardwalks protect cultural resources by routing users to hardened walkways that do not erode the surface of the site. If additional raised boardwalks are desired in the future, it may be possible to construct them with broad, shallow footings that do not penetrate the soil deeply enough to disturb possible buried cultural horizons below.
- 1.11 Consideration should be given to the effects of vegetation modification on cultural resources. Removing vegetation that either increases natural erosion or encourages trail formation has the potential to impact surface and subsurface cultural materials. Any future landscape modifications must take this into account. Devegetated areas that risk damage to cultural resources should be allowed to revegetate.

V. IMPLEMENTATION

Purpose

This plan is to assist State Parks in avoiding or minimizing impacts to the cultural resources at the Slikok Creek Unit. These resources include the features visible on the surface, as well as potential subsurface cultural materials and features. Any ground disturbance or vegetation removal has the potential to impact cultural resources at the site.

Goal 1

Perform a detailed archaeological survey of the Slikok Creek Unit. The 1998 Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan calls for a detailed survey of the unit's cultural resources by DNR. This is needed for appropriate management of the unit, and should be done before any site modification is considered.

Objectives

- 1.1 The survey will build on the mapping performed by Boraas in 2003.
- 1.2 The survey will include examination of visitor impacts on visible cultural resources.
- 1.3 The resultant report should include an inventory and condition assessment of site features, and recommendations for minimizing impacts on any impacted resources.
- 1.4 Survey areas should include the creek's banks and bottom for evidence of prehistoric activity areas and fish weirs.
- 1.5 The report should include a section with detailed suggestions for research projects involving Slikok Creek Village that would help explain how the Dena'ina lived in the past.
- 1.6 The survey and report, in conjunction with a stewardship plan, discussed below, will allow the formulation of a long-term management strategy for this unit.

Goal 2

Continue an ongoing consultation process with tribal and public groups regarding the management of the Slikok Creek Unit.

Objectives

- 2.1 The Kenaitze Indian Tribe must be included in the planning of any future development at the unit. The Slikok Creek Unit is an important heritage site to the Dena'ina.
- 2.2 Future development should include the input of other community groups and interested parties.

Goal 3

Develop a Site Stewardship Plan for the Slikok Creek Unit, as called for in the 1998 Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan.

Objectives

- 3.1 Develop a Site Stewardship Plan, which should be done before any further site modifications are considered at the unit.
- 3.2 Convene a yearly forum of interested parties held in the region regarding the management of the Slikok Creek Unit, to provide regular site stewardship input and guidance.

Goal 4

Foster public outreach and education.

Objectives

- 4.1 State Parks should install interpretive panels on how the Dena'ina utilized the resources at Slikok Creek.
- 4.2 State Parks may produce a brochure, or utilize other media, to explain the prehistory of Slikok Creek.
- 4.3 The Kenaitze tribal community may find the unit useful for public presentations about traditional subsistence use of the area.
- 4.4 A variety of community activities may be scheduled at the site.
- 4.5 The college may use the site, as it has done in the past, for teaching about the area's prehistory and traditional land use as well as the biological resources of the region.

Goal 5

List Slikok Creek Village Site in the National Register of Historic Places.

Objectives

- 5.1 A national register nomination should be written for the Slikok Creek Village Site.
- 5.2 The nomination should be submitted with appropriate documentation and followed until its listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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