

Chapter 4: Recommendations & Implementation



MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

This plan is only as good as its implementation. Numerous management actions are necessary to implement the plan and to respond to physical, social and economic conditions. These actions include soliciting advice from the Northern Area State Parks Citizen Advisory Board; establishing an administrative, staffing and budgeting system; working closely with recreation users and user groups; developing cooperative interagency agreements; examining management efficiencies and effectiveness; researching visitor preferences, behavior and response to management actions; and identifying management actions to achieve and maintain these resource and social conditions.

Public involvement is essential to the successful implementation of the plan. It is important that recreation users and user groups be involved in the interpretation of land management issues, development, and design and serve as advocates for the recreation area. The use of a citizen advisory board serves as an interface between the Division and the public.

FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

While new and improved facilities are recommended for the Recreation Area in Chapters 2-4, construction priorities are not prescribed in the plan. Funding for such facilities depends on several factors that cannot be predicted over the long term. These include DPOR's annual budget, capital funding appropriations from the legislature, reception of grants, and other agencies' funding. For example, many recommended improvements along the Chena Hot Springs Road depend on DOT/PF's construction priorities and funding. Nonetheless, State Parks' staff and the Northern Area Parks Citizen Advisory Board should work together on a regular basis to identify near term development priorities when likely sources of funding sources are better known.

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS AND ACTIONS

Cooperative management agreements provide a common framework that enables land managing and regulatory agencies to work together, inform others of their activities, and avoid incompatible and duplicative efforts. In addition, actions by other agencies are essential to the successful management of the Recreation Area. Proposed agreements and actions by other agencies are listed below.

U.S. Army and BLM

Encourage the development of public access to or through military lands and facilities and the relinquishment of withdrawn lands to the state. Enter into a cooperative management agreement with the military and BLM.

Department of Environmental Conservation

Actively monitor water quality as needed. Manage refuse, solid waste, and potable water in compliance with applicable laws.

Department of Fish and Game

- Fisheries: Stock ponds with game fish as appropriate. Consult with ADF&G during development of ponds and angler/boating access. Develop salmon spawning interpretive areas, exchange visitor use statistics, assess stock status of fish populations as needed, and consult on fishing regulations and law enforcement.
- Reconstruction of pond shorelines and areas near shorelines may be necessary. ADF&G will work closely with State Parks to provide planning input for the construction of fishing ponds, and provide recommendations to improve fish survival and the attractiveness of the waterbody to all, including anglers.
- Wildlife: Determine feasibility of establishing wildlife viewing areas and non-game programs, monitor wildlife populations, encourage research, hunter access, hunter education and safety, and consult on hunting regulations and law enforcement.
- Develop an ecological research program to assess habitat health & productivity over time.

DNR Division of Forestry

- Fire Management: Continue to work with the Division of Forestry to review wildland fire management options for the recreation area using the Alaska Interagency Wildfire Management Plan for guidance.
- Personal Use Timber: Revise, if necessary, the established criteria to permit the gathering or cutting of timber that will protect or enhance the values for which the Recreation Area was established.

DNR Division of Mining, Land and Water

- There are two short segments of the Chena Dome Trail that are outside the Recreation Area and cross land managed by the DNR Division of Mining, Land and Water. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation should apply for an Interagency Land Management Agreement for these two segments so that the entire length of the trail is managed by the same division.

Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

- Gravel Pits: Work with DOT/PF to identify road maintenance needs, restore inactive gravel pits and reduce public safety hazards.
- Work with DOT/PF on flood mitigation and control projects.
- Highway Right-of-Way: Improve visitor access and safety at bridge sites, dikes, pullouts, viewing areas, river access and other features of attraction. Construct safer transitions from Chena Hot Springs Road onto primary facility access roads. Provide for greater informational signing.
- The roadside shoulders of Chena Hot Springs Road should continue to be cleared of all vegetation to enhance driver safety. Hydroaxing is allowed to minimize collisions with moose and other wildlife. Future highway improvements should consider constructing wide shoulders or separated pathways for bicycle and pedestrian use along the Chena Hot Springs Road.

PLAN REVIEW, MODIFICATIONS AND SPECIAL EXCEPTIONS

This plan represents the best efforts of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation to analyze natural features of the recreation area and their capability to provide sustained outdoor recreational opportunities without significantly compromising the area's character. The planning period for this document is 20 years or until the plan is revised. This period is used for the basis of decision making with the realization that intermediate reviews and modifications may be warranted and are appropriate. The Director may initiate a plan review at any time. The plan guides the management and development of the area.

The plan is not a stagnant document. There are several activities that affect the plan implementation that may occur outside the specific planning process or the specific guidelines for this park unit. For example, the park unit may be affected by statewide decisions on:

- policy
- statutes or regulations
- budget allocations, and
- capital projects.

The adopted management plan is a policy statement for the park unit, requiring that developments, uses, and management must be in accordance with its directions. However, the plan must be flexible in order to adapt to changing circumstances and new information. The procedures listed below are intended to permit this flexibility and ensure that the plan continues to be a useful management tool.

Periodic Review

The Northern Area Citizen Advisory Board should be encouraged to schedule regular review of the plan, for example to assess the monitoring program every three years. The management plan may also undergo periodic review when the Director considers it necessary and so directs. The decision to review the plan may be triggered by:

- written public or agency requests for review;
- policy changes within the Division;
- availability of new data;
- availability of new technology for recreational equipment; or
- changing social or economic conditions that place different demands on the park or affect the division's capabilities.

In addition, the Northern Area State Park's Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) may recommend changes to the management plan and implementation procedures at any time after its approval and implementation.

The plan review will include meetings, as appropriate, with the CAB, interested groups, the general public, affected agencies, the Area Superintendent and other Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation personnel. The periodic review will lead to one of the following actions:

- a. no modification of the plan;
- b. modification of the plan; or
- c. granting of a special exception.

Items "b" and "c" are explained in detail below.

Modifications

- a. *Minor changes*: These are changes that, if accomplished, would not cause a deviation from the original intent of the management plan. Minor changes may be necessary for clarification, consistency, or to facilitate plan implementation. Minor changes do not require public review but must be coordinated with the Area Superintendent and appropriate staff.
- b. *Major changes*: These are changes that, if accomplished, would cause a deviation from the original intent of the plan. Major changes require public notice and review prior to adoption.

Special Exceptions

Exceptions to the provisions of the management plan may be made without modification of the plan. Special exceptions shall occur only when compliance with the plan is excessively difficult or impractical, and an alternative procedure can be implemented which adheres to the purposes and spirit of the plan.

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation may make a special exception in the implementation of the plan through the following procedures:

- a. The person or agency requesting the special exception shall prepare a written finding that specifies:
 - 1) the nature of the special exception requested;
 - 2) the extenuating conditions that require a special exception;
 - 3) the alternative course of action to be followed; and
 - 4) how the intent of the plan will be met by the alternative.
- b. The Director will review the findings and issue a determination. If warranted by the degree of controversy or the potential impact, the Director will hold a public hearing before reaching a decision.
- c. The decision of the Director may be appealed to the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources whose decision will be final.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES NEAR THE RECREATION AREA

The lower reaches of the Chena River, running from the west boundary of the Recreation Area to and through Fairbanks to the Chena River's confluence with the Tanana River, represent a significant recreation resource to the region and the state. Except for short stretches in the Tanana Valley State Forest and the Chena Lakes Recreation Area, the lower Chena River has poor access from the road and is not in protective status. An open space river corridor is recommended downriver from the Recreation Area that would result in the protection of the recreation potential for most of the length of the Chena River. The Department of Natural Resources and the Fairbanks North Star Borough should develop a cooperative management plan for this corridor working closely with local communities, interest groups, landowners and river users.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Monitoring and Compliance

Continue to monitor visitor use in the Recreation Area. This includes gathering information on user characteristics; overall perceptions of environmental conditions; visitor satisfaction; reported and preferred types of experiences; impact and tolerances of impacts (ranging from litter and human waste to perceived crowding); river encounters and fishing competition; and

acceptability of proposed management actions. This information will help guide future revisions of the management plan and substantiate funding requests for operations and maintenance. This information will also help park managers better manage the Recreation Area for its intended purposes.

Continue to monitor water quality and the Recreation Area's environment including measuring changes in the health and productivity of key habitats, organisms and water quality over time.

Establish means of monitoring and compliance, especially access roads, trail use, commercial use permits, access to private lands and wood cutting activities.

Private Landowners

Work with private landowners to minimize land use conflicts, encourage compatible development, ensure continued public access and provide incentives for the private sector investment in providing visitor services.

Gravel Sites for Recreation Developments

Gravel needs for recreation developments, campgrounds, trails, and roads may be obtained from sources within the Recreation Area. Gravel extraction must follow a plan of operation, address resource values, public safety, visitor use, rehabilitation and compatibility to park management objectives. Regional alternatives shall be considered.

Media

The status of existing facilities and new development, as well as trail status, should be provided to the appropriate media on a timely basis.

Sign Management Plan

A sign management plan should be prepared to ensure appropriate signing of existing facilities and new developments as they are added to the Recreation Area. This will ensure standardization, avoid confusion and over-signing, and improve public safety and enjoyment.

Staffing

Summer

Extend the one seasonal ranger to year-round for the Chena River SRA. Add a new ranger position for on-the-ground management of recreational use when funding is available. Develop a supervisory ranger for the Recreation Area separate from the one full-time ranger who is supervisory for the entire Northern Area. Add a maintenance worker to the staff structure available to assist in the Recreation Area. Continue to provide field support staff, including Recreation Technicians for front- and back-country, along with trail crews and campground hosts. Continue to support volunteer caretakers who reside at the maintenance compound. As the facilities and infrastructure improve, convert some volunteer positions to paid assistants, as funding allows.

Winter

As budget allows, State Parks will continue to break open trails to the public use cabins, and plow trailheads and recreation access points within the Recreation Area. Extend the summer seasonal maintenance worker to year round. Volunteer caretakers will be recruited to help with winter operations and will be stationed within the Recreation Area. As the winter program grows, volunteer positions may be converted to paid positions, as funding allows.

Trail Design and Construction

Trail design standards need to be established according to a trail classification system. Alignment of trails should be based on management objectives considering resource protection, user group, user experience, maintenance and operating costs, site constraints, avoidance of user conflicts and public preferences. Trail construction by user groups volunteering services is encouraged based on the trail plan and design standards. Table D-1 shows the types of trail classifications in the Recreation Area. See Appendix D.

Trail Management and Use

Summer motorized use is allowed only on designated trails. Winter off-trail motorized use is allowed after the snow depth is adequate to protect underlying vegetation. The agency will announce when the backcountry is open (fall) and closed (spring), generally mid-October and mid-April.

In accordance with regulations, motorized ORVs are permitted on designated trails if they are less than 1,500 pounds gross weight, or less than 8 pounds per square inch ground pressure; if they have more than one drive wheel or track; and are less than 88 inches wide.

Vehicle operators must be over 14 years to operate a snowmachine or other off-road vehicle in the Recreation Area unless accompanied by and under the direct supervision of a parent or person 21 years or older.

Roadside Clearing

State Parks should continue to coordinate with DOT/PF when clearing vegetation along the roadside is planned. To enhance one of the major visitor experiences, driving for pleasure, selective thinning of vegetation along the Chena Hot Springs Road should continue in order to enhance views of distant landforms such as the Granite Tors and views of foreground features such as lakes, sloughs, wildlife areas, the Chena River and other attractions. Vegetation manipulation, including hydroaxing, may serve other management purposes such as improving habitat, maintaining a seral stage of the forest, fire suppression and research. Roadside clearing also increases sight distances thus reducing the number of vehicular collisions with moose and other wildlife.

Widening Road Shoulders and Parallel Trails

Future highway improvements should consider adding wide shoulders or bike/pedestrian pathways along the Chena Hot Springs Road.

Utility and Transportation Corridors

Corridors which would alter the landscape or otherwise detract from the enjoyment of Recreation Area visitors shall not be routed through the Chena River State Recreation Area. Utilities to serve private lands within or adjacent to the recreation area should be planned to avoid or minimize their impact. All utility lines servicing park facilities will be placed underground with vegetation being restored to a natural appearance. All new and existing roadways will be designed to follow existing contours, and any necessary cuts or fills will be revegetated and returned to a natural appearing condition.

Visitor Count

Accurate and complete visitor statistics must be maintained for the recreation area. Attendance figures are necessary to measure user preferences and trends so the construction of new facilities and the redesign of existing facilities can be carried out to meet real demand. Trail registers or trail counters should be kept at all major trailheads. Methods of counting visitors should include induction loop road counters, mechanically triggered trail counters, photoelectric counters, car counts and observations. Surveys of visitors will not be utilized unless authorized by the Director.

SITE PLANNING

Prior to developing facilities recommended by this plan, site planning will occur. The site planning process also serves as an opportunity to review and reassess the management plan's recommendations. Although this plan's recommendations represent the division's objectives and priorities at the time of publication, changing conditions may warrant plan revisions.

During site planning, a detailed site analysis will be performed which may suggest minor revisions to the Plan's recommendations. The site planning process follows standard operating procedures involving internal review and public participation. Adjustments to the plan are expected as more site-specific detail becomes available and is analyzed. If a major departure from the intent of the management plan is warranted, public notice and review is required, unless a Special Exception is granted. The Director may determine the need for public review and comment. See the Plan Review, Modifications and Special Exceptions section in this chapter.

OTHER MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

Partners and Volunteers

Strategies should be developed to increase management effectiveness and efficiency through use of volunteers, campground hosts, Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) and Adult Conservation Corps (ACC) crews, prison labor, and non-profit organizations. There should also be greater emphasis on cost saving measures, restructuring fees, and partnering with the private sector.

Education and Interpretation

Additional educational materials should be developed that are designed to assist in protecting public safety and park resources, enhance the public's experience in the SRA, and reduce conflicts between users.