



Chugach State Park Update on Planning Effort



APRIL 2008

Newsletter #1

DEAR INTERESTED CITIZEN,

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources recently initiated a planning process to revise the Chugach State Park Master Plan and Trail Plan, and to develop a joint Access Plan with the Municipality of Anchorage. Earlier this month, the Chugach planning team held three public scoping workshops in Anchorage, Indian, and Eagle River to gather information about how people use the park and how they would like the park to be managed in the future. The workshops provided the public an opportunity to express their ideas and provide input about current management, uses, and resources adjacent to and within Chugach State Park. Specific topics of discussion included: trail and facilities maintenance and development; acquisition of legal park access; commercial, recreational, and subsistence uses; improved volunteer involvement opportunities; and the management of wildlife.

Over 100 people attended the Anchorage scoping workshop. Most comments supported addressing access issues along the boundary to disperse use. Support to incorporate new types of recreational uses in the plan was also widespread. Several Anchorage residents favored managing the park as it is, and would like trapping restricted to remote areas of the park.

Over 35 people attended the Indian Valley scoping workshop. Several people commented on issues and goals that focused on the need to minimize conflicts, protect the area's natural values, provide a range of recreational uses, and improve

public safety. Some Indian residents also requested trapping be restricted to more remote areas.

About 36 people attended the Eagle River scoping workshop. Comments received here were generally in support of focusing first on management of existing facilities and then on modest development of new facilities. Several comments focused on the need for an increase in park funding and staffing, more outreach education, and secured access to the park.

This newsletter contains a summary of the comments. There were many more comments than we could list here—these are just the main issues and ideas—but you can check the project website for a complete listing. The Chugach planning team is committed to conducting a comprehensive public process and developing a shared vision for the future of Chugach State Park, but we need your participation to do so. There is still time to provide input during this initial scoping comment period if you have not done so already or if there are additional issues that you feel need addressing.

We look forward to hearing from you,

The Chugach Planning Team

OVERVIEW

Chugach State Park contains approximately 495,000-acres of rugged mountain terrain and is located predominantly within the Municipality of



Anchorage. The park was established as a result of extensive input by citizens groups in the Anchorage area. The State Legislature passed the bill creating Chugach State Park in 1970. The purpose of the park is set forth in the legislation establishing the park, AS 41.21.120 – 41.21.125: “*The park is established to protect and supply a satisfactory water supply for the use of the people, to provide recreational opportunities for the people by providing areas for specified uses and constructing the necessary facilities in those areas, to protect areas of unique and exceptional scenic value, to provide areas for the public display of local wildlife and to protect the existing wilderness characteristics of the easterly interior area.*”

PURPOSE OF THE PLANS

The Chugach State Park Master Plan guides park management and makes recommendations for the development of recreational facilities within the park. The Chugach State Park Trail Plan provides specific guidance for trail development and maintenance. The Chugach Access Plan will guide the Municipality of Anchorage and the State of Alaska in the placement and development of access points along the boundary of the park.

IN THIS NEWSLETTER AND ONLINE

This newsletter summarizes the comments received during the public scoping workshops and written comments submitted to date concerning the revision of the 1980 Chugach State Park Master Plan and the 1986 Trail Plan, and the development of a joint DNR and MOA Chugach Access Plan. Also included is a summary of what to expect next and how you can become involved. For a complete list of comments and additional information, see:

<http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/units/chugach/>

The following is available on the project website:

- Newsletter #1 (this newsletter), April 2008
- Public Comment List, April 2008
- Chugach State Park Access Inventory, Analysis and Recommendations, October 2002
- Chugach State Park Trail Plan, January 1986
- Chugach State Park Master Plan, February 1980

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The following is a summary of comments received during the public scoping workshops held in Anchorage, Indian, and Eagle River organized by major themes including:

- Master Plan
- Trails
- Access
- Facilities and maintenance
- Wildlife
- Hunting and Trapping

MASTER PLAN

SUMMARY OF GENERAL MASTER PLAN COMMENTS: Many comments were directed toward the general management of Chugach State Park and the revision of the 1980 Master Plan. These included the need to address litter, human waste, camp fires, and general resource protection in the plan. A few people suggested including a provision in the plan that addresses unanticipated future activities and associated use numbers to give park managers the tools to address these uses as they surface. One resident noted that in the future, Chugach State Park may need to evaluate implementing a backcountry permitting system to incorporate and promote “Leave No Trace” principles.

Some suggested addressing fire hazard management in the plan, while others



wanted helicopter overflights and access management addressed. The protection of the viewshed was brought up, including addressing tower suitability within the park, tower heights and design restrictions. One resident expressed the need to increase the level of maintenance of park trails and facilities while also supplying safe trails and access. Another requested that less money be spent on capital improvements and more money be spent on human resources instead.

COMMUNICATION WITH THE PUBLIC: Several comments were received regarding communication. Many residents expressed a desire for better communication between park staff and the public. The need for improved coordination between the various agencies responsible for managing certain public resources was also suggested to improve public understanding of issues. This idea came from the current problem some have of not knowing whom to call when issues arise and often getting the runaround from various agency representatives.

PLANNING PROCESS: A few comments focused specifically on the planning process and plan format. Several were concerned that the planning process would be rushed, while others requested that we keep the same format as the old plan. Some expressed concern with opening up the existing plans for revision and instead suggested proceeding with a series of limited and targeted amendments to address issues of concern. Some suggested acknowledging military lands and providing a description of land agreements such as that between the state and the Alpenglow Ski Area at Arctic Valley.

DESIGNATION OF MANAGEMENT ZONES: A few people expressed concern regarding the designation of management zones in the park. Some wanted the quality of the park and the park experience to remain status quo. Several residents

wanted the wilderness boundary and character of the park to remain as it is, with no increase in motorized use. Others would like to see a decrease in motorized use, stating noise, smell, and safety concerns as reasons for the decrease.

Others commented that the park has been multi-use for years and should remain that way. One comment requested that the wilderness boundary be reevaluated to allow for an increase in and dispersal of motorized use, citing the conflict between non-motorized and motorized communities resulting from the current use pattern which boxes in and concentrates motorized users to the valleys. Some expressed concern that the end product of this planning effort would result in a complete non-motorized park and noted that everyone has a right to use the park and park facilities; therefore compromise is needed between the various user groups.

LAND ACQUISITION: A couple of comments addressed land acquisition. A few suggested taking advantage of lots for sale adjacent to and within the park. One resident requested that restrictive covenants be removed when in-holdings are purchased or obtained so as not to limit park management or uses.

FEES: Several comments addressed user fees in the park. Some supported the implementation of user fees where facilities are provided, stating that the fees need to be used for funding park maintenance and staffing. Others expressed concern about pricing people out of the park with the user fees, and the negative repercussions associated with fee collection on neighboring communities. One reason included the increase in park users refusing to pay and looking elsewhere—in driveways, along roadways, etc.—for free parking. A few comments proposed looking at other income-generating opportunities such as permits,



events, and facility fees to offset operating cost.

FUNDING & STAFF: Many comments were received regarding the lack of park staff and funding. Several residents expressed the need for improved funding for more staff to provide increased enforcement and on-the-ground presence. One resident appreciated seeing the presence of a patrol ranger recently in the Bird Creek area.

TRAILS

SUMMARY OF GENERAL TRAIL

COMMENTS: Many comments were received relating to trails and trail maintenance in the park. Several addressed the need to designate and design specific areas and trails for the various motorized and non-motorized uses. One resident suggested examining alternating use designation for some trails within the park, citing the alternating use by year on the Resurrection Trail near Hope as an example. Many expressed a concern regarding the management of horse use in the park and the need to designate and design horseback riding trails. Others requested that “four-wheeler” use be addressed. A few suggested designating and designing more mountain bike trails, some proposing utilization of existing facilities to connect areas such as the old jeep trails near Arctic Valley and the Eklutna Lake trail. Some residents wanted to ensure that winter cycling use on trails within the park be allowed and addressed in the plan.

TRAIL DESIGN: Numerous comments focused on trail design. Several wanted to see more loop trails, while another would like to see a mixture of different types of trails; pointing out that in some areas smaller trails would be sufficient. One resident proposed that State Parks be forward-thinking in trail design, suggesting adding safety features and possibly paving heavily used trails. Many wanted to see well-designed trails and trailheads, while

some proposed designing trails for specific uses to help generate funds.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE: Several comments focused on the need to manage erosion and off-trail impacts and the labyrinth of social trails being created in some areas of the park. Possible resolutions proposed were better trail education and increased ranger presence. Also more signage and better route marking was proposed to address these issues and encourage compliance. One resident expressed the general need for better care of existing trails, while another suggested implementing an “Adopt-A-Trail” program to provide maintenance and help offset associated costs. One resident stated that skiers appreciated grooming of some of the park trails and that they would like to see it done on a weekly basis during winter.

SPECIFIC TRAILS: Many comments were specific to certain trails or areas in the park. These included suggestions for an alpine trail in the vicinity of the Eagle River Nature Center, alternatives to the Eagle River Greenbelt trail, and safe access and trail connectivity near Eagle River High School for utilization by student athletes and the possibility of using the school’s lot as parking for trail users. One comment proposed connecting Falls Creek Trail to the Powerline Trail, while another proposed providing access to Big Peters Creek via Little Peters Creek. Some suggested that State Parks work with the military to gain legal access across the small portion of military land near Long Lake to establish a loop trail.

ACCESS

SUMMARY OF ACCESS COMMENTS:

Many comments were received regarding access to the park and park facilities. A few residents wanted the gates at some of the park facilities left unlocked before and after peak times and the summer season



for use by locals. One resident suggested developing new trailheads in Potter Valley, and others requested that the Gasline Trail access be improved. One comment proposed the privatization of some trailheads, while another would like to see a mixture of different types and sizes of park access points.

Some suggested providing key areas of access to the park to engage the community. Many residents suggested constructing access points within the park boundary rather than in neighborhoods outside of the park. Justifications for this included the lack of respect some park users have for neighboring land owners and the general concern residents of boundary communities have regarding the impact that park access has on private property and community maintained roads and facilities.

BIRD & INDIAN: One resident suggested eliminating neighborhood feeder roads from the Bird and Indian areas and providing access to the park via the highway instead. Another resident cited prior collaborative planning work done by residents and park staff in the 1990s on alternative access to the park via feeder trails to minimize impacts to neighborhoods. One comment proposed eliminating the Ocean View access point altogether due to the dust problem and safety concerns.

CANYON ROAD: Several comments were received regarding the need to address the Rabbit Creek access issue off Canyon Road. Residents of the Canyon Road vicinity offered suggestions for improving the situation, and expressed concerns related to private property and safety issues. Many feel that the current road condition poses a safety hazard due to its steep, narrow nature, and the lack of suitable parking and access for emergency vehicles. Also of concern is the increase in traffic, noise, and crime in the area.

EAGLE RIVER: Many comments were received expressing the general need for additional access points and parking in the Eagle River vicinity. Some suggested the expansion of parking at the Eagle River Nature Center, and the utilization of the Lions Park lot to provide access to Eagle River. Many stated the need for legal access to Ram Valley, since the valley experiences heavy use. One resident suggested using "Skyline" as a good example of successful partnerships, adequate parking, and legal access for park users. One person pointed out that Alpenglow Ski Area at Arctic Valley has good parking, which should be utilized.

FACILITIES & MAINTENANCE

SUMMARY OF FACILITIES COMMENTS:

Several comments addressed maintenance and development of park facilities. Some wanted State Parks to build more sustainable, environmentally friendly facilities that fit the local environment. A couple of residents wanted more year-round facilities, and a few proposed utilizing composting toilets for related reasons.

One comment noted the need for two or more major visitor centers for dissemination of park and educational information, while others expressed the need to upgrade the Eagle River Nature Center. A few residents cited the need to provide maintenance and adequate parking at existing access points and facilities prior to creating new ones. Some wanted to see more hardened trailheads for the larger trails. Another suggested paving Arctic Valley Road, while yet another wanted "less pavement and more dirt" to create more of a balance. Several comments addressed the need for the State to contribute to community road maintenance.

CAMPGROUNDS: A few people commented on campgrounds in the park.



One comment suggested establishing a group campground for organizations, to generate operating funds. Another did not support a campground in Indian. Several comments were received regarding safety concerns surrounding the Bird Creek campground and related maintenance needs.

PUBLIC USE CABINS: A few comments were received regarding Public Use Cabins (PUCs). One resident wanted State Parks to consider a PUC near the top of Bear Mountain, while others wanted PUC suitability addressed parkwide, including consideration of a hut-to-hut system of cabins.

WILDLIFE

SUMMARY OF WILDLIFE & WILDLIFE VIEWING COMMENTS: Some supported improving wildlife viewing areas especially along the Seward Highway so as to improve safety. One resident did not want to see improvements made to the viewing area near Windy Corner due to the presence of an indispensable natural resource and the possible impact development could have on wildlife. Another resident was generally concerned about how new facility developments would impact wildlife.

HUNTING & TRAPPING

SUMMARY OF HUNTING & TRAPPING COMMENTS: Several comments were specific to hunting and trapping regulations within the park. Some suggested eliminating trapping altogether from the park, while others expressed a desire to restrict trapping to more remote areas of the park. A major reason for these suggestions included safety concerns resulting from the use of traps in close proximity to private property and heavily used park facilities. One comment suggested including a no-trapping buffer behind neighboring communities. Others suggested the need for more outreach

education along with a notification program to advise when and where trapping is occurring within the park. Numerous incidents were cited regarding legal and illegal trapping activity and the need for better communication with those charged with managing the State's wildlife.

OTHER COMMENTS

EDUCATION & INTREPRETATION: Several people commented specifically on education and interpretation in the park. Many were in favor of State Parks increasing their interpretative program, expressing the need for more outreach education and information dissemination regarding responsible and safe use of the park and its surroundings. Suggested topics for interpretation and educational displays include, "Leave No Trace" principles, backcountry habits and trail ethics, neighborhood etiquette, and resource protection. Many suggested making educational information more widely available through signage, visitor contacts, and the utilization of visitor centers and special events.

VOLUNTEERING: Several residents suggested improving and expanding the park's volunteer program through partnerships to help defray costs, and to help with park improvements and maintenance. One resident cited the need for better communication with individuals interested in volunteering and more notice regarding the type of projects and work opportunities available.

MISC. IDEAS & ISSUES: A few residents were interested in the involvement of the military in the planning process. They also wanted to see State Parks improve communication regarding the Seward Highway project. Some suggested utilizing local names on maps and signage when feasible to help eliminate confusion.



SUMMARY OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

TIMELINE TO DATE

1. April 2008, the Chugach planning process was initiated and public scoping workshops were held in Anchorage, Indian, and Eagle River.
2. April 2008 (current step), the 1st newsletter summarizing comments gathered during the scoping workshop is released.
3. June 2008, end of scoping phase comment period.
4. Summer 2008, information gathering and issue identification period for planning team.



WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- The written comment period for the scoping phase of the planning effort ends June 2, 2008.
- Scoping comments will be reviewed for determination of planning effort scope of work and timeline.
- Land management alternatives will be drafted and public comments solicited.

HOW CAN YOU BE INVOLVED?

In order for the agencies to choose land management alternatives that provide the greatest benefit for all Alaskans, public participation is essential to the planning process. We are seeking your input on current and future issues, goals, and uses as part of our initial scoping and issue identification stage of the planning process. You can get involved by:

- Visiting our website and reviewing the existing plans and planning process steps;
- Writing, emailing, or faxing your written comments to the planning staff by June 2nd; and by
- Attending future public meetings and submitting comments on future documents.

We will keep you updated of the progress of the planning effort through newsletters like this one. If you received this newsletter by mail or email, you are on our mailing list. If you did not receive this newsletter directly from us, please contact us so that you will receive future planning process updates. For more information, or to comment on any of the information presented in this newsletter, please contact:

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Chugach State Park
Planning Update



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