Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Much of the trail management effort in Chugach State Park until recently has been directed to the management of trails that were inherited when the park was established or trails that emerged through use. While the previous 1986 trail plan was comprehensive and provided general trail management direction, little funding was available to implement it and so the basic trail network in the park has generally remained the same. Since then, the thinking on overall trail construction and management philosophy has evolved nationwide as most trail management agencies, like State Parks, have struggled to keep trails in acceptable condition. In order to provide good trail experiences, it became clear that best management practices needed to be upgraded to create a system where trails could be managed to enhance recreational opportunities, provide greater resource protection and most importantly given the availability of trail resources, require minimal maintenance.

In March 2009 the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation finalized a Trail Management Policy that provides direction on how the Division will manage, develop, maintain and assess the condition of state park trails. The policy provides goals and trail management concepts for sustainable and responsible trail development and management. This trail plan was developed consistent with the concepts in the Trail Management Policy and will serve as the framework for management and trail development within Chugach State Park. The use of sustainable design will create important long-term benefits, principally a reduced need for regular maintenance and repairs into the future. The use of the recently developed interagency trail classification system will enable the Division to better coordinate with partners, share resources and allow for greater efficiency and seamless trail connectivity.

Accommodating a variety of recreational uses and trail user groups is a challenge within the park because topography influences use patterns and park users are frequently competing with each other to use the “best” areas. Under this Plan, sustainable construction and trail maintenance practices will be utilized on all future trail management activities including both trail-related project work and regular trail maintenance. The trail system will remain multi-use in nature but will abide by the standards in the new Trail Classification System. This system defines trail standards and design parameters by a trail’s designed and managed uses.

Plan Purpose

The Chugach State Park Trail Management Plan is needed as a strategic tool to plot the course of trail management in the coming years. It is based on an analysis of existing access points, trails, the park environment and resources, land ownership and status, and current and anticipated trends in recreational use. The plan identifies management objectives and establishes guidelines for the future use and development of trails in Chugach State Park. The primary purposes of this plan are to provide:
Chapter 1: Introduction

1. A trail system which allows for optimum recreational use of the area while protecting the natural resources of the park.
2. A consistent set of principles and policies for trail management.
3. A basis for future funding.
4. A roadmap for the trail building and maintenance efforts.

Planning Process
The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began the planning process to revise the 1986 Chugach State Park Trail Plan in April of 2008. Public scoping workshops were held in Anchorage, Indian and Eagle River to gather information and identify issues and concerns. Many comments were received during the scoping phase of the process that focused on trails and trail maintenance. To learn more specific details about how people use the park and would like to use the park, additional focus group meetings were held throughout the remainder of the year with a variety of user groups. The information gathered was used to prepare and evaluate management alternatives. Analysis of this information and public comments provided the direction needed to recommend new trails and trailheads, improvements or upgrading, and trails that should possibly be closed or relocated. With the help of the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board, the planning team drafted this plan for public review and comment. Once the public comment period is over, DNR staff will review comments and revise the plan as needed. A final plan is then prepared and approved that will guide trail management decisions within the park.

Trail Inventory Process
In the Spring of 2007, a Trail Inventory and Assessment Project began as a pilot program in Chugach State Park that has proven to be a major asset in the development of this plan. The pilot program was initiated by the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board using the National Park Service’s (NPS) River Trails and Conservation Assistance Program resources. It was a collaborative effort between State Parks, the US Forest Service (USFS), and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources’ Land Records Information Section. The project objective was to demonstrate the feasibility of a comprehensive trail assessment and condition survey for a subset of Chugach State Park (CSP) front-range trails, provide project data and maps, and ultimately evaluate applicability as a management tool for use in all State Park units with trails.

The project plan was to map existing CSP front-range trail centerlines as accurately as possible while recording basic trail condition and associated constructed features found directly adjacent to the trail using Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers, and processing and archiving these data in a Geographical Information System (GIS). Over two summers the field mapping crew used GPS units with sub-meter accuracy and basic trail inventory equipment to collect data for approximately 265 miles of trails. The crew collected information based on uniform standards similar to those adopted by the USFS and utilized by the NPS and the Municipality of Anchorage. The data included trail centerlines; trail...
condition information such as amount of brush, erosion, trail width, grade, and surface type;
trail structures such as bridges, culverts, boardwalks, and signs; trailheads and associated
features including gates, kiosks, parking, fee stations, and toilets; physical features such as
ford sites and viewpoints; and photographs with spatial coordinates to create photo links.

For the first time, accurate trail alignments and distances are known for a large portion of the
trails within the park and the condition of the trails and associated structures are documented.
In the future this information can be used to make further assessments and prescription
decisions, to generate maps and trail websites, to help in securing grant funding, and for
further planning purposes.

**Use and Users**
Perhaps the most heavily used resource within Chugach State Park is the trail system. Park
trails offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities year-round for residents and out-of-
state visitors alike. Summer uses include hiking, mountaineering, bicycling, trapping,
fishing, running, horseback riding, orienteering, kayaking, rafting, canoeing, packrafting,
riding ATVs, paragliding, berry picking, nature walking, sightseeing, and hunting. Winter
activities include skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, dog mushing,
skjoring, winter biking, and ice-boating. Demands for organized events within the park such
as bike races, mountain races, fund raisers and other gatherings continue to grow as does
commercial use of the park. The differing skill levels of park users and the multitude of
competing interests and uses often overlap seasonally and geographically. This plan seeks to
lay the framework for a network of trails that over time will provide diverse trail
opportunities and experiences for a wide variety of park users.