

## CHAPTER 2

### PUBLIC PREFERENCES AND EXPECTATIONS

Residents and out-of-state visitors frequently have different preferences and expectations when visiting a recreation or park area. In the particular situation of Chugach State Park, a rugged, mountain park close to the state's largest population, some interesting observations can be made.

#### Residents

Use of the park by residents has risen dramatically since its establishment in 1970, many times faster than the general population growth of the area. This is probably due primarily to:

1. Better road access to the park.
2. New trailheads and increased parking.
3. New trails and better maintenance.
4. Developed picnic and leisure facilities.
5. Increased facility servicing and ranger presence which gives areas a more orderly appearance; making them more family oriented.
6. General awareness of physical fitness by the public.
7. Increased appreciation of natural processes and desire to see wild-life.
8. Better signing and media publicity.
9. Daylight-saving time (more evening use).

As recently as 1974, it was quite possible to hike at Glen Alps in the Hillside on a warm, sunny weekday evening in mid-June and see perhaps one other car in the parking area. Now it is typical to find two or three dozen cars on a similar evening. Residents have discovered their park, and the potential for increased use is probably many times present use, even with no increase in general population.

New residents tend to seek out the more obvious access points first - those which provide easy access on good well-marked roads - Turnagain Arm, Eagle River Valley (visitor center), Arctic Valley and Eklutna Lake. Their first hikes are usually short and oriented around facilities. As they become more familiar with the park, they seek out new and less obvious areas which provide more penetrating experiences and longer, more arduous hikes - increasingly distant from the "general user". The lesser known trailheads and backcountry areas of the park are used principally by well acquainted residents.

#### Out-of-state Visitors

Out-of-state visitors or tourists are also discovering the park. Their experiences are generally much more superficial - passing through it, for example, along Turnagain Arm, perhaps in a tour bus or rented car. Increasingly, areas like Glen Alps, Upper Huffman and Upper O'Malley are being "discovered" because of the panoramic views and the chance to see Mt. McKinley, a major Alaskan attraction.

Easily accessed destinations with superb scenery are most in demand by visitors with limited time. Many want to be able to experience and photograph the magnificence of Alaska as conveniently as possible. Destinations such as Turnagain Arm, Arctic Valley, Eagle River Valley and Eklutna Lake offer the best opportunity for sightseeing without running into accessibility problems.

Other areas with high use potential, because of their proximity to downtown Anchorage and fine views, are Upper Huffman trailhead, Upper O'Malley, and if the road is improved, Glen Alps Trailhead. Trail experiences for visitors tend to begin where the trail is obvious, inviting and looks safe. Eagle River Visitor Center Trail (especially the new nature trail) is a good example. Displays of natural history and good maps invite a walker to explore further. Other trails with a high potential for attracting visitors are the Old Johnson Trail at Potter Marsh (Section House Visitor Center) and McHugh Creek, the new Upper Huffman to Flattop Trail (to be recommended in this plan), Eklutna Lake Glacier Trail, and an improved Ship Creek Valley trail. It is conceivable that tourist use of the park could rise dramatically, yet impact only the peripheral areas of the park. Most trails would be used for the first half mile or so, yet the experience could be rewarding enough to many visitors to entice them to remain longer in Anchorage.

#### Increased Access

Bus service, both tour buses and Municipal buses, would substantially increase use by residents and visitors. Lower income residents, younger people, and the handicapped and elderly would benefit particularly from Municipal bus service. Visitors would benefit by the convenient bus access to areas they know little about reaching. Both residents and visitors want to enjoy a rewarding nature experience that involves carefree access to the superlative recreation resources that are represented by Chugach State Park.

The use of buses would reduce the need to expand parking facilities as more and more people visit the park in the future. It would also reduce traffic in residential areas bordering the park.

#### Common Interests

Generally speaking, out-of-state visitors expect more in the nature of developed facilities at trailheads than residents, largely because of their orientation toward similar facilities in the more developed states. But visitors, like residents, also have a strong desire to experience a little bit of the real Alaska during the short time they spend in Anchorage. The trails of Chugach State Park can provide visitors an unparalleled opportunity to have intimate contact with natural Alaska.

#### User Expectation/Satisfaction

This section will examine user expectations and satisfaction elements by type of recreational activity.

#### Cross-Country Skiers

To the cross-country skier, the condition and design of the trail is paramount. A smooth, well-honed track adds immeasurably to the enjoyment of a

ski outing. Conversely, a rutted, gouged or otherwise damaged trail can prove to be almost unskiable or thoroughly unpleasant to use.

The rhythm of a trail is a key element for user satisfaction. The trail should ski smoothly without being jerky or of monotonous grade. If the skier can develop a good stride with carefree turns and hills, several of his or her expectations will have been met.

The skier should be able to enjoy a variety of scenery and vegetation types. Fortunately, the highly diversified landscapes of the Chugach Mountains make this easily achievable. Nonetheless, a conscious effort should be made to provide a variety of environments and vistas along any given trail.

Loop trails can provide diversity by allowing the skier to experience new scenery along the entire route. Loop trails at different elevations and terrain configurations are also capable of taking advantage of superior snow or weather conditions prevalent at certain elevations. Loop trails are sometimes easily created by constructing short connecting links with existing trails, or by connecting other loops. Loop trails can serve as a valuable management tool in providing a wide variety of satisfying experiences in areas that are most capable of accommodating such trails. For example, in the Hillside unit, extensive loop trails west of Campbell Creek would provide the kind of outing most two or three hour weekend skiers desire without having to cross the creek into areas that are desirable to retain as dispersed, low impact landscapes that are important for wintering wildlife or wilderness characteristics. In this way, greater use can be accommodated near the park boundary in development zones without placing greater impacts in backcountry natural areas or wilderness zones.

Origin - destination trails will always be the major trail type in Chugach State Park. Trails beginning at a park periphery trailhead and penetrating the park to specific landscape features will always be in demand. Many of these are already available to one degree or another, and vary from poor to good in serving as ski trails. Narrow valleys and changes in elevation limit the options for acceptable trail grade and variety more often than not. Where there is a choice, open forests are often preferable to treeless areas especially on cloudy days, which result in whiteout conditions, or windy days, which result in an unpleasant chill factor or wind-eroded snowpack.

Skiers expect ski trails to be free of motorized uses, which can easily destroy the tread of the trail; and also free of horses, hikers and dogs, each of which damage ski trails in different ways. However, many skiers enjoy taking dogs with them on ski outings since many of the Municipal ski trails are closed to dogs. The trenching that occurs from walking may render a trail unskiable, dangerous to use, or just unpleasant to the skier. The expectation of the skier is, that for satisfaction and enjoyment of the outing, none of these unpleasant events will occur on trails managed by Chugach State Park. Fortunately, the more skiers that use a trail, the less likely it is that there will be inappropriate uses of it.

In a nutshell, the skier, in order to have a satisfying experience, expects to follow a well-maintained trail free from inappropriate activities, through a variety of scenic woodlands and alpine areas. The condition of the trail is important to the skier.

Horseback riders. Horseback riders in Chugach State Park seek experiences that allow them to get away from it all in pleasant, quiet surroundings and to enjoy the manifest beauties of nature in the mountains. Equestrian trails should follow hardened surfaces so that horses can avoid mudholes and insecure footing. Grades should be moderate, especially where winter use is anticipated. Equestrian trails should also be free of all motorized activity which could result in danger to horse and rider. A good horse trail should provide the rider with a variety of terrain and vegetation types, and give the feeling of going somewhere. This can be achieved, even in the relatively limited flat terrain of the Hillside unit, by providing a series of loop trails. Wide, hard-surfaced trails such as the powerline trail in the Hillside are ideal for providing longer trips amid spectacular mountain scenery. The combination of loop trails and several good longer destination routes within the major valleys of Chugach State Park can provide the horseman with exhilarating, safe and satisfying riding experiences. Wildlife viewing is very successful on horseback because many species are unafraid of a human on horseback.

Many of these trails already exist, but in some instances new trails will be needed to provide continued satisfactory experiences. Several trails may have to be relocated in part, because of trail degradation, such as large mudholes, which pose a hazard to horsemen and other users. Sensitive alpine terrain can also suffer from horse use. Wet areas must be avoided if satisfactory trail treads are to be maintained. Through careful route selection, difficult situations can be avoided allowing the rider to have an experience that is thoroughly enjoyable and safe.

Sled Dog Musers. Dog mushing enthusiasts need a more exacting set of favorable conditions than other trail users in order to enjoy their sport. This is partly because of the difficulty in disciplining a large team of dogs and the fact that the team and sled are more unwieldy than any other over-the-snow transport even under the best of conditions. The driver frequently stands 30 to 40 feet behind the lead dog, and this limits his ability to see and respond to sharp changes in the trail or other hazards. Generally flat grades, gentle turns, and ample width (ten feet plus) are important requirements for dog trails.

It is especially important that sled dog trails are free of motorized vehicles or horses. The natural hazards of moose are severe enough without adding additional hazards that are controllable by management techniques. Even skiers and people on foot can create problems for dog mushers in narrow trail corridors.

Most of the frequently used winter trails in Chugach State Park are considered multiple use winter trail corridors that are reasonably compatible for sled dog teams and skiers or hikers. If the trail clearing is wide enough, both uses can be accommodated without conflict. The Hillside unit trails, the powerline, gasline and Wolverine trails, are frequently used by mushers when the snow is deeper there than in town or other sea level portions of the park.

To provide more opportunities for sled dog mushers, a connection between the Hillside Trail System and Far North Bicentennial Park Trail System should be made. Then additional loops should be constructed to diversify travel distances and possible motorized use conflicts should be examined. If the sled

dog musher can choose a variety of loop trails with moderate grades, wide tread and gentle turns, that are independent of motorized activities, then his desire to enjoy one of Alaska's most time-honored traditions will have been met.

Snowmobilers. The snowmobiler likes trails that go somewhere. The concept of a distant destination is important, in part, because it takes so little time to get there, and because such routes traditionally have provided a wide range of conditions that are challenging to the user. Distance, lots of space, adequate snow cover, and freedom from avalanche hazards are the requirements for enjoyable snowmobiling.

A wide range of trail types can be used by the highly responsive, agile, and speedy snowmobile, which includes the three- and four-wheel ATC's. This has led in part to conflicts with non-motorized users.

For these reasons, carefree snowmobiling requires trails and areas that are extraordinarily well marked and laid out to take advantage of natural terrain breaks, heavy vegetation and logical topographic boundaries. The number of non-motorized trails that intercept snowmobile trails should be kept to a minimum to discourage penetration of snowmobiles into non-motorized areas. This is essential, because, if the system of area zoning is not enforceable, snowmobilers will find themselves under increasing pressure to close these areas as the steady escalation of non-motorized users make their own demands for trail use felt.

Three-wheelers and motorbikes. It should be noted at the outset that three-wheelers are considered to be snow vehicles in winter (like snowmobiles), while two-wheel motor bikes are not. Also, both two and three wheeled bikes are simply off-road vehicles (ORV's) in the snow-free seasons, which will be discussed now.

Like snowmobilers, motorcyclists enjoy destination-oriented trails that traverse a wide range of challenging terrain and provide the distance that is sought - in a word - going somewhere. Practically any trails but the steepest are accessible to cyclists which creates both opportunities and the need for limitations. The limitations are concerned with site degradation, particularly soil erosion and destruction of vegetation, as well as noise near non-motorized users. The opportunities are that the network of logging roads in Bird Creek Valley that may have been viewed as undesirable for most uses are well suited for ORV use. However, in general, because of the preponderance of alpine zone in Chugach State Park, and the narrowness of accessible valleys, little of Chugach State Park is suitable for ORV use when compared with more favorable areas north of the park and the numerous potential conflicts with non-motorized users within the park.

Mountain bikers. Mountain bikers are enjoying a new sport in Chugach State Park. Most bikes are being used for reaching specific destinations in a short time using better than average trails such as the gasline and powerline "roads" to Indian, and the Eklutna Lake Road between Campground "A" and the glacier. Mountain bikers want additional suitable trails for their activities in Chugach State Park.

Several preliminary studies in other states indicate that mountain bikes cause soil compaction and displacement roughly comparable to vibram-soled boots, except on steep downhill grades where a small amount of additional gouging may occur to the trail tread. Perhaps the most significant impact is social as some hikers may resent the ease with which mountain bikers arrive at back-country destinations.

Hikers and mountaineers. Chugach State Park is a hiker's and mountaineer's dream. It offers gentle, forested valleys, vast alpine regions and mountains that range from gentle to extremely rugged. Interspersed throughout are gem-like alpine lakes and several large glaciers and ice fields. Hiking and mountaineering are the only practical means of reaching vast areas of the park.

Designated or improved foot trails are desirable within the forested zone and among the alder brush fields. Few additional improvements, other than those to promote public safety such as rustic bridges and alpine cairnes, are needed to provide a satisfying experience for many hikers and mountaineers. For those who desire shorter duration, closer to the trailhead experiences, a few wider trails that permit side-by-side conversations with family or friends are desirable. Picnicking experiences frequently accompany these day hikes.

Wildlife viewing is a prized experience for many in Chugach State Park. Narrow, low-standard trails are ideal for wildlife viewing. There should be enough natural impediments to guarantee that no motorized use is possible on environmentally sensitive wildlife viewing trails. This could shatter the user experience and threaten wildlife populations. Wildlife viewing trails thus differ sharply from nature trails which are built to much higher standards to accommodate even the young and handicapped.

Boaters and river runners. Eagle River is the only regularly used boating or floating stream in the park. However, it should be noted that Bird Creek, Ship Creek (in park) and Peters Creek can be kayaked for short distances and this is happening occasionally now. Eklutna River may also have some potential. Since the nature and character of the stream is a given, and one found most enjoyable by some kayakers and rafters, contributions to enjoyment or satisfaction are mostly in the nature of access points. The Moose Pond and Eagle River campground are two principal points of access. Maintaining water quality and the quality of shoreline viewsapes, especially beyond the park boundary, are important components to be dealt with in preserving Eagle River's recreational assets. The proposed Eagle River Greenbelt Plan will be a vital component in protecting the stream within the municipal boundaries.

Eklutna Lake serves a trail function because it has road access at the north end and attractive destinations beyond the seven miles of lake surface at the south end. A walkway to facilitate hand launching of small craft would be useful at each end of Eklutna Lake because of the fluctuating water level.

Handicapped users. Disabled persons would benefit from the construction of recreation trails designed to meet their specific needs. Nature trails which feature fairly flat grades, compacted and mud-free surfaces, and interpretive features are well-suited for their use and enjoyment. Trails suitable for handicapped use should be sited in a variety of park environments to provide

shorter access from various parts of the city, and to provide a variety of splendid viewscapes at different seasons. These should include an alpine area, several along Turnagain Arm, Eklutna Lake and Eagle River Visitor Center. Well-designed handicapped accessible trails can provide enjoyable outdoor experiences and new challenges for handicapped persons.