CHAPTER 6

MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS

Vegetative Destruction

When trails are built, there are potential management problems. However, a well-designed system of trails can be used to alleviate management problems. For example, a maze of random or helter-skelter trails, such as those around Flattop Mountain, can result in destruction of much of the alpine vegetation. It can be argued that had two or three well-designed, hardened and carefully signed trails been constructed there before the parking lot was rebuilt to hold five times as many vehicles, that much of the present damage (which is appalling when seen from an overlook perspective) could have been avoided.

In a related matter, the horse trail within Ship Creek Valley passes through springs and moist seeps which have become an ever widening quagmire of mud as users seek "dryer ground" along the fringes. New trail construction can result in the relocation of portions of the trail to nearby drier ridges and the hardening of other potentially troublesome sections of trail. Part of the relocation should include signs and barriers to prevent further use of the old trail.

In the Old Johnson Trail east of McHugh Creek Picnic Area is a large scree slope crossing the trail which grows larger and more unstable daily. The reason for this peculiar phenomenon is misdirected human use of the trail. To gain a firmer foothold, users climb a fraction higher each time on the "sliding bench". The net result is a trail going well up the scree slope before it goes down the other side to the Johnson Trail. This has resulted in many people either continuing up the scree slope to a dramatic overlook, or people seeking to access this overlook by this dangerous scree and rock chute, resulting in a continuing accumulation of debris on the Old Johnson Trail. To alleviate this problem, a new loop trail (#506) has been proposed to gain a logical and safe access to this overlook, and thence to continue up to McHugh Ridge which is absolutely spectacular, eventually tying into the McHugh Creek Trail (#505), in a loop configuration. Access up the scree chute can then be barricaded and closed, and the Old Johnson Trail repaired with a rerod and log bench to help contain the scree. Natural revegetation will then very gradually help to stabilize much of the slope.

Littering

Littering along trails is increasing noticeably each year. This is a sad reflection of today's society and something which many trail advocates would not have predicted. Examining this situation reveals some interesting insights. For example, littering along the Iditarod Trail (#201) south of the Eagle River Visitor Center seems to have decreased with the advent of the visitor center even though use of the trail has increased many times. It is likely that the visitor center itself and personal contact of users by the ranger staff has put people in a frame of mind that encourages responsible behavior and appreciation of the natural surroundings. On the other hand, an area such as McHugh Creek Picnic Area trails (Old Johnson Trail and Table Rock) show increased littering each year - roughly proportional to the increased use of the trails. One can only assume that the lack of personal

contact with rangers and the lack of "appreciative interpretation" has not put potentially troublesome visitors in the proper frame of mind. Rangers are stretched very thin here considering the size of the crowds they deal with and funding limitations perpetuate this problem.

Three actions may help to eliminate the littering problem in places like McHugh Creek and its trails. First, rangers should talk to as many users as possible - especially the ones who appear troublesome. This takes a lot of time and it is not always pleasant, but it may more than make up for the time spent in retrieving litter. Secondly, litter containers placed conspicuously at trailheads with attractive signs that plead for responsible litter disposal may be an improvement over the somewhat distant dumpsters. True, it takes more time to empty scattered litter containers, but much less time than collecting it over half a mile of trail - especially broken bottles. It is well known that uncollected litter encourages further littering. Third, the psychology of signing is very important to encourage responsible behavior in users. Signing is needed at each trailhead that encourages personal responsibility for proper litter disposal. These concepts could be implemented and monitored at selected trailheads to see if it results in a significant improvement.

There is little doubt that the most far-reaching measure to reduce littering along trails is statewide bottle/can legislation which would target 90% of the trail litter that now accumulates. This legislation makes the individual responsible for proper disposal of beverage containers instead of the state, and it puts a price on those containers that are not returned by their users, assuring that someone will return them.

Motorized Vehicles

Each year brings a greater diversity and number of motorized vehicles capable of off-road use. As the number of residents living along the park boundary increases, greater pressure is placed on non-motorized zones within the park. Enforcement with existing park staff is not enough to meet this challenge. Clear signing and carefully engineered barriers can help, but ultimately it is the legitimate users of the park who will have to bring about compliance with existing regulations. This is the single best argument for encouraging greater non-motorized uses along the park boundaries. The "self policing" action that occurs when many like-minded recreationists use an area is a great asset to continued proper use.

Seeking greater cooperation with the military police where parkland abuts the military reservation should also result in better enforcement of common goals in areas such as the North Fork of Campbell Creek and Ship Creek. A similar effort should be made with the Municipality of Anchorage to enforce common goals where Far North Bicentennial Park abuts Chugach State Park.

Barriers are a useful enforcement tool. The standard verticle 8"x8" treated wooden posts close enough together to deter motorized users but permit passage of foot traffic, are very useful where they are visible and near the trailhead. In areas where these are repeatedly removed or cut down, large rocks should be used or metal posts anchored in concrete barrels with large cable. When new non-motorized trails are built, barriers should be installed at key penetration and access points to defer illegal uses immediately. Proper barriers and signs are an integral part of trail construction.

Signs that are clearly placed and strategically located are also important to achieve compliance with the majority of motorized users. They should be as economical in size, words and installation as possible to reduce costs and visual pollution. Innovative signing is needed. The fiberglass six-symbol, six-red slash 6"x8" sign is excellent. Clever signs may win compliance, too. Such as: "Everyone is welcome in this area, but all motorized vehicles must remain in the parking lot."

Signing

Economical and clear signing can do much to encourage proper use. For example, on the new snowmobile corridor, small 4"x6" fiberglass (reflective) arrows pointing toward each other on small metal posts 10 to 12 feet apart would be much clearer than large "Yes/No" metal placks on 4"x4" posts which are quite confusing as to intent on the existing corridor.

In an eastern national park, a horseshoe-shaped trail that followed the perimeter of forest and flower meadow was receiving a lot of cut-through foot traffic in spite of signs which read - "Stay off the meadow - please go around." The flowered meadow was suffering as a result. This sign finally kept people out of the meadow - "This meadow needs a rest - follow the designated trail."