

Planning for the Future of the Kenai River Ranch

Kenai River Special Management Area

DNR- Parks and Outdoor Recreation and ADF&G Habitat and Restoration

Public Scoping Written Comments

Between January 13, 2015 and February 10, 2015, the Department of Natural Resources and Fish and Game accepted written comments as part of the initial scoping phase for the planning of the Kenai River Ranch. Names are listed only where the name of the individual or organization was expressly stated within the body of the comment.

The planning team would like to thank those that took time to submit written comments. The following is a compilation of the scoping comments submitted.

Comment 1 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 20, 2015 6:36 PM

Unfortunately we are unable to attend the meeting this evening regarding the planning stages of the Kenai River Ranch property. However we would like to express one of our concerns with the development of this property at mile 12 Funny River Rd.

Our concern is simply pertaining to this property becoming a camp ground. This concerns us as we have lived out here in the Funny River area for over ten years and we don't feel that we have a place to fish right on the river. And we've noticed there is a shortage of boat launch areas, while a new boat launch is needed out here, our concern is if this property becomes a "camp ground" then it will be loaded with outsiders and us locals will still not have a sufficient place to fish from the banks and be able to launch a boat into the Kenai River.

We understand the income stream from a camp ground Could be great revenue however looking at the bigger picture, we are concerned with the current access for locals to be able to play as well. Meaning fishing from the banks and launching a boat.

If people are camped and filling up the boardwalks along the river then when we, the locals come down to fish, it will be over loaded with campers fishing the banks.

Now if it becomes just a "day use" park, then we, the locals will have a better chance of using the park and the board walks to fish, plus use the boat launch and have a place to actually park. (Unlike the boat launch at Mykiss at roughly mile 14 Funny River Rd. where there is very limited area for parking) If this new camp ground is full then we're can we go to launch our boat or fish from the banks?

There is a current launch past this proposed area off of Mykiss Rd., but this is incredibly small area and can only hold up to six or so vehicles with boat trailers.

As we would love to support the growth of Funny River and access to the wonderful Kenai River, our concern is still in helping the locals with getting to enjoy our own back yard.

We appreciate the opportunity you've giving us to be able to share our thoughts with you and we will continue to support the positive growth of our beloved community.

Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns.

Comment 2 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 20, 2015 10:44 PM

As year round residents of the Funny River Community and very active members of the community we are feel that development of this property is not in the best interest of the river or the community at this time. If funding is available for use in the community it should be directed toward safety issues such as a safer bridge over Funny River and a access bridge out of the community across the Kenai River. The development of pristine habitat acres along the river is very irresponsible to the river and partial of land should be protected. A river that is fragile now needs not to see further development along it's banks but protection. We believe it is not the wish of the majority of the Funny River Community to see this development go forward at this time.

Comment 3 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, January 21, 2015 10:06 AM

This property was my grandparents homestead and holds many memories. The EVOS conservation easement provides an opportunity to preserve a Kenai River property for future generations. Any development should be considered carefully to ensure the habitat is protected. if development is determined as the best alternative, I would prefer minimal development that provides for day use and incorporates educational opportunities regarding the history of the property and the natural environment. Thank you for providing the opportunity to comment.

Comment 4 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 20, 2015 7:42 AM

River Ranch Comments

It is understand and agreed that a boat launch in the middle river on the Funny River side of the river would be very nice. A public place to fish, a public park with picnic sites, maybe a covered picnic area would also be a good thing. However, the planning committee will have to keep in mind what the Funny River Area is and needs to be before it can accommodate the additional tourist traffic a public facility will generate. To pretend that the area created will be used only by locals is a joke. As it is the Funny River population doubles in the summer (1/2 of the homes are seasonal). Add to this the additional people from the peninsula along with Anchorage, Palmer, Wasilla and the rest of the state who also want a public fishing/launch site in the middle river. Look what has happened in Kenai with the dip netting. It is not just locals, and the remainder of the state does not care about our beautiful area. That being said, the Funny River area consists of the community center, the fire/EMS station, several churches, the golf course, a small store, 1062 housing units, (of which 591 are seasonal homes), several lodges and rv parks. We have:

- no gas station;
- no Laundromat;
- no restaurants;
- no public water;
- no public toilets;
- no showers;
- no propane filling station;
- no rv dump site, and
- only one way in and out of the area (12 miles of curvy, narrow road).

Funny River basically does NOT have the infrastructure to accommodate the additional tourists that would be attracted by a public fishing spot/boat launch. We can barely accommodate the increase in summer population now, much less more people traveling the road to fish or camp. Which brings me to another point.

We do not need a huge RV Park unless there is infrastructure to accommodate it. This would include all of the above mentioned facilities we are missing plus it would have to include in the plan how to charge

people, how will garbage be hauled off, how would parking, camping and fishing be monitored? All one needs to do is take a look at the borough transfer site on any given day in the summer. People are uncaring about the rules. Camping or an RV Park, if at all, would have to be phased in, not just fill up the 146 acre parcel.

Then we go back to an old problem, traffic on the road. Many year around residents have to drive the road every day to get to work. We choose to live here and don't mind the drive. It is much more frustrating in the summer with twice as much traffic on the road, but we can handle it because we love living in this basically quiet community year around. But add more traffic pulling boats, campers and ATV's plus more RV's? No! This will create problems on the road. More accidents. The whole idea of the bridge from Sterling seems to have gone by the wayside once the road was paved. This potential bridge, in my opinion, is an essential part of the infrastructure needed to accommodate a facility in the Funny River area, and should be the priority of the Chamber and the State prior to development of River Ranch. The bridge itself has been controversial, and didn't get through the last time it came up, and likely would not make it again. It is my understanding that the bridge proposal got shut down by the people on the Sterling side of the river over the fact that it would ruin salmon spawning or some such thing. An environmental problem. Has this changed?

Most likely, no matter what, a facility will be built at River Ranch. If and when this happens it will need to have:

- multiple launches
- fishing platforms to keep people off of the banks;
- running water and fish cleaning tables with supervision to assure the rules are followed;
- restroom facilities with scheduled cleanings;
- picnic facilities;
- a lot of parking;
- a lot of dumpsters with daily transfer and
- funding to maintain the facility

Locals also need to know if and when this will happen to give residents of the area the opportunity to get the remaining necessary infrastructure in place. There could be opportunity for residents, but this in itself could be a problem because this area has been promised things before (such as the bridge).

People have put their life savings into potential projects only to end up with broken dreams. Many have lost trust in the state along with losing their money. A plan with financial help from the State of Alaska for locals to finance business and infrastructure would be very helpful.

In ending, I would just ask that the Funny River Chamber of Commerce and the State of Alaska keep the priorities and necessities of all residents of the Funny River area in mind, not just the preferences of a few and priorities of out of town people. Why Anchorage residents are weighing in on this is beyond me. It should be up to the residents of the Funny River Area. They should decide if this is what is wanted in our area and if this is consistent with why we live out here. It is a fact that it is easier to obtain funds to "develop a facility" than to "operate and maintain" the facility. You do need to show how this facility will be a true asset to our area and remain self sustaining while not coming from our pocket book.

Thank You for your consideration,

Comment 5 of 39 – submitted Thursday, January 22, 2015 12:25 PM

I would just like to say please leave it alone. Funny River, dose not any more traffic on the road. If you are set on making a boat launch or camping go 1 mile down and improve what is already established.

Comment 6 of 39 – submitted Thursday, January 22, 2015 7:28 PM

Thank you for providing us a chance to attend the work shop meeting the day before yesterday with regard to the Kenai River Ranch.

I understand that the project is to raise ideas that will preserve the environment and create a recreational site. After hearing recreational site at the river, I was initially only able to think of fishing opportunity.

However, there was an eye-opening idea expressed at our table. Thanks to a former resident of this site, lots of memories and experiences were shared at the table. One lady who is involving in kid's education raised an idea: Make the site like an open air museum for kids to learn about homesteading.

I thought this idea was wonderful. Preserve the environment, and provide a peaceful place where people could learn more about an important part of Alaskan history.

Sometimes a museum might require manpower stationed at the site all the time. However, take Manzanar internment camp site in California for instance. Although that was an unmanned site when I visited there, it was very informative and I was able to imagine what life was like in those days.

It seems there are still several people alive who used to live there.

By using their valuable input, the recreational site could be designed based on the former homestead and the visitors can experience the life in those days.

It was also mentioned that people can observe lots of wild life. More moose and eagles are visible there than any other places along the river.

We want this preserved, rather than disturbed. I want to have the river bank protected and want people to learn how much residents on the riverfront are taking care of protecting river banks.

If the site is restored as a recreational place reflecting cultural and historical background while preserving the nature, I think it is wonderful.

Comment 7 of 39 – submitted Saturday, January 24, 2015 7:17 PM

1. Protect the habitat.
2. Protect the sockeye runs.
3. Limit the total number of individual fishermen allowed to fish from the riverbank each day (maybe by a registration system or -----). We don't need another Russian river combat fishing area on the peninsula.
4. Have an onsite Park warden at the location 24/7 during the sockeye runs.
5. We live in the Funny River area and already have a brown bear problem, The park Dept. and Fish and game must assume responsibility for fish waste disposal.
6. Increased traffic must be considered and should be a factor in the number of cars and persons allowed each day. The Funny River Road is a medium level accident road, narrow and no shoulders and can't handle much increased traffic.
7. There is little or no camping available in the Funny River area, so any park additions should take into consideration that most road traffic will be two way and improvements to the Funny River Road may be necessary.

Comment 8 of 39 – submitted Sunday, January 25, 2015 10:17 PM

I was at the meeting in Anchorage and want to be sure you understand our groups first choice for action on the funny river property at mile 12 on funny R. road is nothing, leave it as it is.

Comment 9 of 39 – submitted Sunday, January 25, 2015 12:46 PM

I want to thank you for the time you spent with me discussing THE KENAI RIVER RANCH. Up to that I knew nothing about it and I hope I didn't take up a lot of your time. Please keep advised on what is going on with the project.

Comment 10 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, January 28, 2015 7:17 PM

I would prefer that the Kenai River Ranch property be left undeveloped. We are very against this becoming a campground or fishing area that would bring in lower river type crowds. There are too few open spaces as it is on the river.

I feel that the Funny River Campground, which is within a couple miles of this property is underutilized. Putting efforts into making that a desirable campground with fishable area, makes more sense.

As for boat launch. There is a need on the funny river side of the river for a launch, but sadly with launch comes fishermen and enforcing the conservation easement will be difficult. If a launch were to be built, securing property adjacent to MyKiss and making this into a launch is much preferable. Behind the island is the perfect launch area.

I would not be opposed to some type of trail loop in this area to give locals and visitors a way to get out an exercise without walking on the roads.

Restoring bank on the Eastern property line should be considered a priority.

Comment 11 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, January 28, 2015 8:39 PM

My number one priority would be to restoring bank on the Eastern property line.

I would prefer that the Hanson farm, Kenai River Ranch property be left as nature as possible. I would love to see a primitive trail system around the wooded section of the property. There is a great deal of wildlife that feed and rest on this property. The wildflowers are unique and wonderful.

I am strongly opposed to a campground or fishing area that would bring in lower river type crowds. There are too few open spaces as it is on the river.

There is a need for an improved on the boat launch for Funny River residents. If a launch were to be built, securing property adjacent to MyKiss and making this into a launch is much preferable. Behind the island is the perfect launch area.

The Funny River Campground, which is within a couple miles of this property is underutilized. Putting efforts into making that a desirable campground with fishable area, makes more sense.

Comment 12 of 39 – submitted Thursday, January 29, 2015 3:48 PM

After our meeting in Anchorage and further thought I have to agree with other attendee's comments.

We do not need camping in this area, and since the area was purchased for one reason, to give salmon a quiet spot, before their run further up the river, that would be forgotten.

I do know that we need a boat launch for the residents on the Funny River side. If at all possible it would be nice to overhaul Mykiss launch behind Island so it could be used. Also this spot is also crowded with fisherman by the launch and the same thing would happen at the farm, except they would just keep spreading up and down the bank.

A trail through the farm would be nice. The wild flowers are so pretty, you do not see them unless you are walking. Just a pleasant walk. Also could be made bike friendly, the road is dangerous and we try to bike the old Funny River trail as far as we can to avoid it.

The bank along the farm does need to be restored. We love to float the river, so have seen the damage, but also love passing by the quiet areas along the river. So beautiful

Comment 13 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 2, 2015 7:44 AM

I would like to take this opportunity to voice my strong concerns about the potential development of Kenai River Ranch Property.

When this property was deeded to the State, the residents of the Funny River area were advised that the property would be managed by the state commensurate with the needs of the community.

However, within days of acquiring the property, "No Bank Fishing" signs were posted along the entire parcel by the state. Since many local fisherman used this property, with the permission of the land owner as a bank fishing access point, this state action negated the use of this extremely valuable fishing access. In addition, at the same time, the state also posted, "No Bank Fishing" signs along the entire state owned parcel downstream from the Seward Meridian access point at river mile 30.2; thereby, negating any public river access in the entire Funny River Community area except for the small fishing area at the Funny River State Recreational Area which can accommodate only a few fisherman.

This is unacceptable when compared to the extensive state funded public fishing access areas that have been encouraged along the opposing west bank of the river from its mouth to Snow River. In fact, except for the minimal improvement of the Funny River State Recreational Area bank fishing access, not one single state funded improvement has been afforded the public from the Kenai Visitor's Center for the entire length of the Kenai River accessible from Funny River Road.

However, my single biggest issue with this project is that there is a desperate need for a public boat launch near mile 12 to 14 of the Kenai River from Funny River Road. Currently, with no public access to launch your boat you have to trailer your boat to Soldotna Park or trespass and use the Seward Meridian access off of King Salmon Ave. at river mile 32.8.

If you use this unauthorized boat launch you have no bathroom facilities and create a huge mess and public nuisance as witnessed in the past by trespassing and using the private properties adjoining the access point.

In addition, you also do not have any public parking in this area so vehicles simply use adjoining roads and park on the road berm and block the road and private driveways at the height of the fishing season. The negative, multi-tier, long standing impacts concerning boat access to the Kenai River that have impacted on the Funny River Road residents and other visitors could be negated to a high degree if the state would simply construct an off current boat launch on this property.

The launch has to be an "off current" launch to ensure the safety of the users. To simply design and build an "on current flow launch" is unacceptable. As used by other states, off current launches are the only safe approach to remedy a boat launch/recovery event where the boater attempts to safely access a fast moving river or stream.

I applaud the state in its attempts to manage and reasonably develop the Kenai River Ranch property. It has been many years where a need existed, property was acquired and now the public scoping process has been deployed to remedy some of the unacceptable inequities of access confronting the residents of this 22 mile element of the river.

In the scoping package on-line it states that one of the goals of this project is to "... Maintain fishing closures as described in ADF&G riparian habitat bank closure regulation. However, in the opening statements you make reference to "...bank fishing opportunities". These two statements seem to be at odds as this river access area is currently closed for all bank fishing.

What is the Department's position of the use of this area as a "...bank fishing public access location? Will there be bank fishing and if so how will the current regulation be amended?

Comment 14 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 2, 2015 4:34 PM

I want to protest the proposed development of the Kenai River Ranch. I live less than a river mile away from this property. Since the paving of Funny River Road this area has exploded with development and

this property is one of the last undeveloped parcels in this area and throughout the watershed. Fry need undeveloped bank to survive and these areas play a key role in that process. It would be a shame on the state to develop this property solely for greed and forsaking wildlife which it's supposed to protect.

I say greed because the development of this property serves no other purpose. Since the Funny River campground is right around the bend from this property, what else could it possible be? Any development you have designated for the Kenai River Ranch could be fulfilled at the Funny River campground.

I say designated because it's apparent that the greed in your office has already decided the fate of this property regardless of the facade of this process which makes the will of the people mute.

Comment 15 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 2, 2015 5:09 PM

My wife and I attended the meeting about the Kenai River Ranch at the River Center in Soldotna. Thank you for setting that up.

We were pleased that the majority of people there were against any major development of that property. We heard that the meeting in Anchorage produced the same result. It's refreshing to know that people are willing to set aside "wild" parcels like this one for the good of the environment and fish and wildlife that make use of that area.

We are in favor of no development of any kind if that is a possibility. Lets leave the parcel for the next generation to enjoy as a special example of a natural area.

Comment 16 of 39 – submitted Sunday, February 8, 2015 9:56 PM

I support minimal development of this property, at least near the river. Given the was the river has been loved to death, these few remaining undeveloped parcels should be conserved in the state of the old river. I do not know the name, but there is a process used by developers where they mitigate adverse impact on wetlands by buying or donating other wetlands. That same rationale should be used here to mitigate the damage already done to the rest of the river. The lower river and the upper part of the middle river are prime examples of what this stretch of the river should not become. The area across from this parcel and slightly upstream, as well as the stretch from Morgan's Landing downstream for several miles, are some of the last parts of the river that are not lined with cabins and development. Those types of undeveloped strips are what make this part of the middle river unique.

I attended the Anchorage meeting, and support the views of most of those present, and especially of Holly's table where I participated. One thing that I do not recall being addressed was the fishing in this area. Even before the terrible king runs and closures of the last few years, the king fishing in this area was poor to mediocre at best. It was nothing like the lower river. The trout fishing is nothing like the area from Bing's to Skilak. The beauty and relative quiet are bigger draws than the fishing. But since this land is on the river, there seems to be some mindset that the land should be used for fishing. Two weeks of red fishing is not a good reason to destroy the natural beauty of this property.

Any development should be minimal, away from the river, no visual or noise pollution, and generally low impact. The bears, moose, cranes, ducks, foxes, loons and other critters should be allowed to continue using the land. Those floating or boating the river can enjoy its natural beauty.

Comment 17 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 9, 2015 11:32 AM

This email is to confirm the meeting I attended on January 21, 2015, with regard to development of the Hansen Ranch property on Funny River Road. That property was purchased sometime ago and meant to remain an undeveloped piece of property for habitat of fish and animals. The people at the January 21

meeting, overwhelmingly had the same message, and that was they, and I, do not want the property developed. I suspect the same result was had for the people at the January 20th meeting but you would not confirm that at our meeting.

Our reasons for that were many, including, but not limited to:

1. Wildlife protection of fish fry and animals that use the property and should be able to continue to have that sheltered area/
2. Additional traffic at the Bend in the River Subdivision boat launch which is a continuing problem for the residents of that subdivision. We cannot handle the traffic on the boat launch that we now have, additional people using it would be detrimental to our subdivision.
3. The Funny River Road cannot handle the additional traffic very easily, especially if it has more motorhomes. Do you plan on improving the road if you create more issues with traffic on it?
4. There was serious doubt as to the Funny River Community requesting this property be developed. Those of us who spend a great deal of time at our respective homes there have not heard any of these plans, and most of us do go to the Funny River Community Center from time to time and most likely would have heard of it.
5. There is already a campground that is a couple of miles from the Hansen Ranch that could be utilized if you want any changes. We asked why you didn't improve something you already have instead of new development and destroying the habitat at the Hansen Ranch. However, any work done on that needs to address our Funny River Road issue and the Bend in the River Subdivision boat launch. We do not need additional stress on either of those. I also want to say that at our January 21 meeting, we were asked to submit "ideas" that were written down on big boards. I'm sure you have that paperwork. Again, overwhelmingly the people did not want development. You wrote down every single idea just to have things written down on those boards, but again that was not the consensus in the room. I asked if we don't want it, why you would continue to submit 3 drawings of changes, but apparently you will do that regardless. We asked about funding, you did not say you already had it. We are hopeful that you do not. Feel free to email me with any progress you make on this plan.

Comment 18 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 9, 2015 12:11 PM

We need to stop more Kenai river development we are killing the river as it is. Letting more people on the banks will be bad for preservation of the river also a boat launch is a very poor idea. There are so many boats on the river now we will even pollute it more than it is. Thank you for taking our input.

Comment 19 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 9, 2015 3:57 PM

Kenai River Ranch:

I've spent well over 20 years living across the Kenai river from this parcel.

It's a wildlife highway. Moose and calves, bears, coyote, caribou, lynx, etc... coming down to drink/feed/ or swim across. Eagles nests, duck nests, river otters, etc... How far is it up and down river to two opposite sides of the river are wilderness- where animals have a corridor for safe travel? Over two miles down river and 10+ miles upriver.

How many people would use this?

No one from Soldotna/Kenai would tow a boat 12 miles to launch it when you can go to the end of east Redoubt, Swiftwater, Centennial, etc.... and access the same water.

This development would overwhelmingly be used by the few residents of Funny River.

Should state money be set aside to benefit a few of Alaskans?

What percentage of Funny River property owners beyond mile 12 are local year-round residents?

Instead of adding a new boat launch, parking, restrooms, etc..., expand existing launches by adding additional lanes. - The Pillars could easily be three boats wide with little investment from the state.

Funny River residents really need a public launch above the Naptown rapids, not below it. As a guide of over 20 years- The top part of the parcel is excellent sockeye fishing. The middle is lousy. The lower 1/4 is good and wadeable. The whole area has been called the finest king salmon spawning/smolt rearing for the middle Kenai.

One of the best values of wild spaces is that they are wild. Once developed they are compromised. It may be best to leave it as it is for future generations.

Say we dredge a boat launch, pave it, put in outhouses, camping sites etc... - Will it generate enough use/income to justify it? What if sockeye go the way of the King salmon?

How many days during the summer is the Funny River campground maxed- all 10 sites filled? 10? 12? Morgans Landing platforms --Its great that they are handicap accessible, but for 99% of the fishermen, they are too high, dangerous to fish off, and actually get in the way of harvesting sockeye. They were very expensive, get little use, and are an eyesore. They are also located 12 miles from Soldotna.

I vote for no development...let it remain natural.

Comment 20 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 9, 2015 4:11 PM

I have lived out funny River Road for 35 years approximately 8 miles further than the proposed boat launch etc. development. I have watched as this road as it it went from only seeing a car only two or three days a week of coming and going to constant traffic all day long. This road is very narrow has no shoulders and is very curvy and hilly. The prospect of having more slow moving cars and pickups towing boats or motorhomes is going to cause more traffic problems. People trying to get around these slow moving vehicles will be passing in places that a driver cannot see far enough to safely do so as I have witnessed so many times. My family alone has had so many close calls from impatient drivers. Our lives have been put in jeopardy and by jeopardy I mean death or very serious injury.

To create another tourist draw will only make things harder for those of us who live there year-round. Just a plain boat launch with no place to overnight park or camp or bank fish would serve the local people. Only those people living out funny River would use the boat launch. Anything other than that would create another tourist problem complete with bank degradation and all the other issues that come from nonresidents.

I have talked with many of my neighbors and friends who live along the road and they feel the same as I do that the potential for harm and disruption is greater than the benefits gained from a boat launch on this side of the river. Those people who favor the development of that area are not real interested in the boat but are very interested in a large campground. Those who have little businesses right in that area see it as a revenue enhancement for their businesses. Especially the people that own the liquor store and I must admit that having more drunks running up and down that road is not a pleasant thought along with intoxicated boat operators. This upper section of the river is not a good place to fish for King Salmon as they are in spawning stages when they get this far up the river they are not quality fish to eat. Unless you are a very experienced River navigator boat damage and bodily injury will be routine especially when the river is not at normal midsummer water levels or during non-daylight times. The only other group that I have spoken with that are in favor of this development are people who have opened subdivisions and would love to see lots of perspective land buyers.

If it is not plain at this point I nor anyone in my family or my neighbors wish to see this development take place.

Comment 21 of 39 – submitted Saturday, February 7, 2015 8:54 AM

I have been a Funny River resident for over 20 yrs. , and watched the traffic steadily increase every summer during fishing season , out FR Rd.

Property lines are not respected , signs and fences are ignored , trash and human waste is increasingly

scattered about , and commute times to and from town have greatly increased with the increase in slower traffic due to boats and motor homes.

These problems can only grow worse with increased traffic to a local boat launch out FR.

The Kenai River is already getting over developed. Too much human pressure on river banks , natural resources , and the river itself. Not to mention the fish.

To the developers it's all about money. We need to realize that there is a whole lot more at stake here than just a few unhappy fisherman. We are losing our wild habitat ,and the quality of life that is the reason most of us live here.

If this area is opened to the public , the joy and tranquility of the Funny River lifestyle will be lost forever. Hind sight is 20/20 , but once this is allowed , it will be too late.

Please do NOT open this area for a public boat launch.

Comment 22 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 9, 2015 6:12 PM

Several years ago my neighbors and I were involved in the Kenai Peninsula Borough dedicating the Caymas Subdivision land that the Kenai River borders on as a no fishing, no camping, no boating, etc. area to protect that section of the Kenai River from abuse. That particular section of the Kenai River is one of the two best King salmon spawning and rearing areas of the river. Now there are those who want to develop the land bordering on the other side of the river to include a boat launch, picnic areas, camping areas, bank fishing platforms, etc. Namely...the Kenai River Ranch land as the developers are calling it. That land is presently a wilderness area that supports a lot of moose, a few caribou at times of the year, brown and black bear, coyotes, wolves, foxes, lynx, sandhill cranes in the summer nest there, there are several eagle nests on the banks of the river along that property, etc., etc. What is the reasoning behind this movement for development that would disturb a prime king salmon spawning area as well as destroy the habitat that so many wildlife species make their home?

Also, the river at that area is rocky and flows at a minimum of 7 knots. Why would you want to let novice boat operators launch in such an area where they do not know how to run that section of the river? I live near that area. During the best time of fishing the Kenai River each summer, I usually only see about 20 boats float and drift by during the day if it is a busy day.

I attended the meeting that was held in Soldotna about this development. There were folks from both sides of the river there that night, and the vast majority of them did not want any development or at least only a very limited development of that land. They almost all said no to a boat launch and river bank fishing areas. One suggestion was to make a picnic area back from the river and only develop a trail to walk down to the river in the section of the land farthest upriver. They suggested perhaps dedicating it to the homesteaders who developed the land into farms, etc. years ago and not an emphasis on fishing at all.

I vote to oppose development of the Kenai River Ranch.

Comment 23 of 39 – submitted Monday, February 2, 2015 10:31 AM

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Kenai River proposal. As a Kenai River homeowner who resides across from the Southwest end of subject property, we have great interest in the development plan. For the past sixteen years we have enjoyed the solitude of watching the wildlife: Grizzlies, black bears, ducks, cranes eagles, loons, and many other wildlife creatures. This is pristine property well protected and preserved by the original owner and we need to keep it that way. I am sure the goal of the Exxon Valdez funds is conservation. It is a great habitat now so don't turn it into the circus like the lower River or the disaster below Skilak Lake or even the zoo at Centennial Park. If anything, let's cut down the many beetle kill spruce trees to keep the disease from spreading and enhance the beauty of the property. The shoreline banks are already posted and designated as a riparian habitat area under

the EVO Conservation designation program and is off limits for bank fishing. Opening that area to bank fishing would cause more damage which already exists downriver toward the banks of the Red Island area. With the closure of King fishing, boat traffic has increased greatly not only causing bank erosion in that area but also the banks of the property owners especially during predominately high water. Guides hauling their clients have no respect or regard for others property and insist on hugging the bank at high speeds causing big waves and erosion. Many of us have taken great measures doing spruce tree revetments projects but it is a losing proposition because most of them don't care. Creating another boat launch causes more traffic congestion, pollution, and more personnel expense to manage the operation. Recommend the existing boat launch upstream at Mykiss St be improved with available funds or develop one at Funny River SRS. The one at Mykiss is ideal because there is no current to contend with and is safer for launch.

No camping and certainly no motor homes. It would destroy or trash this area. It would also generate security problems for the many homeowners located in Funny River area and those across the river since most of the properties are vacant during the winter months. If you need to build something do hiking and nature trails in upper part of property for youth, school groups, families, or adults. Picnic benches, tables and restrooms are surely good projects. Bottom line keep as it exists today and enhance its beauty.

Comment 24 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, February 10, 2015 11:36 AM

Thank you for the opportunity to comment at this time on the future of the Kenai River Ranch property and to participate in the public workshop held in Anchorage on January 21. I own property across the river from the Northeast corner of the Kenai River Ranch property and for the last 35 years have spent the summers, and now much of the winter, in the Sterling and Soldotna areas.

I was pleased to hear at the workshop from the various state employees that development of the property in some form is not a foregone conclusion. As you know, it was the unanimous consent of the participants at the Anchorage Workshop, which were mostly Funny River area residents, that no development occur on the property. I understand this was also the majority opinion of participants at the Soldotna Workshop. As an area resident, I do not see any “need” to develop the property for recreational purposes. No “need” has been documented or reported, nor discussed at the workshop I attended. In fact, it was noted at the Anchorage Workshop that numerous other facilities and sites exist in the area to satisfy the demand for recreation use, and those locations are underutilized. While there was some talk about a boat launch, it was generally agreed that it would just be for the convenience of local residents, and numerous alternatives currently exist. Further development and/or enhancement of boat launches at those facilities should be studied and given priority. I noted that properties identified as “recreation” in the Kenai River Comprehensive Management Plan are designated as such, subject to the protection of the riverine and other habitat areas. The Kenai River Ranch property is a prime and pristine habitat for numerous species from Bald Eagles and Owls to Bears, Wolves and Moose. I know this for a fact as I see them often on the property. In addition, the property river bank provides valuable habitat for fish as evidenced by the no bank fishing restriction. It is an area where numerous species of fish can travel, live and spawn with little impact from man. The Kenai River Ranch property is increasingly unique as valuable habitat and should be preserved for those purposes.

Any development would destroy a portion or all of the habitat. It would be an irreversible mistake. Given that there is no “need” for the Kenai River Ranch property to be developed for recreational purposes, as evidenced by testimony of most area residents and the underutilization of current area facilities, and the undeniably devastating impact any development would have on both fish and wildlife habitat, not to mention other problems such as infrastructure capacity and budget concerns, I am opposed to any recreational development on the property.

Comment 25 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, February 10, 2015 3:54 AM

I have been a local resident since 1983 and have lived on Bradford Rd. for 8 years of that. Because of my location I have witnessed first hand the daily activity at the KRR. It is common to see the local pair of nesting eagles hunt the field, Sandhill cranes stop there for long periods and one of the coolest things I saw was a Wolf diving nose first into the snow for a Shrew? or Rabbit? I couldn't see the prey. With Morgans Landing just below KRR and Funny River Campground just beyond that there is plenty of opportunity for recreation and if a boat launch was deemed needed how about at Funny River Campground? Upriver from KRR is house after house dock after dock. So here we have this beautiful open space, do we really want to erase that for an unneeded campground? There have been so many mistakes made from human impact on the river can we get it right this time for preservation sake and future generations. Thank you

Comment 26 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, February 10, 2015 9:01 PM

I attended the workshop in Anchorage to express my views in person and listened to those in attendance.

My primary objective is to see this large parcel of land preserved from any further development in perpetuity. I grew up on that land as family friends of Gene and Della Hansen visiting often as well as working in the hay fields and roaming the countryside.

I am now in adulthood, a frequent visitor to the Sterling area and lover of the Kenai River watershed. It is my intention to retire back to the peninsula and I hope to be located in the Sterling area within the next 10 years.

This parcel of land should be preserved for future generations as it has many special features, beyond my own fond memories. Here are some of the reasons I believe it should be preserved, left alone to be one small place that wildlife can breathe and be, without the ever present encroachment of people and development.

The stretch of river that borders the Kenai River Ranch holds some of the best King spawning habitat on the river. It is one of the last large chunks of undeveloped riverfront either above it or below it. For this reason alone it should be left to go back to nature. Wildlife has already claimed the overgrown hay fields. There are resident sand hill cranes nesting there. It is an active area for eagle activity, including nesting. Finally, I just flat out believe our greediness and need to put our footprint in every available space needs to be restrained. There is intrinsic value in wilderness. Wilderness and wild places feed our souls and God knows, we all need more soul!

Thanks for listening and I sincerely hope these comments are taken into consideration when decisions are made.

Comment 27 of 39 – submitted Sunday, January 25, 2015 1:10 PM

To quote a scientist friend of mine, "Unfortunately we are loving the river to death. Having grown up in NJ I saw this many times. Each generation tends to lose a sense of what is in fact lost." I have just learned that the property purchased with Exxon Valdez funds is being considered for creating a public boat launch, camping and RV park. (there is already a State park only a short distance from this property.)

We are ten year residents of the area, and live near the end of Fisherman's Rd. In the time we have been here we have seen the river become an uncontrolled mass of people. and have watched as king salmon have nearly disappeared. Erosion on the river caused by heavy boat traffic is a serious problem.

The property in question purchased by Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) trustees funds is critical habitat for moose, caribou, wolves, lynx and other small mammals. Not to mention the many birds and waterfowl nesting and feeding there.

According to the trustees website's "Small Parcel Program (generally parcels of 1,000 acres or less) deals with strategically located habitats, usually located on coves, along important stretches of river, or adjacent to valuable tidelands. They are often close to spill area communities or within already protected areas, such as refuges and parks. These lands are acquired for their habitat qualities as well as their importance for subsistence and recreational use." A good portion of the land is swampy and would require fill to make it useful. And the development would require additional road maintenance. Pressure would be put on an already overused transfer station at about mile 9. At this time the Federal Subsistence board has voted 4-3, to allow gillnetting by Ninilchik Tribal Council members on the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers. Proposals have also been submitted for Cooper Landing and Moose Pass. The Kenaitze Indian already is allowed subsistence gillnetting on both the Kenai and Kasilof Rivers. There is no limit on the number of guides, and no enforcement on any regulations that there are for them.

Dipnetting at the mouth of the Kenai, where the head of household can have 25 fish and each family member an additional ten is in my opinion much too liberal.

How much more pressure can this fragile river survive? Although recreational use is included in the property use, I do not feel it is a good use of this land.

Please consider this letter as a request to leave this property as it currently is – and don't jeopardize this river any further.

Comment 28 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, February 11, 2015 9:31 AM

Kenai River Sportfishing Association provides the following comment on the proposal for development of the Kenai River Ranch property. A range of development options exist, from no development to full development with campgrounds, trails, parking lots, bank angling access and boat launch facilities.

The Kenai River Ranch property has high values for fish and wildlife conservation, as a large undeveloped footprint along the Kenai River. These are important values to consider when looking at development options of the property.

KRSA supports limiting any development to a boat launch facility, with suitable facilities as a day use parking lot and restrooms. Currently there is no public access boat launch facility along the whole of Funny River Road, along the south side of the Kenai River. As such we support further exploration of the boat launch concept to provide the Funny River community a public facility to provide boating access where none exists now. Considering its location, the most likely group of people to make use of the facility would be local residents.

At this time we do not support further development such as bank angling infrastructure or campgrounds. The riparian zone of the property is currently closed to bank angling from July 1 – August 15. This timeframe is the most popular for bank anglers who are fishing primarily for sockeye salmon. Campground development that would attract overnight stays and most likely bank anglers would seem to invite conflict with the properties riparian closure to bank angling.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Comment 29 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, February 11, 2015 9:31 AM

I am against the use of the Kenai River Ranch.

My Reasons are:

1. I was told by a Funny River homesteader that the Hansen Bend Kenai Ranch could possibly have been a native living site.

2. There is too much traffic on the river as is, erosion on the banks is quite evident.
3. Disturbance of salmon breeding grounds.
4. There are many people including myself that want to keep Funny River pristine with minimum development. We are now seeing outsiders coming out here polluting, destroying property, poaching, thieves, and drug addicts. Absolutely no respect!
5. Traffic on Funny River is dangerous with trailers, boats cars speeding. Accidents are already prevalent.
6. Locals would not get a chance to use the area during fishing season
7. And finally who is going to pay for the maintenance and attendants when Alaska is already strapped for money. All and all this is not sustainable.

Comment 30 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 20, 2015 8:31 PM

I have read more than once from Kenai River managers of one type or another that the Kenai River has a major problem of too easy access for the general public.

Why then do we have a to develop a beautiful piece of raw property that is home to wildlife, protected from bank degradation, and allows for keeping additional human pressure on the Kenai River restricted. The DNR-Parks should review the health of a natural resources before a change is allowed to be made, i.e., allowing 50hp motors on the Kenai River. The degradation to the banks on the lower Kenai River is quite obvious with the additional wave action.

Comment 31 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 20, 2015 8:31 PM

No boat launch, too much powerboat activity occupying in the area already. Could be a State Recreation area with day-use, arboretum, and picnic area, educational opportunities about homestead property and river habitat. Trails along the upper terrace areas above the tree line connecting to the and from the state recreational area. Some walk-in fishing opportunity during July on the upriver hundred yards off graveled river bank area. (The entire area is open to bank fishing after August 15th currently.)

Comment 32 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 20, 2015 8:31 PM

We don't want the property developed! See details of project need to be put in FRCCCA Newsletter each month for resident input.

Comment 33 of 39 – submitted Tuesday, January 27, 2015 11:01 AM

Would like to see it developed into a park. People across Funny River Road, those without property on the river don't have access unless they access at the boat ramp.

Comment 34 of 39 – submitted Friday, January 23, 2015 5:32 PM

We don't need to open the Kenai River to more boats, campers, fisherman and other problems that arriver with them in the area of development under discussion. There is enough to handle already trying to keep this area clean from garbage and other debris, especially in our summer months. This includes the river, roads and private property.

The spruce tree revetment proposal that many of use on the river implemented has possibly helped with the natural and unnatural erosion of the river bank. Bank fishing has also been a target of help from the state. Now this proposal? No. Our natural resources, animals, birds and fish have dwindled

considerably in this area as a result of overfishing and the Funny River Horse Trail fire. (Also in this same area) Do we need human carelessness to add to this problem? No the need to keep all development of such proposals as this in the foreseeable future is very important! Our children, grandchildren, etc., need to understand what good stewards we are and were for their families in years to come. Our road from Soldotna (Funny River Road) is always in need of repairs and should be a consideration. Also, on the books is the bridge from Sterling. There are several boat launches, RV Parks, camping areas on or near the river and bank fishing in town, and up river. If this proposed project is to be built by Alaska State Parks, who will guarantee its long road and other maintenance? Is it really cost effective for the few months it will be open? Our other state park near to this same location is closed by and large the whole of late fall, winter and spring as are the other state parks in Alaska. The proposed fee for use will take care of the entire facility? No. please do not let one person or group speak for all the Funny River people who like me, know nothing of this proposal, and who probably still don't. Notices should have been mailed out long ago to all.

Comment 35 of 39 – submitted Friday, January 23, 2015 5:32 PM

I live on the river, I bought here in 2004, and have been here fulltime and year-round since January 2006. But I submit these comments with no vested interest in any outcome of this proposal, because this spring we will be selling and relocating elsewhere on the Peninsula.

Some things I feel must be taken into account when planning for the River Ranch property: Existing access and infrastructure on the south side of the river is already inadequate and cannot support additional users.

Funny River road appears near the end of its useful life without re-grading and resurfacing. New shock absorber-challenging frost heaves appear each winter: many become permanent. Maintenance has been limited to ship-sealing creaks, providing a wonderful bumpity-bumpity experience for its full length. Twelve miles of "no passing allowed" mean the slowest vehicle sets the pace. Think about hundreds of first-time users each summer pulling fifth-wheelers or boats as they look for the new River Ranch campground and boat ramp. The current trash transfer station is already overwhelmed most of the summer. Better tell the Borough to add extra shifts. And who pays for that? Oh that's right, I do. Not the visitors that will cause the added expense. These days "campground" means "RV Park". Exiting access to the property from FRR would have to be replaced with two-way access adequate for RV's. Power? Water? Dump stations?

Neither the public nor the Kenai River currently suffer from lack of access to the river. Why promote greater public access and use when the river, its banks, its wildlife, and its fish already suffer from unrestricted access and overuse by guides, sportfishers, and local residents? Additional public access to the river is not only a solution to a problem that does not exist, it would make an existing problem even worse.

Continuing development of private lands along the river from Soldotna to Kenai Keys has greatly eroded availability of habitat for wildlife. The frequency of wildlife we now see on and around our property is a small fraction of what we were seeing our first few years.

As much as private property development along the river has impacted wildlife, perhaps the three fires in our region over the last ten years have had greater impact. Natural events, yes, but such huge degradations of area wildlife habitat should be reason to preserve rather than destroy remaining

habitats. The River Ranch property is a mere remnant of what was once available to wildlife along the Middle Kenai; to the extent possible, it should be preserved for wildlife now dependent on that land. Additional access to the river for boat fishing, whether guided or independent, can only put even greater pressure on our salmon runs. As our salmon go, so will our trout. I have seen much greater fishing traffic on the river the last three years than I saw our first three years. I will leave the river a pessimist as to the future of our fish. At most, I would hope fishing access at River Ranch would be limited to protected bank fishing.

My suggestion as to a “best use” for the River Ranch, if it cannot be left as is:

Two walk-in (in winter, ski-in) public use cabins on the property with good separation. Cabins big enough for family sleeping. Charge a premium fee for the premium location and supports. Two cabins, perhaps a central covered pavilion with sheltered BBQ’s and tables, and more natural science education. No more than three cabins: minimized user density in favor of wildlife.

Maintained and signed nature trails to provide controlled access to the natural environment of the property, with information and education and education for users as to native plants, micro – ecosystems, the natural science of the river and it’s adjoining land.

Small bank fishing decks for each cabin with fish cleaning tables and gut chutes. (Buckets and basins in the cabins? Probably not; they would be quickly find heir way back to Anchorage. Maybe they are on a list for users to bring.)

Provisions for trash at the parking area. Cost of such provisions could be factored into the fee structure. No dogs. No bikes. No dogs for obvious reasons; bikes would cause trail damage and would turn the walking trails into racecourse for ten year olds. Fire pits and firewood provided. Wood stoves in the cabins. Think: “River Ranch Recreation and Natural Science Center” It could win awards. Most importantly, add my voice to those of my Funny River area neighboring property owners who are against any plan that encourages or provides for hundreds of new users of the river, the road and the infrastructure.

Comment 36 of 39 – submitted Friday, January 23, 2015 5:30 PM

There is no reason to open the river for more fisherman, boats, campers, etc. We already have a problem with garbage, dumpsters, etc. during the summer, spring and fall. Our three dumpsters are not enough to provide from the people there now. The area proposed has in island like abutment, marshes, wildlife that would be obliterated if this is made into a boat landing and parking area. We along the river have already been targeted with “spruce tree revetment” for years. We have still lost five feet of river frontage from boats that speed up and down river and airplanes that like to land on the river.

Our natural resources, animals and fish have dwindled considerably and need places to revive. The Funny River Horse Trail fire has also reduced our wildlife and birds. The area should be left as is or made into a riverbank fishing area like the lower river has in Soldotna, NO BOAT LAUNCH.

Our road “Funny River Road” has problems with up keep as is . There are several boat launch areas for the upper river as is Bings Landing, Dots Landing, Skilak Lake, Kenai Keys, private and others.

There should also be a speed limit on the river, boat races go on the whole summer and make horrible waves. This is a “no” vote for this project.

Comment 37 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, February 11, 2015 2:19 PM

1. I would like to see the entrance moved off Funny River Road over to Owen. This section of Funny River Road is know for high speeds, a bad corner (where even a trooper car went off) and passing – even though it is a no passing zone.
2. One designed use should be horseback riding. Horse riding has been common in the area since before homesteading. However, the growth of the area has eliminated most traditional trails. It would be nice to have a place where horses could be ridden, with limited brush clearing to maintain an open area of 40-50 acres. This would also create and maintain moose habitat. Moose are frequently seen in what used to be hay fields. They need brush maintained at a level they can reach.
3. A second use for the property should be a place to train dogs. This fits the sport hunting use of the land. Dogs can be trained for hunting and tracking. Tracking dogs need areas to be trained, and this can be utilized by Search and Rescue teams, too.

Comment 38 of 39 – submitted Wednesday, February 11, 2015 3:36 PM

The name Kenai River Ranch suggest ideas of horses. I've been living in Funny River my whole life and have been a horsewoman almost as long. As Funny River becomes more populated, there is increased traffic and higher speeds which make riding by the road unsafe. Where there were formerly open trials, there are now houses and roads. Many people on Funny River have horses with increasingly less space to enjoy riding. Kenai River Ranch could enable a safe environment for horse riders to enjoy the nature while making a low impact on nature, if some acreage would be set aside and enabling horse-riding as a designated activity for the land.

I would also like to suggest moving the entrance to Owen Street. The stretch of road by the golf course where the entrance is currently planned is next to where I live, and I can say with certainty that that area would not be a good place to put the entrance. People to not drive safely there often speeding, despite a corner (which there have been many accidents on) and a hill which decreases visibility by the crossroads of Pioneers and Owen. There are many drivers who pass illegally along that stretch of road and who are not used to slowing down for someone turning or pulling out. Moving the entrance to along Owen Street would be safer and not out of the way for anyone who would go to Kenai River Ranch.

Comment 39 of 39 – submitted Thursday, January 29, 2015 10:15 AM

Would like to see day parking, boardwalk to not destroy the riverbank, in the future a boat launch is necessary in the community.