

Appendices

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Appendix A: Summary of Public Comments

Planning for the Future of the Eagle River Nature Center – Master Site Development Plan Comments- January 28, 2010

Site Planning- Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Design and Construction Section

Comment # and subject	Issue Statement / Public Comment	Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Response
<p>1. Work with what we have</p>	<p>A new site development and building expenses would be enormous and the impact of existing property, trails and habitat as well as new roads would also be traumatic. There is adequate room to expand the existing facility and/or construct a new facility without the need for a new road. A new road will increase the project cost, future maintenance cost, and result in less money to spend on important environmental education and outreach the nature center performs. Has the State considered “no action” as an option, no action would not mean terminating the ERNC.</p> <p>The creation of a new access road does not seem necessary. There are benefits to having the traffic flow to the “end of the road” as opposed to having a four way intersection along Eagle River Road with traffic coming in and out of the valley intersecting with nature center, visitor traffic and neighbor driveways opposite the new proposed access.</p>	<p><i>The Friends of ERNC have been working with the current facility since 1996; it was an undersized facility then and is today. The Eagle River Nature Center (ERNC) has been feeling growing pains since the very early years and it has become apparent continuing to ignore the safety issues and growth needs is not responsible on behalf of the ERNC or Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR).</i></p> <p><i>New development and impacts to the area will be difficult to accept, as well, the cost of completing a major project such as this will be costly, however, as stated above it is inconsistent with the Mission of the ERNC or DPOR to ignore the existing impacts and program needs.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR is not considering “no action” as an option for the reasons stated above.</i></p> <p><i>Any proposed intersection on Eagle River Road would be permitted through Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) to meet the AASHTO design criteria. DPOR will make recommendations to DOT&PF to make the end of the road fit into the community landscape and provide a new access to Eagle River Nature Center.</i></p>
<p>2. Trails</p>	<p>The removal or disruption of the current trail system for building a new road or making the current trail system more ADA friendly would destroy the integrity of the trail system for 98% of the population, this seems unnecessary.</p>	<p><i>The State is required by Americans with Disabilities Act to provide a fully accessible program. We will work with the existing trail system to bring it into compliance and to improve the quality of experience while maintaining the integrity of the trails.</i></p>
<p>3. Parking</p>	<p>The proposed expansion of parking does not seem sufficient to accommodate future projections of visitor use/traffic, considering much of the current overflow parking takes place along Eagle River Road, blocking neighbor driveways.</p> <p>Many people parking along the road are not using the Nature Center, instead they are accessing the parks many trails. As a result visitors not wanting to pay the \$5.00 fee have</p>	<p><i>As part of identifying the ERNC shortcoming and needs hundreds of vehicle and pedestrian counts were collected and the data from that survey information produced the “Analysis Results Report” by Peter Holck PhD. In the document it clearly projected the number of parking spaces required in a 15 year projection. This is the guiding document for our expansion projections.</i></p> <p><i>Parking fees for the ERNC are separate from Alaska State Park parking fees as outlined in the 25 year concessionaire permit which includes a provision to</i></p>

	<p>created a safety issue along Eagle River Road. Overflow parking is mostly needed at the height of the summer season during major events. Could the “overflow parking” area be reopened using the existing road to the maintenance site? The road could be widened and a new parking lot could be put where racetrack and educational yurt exist. Also, better signage and more designated handicapped spaces by the front door should take care of the problem. Would reserved handicap parking be an option?</p>	<p><i>allow the collection of parking fees by the Friends of Eagle River Nature Center to help offset operational costs to the ERNC.</i></p> <p><i>The overflow parking area has become the ERNC maintenance yard as a result of a lack of sufficient space, site alternatives are being explored where additional parking, utilizing the footprint of the racetrack would alleviate the current need for safer parking. Reserved accessible parking spaces are a consideration; however the new Master Site Development Plan will address the appropriate number ADA of parking spaces needed for the facility.</i></p>
4. Parking	<p>Parking should be small, with additional parking at the North Fork, and a shuttle service (paid for by users) to bring people to and from to keep the impact onto Nature Center and its inhabitants to a minimum (as in Denali Park).</p>	<p><i>Vehicle and pedestrian counts were collected and the data from that survey information produced the “Analysis Results Report” by Peter Holck PhD. The figures illustrate the numbers of parking spaces for projected growth of the ERNC. DPOR will propose a parking area in the relationship to the ERNC facility to accommodate the projected needs of the center. Therefore, a shuttle service would not be required for park visitors.</i></p>
5. Current Location	<p>Relocating the ERNC to the furthest extent of its current footprint creates new impacts for additional neighbors, damages more pristine resources within the area, and does not best utilize existing trail networks. It is not necessary to build a new nature center or a huge maintenance facility. Instead with minimal work an expansion and remodel of the existing facility could add classroom and lobby space. Perhaps building up or a creative design using the slope with piling and retaining walls could facilitate generous parking on top and new building underneath if an expansion over the hill was done. Renovating the intersection directly at the nature center entrance could also allow for better vehicle access.</p>	<p><i>It is understood any development will impose an impact, however, through good design we intend to minimize the amount of impact to the resources and existing trail network. Retaining the existing facility is not in the best interest of the ERNC or DPOR as the current location does not provide adequate space for much needed parking and the proposed building square footage.</i></p> <p><i>Our planning team is looking at all possible options, however, retaining the existing structure is not recommended. To bring the structure up to code would require a complete remodel and it would still not address the parking and circulation issue.</i></p> <p><i>To have the building and parking on different elevations would disrupt the visitor experience; also, this would not follow good design practice and lead to further problems.</i></p> <p><i>As part of our planning process we are looking for ways to minimize safety concerns at intersections with the current end of the road design proposed by DOT&PF. DPOR is looking to reduce conflicts with non park visitors.</i></p>
6. Current Location	<p>The old lodge could serve as a commemorative entrance and reception area.</p>	<p><i>See answer above. Also, at this time the Friends of Eagle River Nature Center have expressed they do not have the resources nor the funding to operate two facilities, considering staffing, maintenance and cost.</i></p>
7. Site A	<p>Site A is an undeveloped location that would result in substantial impacts to pristine, undisturbed wetland and upland habitats, including new development along an anadromous stream with high wildlife habitat</p>	<p><i>At this time we have analyzed the existing natural and social resources to avoid or minimize impacts to high value wildlife habitat and resources.</i></p> <p><i>The Historical Iditarod Trail is defined as a corridor though this area of the Eagle River Valley. The actual</i></p>

	<p>and migration value. Alternative A is too far from the existing trail heads in the park, does the historic Iditarod Trail runs through here?</p> <p>Also, introducing an intersection as shown for Site A could bottleneck traffic creating a road hazard, as well there could be people crossing the road by foot to have their picture taken at Falling Water Creek endangering pedestrians.</p>	<p><i>trail location changed with each winter conditions and is located from the river bottom to trails that cut through some locations along the valley. DPOR is working with the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer and BLM Iditarod coordinator to make sure we do not impact the historical values of the Iditarod Trail corridor.</i></p> <p><i>There is an existing road cut through Area A, it could have been used as the Iditarod Trail in the past, however there is evidence of this site being used as a hunting camp in the past.</i></p> <p><i>Regarding road impacts refer to comment 1 response.</i></p>
8. Site A	<p>Site A is likely the best place, because it does not degrade the current trail system. Site A could be a modest site and supplement to the current center- have one be the main education research center and the other more for hikers and park visitors embarking on walks.</p>	<p><i>Site A was chosen because it afforded sufficient land base for a new facility location, however, after further consideration Falling Waters creek divides the usable area in half segregating the buildable area. Also, Site A does not retain the existing interpretive program of the ERNC.</i></p> <p><i>Regarding having two locations, the Friends of ERNC have expressed they do not have interest, resources or funding to maintain two structures.</i></p>
9. Site B - road	<p>The ERNC indicates that it wants to minimize disturbance to neighboring properties, however the road shown in Site B cuts off property owners living adjacent to the park, reduces property values, adversely affects the views from adjacent properties, increases noise and effectively turns properties into islands between two roads. In addition the project cost, future maintenance costs results in less money to spend on the important environmental education and outreach work the Nature Center performs.</p> <p>The new road as proposed in Option B would impact areas which have been less impacted in recent years and which appear to be critical wildlife habitat. Moose, brown bear, lynx, beaver and coyote have been observed in the area of the proposed road. This area boasts a diverse forest composition, wetlands unimpeded by trails or culverts and rare human/dog traffic. Abundant wildlife trails show the importance of this area for animals moving up and down and across the Eagle River Valley, as wildlife traverse from Ram Valley to the Eagle River, following Falling Water Creek and smaller creeks running through residential properties and into the area of the proposed road. Putting a road as shown in Option B goes directly against what the Park is all about.</p> <p>The road approach to the Alternative B site</p>	<p><i>Our planning team is working to evaluate all possible options for road construction at Site B. DPOR concurs the road proposed on Site B could affect the neighbors and wildlife habitat, however would minimize the amount of cut and fill slopes as opposed to an access road near the current building.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR's Mission states to "provide outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment and welfare of the people" also, to conserve and interpret natural, cultural and historic resources. The road proposed on Site B provides safe access for park visitors, it is the responsibility of DPOR to explore all safe possible options for access to Site B.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR is aware of the potential environmental and wildlife impacts in the area of the conceptually proposed road in Site B. We understand the concern of wildlife using this area as a corridor crossing the valley and are looking into other potential alternatives to providing safe vehicle access to Site B. DPOR has two alternatives for vehicle access to Site B for evaluation.</i></p>

	needs to be reevaluated with other options for accessing the new site for the Nature Center. The current proposed access road alignment for Alternative B is not the only option, other approaches need to be re-evaluated, it may require additional engineering and design for safety, but are feasible.	
10. Site B - racetrack	The existing site is well suited for an expanded or new facility this area is already impacted by development yet has superb natural features and views within close proximity, has excellent access to the existing network and variety of trails, and could best make use of existing resources including the current center, toilet facilities and volunteer housing at the “race track”. However, would “vegetation” adequately mask/hide the building and parking lot?	<p><i>Current concept site plans are considering use of existing disturbed areas, including the race track, septic field, current building location, maintenance area and educational yurt location. It is good sustainable design to use as much disturbed or existing impacted areas as possible.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR cannot guarantee re-vegetation of the site would adequately mask / hide the building or parking areas, however, it is through good design practice we intend to minimize impacts to the neighborhood through site planning, re-planting and screening with existing vegetation. Disturbed areas will be seeded or shrubs and trees will be planted during construction to help restore the site back to a natural state.</i></p>
11. Site B - racetrack	Site B would allow the facility to develop at its existing location, expanding into the "racetrack" area if necessary to provide additional parking, maintenance, and interpretive space. Site B is most consistent with the stated mission of the project: to "address the daily operations of the Nature Center and provide a base for future growth the meet demand," and to "further the educational and interpretive opportunities available to the park visitors ... develop new facilities ... while promoting preservation and protection of the historical, natural and recreational resources."	<i>DPOR agrees we will follow our Mission as stated to "provide outdoor recreation opportunities and conserve and interpret natural, cultural and historic resources for the use, enjoyment and welfare of the people. "</i>
12. Site B - racetrack	Emphasis on Site B, locate the new building site close to the existing center, build directly below the current site, near the septic system leach field, the parking lot could be located nearby, and perhaps move the volunteer cabins to where the current maintenance structure is. Move the maintenance structure closer to the new Nature Center, and put the parking lot where the volunteer cabins currently are.	<i>DPOR has reviewed all comments received and will work with those ideas that fit the Mission of the ERNC and DPOR to see how those ideas may be incorporated into the concept site plans as the DPOR Design Team see fit based on the Mission.</i>
13. Site B - support	Option B should be brought forward for detailed planning and analysis to maximize the use of existing developed land and previously disturbed habitat. Next stages of planning should include: Additional variants for automobile, bus, and	<p><i>DPOR will consider all listed items in the Master Site Development Plan.</i></p> <p><i>As stated above regarding site plan consideration; refer to comment 12 responses.</i></p>

	<p>bicycle traffic into, through, and off site</p> <p>Multiple variants for short-term and long-term parking and pedestrian movement</p> <p>Multiple building-location variants to maximize existing view shed, trails, site conditions and utilities while minimizing development of previously undisturbed habitat</p> <p>Multiple trail variants to clearly plan efficient use of existing trails, recognizing the multiple types of user groups with various, sometimes conflicting, needs</p> <p>Multiple building design variants to include reuse of the existing building, net-zero building designs, or living-building designs, to further minimize the impacts and various footprints associated large, community buildings</p>	
<p>14. Site C + D</p>	<p>If Site C or D is selected the traffic flow along Cumulus Road would increase the noise and residents would lose their feeling of seclusion. Road conditions are less than favorable in summer and winter. Funding to complete and maintain the road would be difficult to obtain by the Nature Center. Also, would Parks and Outdoor Recreation compensate homeowners for the disturbance, or offer to purchase adjacent property?</p> <p>Options C and D could also degrade the value of the interpretive trails and program which make the nature center so successful. Under Options C & D, a heavily used road and parking area would be constructed along these interpretive trails or on the adjacent private road. The interpretive trails would suffer increased noise and vehicle traffic, degradation of wildlife habitat and loss of wilderness atmosphere. Options C and D would destroy the very assets that created the need for expansion and growth. Options C and D should be rejected in favor of an alternative that preserves the atmosphere along the interpretive trail and at the viewing decks.</p> <p>Options C and D would further encroach upon the more remote trails, cabins and the rapids yurt site and the wilderness enjoyed by backpackers and day hikers. Many park users view the parking area and visitor center as the "gateway" to Crow Pass and other more pristine trails within the greater Chugach State</p>	<p><i>Sites C & D provide a facility in the park but the impacts would not allow the ERNC to continue the existing interpretive program they have built their outreach on. Sites C & D are world class sites and to introduce a vehicle road system, parking and a new interpretive program will impact the natural and social integrity of the Upper Valley of Eagle River in Chugach State Park. DPOR is not considering the purchase of land from adjacent homeowners of their property.</i></p>

	<p>Park. Options C and D would move the "gateway" - and its radius of popular interpretive trails - further into the park, encroaching upon trails which currently reflect a more "wilderness" flavor. This is not consistent with the plan's mission to "protect the historical, natural and recreational resources" of the park. Alternatives C or D do not meet the objectives stated for the ERNC's current or growing needs.</p>	
15. Site D	<p>Site D has the longest road to be constructed; it also appears to be located in the floodplain. Any required drainage features might be dammed by beavers.</p>	<p><i>Site D would have the longest road constructed at 1.88 miles and is located at the edge of the bolder field and upland forest. It is several thousand feet from the active beaver area or stream.</i></p>
16. Site D	<p>Site D is the best location because the site is far enough from the local residents; it would be more costly, however, would put the facilities in the park and not disturb neighbors or residents. Also, it is not on a bear crossroads although, of course, bears use the area and may be attracted to garbage unless suitable storage facilities are provided.</p>	<p><i>Site D was a chosen Site Location because there is sufficient land base for a new facility and program; however, this location would not retain the existing interpretive programs an important consideration. All of Alaska is considered bear country and any new development will follow the appropriate State and Municipal standards for trash storage.</i></p>
17. Site D	<p>Site D has great views looking up the Eagle River valley and adjacent peaks. The site should be constructed on the large terminal moraine where an underground building could be placed-- a building similar to the one at Denali National Park.</p>	<p><i>Regarding Site D location; refer to comment 16 responses. Parks is looking into all sustainable options available in building construction and design.</i></p>
18. Alternative Locations	<p>With 500,000 acres in Chugach State Park it is more than possible to develop an alternative that does not impact the neighborhood if the Nature Center and Division of Parks and Recreation are willing to work with neighborhood members</p> <p>A potential alternative location for the Nature Center could be considered at Mile 7.4. The location offers adequate parking, river access and potential for a pedestrian bridge for access to the south side of the valley which could link with the Symphony Lake Trail via Eagle River Overlook Trail.</p>	<p><i>The Upper Eagle River Valley is the project focus for a proposed location of the ERNC. It is important to the ERNC and DPOR to retain the current interpretive program. DPOR has been working with the neighbors and public during this public process by collecting comments and personal accounts from adjacent neighbors of the ERNC. DPOR has been working with the public throughout the planning process. The trailhead at the North Fork of Eagle River is outside the recommended project area for development of the ERNC.</i></p>
19. Wildlife Impacts	<p>The area between the Albert Loop Trail, the race track and Eagle River road is an important calving and feeding corridor for moose especially in the spring, early summer, and winter. Black bear and brown bear frequently travel through and use this area as well. The old growth cottonwood supports great horned owl nesting and an abundance of prey such as squirrel and snowshoe hare. It is imperative the Master Site Plan is thoroughly reviewed by</p>	<p><i>All areas within the Upper Eagle River Valley and the existing ERNC are in bear county. Understanding the high value wildlife habitats to habitat corridors in this area will be analyzed by and working with naturalists and biologists with DPOR and the Department of Fish and Game. The area referred to in the comment would be described as wildlife habitat and will be evaluated. Alternatives will be presented to avoid or minimize impacts to wildlife</i></p>

	<p>Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Biologists. Alternative B locates the road and a new visitor center next to the Albert Loop Trail. This trail is closed every year in the fall while brown bears feed on salmon in the beaver ponds and streams. It would be unwise to put people and development in close proximity to an area of known annual bear activity. The trail is closed for public safety because of previous bear attacks. The salmon provide the nutritional requirements for bears before they hibernate. The road will cause impacts and disturbance to bears that will affect their survival. It is irresponsible and inappropriate management of natural resources to develop the access road and the Nature Center in this area.</p>	<p><i>habitat areas.</i></p>
<p>20. Planning Process</p>	<p>It has been requested the Nature Center and Parks and Recreation suspend the current proposed master plan alternatives and work with the neighbors to develop an alternative that avoids impacts to the neighborhood and provide a sustainable plan for the future. There has been a lack of notification to the affected property owners in the Gateway to the Park Subdivision. Notice was not sent to neighbors regarding the September 10th or 17th meeting.</p> <p>The Nature Center and the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation have not shown regard for the property owners in the Gateway to the Park Subdivisions and have failed to properly notice and involve the affected public. Residents were not directly contacted before the alternatives were developed. It would have been helpful if someone described the problem/need for expansion. The presenters seemed to assume that we all know that the center needs to expand.</p> <p>It has been strongly suggested the Nature Center and Division of Parks and Recreation to establish a subcommittee of neighborhood representatives to work with the Nature Center and Division of Parks to assist in developing alternatives that would not impact any of the neighboring properties.</p>	<p><i>The Friends of ERNC and the DPOR have developed a public process for the Master Site Planning Development of the ERNC and have been working with the residents and neighbors towards a sustainable plan. We have collected sufficient information and have encouraged involvement from all stakeholders via written comment. Regarding Public Involvement; refer to comment 18 responses.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR has a public process for this project that will invite the public including the neighbors of the ERNC to provide public input.</i></p> <p><i>The planning process is to evaluate the existing site and possible alternative sites in the Upper Eagle River Valley, Site Alternatives A-B-C-D were requested by past DPOR Directors to evaluate the possible best locations for the Eagle River Nature Center to meet their needs and objectives. This process was a DPOR in-house question brought forward to the public for their input and transparency.</i></p> <p><i>Information regarding an expansion at the ERNC has been in planning since the early 1980's. As part of the latest planning effort by the Friends of the ERNC, media releases and information was published on the DPOR and Friends of ERNC webpage's. The ERNC also, conducted visitor surveys for those people using the ERNC. Mail out flyers had been sent to over 200 residents within the vicinity of the ERNC.</i></p> <p><i>The problem and need for expansion at the ERNC in short-</i></p> <p><i>"From the early years, it was apparent that the Nature Center's physical facilities were becoming less able to accommodate all the various groups being served. Its aging structure and utilities, plus constricted and inefficient spaces, have been ongoing concerns. Most</i></p>

		<p><i>importantly, the facility has not been able to accommodate the programming needs of recent years.”</i></p> <p><i>- Asta Spurgis, ERNC Director</i></p>
<p>21. Planning Process</p>	<p>Adjacent properties will be adversely impacted and the character of residents property and subdivision impaired by the alternatives proposed in Site B. It has been requested the Nature Center and Division of Parks and Recreation suspend the current proposed Master Site Plan alternatives and work with residents to develop an alternative that avoids impacts to our property and our neighborhood, and meets visitor needs.</p>	<p><i>To maintain the existing parking area at the ERNC, will have greater impacts to the surrounding neighbors then if DPOR works with the adjacent neighbors to minimize such impacts in the Master Site Development Plan. DPOR will continue working with the neighbors to understand the possible impacts to each neighbor.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR and the Friends of ERNC do not intend to suspend planning for the Master Site Development Plan.</i></p> <p><i>As stated above Regarding Public Involvement; refer to comment 18 / 20 responses.</i></p> <p><i>“The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation envisions an affordable and accessible system of parks that provide divers, safe, year-round, high-quality, family-oriented, outdoor recreation experiences; statewide programs that enhance the enjoyment and stewardship of the state’s outdoor recreation, natural, historic and cultural resources; and a dedicated, professional staff that fully meets the needs of the public. “</i></p> <p><i>The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Ten-Year Strategic Plan 2007-2017</i></p>
<p>22. Neighbor Impacts on Property</p>	<p>A resident in the Gateway to the Park Subdivision states they have owned their property since 2006 and found no publicly available information regarding the proposed Master Site Plan during their research prior to purchase. Alaska State Certified Appraiser, Susan K. Crosson, she specifically noted the following in the site description: "...The subject is bordered by Chugach State Park and has a secluded setting with no development allowed on the parkland to the south..."</p> <p>Alternative B would directly and adversely impact their property (Block 2Lot 1" of Gateway to the Park Subdivision) by constructing an additional Park access road immediately adjacent to their property and their neighbors. They feel this is unacceptable and must not be carried forward as a viable alternative.</p>	<p><i>The area to the south of this private property was never zoned as undeveloped land or wilderness. Alternately, it was considered in the 1980’s as alternative access to the park, however was never developed.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR will apply design techniques to minimize the visual and noise impacts to the neighbors. Existing visual and noise impacts to the neighbors have already been evaluated and will continue to be evaluated during the planning process. DPOR will present other alternative that will avoid habitat impacts as well.</i></p>
<p>23. Bus and Recreational Vehicles</p>	<p>Are there potential plans to expand access for large tour buses and recreational vehicles through the Gateway of the Park Subdivision?</p>	<p><i>The mission of ERNC is to provide community programs focused on education. The ERNC does not intend to focus their education outreach to commercial tour companies. The design vehicle for the site will be a large school bus and a recreational vehicle.</i></p>

<p>24. Building Character and Setting</p>	<p>The building’s rustic charm a feature that has maintenance drawbacks helps visitors slow down, remove their city hats, and focus on exploring and appreciating nature. Future plans should aim to preserve the existing character and atmosphere of the nature center. It is a unique place and could be negatively impacted by overcrowding and over extending its current programs. The new building should maintain its rustic charm and not shift to an institutional approach and crowd control.</p>	<p><i>As outlined the Core Values of the Friends of ERNC “Excellence in Service” their guiding principle is to practice the art of conversation, take time to listen to visitors experiences, and help visitors see and enjoy the area. The ERNC intends to preserve the existing character and atmosphere of the ERNC as described in the Goals and Boundary Conditions developed by the Friends of the ERNC for this planning effort.</i></p> <p><i>The Friends of ERNC have stated they would like to “retain the character of the existing structure. They intend to keep what is cherished, and add what is needed with minimal impact to the environment.”</i></p>
<p>25. Building</p>	<p>The existing Nature Center building should not be torn down. It is an historical landmark and should be used for something appropriate, perhaps volunteer housing or turned into some type of cafe/coffee shop. Residents have expressed interested in acquiring the building. Perhaps the Mountaineering Club of Alaska could be interested.</p>	<p><i>The ERNC is not a historical landmark or historic property and is not on the Alaska Heritage Resources Survey. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources Office of History & Archeology was requested to evaluate the building for its historical significance. The ERNC does not meet the National Register Criteria for Evaluation.</i></p>
<p>26. Signage</p>	<p>Could the park or Nature Center take some of the funds allocated in the expansion project to fix the signage in the park? Currently, the signage is confusing, misleading and often takes visitors onto adjacent private property. Better signage is needed to keep visitors and neighbors safe.</p>	<p><i>Current signage is inaccurate and misleading; it would be specified as part of the Master Site Development Plan (MSDP) to upgrade signage to keep visitors on the associated trails and within the program zones. However, current funding is allocated for the planning of the Master Site Development Plan, not for Deferred Maintenance and signage.</i></p> <p><i>This issue has been brought forward to DPOR management and currently DPOR Interpretive and Education Section is working on updating trail maps and creating a trails brochure for the ERNC. Trail signs are not a part of this funding, however, would be addressed in the MSDP.</i></p>
<p>27. Noise and Maintenance</p>	<p>The current maintenance structure should be relocated to minimize the impact on the local landowners. On a regular basis volunteers can be loud and disruptive. Relocating this structure and blocking off the upper section of the old race track (to be used only for emergency vehicles/access to helicopter landing zone) to both Nature Center maintenance activities, and pedestrian traffic would solve this impact. Those park users who are utilizing the Albert Loop trail should be re-routed to stay on the lower race track. This would create a greater buffer between park trails and private property. Visitors come to the Nature Center to enjoy education programs and gain an appreciation for nature not to see trucks and ATVs.</p>	<p><i>The ERNC located the maintenance yard at the existing overflow parking area on the old race track as a result of a lack of sufficient space. This site was chosen for the ease of accessibility to surrounding trails for program needs. ATV’s are an approved part of the maintenance and operation at the ERNC.</i></p> <p><i>The proposed alternative sites for the maintenance facility will be evaluated to reduce visual and sound impacts to the neighbors.</i></p>

<p>28. ASP Mission</p>	<p>Our parks have been set aside in the interest of outdoor activities and preservation, not for indoor education, entertainment, and other programs.</p>	<p><i>The Mission of DPOR is to “provide outdoor recreation opportunities and conserve and interpret the natural, cultural and historic resources for the use, enjoyment and welfare of the people.”</i></p> <p><i>“Build a strong identity and broad public support with high-quality education and interpretive programs and innovative communication strategies.”</i></p> <p><i>The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Ten-Year Strategic Plan 2007-2017</i></p>
<p>29. Facility Need?</p>	<p>More development and improvements will bring more over time until the very essence of the area is lost. Even though plans are not for a big intrusive Nature Center at this time, it will be just a matter of time before still yet another; bigger center with more ancillary facilities is required to keep up with demand. Would this facility compete with the state-of-the-art ventures such as Campbell Creek and Portage?</p> <p>Is a new Nature Center “needed”? Some people want services and facilities to be “improved” or expanded but that doesn’t necessarily translate into a “need”, unnecessary infrastructure in our State Parks only adds to the incurring maintenance costs.</p>	<p><i>As our population grows more developments and improvements will need to be made in our parks, it is our responsibility as a public agency to do our best to follow our Mission and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. We have a need for park improvements to promote outreach, education and interpretation. Good planning and management can set the foundation to obtain the operation and acceptable capacity of the site.</i></p> <p><i>The Friends of ERNC do not intend to compete with Campbell Creek Science Center or the Begich Boggs Visitor Center. Both facilities have Missions that are different from DPOR and the Friends of ERNC, as each public agency; BLM and US Forest Service is serving a different need to the public.</i></p> <p><i>Because the ERNC is DPOR’s only nature center there is a need to continue the outreach, education and interpretation currently programmed. As stated above, improvements are needed to continue the daily operations and quality of programming.</i></p> <p><i>“The centers physical facilities are becoming less able to accommodate all the various groups being served. The Nature Center is an aging structure with aging utilities; the building is constricted in space and efficiency. Most importantly the facility is not able to accommodate the programming needs of recent years.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>– Asta Spurgis, ERNC</i></p> <p><i>Director</i></p>
<p>30. Fire Service</p>	<p>The Anchorage Fire Department and the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group has done extensive preparation to help us understand Wildfire Protection Planning and preparedness. The Emergency Watch Group for Misty Mountain, an organization with 16 families in their watch area, has a newsletter and would like Parks to stay involved with the Alaska Wildland Coordinating Group regarding Fire Service and how a new Nature Center Facility might impact the Valley. Could the new Nature Center bring fire service farther down valley? Currently, fire service only extends six miles up Eagle River Road. Please remember fire</p>	<p><i>DPOR has contacted the Anchorage Fire Department and the Wildfire Protection Group to learn more about how we can work with Eagle River and the Municipality of Anchorage to be Fire Wise. The proposed site will be designed to provide access for emergency services and fire emergency service vehicles to the ERNC. We will look at applying Fire Wise and the Wildland Urban Interface Code concepts to the surrounding landscape at the proposed facility site.</i></p> <p><i>As for extending fire service past mile six of Eagle River Road, DPOR suggests speaking with your local Eagle River Valley Community Council.</i></p>

	protection and EMT issues with the greater number of visitors, traffic accidents as well.	
31. Volunteer Housing	Volunteers need to stay presentable to the public, better housing with convenient bathing and cooking facilities is important.	<i>The ERNC has identified improved facilities for volunteers and winter caretaker is an important part of the program.</i>
32. Communication	<p>There needs to be <i>better communication</i> between the ERNC and State Parks. Many projects performed by the ERNC end up being done so "under the radar" (wood lot/splitting area relocate), are not done professionally and end up having to be either redone by state parks (bridges and viewing decks), or abandoned entirely (Albert Loop expansion trail of 1997-8), with the result that the parkland suffers unnecessary impact. This also results in unnecessary noise and impact on the local landowners and park users. Plus, it's a waste of valuable ERNC and Park funds.</p> <p>Also, a better, more efficient strategy for harvesting wood needs to be implemented. The amount of 4-wheeler activity required for transporting all the wood used is getting out of hand; also, the brush pile on the lower race track is a major fire hazard.</p>	<p><i>DPOR was aware of and approved the wood lot/splitting area relocate, this activity is generally only conducted on Thursday.</i></p> <p><i>With the adoption of DPOR's Trail Management Policy, future trails will be designed and constructed to sustainable standards and guidelines. As with all Trail / Management Plans developed by DPOR we hope they will reduce waste and increase efficiency in our parks.</i></p> <p><i>As for the disturbance of the ATV's to the programming, the planning team is considering ways to keep operations efficient with minimal impacts to the visitors and programming.</i></p> <p><i>Regarding the brush pile on the lower race track it is an operational management issue and the planning effort will look at maintenance and operational practices to minimize such impacts to the surrounding area.</i></p>
33. Motorized Use	The trail systems at the ERNC are being adapted for motorized use, creating a trail system that is losing its appeal. Residents have questioned the impacts and validity of 4-wheelers being used when bicycles are not even allowed on the trails around the center.	<p><i>In conducting logistics, operations and maintenance and park management functions, these trails are traveled on by ATVs in accordance with the concessionaires 25 year contract.</i></p> <p><i>The trails at the ERNC are not being adapted for motorized use. The draft Chugach State Park Trails Management Plan is not recommending them as motorized trails.</i></p>
34. Road Concerns	Currently, visitors to the Park trespass on Cumulus Road and ignore the fact that this road is not the park often in the spring and summer months, and I feel that if plans C or D are implemented this would be more of an issue.	<i>Through good site design and with the use of minimal signage could help direct visitors from areas we do not intend them to go. Evaluation of the trails will be required to make recommendation for vegetation barriers and minimal use signs. However, this is an operational issue outside the scope of the project, and Chugach State Park Management has been notified.</i>

**Planning for the Future of the Eagle River Nature Center – Master Site
Development Plan Concepts Comments- July 7, 2010**

Site Planning- Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Design and Construction Section

Comment # and subject	Issue Statement / Public Comment	Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation(DPOR) Response
<p>1. Work with what we have</p>	<p>Why does the ERNC want to start completely from scratch, eliminating the entire existing infrastructure, building entirely new roads, new initial trail access and of course new buildings?</p>	<p><i>The Eagle River Nature Center’s board members and staff (ERNC) have always tried to work with what we have. We built a large yurt to serve as a classroom space. We built 3 storage sheds and a Quonset hut to store our trail equipment, educational materials, gardening supplies, and maintenance supplies. This band-aid solution has worked, but with great inconvenience to our staff, volunteers and program attendees. For instance, the yurt is much too cold during the winter months. These add-on facilities have helped, but overall, they have made operations inefficient and labor intensive. ERNC had a builder look at designing a classroom addition to the existing facility. To do this, windows in the main space would need to be eliminated; the back gardens and outside area would be considerably reduced; and the original facility would need to be updated to current standards and codes (electrical, mechanical, structural, ADA). This would be very costly and we would still have too few restrooms, no space for coats and student’s backpacks/lunches; the same parking challenges; a trail that is no longer ADA compliant; and scattered maintenance and storage facilities.</i></p> <p><i>A new building could consolidate these spaces under one roof and make operations more unified, building systems more energy efficient, and provide the types of spaces needed for a nature center. Please keep in mind that the building was once a bar and later renovated by State Parks to be a visitor facility in the early 80’s. The work was done by a passionate group of State Park individuals who converted it into the lovely space we all know. Unfortunately, over the years, they too realized that the space had significant limitations. As the population has grown and as the ERNC’s work with school children and families has increased, so too, has the need to provide more space for these activities. It is not ERNC’s intent to construct a grandiose facility. ERNC has looked at an optimal plan as a starting point. ERNC would like a small, efficient and economically viable building which maintains the character of the existing building and addresses the inadequacies of the current situation.</i></p>

<p>2. Project Scope</p>	<p>Of the options put forth to the public they have footprints that are beyond the scope of the mission of the Eagle River Nature Center, and the needs and desires of the most frequent users.</p>	<p><i>The footprint shown in Concept C is an optimal one, but not necessarily the size that would be built. Construction costs, operating costs, and other issues that are sure to arise in the next phase of development (architectural, engineering) are yet to be evaluated. ERNC prefers a facility which requires the least amount of staff to operate and satisfies the needs and desires of our community</i></p> <p><i>As our population grows, more improvements will need to be made in our Park. It is our responsibility as a public agency to do our best to follow our Mission* and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities. There is a need for park improvements to promote outreach, education and interpretation. Good planning and management can set the foundation.</i></p> <p><i>* The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation provides outdoor recreation opportunities and conserves and interprets natural, cultural, and historic resources for the use, enjoyment and welfare of the people.</i></p>
<p>3. Entrance Road</p>	<p>In Concept C there is a divided entrance road, what purpose does it serve? Perhaps it is for slowing traffic however, what would DOT recommend?</p>	<p><i>The intention of the divided entrance is to slow traffic and to offer the visitor a sense of arrival. By dividing the entrance DPOR is better able to buffer the road and offer a more 'park like feel' to the entrance. DOT will be consulted regarding this design.</i></p>
<p>4. Site B - racetrack</p>	<p>DPOR should consider minimizing impacts to the slough from onsite activities related both to construction and future operations of the planned facility. By pulling the facility back from the slough and sighting it in the cover of the woodlands is to invoke visitor curiosity and wonder – exactly what a nature center is intended to do. While Option C provides the greatest buffer, the less than 1200' proposed seems far less than adequate.</p>	<p><i>DPOR has designed the facility the greatest distance from the slough as possible while maintaining as much of the natural vegetation.</i></p> <p><i>DPOR and ERNC agree that the approach to a new nature center should do its best to invoke curiosity and wonder. It is our hope that this can be accomplished using Concept C site plan. This plan will help guide the architectural planners in the next phase. Ultimately, the scale of the facility will be dependant on environmental and economic factors and community desires.</i></p>
<p>5. Concept C- Wildlife</p>	<p>The nature center, outdoor classroom, and most of the parking is perched on an artificial bluff. If the new slope is relatively steep and at least 40-60 feet high it may deflect most brown bears away from areas heavily used by visitors.</p>	<p><i>DPOR has taken into account the presence of black and brown bears in the area. Although it is nearly impossible to restrict migration patterns of bears, placing the Nature Center away from the stream and feeding areas will hopefully deter bear activity around the Nature Center facilities.</i></p>
<p>6. Concept C</p>	<p>After evaluating the three alternatives, ADF&G recommends Concept C as the preferred alternative in regards to habitat and potential brown bear and human interactions.</p>	<p><i>No comment needed.</i></p>

<p>7. Concept C - support</p>	<p>Concept C works for the following primary reasons; it minimizes noise and visual impacts to neighbors of the ERNC; it minimizes the overall footprint while meeting the ERNC’s future infrastructure needs; and it pulls the footprint away from the existing clear water slough habitat and its associated natural resources.</p>	<p><i>Concept C is intended to minimize the impacts to the surrounding landscape by designing a more compact parking and building area. By utilizing existing disturbed areas, Concept C successfully nestles the infrastructure into the landscape.</i></p>
<p>8. Concept C - Parking / Buffer</p>	<p>If there is no feasible alternative to a Phase II parking area, then consider a parking area located on top of the bluff. If this cannot be done, the proposed surface drainage retention ponds could be redesigned to provide somewhat of a buffer between the proposed Phase II parking area and brown bears. If the ponds were combined and wrapped, in an "L" shape, around the Phase II parking lot, the relatively deep water may deter bear movement along the toe of the new slope, through the parking lot, and may deflect a charging bear, responding from the woods to human activity on the parking lot. The pond would have to be at least 6 feet deep and 20 feet across to enhance its potential as a barrier. There is no guarantee that this barrier would be 100% effective, which is why sitting the entire facility on the bluff is preferable.</p>	<p><i>DPOR has considered many alternatives to the location of parking, however, due to site limitations, the bluff is not a preferred location for an overflow parking location. The retention ponds will be examined in greater depth in the next phase to determine their potential as a barrier.</i></p> <p><i>All areas within the Upper Eagle River Valley, including the existing bluff that the Nature Center is built on, are bear territory. Bears are often seen on the bluff, as well as, below the bluff.</i></p>
<p>9. Concept C - security</p>	<p>The ERNC and DPOR need to provide for security at the new ERNC- The relocation of the main ERNC as shown in concept C requires adequate security monitoring and even on-site caretaker year round. A motorized gate, security monitoring on the entry road and all access points from the ERNC trails to the ERNC building- especially during winter months when access from the Briggs Bridge to the ERNC via the frozen Eagle River is possible need to be included in any final plan.</p>	<p><i>The ERNC currently has an on-site winter caretaker and on-site summer host volunteers. The parking areas would be designed with security gates and the issue of having security monitoring has been brought to the attention of DPOR and the ERNC.</i></p>
<p>10. Building / Buffer</p>	<p>If the nature center building is going to be torn down, it's very important to my family that we look down on a beautiful landscaped area, and do not see maintenance buildings, or hear maintenance noise.</p>	<p><i>DPOR and ERNC agree that the maintenance facility should be “tucked away” from view and to minimize disturbance to neighboring residences. We feel that this can be accomplished in a creative and beautiful manner.</i></p>

11. Building	It is in the best interest of DPOR to present cost/maintenance choices in looking at the type of building you ultimately choose at the Site C.	<i>DPOR and the ERNC agree that this is essential during the next phase. Funding for the next phase (architectural, cost analysis, operational analysis) has yet to be secured and will be dependant on the mutual consensus of the community, Alaska State Parks and the ERNC.</i>
12. Building	The new building for the ERNC should not be a log building, instead something more sustainable.	<i>DPOR and the ERNC have not decided on a method of construction for the new Nature Center. The intent of the new structure is to hold the characteristics of a log structure without necessarily being log.</i>
13. Maintenance Area	The maintenance area would be best located on the existing racetrack area near the proposed parking lots, instead of near the private road in Concept C.	<i>The location for the maintenance area in Concept C was chosen for its relationship to the trails and building.</i>
14. Alternate Option	DPOR should consider of a lower-impact fourth option that would build a new building in the existing location. A new parking lot could be created on a terrace below, where the current utility road is. This parking lot could be used for over-flow only purposes, allowing maintenance efforts and costs to be kept at a minimum.	<i>The existing location was determined to be too small an area to accommodate future needs. Conflicts of this site include: private residential road access, steep trail grade no longer satisfies new ADA requirements, and nature center operations would need to be halted for an indefinite amount of time.</i>
15. Visitor Use	The proposed concepts, with their large footprints, sacrifice the existing unique quality—threatening to make the ERNC just another wasted area targeted at summer visitors, rather than Alaskan families.	<i>The ERNC feels that a new building can be designed in a way that maintains the warm atmosphere of the current facility. Classroom space and adequate public facilities (restrooms, coat area, parking, etc) should make the center even more attractive to Alaskan families. It is a priority for the ERNC that the design will improve on the inadequacies of the current facility and replicate the parts that make it so special.</i>