

**SUSITNA BASIN
RECREATION RIVERS MANAGEMENT PLAN
ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
Wednesday, May 17, 2023
10:00am-12:00pm**

MINUTES

The recording for this meeting is available [online](#).

I. Call to Order

- A. The regular meeting of the Susitna Basin Recreation Rivers Advisory Board was called to order at approximately 10:04 AM on May 17, 2023, at the Main Borough Building in Palmer and online via Microsoft Teams.
- B. Roll Call – Board Members Present: Mike DeMaria, Emma Pokon, Nancy Conklin, Israel Mahay (Chair), Mel Grove, Mike Overcast, Curt Scoggin & Stephanie Nowers.
- C. Board Members Absent: Greg Bell (excused) & Joseph Wright (Vice Chair)
- D. Mike DeMaria MOVED to approve the meeting Agenda. Mike Overcast SECONDED. PASSED without objection.
- E. Mike DeMaria MOVED to approve the Regular Meeting Minutes from 4/19/2023. Mel Grove SECONDED. PASSED without objection.

II. Old Business

- A. Board Recommendations on Plan Chapters 2-4 (and other comments)
 - a. Mike DeMaria suggested changing buffers to feet or yards from meters on p. 2-49.
 - b. Emma Pokon requested an update on DNR timeline and process.
 - i. Monica Alvarez (DNR) stated that DNR will get Board recommendations today and use those and scoping information to make revisions to the plan. DNR aims to have the Public Review Draft (PRD) version available in the Fall. There will be a public comment period and the Board can review the PRD and comment at that time as well.
 - c. Mel Grove asked if the state was going to buy back all the private parcels in the corridors.
 - i. Monica Alvarez (DNR) responded that the action is not mandated in the statute or in the plan. The relevant section of the statute begins: “The Commissioner may acquire ...”. There are some parcels included in the plan that are recommended for DNR to consider acquiring if available. DNR cannot dispose of

property in a legislatively designated area.

- ii. Emma Pokon noted that there is private property representation on the board (Mike Overcast).
- d. Nancy Conklin stated that she was happy with the notes/recommendations developed from the work sessions.
- e. Chair Mahay said that the notes DNR prepared align with what the Board recommended. He asked to make sure that the addition of Prairie Creek to the corridors is included in the recommendations. The addition was included in the board recommendations notes.
- f. Mel Grove stated that he would like to see no restrictions (if the technology is sufficient) on motorized access unless there is a biological concern. If there is a biological concern, then that should be studied.
- g. Israel Mahay stated that in some of those areas the restrictions are due to user conflicts and to ensure safety.
- h. Mike Overcast echoed Mel Grove's concerns on non-motorized areas on Lake Creek, the Talachulitna River, and the Little Su. He stated that he also thinks there should be at least a 60-day comment period for the PRD. Stakeholders (especially landowners) should be notified of the release.
- i. Stephanie Nowers thought the board recommendation notes did a good job of summarizing the suggestions from the work sessions. She noted that some of the board recommendations were non-specific such as not having a funding source which has been an impediment to implementation. She asked if DNR will work on possible solutions for these issues. Nowers also asked if once DNR receives public comments, will the PRD come back to the board?
 - i. Monica Alvarez (DNR) responded that some recommendations were not really management plan items, but still good topics for the board to discuss. DNR will still consider those recommendations and could include language in the PRD such as "Look for funding sources for these certain programs" without getting

too specific. The board can provide other recommendations during the PRD public comment period.

- j. Israel Mahay suggested that the board may want to have a workshop to go over the PRD.
- k. Mel Grove noted that he is opposed to all non-motorized sections of the corridors. Parts of the Deshka are restricted May 15-Aug 20, Lake Creek, etc. The justification is not for environmental reasons – but for use by floaters. These types of restrictions can cause user conflict. If it's open to everyone you don't have these conflicts. Safety issues would be another thing. He stated that he didn't want a blanket closure without significant data of a biological concern.
 - i. Mike DeMaria noted that there are safety concerns.
 - ii. Israel Mahay stated that he believes the idea behind Rec Rivers was to emulate the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.
 - iii. Mike Overcast added that the intent of the original plan was to reduce user conflict and it was written at a time when there was a lot more use. Dropping restrictions may make sense if there are no biological concerns since use has changed.
- l. Mel Grove made a suggestion that to increase funding, anyone using the rivers must have a stamp on their boat. Commercial users could be subject to per head fees as well.
 - i. Israel Mahay responded that he likes the idea for a boat stamp which could also be an educational measure. However, he doesn't think that the rivers see the same volume of use anymore that would make the per head fee worth funding a position for enforcement.
 - ii. Mike DeMaria stated that the amount of money brought in would not account for the cost of administration. However, it could be a great educational measure.
- m. Mel Grove asked if Pittman-Robertson (PR) federal funding can be used for Rec Rivers?

- i. Cliff Larson (DNR – Southcentral Regional Land Office) stated that they have used Pittman-Robertson funding for some projects such as grading the road to the rifle range.
- n. Stephanie Nowers provided that the Mat-Su Borough has used Pittman-Robertson funds in the past but failed to come up with the state match which left federal money on the table. She liked the idea of using Pittman-Robertson as a possible funding source with match.
- o. Israel Mahay stated that we will need to learn more about the costs of enforcement and education and possible avenues to fund that.
- p. Mike DeMaria suggested looking at funding for educational kiosks at access points.
 - i. Israel Mahay agreed with this suggestion for the recommendations but asked where funding may possibly come from for this.
 - ii. Cliff Larson (DNR – Southcentral Regional Land Office) suggested that DNR could look at a capital improvement funding request. It may be possible to work with Doshka Landing on a lease to install signs. Knik has kiosks at all entry points.
 - iii. DeMaria: MOVED to put in the recommendation notes that DNR should try to get capital funding for kiosks and other educational items at Rec River entry points. Nowers SECONDED. PASSED without objection.
- q. Monica Alvarez (DNR) clarified to the board that if the board would like to make suggestions for changes to the regulations, that a separate process from making suggestions for changes to the plan.
- r. Stephanie Nowers MOVED to approve formalizing these notes as the board's official plan recommendations for DNR to consider for the PRD. Mel Grove SECONDED. PASSED without objection.

III. New Business

A. Election of New Advisory Board Chair and Vice Chair

- a. Israel Mahay has decided not to renew his board seat once it expires in July. The board held their annual election for Chair and Vice Chair.
- b. Mike DeMaria nominated Mike Overcast for Chair. Mike Overcast accepted. Stephanie Nowers agreed to be nominated for Vice Chair.
- c. Mike DeMaria MOVED Mike Overcast for Board Chair. Stephanie Nowers SECONDED. PASSED without objection.
- d. Mike DeMaria MOVED Stephanie Nowers for Vice Chair. Mel Grove SECONDED. PASSED without objection.

B. Discussion of Summer Recess

- a. Stephanie Nowers MOVED to recess through August. Mel Grove SECONDED. PASSED without objection.

IV. Comments from Members of the Public (Maximum 3 minutes/person)

- a. Becky Long (Susitna River Coalition) and Eric Booton (Trout Unlimited) called in to provide public comment.

V. Comments from Board Members

- a. Mel Grove discussed the process to change the regulations for the non-motorized areas. Cliff Larson (DNR – Southcentral Regional Land Office) clarified that what is included within the plan was adopted as regulation and changes will require a regulation change.
- b. Emma Pokon stated that she would be reluctant to support removing all boating restrictions without hearing more from other users and having additional evaluation if

these restrictions are necessary and the best balance of use.

- c. Mel Grove suggested instead of opening or closing for the entire boating season it may be possible to change restrictions to certain days of the week.
- d. Mike Overcast suggested that we put this issue on the agenda for a later date after we gather more public comment and examine the issue by area.
- e. Stephanie Nowers asked if non-motorized includes more than just boat traffic specifically plane traffic.
- f. Monica Alvarez (DNR) clarified that we can regulate plane landings, but we do not regulate planes in the air.
- g. Mike Overcast MOVED to table discussion on non-motorized use and move it to a later meeting. Stephanie Nowers SECONDED. PASSED without objection.
- h. Emma Pokon asked how DNR can gather more information from the public on their thoughts on non-motorized use. Monica Alvarez (DNR) reminded the board that we did ask the public their thoughts on this question during scoping and in the questionnaire. Emma Pokon read out the results from these questions to the board. Stephanie Nowers pointed out that in the board recommendations, the board did consider public thoughts on the issue and the suggestion included in the recommendations was to look at this issue further.
- i. Israel Mahay reminded the board that a motion was made to table this issue until a later meeting when it can be considered more fully.

VI. Adjournment

- a. Mike DeMaria MOVED to adjourn the meeting. Emma Pokon SECONDED. PASSED without objection. The Board adjourned at 12:00 PM.