

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

(Hybrid-with in person at Potter Section House/Microsoft Teams Electronic Meeting)

Minutes of the January 8, 2024 Meeting

REGULAR MEETING # 1

1. **Call to Order:** Vice Chair Haley Johnston called the meeting to order at 6:03PM

2. **Roll Call & Introductions:**

Present: Haley Johnston, Dave Hart, Bill Britt, Gus Gustafson, Jeff Bidinger, Mark Miner, Stephanie Rice, Tyndall Ellis, Rob Clark, Kyle Shedd, Ted Phelps, Irene Turletes

Excused: Claire LeClair

Absent:

Staff: Ben Corwin, Chugach State Park Superintendent, Rys Miranda, Design & Construction Section/Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation

Public: Casey Durand, Carl Portman, Greg Bragiel, Shaun Sexton

3. **Changes to Agenda & Approval:** Agenda approved with addition under New Business of a discussion regarding the proposed \$5.9 million bond for road improvements in the CASA (Chugach State Park Access Service Area).

4. **Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:** Minutes of the December 11, 2023 meeting were approved with no objection on motion made and seconded by Hart/Ellis.

5. **Public Comments:**

- Carl Portman-Comments regarding the Canyon Road project, appreciated presentation made to the Glen Alps Community Council. See that the project can be phased. Phase I with 100 spaces, this is inadequate, phase 2 could add additional parking, he lives a mile from the gate has counted 150 vehicles; surprised to find out that the section of Canyon Road from gate to right before the Sunnyside trail is not part of the project, it should, this is a dangerous section of road, difficult to plow, unsafe and steep. Recommends that this part of the road be added to the project; do this by using material excavated for the parking areas, to help build up this section of road; minimum work needed is to leave this section of road in better shape than it currently is in.
- Casey Durand-Was active on trail projects on private property during the 2023 summer season, also upgraded his equipment; he is meeting with Steve Cleary next week to discuss Eklutna area trail projects. A new topic for the CAB is he would like to look at funding options for replacing the latrine at the Eklutna Alex campground; looking at grants from water and resource non-profits.
- Shaun Sexton-He is encouraged to see that the Ram Valley trail project includes consideration of locating a trailhead parking area outside of a residential area. He thinks there is a fourth option for accessing Ram Valley, and that is from the Ptarmigan Valley trailhead; the route is mostly above tree

line. He would like to know when the feasibility report for Ram Valley access will be complete and how to get a copy of it.

6. Old Business:

- a. **2024 Capital Improvements funded with LWCF, including Canyon Road project update (Rys Miranda)** - \$1.9 million from Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to make improvements to parking at the end of Canyon Road. Will be awarding contract for geo-technical work needed to start the design process and develop a site plan. Two other LWCF funded projects in the park: paving Prospect Heights Trailhead parking area and expanding ATV parking lot at Eklutna. Prospect trailhead will be closed to public use during the paving work. At Eklutna, the lower ATV parking area will also be paved, which is an RTP (Recreation Trails Program). The Canyon Road work does not include that section of road between the gate and the base of the Sunnyside trail, an area with extremely steep grades; construction expected to begin in 2025. The idea to add a pedestrian path to the project will be considered, but it will be challenging to do that since space is so limited in the project site.
- b. **Eklutna Hydro Update (Ben Corwin)**-Ben will be meeting with project owners in the next week to hear their resolution to issues identified by stakeholders in the draft study plan. Ben will let the CAB know of any further opportunities for public comment. Jeff commented that the draft plan was sparse on data on recreation resources and use. Ben-the AWWU portal alternative does not impact the current recreation use in the Eklutna area. Four species of salmon would be able to get to within about a mile of the campground (one mile below the dam), likely attracting bears to that area. The portal alternative would not change current lake level fluctuations. Project owners keyed in on the funding that Alaska Trails received for improvements to the Eklutna Lake trail; Ben would like to see that funding used to address highest priority sections of trail and to encourage the project owners to fulfill their responsibility to address restoration and improvements to the trail as outlined in the 1991 agreement. Jeff notes that all of Eklutna River is within Chugach State Park and recreation use, including ice climbing, does occur there. If the dam was removed, there would be higher levels on the lake in the winter and less fluctuation between winter and summer lake levels. Rob and Jeff will continue to work on developing options for the CAB to consider in terms of formal comments and/or recommendations.

7. New Business:

- a. **Crow Pass Trail Project (Interior Trails)**- Christine Byl and Gabe Travis, they have been involved in trail work since the 1990s and operated under their business, Interior Trails, for the past 15 years. Have been involved in a number of state park projects in Chugach and Denali State Parks. Planning to do field work on the Crow Pass trail project starting mid-late June, 2024. Particularly interested, as the project evolves, in CAB's position on what scale of change the community and CAB would find acceptable. For example, whether to bridge Eagle River and/or make a major re-route of a section or sections of the trail. It's important to them that the solutions they prescribe to address trail issues are ones that are acceptable to the community and to the CAB. They noted that use/expectations of the trail could change as it becomes part of the Alaska Long Trail, bringing in hikers who may not be expecting or prepared for the kind of trail the Crow Pass has historically been (e.g., brush, sometimes route-finding needed, river and stream crossings without structures). Scope is Echo Bend to State Park/USFS boundary. Ben notes that this is part one of a two part contract with Interior Trails. Part one is an itemized trail prescription/cost estimate and part two is construction.

- b. **Chugach State Park and Citizen Advisory Board (CAB) Overview Presentation (Ben Corwin)**-Ben presented a powerpoint presentation to provide new board members with information about the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation, Chugach State Park and the role and functioning of the CAB.
- c. **Road Improvement Bond for Chugach State Park Access Service Area (CASA) (Haley and Ben)**-Ben and Haley both attended the Assembly work session on the proposed road improvement bond for CASA. While the effort to establish the CASA included a goal to make improvements within the park boundary, legal and jurisdictional issues between the state and the municipality have put any in-park improvements paid for through the CASA on hold so the current focus is on projects to improve parking and access to the park that are outside the park boundary. Bond package is \$5.9 million, including \$4 million for improvements to Canyon Road up to the park boundary. Other projects in the proposal include overflow parking for the Basher Trailhead (\$1.6 million), design and study for road work near Campbell Creek and on Toilsome Drive (\$150,000 each). The Assembly is also considering an overall Parks & Recreation bond and a bond for public toilets; concerns were raised regarding the overall value of bonds that the Assembly will propose to voters, typically they propose only the value of what previous Assembly backed bonds are being retired in that year. The other issue that came up was that the projects in the proposed CASA bond have come about with less public process than road improvement projects in areas within the municipality that are not under a limited road service area (which is the majority of roads within the Anchorage bowl) and are included in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, or STIP. Result of work session was two versions of a CASA bond will be voted on at next Assembly meeting, one for \$4 million with just the Canyon Road project and the other for \$5.9 million. Question about the Basher Trailhead parking area on municipal land: if parking area for state park trailhead is located on non-state land, the state can still charge a fee under management agreement with the land owner.

8. Staff Report: Ben Corwin

- Eklutna, Ptarmigan Valley, Eagle River, Peters Creek and Bird Valley are all currently open to use of snow machines; staff are regularly checking snow depth on the Hillside to determine if that area can be opened to snow machine use;
- Maintenance staff has caught up with plowing at the Upper Ptarmigan, Bird Valley and Indian Valley parking areas;
- The Lion's Club has received patent to the Chugach State Park lands they have been managing as part of the Lion's Club Park;
- Two newly hired park rangers will be leaving 1/28 to attend the Public Safety academy in Sitka;
- George Kerr promoted from an ACC position to the assistant maintenance position;
- Maintenance and trails staff led a First Day hike, 30 people showed up, the staff groomed a trail to the Bird Creek falls and;
- SAR two weeks ago at North Fork access of the Eagle River, a woman slipped under the ice and has not been found.

9. Committee Reports:

- **Access (Dave and Jeff):** Dave went out to the Ptarmigan Valley snow machine area, he visited with the people who were there and heard positive comments about work completed out there, trail corridor clearing, new bridge and plowing of the upper parking area.

- **Budget (Tyndall):** Governor's budget includes \$1.2 million increase in the Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation operating budget; none of that increase directed to Chugach State Park. Fund source for the increase is mainly General Fund/Program Receipts (revenue from park fees). Tyndall has been working to get other CABs to support SB 127 (legislation to increase revenue from vehicle rental tax) in order to increase the funds available to allocate to Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation for park operations.
- **Nomination (Dave):** Welcomes three new board members, there are still two vacancies, encourages the CAB members to work their networks to recruit applicants; looking for diversity in uses, especially from people who participate in motorized use in the park and hunters;
- **Seward Highway Design (Irene):** N/A
- **Trails (Irene):** N/A;
- **Chugach Park Fund (Haley):** Trail Tales on Tuesday, January 23, encourages everyone to attend and we also need one more storyteller; committee is working on work priorities for summer 2024;
- **Wildlife (no chair):** N/A
- **Planning (Jeff):** Working on recommendations on the Eklutna project; notes that the Trail Management Plan will need an update in 2029, suggestion made to request funding for that project in 2026;
- **Outreach (no chair):** N/A;
- **Ram Valley (Haley):** Haley attended the Eagle River Valley Community Council to discuss the Ram Valley project; those present were generally supportive of developing a trail from the Eagle River Road but have concerns about parking; Alaska Trails will be submitting a capital funding request this legislative session to develop a trail to Ram Valley and a trailhead/parking area.

10. Adjournment: Motion made and seconded; Meeting adjourned at **8:58PM**.