

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

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

DRAFT--Minutes of the March 11, 2024 Meeting

REGULAR MEETING # 3

1. **Call to Order:** Vice Chair Haley Johnston called the meeting to order at 6:01PM
2. **Roll Call & Introductions:**
 - Present:** Dave Hart, Haley Johnston, Claire LeClair, Jeff Bidinger, Gus Gustafson, Ted Phelps, Mark Miner, Kyle Shedd, Stephanie Rice, Tyndall Ellis, Rob Clark
 - Excused:** Irene Turletes, Bill Britt
 - Absent:**
 - Staff:** Ben Corwin, Chugach State Park
 - Public:** Shaun Sexton
3. **Changes to Agenda & Approval:** Agenda approved with addition to New Business a discussion of naming three new public use cabins, two in Eagle River campground and one in the Bird Creek campground on motion made/seconded by Shedd/Ellis; motion passed with no objection.
4. **Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:** Minutes of the February 12, 2024 meeting were approved on motion made and seconded by Rice/Hart; motion passed with no objection.
5. **Public Comments:**
 - Shaun Sexton-Shaun clarified that his comments at the last meeting regarding suggestion that DOT assist State Parks with equipment maintenance also included suggestion that DOT when possible, assist State Parks with road maintenance and snow plowing because DOT is already in the area plowing the road and if DOT is not able to assist there is a very good private snow plow operator who plows neighborhood roads in the area.
6. **Old Business:** N/A
7. **New Business:**
 - a. **Public Use Cabins (Ben)**-Contract for PUC construction has been awarded for cabin construction in Chugach State Park as well in other areas of the state park system. At Eagle River campground the new cabins (two) will be built in the group camping area and be accessible by vehicle. Another new cabin will be constructed at Bird Creek campground, it will be just past the Boretide cabin and also accessible by vehicle as well as adjacent to the bike trail. At both cabin construction sites there will also be new latrines constructed nearby. Ben is looking for ideas for naming these three new cabins. He'd like to follow the bird theme in Eagle River and the Turnagain Arm related theme for the Bird Creek cabin. His kids liked Boreal or Snowy Owl or Ptarmigan and for the Bird Creek cabin Black Bear. Other ideas

shared: Magpie, Hooligan (Eulachon), Water Oozle (Dipper), and for the names to be paired with the corresponding Dena'ina name. Consensus to make Ben's kids' day and name the Eagle River cabins Boreal Owl and Ptarmigan and name the Bird Creek cabin Black Bear. Ben will reach out to Aaron Leggett to find out what the corresponding Dena'ina name for all three is.

- b. **DPOR Commercial Use Permits (CUP) Public Scoping**-Scoping comments due by April 12. Ben commented that there may be regulation changes proposed after the scoping period to re-vamp who is eligible to receive a CUP and who is eligible to be denied one and to also refine language regarding how permit revocations may occur. Consensus to wait until proposed regulation changes are made before considering making formal comments.

8. Staff Report: Ben Corwin

- Eklutna, Peters Creek and Bird Valley still open to snow machines, all other snow machine areas closed and will likely remain so for the remainder of the season;
- A couple new outhouses have been installed at McHugh Creek, same contractor will install new latrines near the new PUCs at Eagle River campground and Bird Creek campground;
- Tim Gurnett and Kellen Ford are doing well at the Public Safety Academy in Sitka, Kellen has been promoted to assistant squad leader;
- Leo Jascek has been promoted to the Park Specialist, and recruitment is underway to fill his previous position, the Natural Resource Technician; Leo is also recruiting for eight ACC trail crew positions, the focus of the trail crew will be finishing the RTP funded work in Bird Valley and Peters Creek;
- Summer volunteers recruited for Glen Alps, Bird Creek Campground, Eklutna Lake Campground and McHugh Creek but still trying to fill a big one, Eagle River Campground, send Ben any referrals you might have (maintenance staff have been working on converting a storage building at ER into a host cabin/visitor contact station, results are pretty nice);
- Leo Jascek and Spencer have been productive, with field work at the end of Peters Creek, grooming trails and shuttling materials to the start of the Hidden Lake trail for work that will occur this summer (funded by the Chugach Park Fund and carried out by a crew from Alaska Trails);
- Levi has been active on some trespass issues, snow machine incursion issues and speeding;
- Levi and Keith worked on a serious incident at Thunderbird Falls where they responded to a suicidal individual; the individual in crisis survived; both Levi and Keith received commendations from APD for their work on the incident;
- Re-classification study is underway for Park Specialist, Park Ranger I and II and Park Superintendent;
- Question: was there an illegal trapline up Peters Creek? Ben was not aware of any, there was a trapper who had set traps up Ptarmigan Valley who removed traps as soon as he was made aware that he was targeting a species whose season had closed; (Ben reminded CAB that all trappers who set traps within the park are required to call the park office to register their trapline and share what species they are targeting, they must meet setback requirements and they must have a unique identifier for each set that they share with park employees so that park staff can identify traps they encounter in the field);
- Question: can USFS law enforcement officers enforce laws within the park? Ben: Yes, they can, they have authority to enforce both state and federal laws.

9. Committee Reports:

- **Access (Dave/Jeff):** Deferred to the Ram Valley subcommittee report;
- **Budget (Tyndall):** Has looked at FY2023 revenue report for the park, it appears that revenue went down due to Wood Tikchik being assigned to a different region for management (loss of \$110,000 in revenue) and sales for parking passes also decreased by \$130,000. Noted that income from sales of parking decals at REI was zero in FY2023 (was \$375,000 in FY2022); Ben responded that the FY2023 numbers for REI sales must be incorrect since they are still selling decals. He gave a comment at the Anchorage Legislative session on Saturday in support of SB 127. He talked to Rep. Coulombe and Mears afterward, both voiced support for the park and shared that they questioned Commissioner Boyle regarding why other park areas were slated to get more staff while Chugach was not.
- **Nomination (Dave):** No new applications, hope to have some by next meeting to help fill current vacancies;
- **Seward Highway Design (Irene):** Ben updated the CAB; 6f meetings have begun (meetings which will facilitate any conversions of park land to non-park use in order to satisfy federal requirements set in the Land & Water Conservation Fund grant program); Ben noted that there is a team of DNR employees who will work on 6f conversions for the project. Also attended a stakeholder work group meeting; design team is narrowing down the design concept, focusing on a 55 mph corridor with passing lanes. Ben noted that the design team seems to be listening to his chief concern which is safe and reasonable access to park features and facilities along the corridor.
- **Trails (Irene):** N/A
- **Chugach Park Fund (Haley/Claire):** Plans for 2024 summer are to: 1) improve/fix the Hidden Lake trail, Alaska Trails will do the work, 2) sponsor seven volunteer events and 3) assess trails/trails sections that have poor drainage/alignments and create trail project descriptions for up to three projects (and use the information for future fundraising efforts). Hoping to get some of the local state legislators to hike out to the Hidden Lake project while it is active.
- **Wildlife (no chair):** N/A
- **Planning (Jeff):** N/A
- **Outreach (Rob):** N/A
- **Ram Valley (Haley):** Committee met last week to look at various alignments that have been studied so far. Committee also focused attention on the four main access points identified in the Chugach Access Plan including a parking lot on Eagle River Road with trail ascending to Ram Valley from that elevation (downside is it traverses a very steep section near the top). Ben shared his concerns with this alignment: exposure to avalanche terrain, and also it goes up to a very high elevation and with a elevation loss to enter the valley, some hikers will likely bail downhill rather than hike uphill to re-gain the trail back for the parking area. Ben met with local landowner who suggested another location which would necessitate purchase of land for a parking lot, the alignment from this location adds about two miles of trail to access Ram Valley and also has a much better grade. The committee will get more information about this alternative and consider it at a future meeting. Committee members will also attend Eagle River Valley Community Council in April to update that group on progress towards identifying trail access into Ram Valley. Also considering an open house at the Eagle River Nature Center to get input on the various alignment options once there are a few primary alternatives.

Question about how to receive timely notice on state park and trail issues. Haley suggested signing up to the state's public notice site, she will share that link with the CAB. Jeff suggested putting together a timeline/matrix

for the future years on what future actions may be of interest to the CAB. Discussion also on how to stay up to date on Muni actions, such as insuring that public access is preserved to the park during any subdivision approvals. Stephanie will look for ways to track Muni actions regarding access to the park.

Muni recently approved a trails plan for the Girdwood Area and it includes recommendations for trails that are close to the state park boundary, Haley will send the link to the approved plan.

If Eklutna Hydro on the agenda for next meeting, include information on why DNR supported the portal valve option.

10. Adjournment: Motion made and seconded (Bidingen/Ellis); Meeting adjourned at **7:33PM**.