

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

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

DRAFT--Minutes of the April 8, 2024 Meeting

REGULAR MEETING # 4

1. Call to Order: Chair Haley Johnston called the meeting to order at 6:05PM

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, Irene Turletes, Tyndall Ellis

Excused: Bill Britt

Absent:

Staff: Ben Corwin, Chugach State Park

Public: Casey Durand

3. Changes to Agenda & Approval: Agenda approved.

4. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes: Minutes of the March 11, 2024 meeting were approved.

5. Public Comments:

6. Old Business:

- a. **Eklutna Hydro Update (Ben)**-Ben cannot provide much information, the state's position is being considered at the Director/Commissioner level. Project owners have requested letters from all the entities, including from Division of Parks, specifying agreement with the process and the current preferred alternative. Ben noted that the preferred alternative, the Portal option, has minimal impact on recreation use and facilities. The Commissioner's office, Department of Natural Resources, recently issued a statement on the Eklutna fish and wildlife program. Ben read the statement aloud. Question on whether there will be additional opportunities to provide comments/suggestions on how best to protect park resources and recreational opportunities. Ben responded that there will not be additional opportunity; he suggested that it is likely there will be litigation and if that occurs, there may be opportunities for public input as a result of that process.

7. New Business: None

8. Staff Report: Ben Corwin

- Eklutna, Bird Valley and Peters Creek are open (note on Peters Creek: staff closed it earlier before the last snowfall and someone subsequently flipped the open/closed sign); these three areas will likely close by the end of the week; all other snow machine areas in the park are closed;

- Eklutna and Bird Creek opened to ATV use as of April 1 (date is in regulations) but ATV use not advised in either area until snow pack has cleared a whole lot more;
- Received RTP grant award for six new snow machines and two drags (groomers);
- Eklutna ATV lot expansion and paving has been awarded, project will start May 1 and the lot will be closed for the month of May;
- Two Chugach State Park rangers (Tim Gurnett and Kellan Ford) at the DPS academy are still progressing in their training, they will complete their training at the end of May at which time they will have a transition time to learn park specific regulations, law, report writing and other procedures as a group of six before they start field training;
- Spencer Lorrig has been promoted to the vacant Park Technician position; he has served a number of seasons as an Alaska Conservation Corps employee;
- Leo Jaschek and Spencer Lorrig are recruiting for ACC trail workers, they have two working on Bird Valley and at Peters Creek;
- Summer volunteer positions still open for Eagle River Campground and an additional host at Eklutna;
- Park Rangers just finished annual statewide law enforcement training; really good training this year;
- Levi Schmidt cited a couple people for operating snow machines in a closed area; today he made a contact with someone at Thunderbird Falls who had an outstanding felony warrant;
- House passed a budget that included a \$341,000 increment for Chugach State Park that includes funding for two new positions; park projects still included in the Capital budget passed by the Senate;
- SB 164 was in Senate Resource committee today; this legislation would exempt disabled veterans from requirement to pay day use fees at state park units;
- Public scoping for commercial use permitting regulations addressing denials and revocations, comment period closes on April 12;
- Question about snow plowing at Prospect Heights trailhead--the snowplow contract closed out at the end of March and park's plow trucks are both out of operation, but staff will soon have a new plow truck and will also bring a skid steer up there to smooth the ruts as best as they can;
- Question about plans to pave the Prospect Heights trailhead parking lot—that project has not gone out to bid yet, the project will take about a week and during that time the parking area will be closed; the project will result in traffic moving counterclockwise, which is a big change from current traffic flow, but will improve the turn radius; the fee station will also be moved closer to the latrine and there will be a new kiosk;
- Improvements to Canyon Road will not get done this summer, only the geotech work; noted again that there will be a gap of unimproved road between where the Bond supported work by the muni and the LWCF work done to expand parking at canyon road;
- Project at McHugh creek to replace culvert under Seward Highway, they will have to cut out a section of sidewalk in the park, the new latrines are completed but are not open for use yet;

9. Committee Reports:

- **Access (Dave/Jeff):** Suggestion made for CAB to put together a list of recommended access improvement projects and submit to the Assembly as possible projects under the new Chugach Access Service Area; also suggestion for committee to attend a planning meeting of the Heritage Land Bank

since there are many HLB holdings that are adjacent to Chugach State Park; goal would be to provide a broader perspective on project needs than what the Limited Road Service Areas may propose;

- **Budget (Tyndall):** SB 127 passed the Senate, decreased the tax on Truro and similar rental car platforms down from 10% to 8%. Currently in the House Transportation committee, with hearing scheduled tomorrow, next stop is House finance. SB 127 pairs well with the \$341,000 operating increase that Rep. Coulombe has introduced in the House's operating budget, which would use vehicle rental tax as the source for the operating increase. In 2020 Anchorage Municipality estimated \$750,000 additional revenue from vehicle rental tax receipts attributed to Truro rentals.
- **Nomination (Dave):** No new applications, hope to have some by next meeting to help fill current vacancies;
- **Seward Highway Design (Irene):** There is an updated factsheet about the project but the factsheet does not contain any new information. Ben is participating in meetings with the project team that are focusing on the conversion of park land to non-park land which is a required process under the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund law. Ben (aside) noted that as part of a project for Chugach Electric to re-place power poles they will be staging from a number of park facilities and will be paying Parks for any lost revenue at these sites.
- **Trails (Irene):** BLM is hosting public listening sessions for the feasibility study to designate the Long Trail as a National scenic Trail; meetings will be in Anchorage, Seward, Wasilla, Cantwell and Fairbanks; Irene will send link with more information; Anchorage Municipality recruiting for recreation advisory group participants to help formulate a long-range plan;
- **Chugach Park Fund (Haley/Claire):** Welcomed two new committee members, Tyndall and Kyle; 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 crew is working on site.
- **Wildlife (no chair):** N/A
- **Planning (Jeff):** Stephanie spoke to Ryan Yelle to determine if there is a way to make sure that the CAB and park staff can stay apprised of muni decisions/actions that can affect access to the park; Ryan said that notifications should be sent to Ben, who is not 100% that he is receiving all notices; Stephanie will take on the task of trolling the muni website to look for subdivision and platting actions that may impact park access; suggestion to use Chugach Access Plan for reference:
<https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/units/chugach/chugachaccess.htm>
<https://www.muni.org/Departments/OCPD/Planning/Projects/Pages/ChugachAccessPlan.aspx>
- **Outreach (Rob):** N/A
- **Ram Valley (Haley):** Haley, serving as a representative of Alaska Trails, will attend the Eagle River Valley Community Council, it will be the second meeting of the ERVCC she has attended to discuss the trail to Ram Valley. She plans to share the five most viable trail alignments that have been mapped out so far, including the access point recently suggested and located at around mile 8.5 of the Eagle River road in a newly created subdivision. The trail alignments range in length from 2.4 to 4.1 miles and elevation gain of between 1600 and 3000 feet.

Short update from Ben on the Crow Pass trail work that Interior Trails is doing to identify a plan for improving and possibly changing the trail alignment. Ben would like to keep the river crossing the same at current ford site (no bridge) and keep the trail on the north side of the river. Still not sure how the creek crossings (for instance Icicle Creek) will be handled, considering removing bridges as one option.

10. Adjournment: Motion made and seconded (Ellis/Phelps); Meeting adjourned at **7:45PM**.