

# CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

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

**DRAFT--Minutes of the September 9, 2024 Meeting**

**REGULAR MEETING # 7**

**1. Call to Order:** Chair Haley Johnston called the meeting to order at 6:01PM

**2. Roll Call & Introductions:**

**Present:** Haley Johnston, Irene Turletes, Dave Hart, Gus Gustafson, Kyle Shedd, Tyndall Ellis, Rob Clark, Bill Britt, Gabby Jordan, **Marsella Dent, Joe Hackenmueller,** Ted Phelps

**Excused:** Claire LeClair, Stephanie Rice, Mark Miner

**Absent:**

**Staff:** Ben Corwin, Chugach State Park

**Public:** John Underwood (Happy Trails), Roger Marks (CASA)

**3. Changes to Agenda & Approval:** Agenda was approved as written on motion made/seconded by Bill/Gus.

**4. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:** Minutes of the June 13, 2024 meeting were approved as written on motion made by Irene/Tyndall.

**5. Public Comments:**

Roger Marks with Glen Alps service area. Helped start CASA in 2023 and also helped get \$4Million bond for Canyon Valley Road on ballot and would like to get another bond proposal on the 2025 ballot. A lot of what CASA has been up to for now has been roads, but could be for parking, trails, land acquisition, easements, anything that promotes access to CSP. There's an opportunity here but the administration/assembly hasn't put together a mechanism for project proposals under CASA. CAB could write a letter to the mayor or the assembly if we have ideas and this would be the time to do it. Assembly is putting together bond proposals for next April election. Some LRSA's have put together proposals: Glen Alps is putting a \$2.7M for Upper Dearmon and Basher is hoping to reroute away from creek and another parking lot at Basher. Bear Valley and Upper O'Malley previously put together proposals, but Roger was not sure if they are doing so this year. Bill did some research on CASA, lots of players politically and NGO's that have interest in these outcomes. Lots of opinions on projects, order, strategy (slow vs. fast), tension around how the bond gets put together. One thing that came up repeatedly, is that people didn't know what the park thinks. Projects are on the municipality but abuts the park, want to know if there is partnership, but don't know how to approach. Does CAB have a list of priorities, do we wish to advocate, observe? Unclear to Bill, but all the options are open. We only have a couple of months to weigh in, if we chose to do so. It is a confusing, with no process for prioritizing and planning for projects funded under CASA unsettled mess, not a clear vision. Roger mentioned that there is an opportunity for us to weigh in before the end of October. Some resistance from downtown legislators but the more diverse number of parties coming with priorities will make the bond proposals more palatable. If it is just road service areas asking for roads, less acceptable. Tyndall has similar concerns, even more so as a midtown resident, been looking for the muni to put together a planning/scoping process. Tyndall is concerned about only LRSAs and RRSAs proposing

projects. CASA projects can only occur on land owned by the muni but developments could then be managed by the state, so there is possibility that state could collect parking fees (a significant source of revenue for the park) on parking area developed on muni land. What's the next step? Do we just provide Letters of Support or do we propose priorities? Kyle proposes adding CASA to old business for October.

## **6. Old Business:**

- a. **Indian Valley Trail-** John Underwood, Happy Trails. AK Trails got funding for an Indian Valley Trail rebuild due to non-sustainable alignment, significant deterioration (washed out), part of AK Long Trail. AK Trails subcontracted to Happy Trails. New trail alignment starts on west side of Indian Creek, uses part of Gasline. The alignment avoids ravines and traverses challenging terrain, either steep or flat and wet, lots of little creeks. (Handout) The red trail is the completed section, the blue line is flagged, and the yellow line is concept only, needs field work to determine exact location. Hoping to get to "Creek 1" this Fall, this will require a 45' bridge. Creek 2 will also require a bridge. The existing budget of \$1M will be enough to build the new trail to Creek 3 (which drains valley between Homicide and Avalanche). Tyndall asked about trail class, supposed to be Class 3. John says he's aiming for 4' wide. Given the size of trees and debris, using a larger excavator than would normally use for 4', current path is larger than 4'. Hoping to switch to a smaller excavator after Creek 2. Hoping to get to Creek 2 this year. Crew is 6 (including John). Thinking of using fiberglass kit bridges. Truss for 45' bridge will weigh ~5,000#, use a Blackhawk heli drop. Ben's bridge is likely not going to be used. Whole plan is to get out of Indian Creek (lots of deadfall, bears, water, creek moving, etc.). New alignment promises to be imminently skiable. Haven't talked about signs, but Kyle requested winter reflective navigational markers. Tyndall asked about wilderness designation, history of management plan, eastern portion of the park is wilderness, but Crow Pass was carved out given the high amount of use. Wilderness boundaries are in the management plan. Statute just says eastern portion of the park, doesn't designate boundaries. Current management plan has wilderness starting at Indian Pass. The hypothetical trail connection Indian Pass to Muktuk Marston (304a) is designated Class 2. If not wilderness, you could make a Class 3 trail all the way through. Tyndall wants to decide this before that trail gets built. Haley speculating on why Crow Pass was carved out of the wilderness, to allow bigger campground, events like the Cross Pass crossing. Ben Corwin added that there is a BLM parcel in Ship Creek, managed by CSP, but hasn't been conveyed to the state. Concerns about unexploded ordinance, need to be clear what is allowed. John thinks that Indian Valley can be completed in 2025.

## **7. New Business:**

- a. **Eklutna- (not on agenda)** John Underwood also gave a quick update on trail work he has been involved with at Eklutna. Lots of culvert replacement. A lot of the damage wasn't lake erosion, but bad drainage. Focused on non-motorized trail, only out to mile 7. Really happy with accomplishment on non-motorized trail. Put in a lot of culverts on the motorized trail as well. Back to being an easy family biking trail. Ben mentioned lots of positive comments so far, thanks to AK Trails and Happy Trails. Ben mentioned that he'd previously received more complaints about Eklutna than any other trail in the park. Casey Durrand donated a lot of steel pipe for culverts, which helped extend the budget. Had enough budget to fix both non-motorized and motorized trails, plus some bonus brushing! Irene mentioned the ribbon cutting on September 24th from 12-2PM hosted by AK Trails.

## **8. Staff Report: Ben Corwin**

### **Updates:**

- Eklutna ATV lot, including the newly expanded portion is getting paved this fall. Work is currently underway.

- Bird Valley lot is receiving some upgrades including grading of access road and leveling of the lot. It will also get a new latrine, info kiosk and pay station.
- Prospect contract is being finalized. No construction timeline yet, but at the very least it will get graded before winter.
- The new public use cabins are under construction. The frames are up, but the contractor is waiting on the metal roofing.
- Alaska Trails has been doing great work in the park and via their paid crew, and contracted and volunteer work they have been able to improve:
  - o Hidden Lake trail
  - o Eklutna Lakeside trail
  - o Wolverine Bowl
  - o Brush numerous trails
- CSP crew has been brushing Peters Creek and working on the 4-Mile crossing. Progress is going well, and the bridge looks great!
- Interior Trails has been in the field assessing Crow Pass. They will have the first phase of deliverable ready by the end of October – a trail prescription and costing.
- Partnership clean up of Mile 7 Old Glenn squatters camp.
- Albert Loop closed Aug 6th
- Procurement of 6 new snowmobiles and grooming equipment complete: two 900 Aces four stroke, three 900 Expeditions and one mountain machine plus \$30,000 of grooming equipment.

#### **Staff:**

- Tim and Kellan have successfully passed their field training. Kellan on military leave for month of September. Kellan will be posted at Glen Alps, covering from Arctic Valley to the southern end of the park. Tim will be at Eklutna, covering Eagle River north to Eklutna.
- Regional Reorganization:
  - o With Levi's ranger PCN we reclassified it to a non-commissioned NRSII
  - o With additional vacancy savings, Spencer Lorrige (NRTII) promoted to NRSI (year-round).
  - o Wedeking was also able to leverage funding for an additional NRSI
  - o Recruitment for those new positions will be available shortly
- Division wide reclassification study ongoing, looking at Park Rangers, Park Specialists and Park Superintendents

#### **LE:** relatively quiet summer, crime-wise (too quiet...hmmm)

- Little O'Malley injured hiker 6/25 – lower leg break with dislocation, AMRG/ANG response
- Symphony Lake, injured dog. self-extricated
- Commercial Op without permit -- flattop shuttle van contacted/investigated
- Boaters in distress Eklutna Lake mid Aug; rangers responded, good Samaritan assisted back to shore
- SAR – medical assist hiker report Flattop; Dropped 911 call, rangers responded. Party had ultimately self-extricated
- SWAT barricaded subject standoff Indian Creek
- Squatter/trespass camp cleaned up off Old Glenn near Mi 7

- SAR – medical assist hiker near Mt Baldy...rangers responded, walked/ATV'ed subject out 8/31.
- Reports of dirt bikes on powerline trail

#### **Wildlife incidents of note:**

- Late June 3 black bears were euthanized at Eklutna Lake Campground after becoming habituated to campers' food. Behavior become increasingly hazardous; walking into occupied sites and bluffing visitors off their picnic tables. Hazing efforts unsuccessful Disappointing.
- Moose charged hikers x2 vicinity of Gruening Elementary/Eagle River greenbelt mid-June
- Peters Creek, brown bear sow with 2 cubs on moose carcass currently, trail closed past Mt Eklutna Tr Jct, until 9/14 ('ish).
- Basher vicinity closure(?) late July for brown bear on kill...(or poss Far North Bicentennial?)
- Dumped moose gut pile at Mi 9 ERVR Rd. ERNC staff/volunteers cleaned it up while rangers watched
- 8/29 Black Bear seen with salmon carcass on Toilsome Hill Rd, possibly fed
- McHugh picnic pavilion being frequented by black bear sow with 3 cubs, concerning. Keeping area spotless.
- Hunting season in full swing, 181 bowhunters registered for the Eklutna RM 445 moose hunt, for example.
- 1 DB477 hunter pass the proficiency qual. Hunt opens 10/1
- 3 DL457 hunters passed the proficiency qual. Hunt opens 10/1
- 4 DM467 hunters pass the proficiency qual. Hunt opens 11/1
- 4 DM466 hunters pass the proficiency qual. Hunt opens 11/1

#### **RTP Letter of support request:**

- Tracked skid-steer with mulching attachment for clearing trails.
- SXS with tracks for grooming and trail crew.
- Both grant requests would be submitted under the motorized category which is typically underutilized, better chance of getting the funds.

#### **Discussion Items:**

- Doug Bailey, one of the founding members of the State Park has 25th anniversary print that he is looking to donate to benefit the park and has asked me to discuss it with the group. It has all the signatures from the original founding members as well as the legislators who helped carry the bill in Juneau.
- SB127 Turo Bill vetoed
- Meet With Legislators - Ricky asked that Wendy Sailors coordinate regional meetings with the CAB or CAB leadership and our local legislators to share updates about the Region as they prepare for the next legislative session. Q: Should this be a separate meeting with CAB leadership, before a regularly scheduled meeting, or part of a regular CAB meeting? We are looking at November 6-22 (minus the 13th-14th).

## **9. Committee Reports:**

- **Access (Dave):** Dave had invited Roger to give an overview of CASA. Met with him in June. Top 10 list of priorities. Will attend the Assembly work session this Fall if around. Not back for a month or two. If we need a Letter of Support to the assembly, would Bill be available to spearhead. Bill committed. A couple of projects that come to the top, taking small bites up, the new Stewart Trail, study parking. Trailhead at Basher. Evaluation of Heritage Land Bank parcels adjacent to CSP. Bill responsible for figuring out how to get proposals to the assembly.
- **Budget (Tyndal):** Worked with legislators the past 2 years. Operating increase to get more CSP staff, also get stipends for campground hosts, both made it in the budget, but were ultimately line item vetoed. Last year we pivoted to working on the Turo Tax bill to close the loophole on Vehicle Rental Tax. Turo has pushed the tax liability to individual car owners and Turo doesn't provide that info to the state. The muni has gotten Turo to collect that tax, but not the state. Parks gets \$\$\$ from two sources: 1) general fund program receipts (parking, campgrounds) that the legislature appropriates back to the park, and 2) Vehicle Rental Tax. Not getting UGF. By closing this loophole, would increase VRT and thus parks funding (either operating or capital). Senate passed it 15-5, House passed it 36-2, but the governor line item vetoed it. The legislature sat on the bill all summer to try to convince the governor before transmitting the bill (gov has 20 days to decide). Not a new tax, but the governor said it was and vetoed it. As the budget committee, we've been unsuccessful in getting past the governor's line item veto. They have 5 days of the new session to override a veto, requires  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote. Unlikely a big enough priority to get a coalition together, but the governor will be a lame duck after the election.
- **Nomination (Dave):** Welcome to 3 new board members! The goal is to make sure we have a sufficiently filled board, typically we fill outgoing board members at the end of the calendar year, but we had a lot of vacancies. Losing 3 more at the end of the year. Two existing "hot" applications, Ben just received a 3rd.
- **Seward Highway Design (Irene):** Stephanie out, Irene giving the report. Good agenda item for October for project proponents to give an update. Potter Marsh to Bird Flats is the scope area. Originally on an expedited time frame, now has slowed down. Goal is to have a draft EA for DOT to review by end of 2024. Maybe a draft in January. Lots of access points, want to make sure we preserve and expand access. Ben has been a part of the design team meetings, advocating for access to park facilities and features. Some preliminary designs have improved access at McHugh. Irene asking Stephanie to reach out to DOT.
- **Trails (Irene):** Assist groups on developing plans for trails. Attempted to learn from Hemlock Burn. Try to work with user groups and communicate with the public. Discuss the intent of the trail management plan with the public. Worked on Muktuk Marston and Hunter Pass, met with Eagle River community. Met with Chugach Mountain Bike Riders re: plans for ER trails. Also part of the Ram Valley discussion. 3 volunteer events in the park the next 3 Saturdays. Hemlock Knob, then Sunnyside Flattop for the next 2, through AK Trails.
- **Chugach Park Fund (Haley):** Field of Interest fund within ACF. Signage and trails for the most part. Write grants, do some small events, lots of e-mails, meet in person once a year. Started from the CAB, but Haley and Claire terming out, Kyle and Tyndall are now on the committee and will provide representation from the CAB. Items of note: total of over \$600K in fundraising for park projects since inception in 2016. Hidden Lake trail by the German Bridge, done by AK Trails crew. Got a Conocco

Phillips grant for trail plans, also paid for 7 volunteer trail events in 2024. Big grants going in, Tier 2 to Rasmussen for Williwaw. New bike racks for the German Bridge. CPF also purchased signs with QR code for making donation to the Fund; Ben plans to install all around the front country.

- **Wildlife (Gus):** Suggests having the ADF&G Area Biologist (Cory Stantorff) present to the CAB. What are ADFG's priorities for CAB? Board of Game cycle in two years? Cory and Ben create stipulations for hunts. Lots of salmon underneath the salmon viewing deck at ERNC.
- **Planning (Rob):** Rob is out sick :( Planning committee, new to it, do not meet frequently, working on revision to trail management plan. Questions about trail classifications. Not a lot of work right now, no current news.
- **Outreach (Rob):** also been pretty quiet, increase capacity to interface with park users and area residents which could take a variety of routes, no regular meetings, no other news
- **Ram Valley (Haley):** this is an ad hoc committee, AK Trails got \$ for a trail study, governor vetoed \$ in capital budget to build anything. Location above ER that had tenuous access and lost access, does not have reasonable access. Pressure is off to have a plan given the veto. Scoring rubric to prioritize alignments. Planning to do some outreach at ERNC discussing potential alignments. AK Trails is hosting a webpage about the project soon. Haley has been to the ER community council meeting to discuss. Some neighbor concerns about parking. What's next with governor's veto? These are options, here are the scorings, document for future development. Ram Valley trail is in the trails management plan, has gone through a public process. However, neighbors to the park always feel the need for a "public process". Ad hoc, have Zoom meeting occasionally.

Kyle asked about Canyon Road geotechnical work for the parking lot, Ben thinks it happened, but hasn't seen it, will discuss later.

New members can select committees via e-mail.

Next CAB meeting October 14.

**10. Adjournment:** Motion made and seconded (Tyndall/Gus) and approved with no objection 8:23PM.