

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

(Hybrid-with in person at BP Energy Center/Microsoft Teams Electronic Meeting)

DRAFT--Minutes of the March 10, 2025 Meeting

REGULAR MEETING #3.

Call to Order: after introduction, called to order at 5:05 pm.

2. Roll Call and Introductions

- **Present:** Bill Britt, Tyndall Ellis, Gus Gustafson, Rob Clark, Irene Turletes, Stephanie Rice, Sarah Brye, Kristin, Joe Hackenmueller, Mark Miner
- **Excused:** Ted Phelps, Kyle Shedd, Clark Saunders
- **Absent:** None
- **Staff:** Ella Fitzwater, Wendy Sailors, Justin Dipaola-Allen, Keith Wilson
 - Justin introduced himself as the new CSP superintendent. He began volunteering with CSP in 2010 and worked for the Division of Mining, Land, and water prior to this role.
- **Public:** Katie Winter- State Parks Design and Construction, Cathy Hammond-resident of South Fork Eagle River resident, Carla SlatenBarker- resident of South Fork Eagle River, Shaun Saxton- resident of Chugiak, Will Taygan- Chugach Mountain Bike Riders (CMBR), Michael Hanson- CMBR, Rob Earl via Teams- DNR, land manager available to answer questions about Kachemak Bay State Park, Monica Alvarez via Teams- DNR, project manager for the latest revision of state park plan, John Douglas via Teams-Valdez resident, Kate Huber via Teams- Valdez resident.

3. Changes to Agenda and Approval:

- Katie Winter from State Parks Design and Construction added an item regarding the parking lot initiative at Rabbit Creek Trailhead/Sunnyside of Flattop.

4. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:

- Carla SlatenBarker, resident of South Fork Eagle River, added a discrepancy about the SFER CC letter of support to allow mountain bikes on Muktuk Marston. She informed that board that due process for letters of support were not followed. Additionally, conversations following the previous meeting revealed the SFER CC President does not remember the letter being written.
- Cathy Hammond noted that she did see the December minutes online (which was misstated at the previous meeting). Cathy also clarified the spelling of her name, which is presented correctly in these minutes.

5. Public Comments:

- Carla SlatenBarker: is a South Fork resident, and is a recreational biker and hiker. Was disheartened to hear about proposed bike allowance on Muktuk Marston (MM) trail. She expressed concern about bikes on MM due to current issues with bikes on hiking-only trails. She had worked with Ben and Happy Trails and was pleased with progress, but now that decision has been reversed. MM was supposed to give people another trailhead to spread out traffic in the area and expressed that biking should stay in Ship Creek Valley. She would like to keep hiking and biking separate and would like to see us say no to the regulation change to contain MM traffic at the Arctic Valley trailhead.
- Shaun Sexton: is a biker and hiker. He experienced e-bikes during a trip to New Zealand and is currently shopping for one now. He noted better trail etiquette in NZ with regard to e-bikes on trails. Therefore, he does not support any initiatives to open Peters Creek to additional uses, particularly e-bikes. With over 20 trails north of Anchorage, there is only one place where you can get out into the wilderness, which is Peters Creek area. He fears this area will be ruined if bikes are allowed.
- Will Taygan: (from CMBR) clarified that there's no proposal to allow bikes into Peters Creek. Will also agreed with the sentiment stated by Carla regarding MM. He elaborated that the current CSP trails plan calls for bikes to be open to intersection of Hunter Pass and suggested edits to the plan to move the intersection and provide more realistic options. He raised the question "Are lines [drawn] on the plan binding?"
- John Douglas: (state manager in Valdez) has a few state parks nearby and wanted to know if this was the forum for his concerns. Wendy directed him to the correct division.

6. Old Business:

- Katy Winter: provided an update on Rabbit Creek Trailhead/Sunnyside of Flattop. They have received funding from Land and Water Conservation to do geotechnical investigations. They want to make road wider by cutting into the hill side and will need to support what they cut back. Design has started. Users will be able to park perpendicular and the lot is projected to park 100 cars. There will likely be a concrete pit toilet. She brought 3D models. Due to significant ice and flooding there will be culverts below the road and they hope they can control some of the water within the property line. They have spoken with Glen Alps CC. They will provide updates at 35%, 65%, and 95% progress. The 35% site drawing will be available soon if we are interested in access to that.
- Rob Earl: provided the latest update from Rhys Miranda, which mentioned narrower parking spaces and the parking stalls shortened slightly due to increased retaining wall height being cost prohibitive. The current plan is a gravel lot and therefore no striping. Signage will be necessary to educate users on how to park. Pedestrians will be able to walk along the wall. Best estimate for schedule: bid documents by summertime.

7. New Business: DNR Planners Update and Q&A regarding CSP State Park Plan (Monica Alvarez and Rob Earl)

- Tyndall kicked off the agenda item with a briefing about the history and organization of the current *management* plan and the current *trails* plan. The current park management plan was completed in 2015, and the trails plan was from 2009 (but was approved after amendments in 2015 along with the management plan). One of the capital projects proposed last year was Arctic to Indian. This project was vetoed, but there is indication that the legislature is interested in funding this trail. It would be part of the Alaska Long Trail (ALT). There is a lot of interest being churned and the area currently only supports winter use. Indian Trailhead to the Pass is currently under construction, which will be a wider, more accessible trail from Indian to tree line. The question arises: what does it become from tree line to Arctic Valley? Are there any revisions to the plan that might be useful when the capital dollars become available? This will be built with mechanized equipment. Does the wilderness area restrict the type of equipment that can be used for construction? A brief discussion on state park versus federal “wilderness” definition. The state park has three designated areas: wilderness, recreation, and scenic. For example, Crow Pass trail was removed from the wilderness designation because the trail gets more use than what would otherwise be allowed. This gives the state park more allowance to manage the trail for higher traffic such as campgrounds, restrooms, parking, etc. Therefore, if Indian to AV becomes a thru trail with lots of use close to Anchorage, this could be reason to change the management plan.
- Rob Earl from DNR: Clarified that in wilderness area you can use 4 ft. machinery and go back in to fill a foot on each edge. He also mentioned the controversial regulation of no bikes on that trail, since there is no option to pass a change because the area is not designated for biking in the plan. Therefore, there cannot be cabins in that area.
- Monica Alvarez from DNR: Explained that to change the design and managed use of a trail would require a revision to the plan. The use of mechanized equipment is allowed in wilderness area. She also explained that the original plan was very different from plan that was approved. The planning process was a big balancing act and very controversial at the time, and is curious to see if public sentiment has changed with ALT in the mix. This could turn a small amendment into large issue.
- Tyndall (exhibiting the management plan): Eastern area is wilderness designation, peripherals are recreational. The statute is the law, the plan is how the park is managing that law. Can we grab a specific statute from plan?
- Monica elaborated on DNR policies to designate park areas in CSP vs. other parks.
- A question outlined by Stephanie: do we plan for the recreational foot traffic and make changes now, or wait until the traffic comes to make reactive improvements and change designations? This has the potential to be a very popular trail. The ALT has proposed different levels of passing through CSP: Crow (extreme), Indian to AV (moderate), through ANC (easy). This is a discussion worth having before investing the money.
- Irene: Does it have to be an amendment to just that area or do we have to revise the whole trails plan? What’s our authority as a CAB?

- Justin: thinks there is a process to amend one area. ALT has moved from conception to planning, so it's good to anticipate change and use.
- Monica: plans can be modified but take longer than we think and targeted amendments are more efficient than opening entire plan. She thinks that this type of change is big enough to request public input because it has a broad scope and will have a ripple effect for the permitting matrix. The last plan took 8 years to produce, but now won't take as long because of technology. We should plan for at least 1-2 years for a targeted amendment. The CAB can request that the department look into it, the DNR just needs the resources to prioritize it. Can we formally request to enter the queue? This department does all the planning for all Alaska public lands.
- Rob: asked Monica to speak to public scope and process. Minor amendment can be done with little public process and just a comment period. Bigger amendments require meetings and longer comment periods. Creating the current plan required them to attend many CC meetings. It will be a multi-step process: public review draft, followed by comment periods and meetings to receive input, then the intent to adopt phase. It would then go to commissioner for adoption. She encouraged the CAB to have a vision of what the trail could look like, and therefore target specific changes to the plan.
- Bill: affirmed that having a clear vision would keep the process as limited and quick as possible.
- Will Taygan: said CMBR has requested to change the use status of certain trails. He believes this would be a targeted, minor change. For example, MM is a class 3 trail, so would a reclassification be a major or minor change? Biking is the #3 and #6 recreation preference for uses in the park, but when the management plan was created it wasn't even in the top 5.
- Irene: who makes the decision on whether these are major or minor changes? Monica clarified that changing managed use is not minor change (therefore it is a major change). Minor changes do not change the *spirit or intent* of the plan (example: technical error on map). Amendments to the *intent of the plan* can major or minor.
- Carla: suggested that today's plan does not reflect the current user group. Is there a possibility of hiring consultants to do the plan instead of waiting in the queue with DNR?
- Tyndall: State provided some planning money from Ram Valley, but doesn't expect any money to come from state funding for planning this year. We would need a creative alternative for funding.
- Comment from Shaun: he is concerned that he and his neighbors didn't know the planning process was happening in 2009 and 2016. He would like to see projects that aren't dominated by special interest groups, and Irene confirmed that the scoping process could alleviate that concern.
- Cathy Hammond: queried Monica about what situation would warrant a change to the current plan? Monica confirmed it needs to only affects one individual piece, nothing that changes the intent of the plan. Also clarified that they do use consultants and contractors when funds are available.

- We should keep this as old business for the next meeting. This gives the CAB an opportunity to review the current management plan and is a potential project area for the Planning Committee.

8. Staff Report: Ella Fitzwater

- **Park Conditions:**
 - Eklutna Lake: Recent warm temperatures have caused the lake ice to deteriorate, now covered by about an inch of snow. Colder temperatures have slowed the thawing process.
 - Trails: Very little snow remains throughout the park.
 - McHugh Trail: A landslide, approximately half a mile from the trailhead, has made the area unsafe for visitors.
- **Park Operations & Maintenance:**
 - Luke Machines: UAA is generously donating parts and assisting with repairs. Head parking areas are also being addressed.
 - Trail Clearing: Staff continue to remove downed trees from trails throughout the park to ensure safe access.
 - Outhouse Maintenance: Repairs are currently underway. One incident of a visitor being accidentally locked inside highlights the need for more routine checks.
 - Cabins: Park staff have milled and routed new cabin signs for each of the park's cabins.
 - Glen Alps Bear Management: The area will transition into a food management zone. Garbage cans and outhouse doors will need to be secured to prevent bear encounters.
 - Campgrounds: Due to warm weather and low snow levels, some campsites will open early this season.
 - Park Cleanup: Ongoing campground and area-wide cleanup efforts are underway to prepare for the season.
 - Hiring: We are actively recruiting seasonal staff. Camp host positions are almost filled.
- **Training:**
 - Staff completed avalanche safety training with Mary Gianotti.
 - Saw training and certifications are being scheduled with Forestry.
 - A Basic Firearms Course is scheduled for park staff with ADFG.
 - Bear safety training and an overview of park rules and regulations will be scheduled for incoming camp hosts and seasonal staff.
- **Facility Repairs:**
 - Bird Point cabin and Eagle River camp host cabin are currently being remodeled.
 - Ongoing repairs are being made to park structures, picnic tables, and park signs as we prepare for the opening of campgrounds.

- Law Enforcement Update from Keith Wilson:
 - Incidents of note since last CAB mtg (2/10)
 - SAR (Search and Rescue): late afternoon on Saturday Feb 15th, 17yo injured above Meadow Creek drainage, vicinity of Mt. Magnificent/Mile Hi. Victim had a suspected femur break. AMRG volunteers (Alaska Mountain Rescue Group), victim's family and friends, Rgr Ford, Rgr Wilson responded. Difficult to evacuate by litter/ground team, AK Air National Guard Helo requested and was able to extract victim by hoist after dark and transport to hospital.
 - SAR Friday Feb 18th (7p to 1:30a) Hypothermic and lost solo hiker phoned for help near Rainbow Peak. AMRG and ASARD (AK SAR Dogs) volunteers located and assisted 50yo victim down to trailhead.
 - Death in the park, Feb 19th Sunnyside/ Peak 2 vicinity. Victim's friends searched for and located missing/overdue 58yo hiker; deceased, suspected medical. AMRG recovered body and turned over to APD.
 - Peters Creek sublegal moose case; magistrate judge found defendant not guilty at trial. Rack and meat was returned 2/24. Disappointing decision.
 - Additional Law Enforcement Updates
 - Rangers continuing to do trailhead fee enforcement while on patrol.
 - Vandalism discovered, and/or illegal dumps cleaned up at: Eklutna Lake, Briggs Bridge
 - Several individuals contacted for Camping where prohibited; living out of vehicles
 - Rogue motorized users cited: dirt bikes on hillside area roadways, ATV's on Lakeside Trail at Eklutna. Also a motorized paraglider at Lake.
 - Commercial guides w/o current permits contacted x2.
 - ATV season reopens April 1st, Eklutna and Bird Valley
 - Eklutna Lake overflow campsites open; Bird Creek Campground expected to open shortly.
 - Fat tire bike season ends 3/31 (Middle Fork Loop trail, etc)
 - Feb 21st Joint training/orientation with Mat-Su Rangers

9. Committee Reports:

- **Access (Bill):**
 - SB47 allows greater coordination between the muni and park. A Trails Coalition meeting will take place on 3/19, Rob can attend. The CASA 2025 bond is disappointingly small, including only 300k for the design of Basher trailhead. A concern in the January meeting was that numbers were very preliminary. The assembly became "gun-shy" with big numbers and wants more solid figures before allocating funds. Park bonds: vote **Yes** on 9! Yard signs are available. Question asked: What is the best way for the CAB to engage in the CASA process? Answer: We are currently engaged through Access committee by writing letters of support and providing lists of potential projects. Justin might know more about land swaps at next meeting. Irene mentioned that the assembly is willing to hold a special vote for construction funds.

- **Budget (Tyndall):**
 - Noted this will be a tough year on budget side. Due to prior vetos, we won't be trying to change legislation. Capital dollars are limited from the legislature this year. Dollars won't be coming from the general fund, therefore receipts and VRT (vehicle rental tax) will remain the main source of funding.
- **Nomination (Gus):**
 - The CAB still has one open seat. He will have a conversation with Alison Smith tomorrow or Wednesday. Unsure where online applications are going now that Ben is gone, but encouraged staff keep an eye out for other applicants.
- **Seward Highway Design (Stephanie):**
 - Still no EA. We'll be able to read as soon as it's available so the committee can assess impact to park and users. A land swap with Ram Valley is the first priority, but other options are available. Justin doesn't have copy of the land swap list yet. Compensatory land must match other land by dollar amount. HDR is doing EA for the DOT. There is no minimum time period for public comment on EAs.
- **Trails (Gabbie):**
 - Was there an initiative to combining access and trails? She will send an email to trails members to get their opinions and feedback.
- **Chugach Park Fund (Tyndall):**
 - The biggest project for this summer is Williwaw. They did not get the big Rasmusen grant.
- **Wildlife (Gus):**
 - The state is waking up. Ella Fitzwater is doing presentation at Eagle River Nature Center with Marla. Reminder that the ADFG call for proposals is the 25th.
- **Planning (Stephanie):**
 - No updates, but asked what the board would like to see from this committee. We've had big discussions about planning today, so value remains high in this committee. A brief discussion was had regarding Wilderness versus wilderness (state park definition versus federal definition). Stephanie offered to reach out to the muni planner once per month and see if there's anything of interest to the CAB.
- **Outreach (Rob):**
 - None
- **Ram Valley**
 - None

10. Adjournment