

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

Hybrid Electronic Microsoft Teams, 5:00 pm
BP Energy Center

Agenda for June 9, 2025

Regular meeting #6

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call & Board Member Introductions:

- a. **In Person:** Irene Turletes, Gus Gustafson, Joe Hackenmueller, Bill Britt, Mark Miner, Tyndall Ellis, Gabrielle Jordan, Kristin Vantrease, Rob Clark
- b. **Online:** Clark Saunders, Kyle Shedd, Sarah Brye, Ted Phelps
- c. **Absent:** None
- d. **Staff:** Justin Dipaola-Allen, Kellen Ford
- e. **Other guests present:** Brad Mieklejohn- The Conservation Fund, Margaret Williams- Anchorage resident, Bill Sherwonit- Anchorage resident, Tim Glassett- AK DOT Avalanche Program Artillery Manager, Shaun Sexton- Chugiak resident, Timothy (online), Carla SlatenBarker (online), Nancy Pease (online)

3. Changes to Agenda & Approval: Approved.

4. Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes: Minutes will be available shortly for the May meeting. Gabbie apologizes. Shaun called into the meeting and would like to know how to find the meeting recordings online. Justin mentioned that he would find a way to get that done soon.

3. Public Comments:

- a. Brad Mieklejohn: voiced concern that a bike trail from Arctic Valley to Indian is incompatible in the wilderness area. Ship Creek Valley is designated as wilderness and referenced the Alaska State Legislature wilderness designation. His public comments closely mirrored his letter in Attachment 1 at the bottom of these minutes. His follow up letter to the CAB is Attachment 2 at the bottom of these minutes.
- b. Margaret: no public comment but agrees with what Brad said and voiced opposition to a mountain bike trail in the wilderness area.
- c. Shaun Sexton referenced the letter of support we wrote from December that supports the mountain biking and issues with wilderness boundary.
- d. Bill: former CAB member in the 1990s. Is also a member of Friends of State Park, which is not very active right now. Bill agrees with Brad's comment and voiced opposition to allow mountain bikes in the Ship Creek Valley. Recalls that only primitive trails should be allowed in the wilderness area and is concerned about park management and maintenance. Lots of bike trails in the front country. He referenced the South Fork Rim Trail maintenance as a base for maintenance concern on new trails.
- e. Shaun Sexton: Also voiced concerns with Alaska's poor maintenance history with regards to infrastructure. He also referenced Administrative Order 358 (issued 2 weeks ago), regarding a freeze on preparing regulations.
- f. Greater discussion ensued regarding regulation change versus a change to the management plan. Tyndall clarified that there isn't funding to complete a full management plan, but there is a time period where the plan is supposed to be reviewed

and therefore allowances exist to amend the plan. This would include public comment and input. Chugach Mountain Bikers and Single Track Advocates were the ones to request this change, and we were the ones to help that happen. There was a broader discussion about regulations, statutes, incompatible uses, and how the management plan encompasses those items. Tyndall directed Bill to page 124 of state management plan and mentioned that the challenge of the one change to that trail and figuring out what the community wants. The Alaska Long Trail initiative is talking about having 3 options through Anchorage.

- g. Margaret: voiced concern about the bike communities having a greater financial influence and the lack of trail maintenance.
- h. Justin: referenced Monica's comment (planner from DNR) regarding the significance of the plan amendments. Although the request is specific, the DNR will ultimately have the say in how broad the scoping process should be. Clarification was made on who makes the decision on how broad the scoping process is (Director of State Parks) and whether the information goes out in public notice and community councils (it will if it's a full plan review, generally dozens of public meetings).
- i. Shaun Sexton: requested a copy of the letter submitted by CMBR.
- j. Justin: clarified that this board is an advisory board and that we cannot change process. In his position, he cannot change statute. When the public puts pressure on the legislature to change the park, a different process will ensue.
- k. Gus: reiterated that it's our duty to represent all users and explained our process and that we treat all users equally. Because CMBR came first as users to the park we supported them but welcomed today's guests to submit a letter of opposition to the DNR to open the plan.
- l. Bill: voiced concerned that the CAB wrote a letter of support for this project.
- m. Irene: reiterated that we are allowing the public process to happen. We had several long discussions and although we did not all personally agree with this, the board voted to open the plan, which will reevaluate whether the plan needs to be modified. She suspects there will be rigorous public comment.
- n. Margaret: encouraged the CAB to uphold the wilderness area legislative order. This reopened the discussion about federal Wilderness vs. state wilderness areas, whether machinery can be used for trail construction. Mechanized vs. machinery. Doesn't preclude using bikes. Our state wilderness definition is very vague. Machines are generally allowed to build trails. Justin emphasized that using machinery is better for building trails than using hand labor.
- o. Tyndall: moved to rejoin the meeting and mentioned that this will most likely be a 2+ year process.

6. Old Business:

a. Commercial Use Permits: Clarification on Commercial Use Permits

Joe wants to know who has commercial use permits and how those are issued. Justin brought up the website that lists the permits. The requests get sent to a permitting office (which bypasses Justin). He referenced Director's order 328, which allows permit authorization to be done by the director via the permitting team. Justin doesn't think he signs permits (only special use permits). Justin mentioned an example of celebrities requesting to use ATVs, which were denied. Justin emphasized that he tries to support local business when he can and clarified that

the criteria for issuing permits is not based on whether the business will enhance the park experience for all users. Rather, they want to help grow Alaska's economy. The permitting team won't issue a commercial permit if the public can't access a specific area. Concessionaire contracts go through a different process, for example Arctic Valley or the ERNC. The specific example mentioned: a booth set up by a real estate agent to take pictures and hand out goodies at the ERNC. Justin and Gus emphasized that this brought new users to the ERNC, who will probably post pictures online and enhance people's knowledge of the park. Justin emphasized that commercial permits are an important revenue stream for our otherwise underfunded park. Any questions regarding vendors can be emailed to Justin, who will forward to a law enforcement officer.

b. Long Intros: Tabled as a summer assignment. Motioned by Gus, seconded by Tyndall.

c. Summer field trip ideas: July 14th and August 11th are second Mondays in August. Tyndall will try to set up walk with Roger Marks to walk with him on Steward Trail on August 11th. Roger has good information and insight into this area. Mark Miner suggested the Bear Valley access as a field trip. Also suggested: Brewster's road, (Kellen mentioned he is the ranger in Hillside and Turnagain arm and knows that area), Williwaw Lakes with the trail updates, Ram Valley. Motion by Tyndall, Bill seconded.

7. New Business:

a. DOT Avalanche Specialists Presentation from Gim Glassett

Tim is here to represent the AK DOT Avalanche Specialists. He mentioned a lack of funding, as the avalanche program is a very small part of the entire DOT. They are putting up a station at Penguin Ridge to support avalanche awareness, which will be flown in a basket and deployed within a few hours. Statewide weather stations are installed and maintained via federal grants. CNFAIC website does not include DOT weather stations but soon they will be more readily available to users. This new station on Penguin Ridge will be similar to the one on Penguin Peak (joint CNFAIC station with DOT).

Another upcoming project is the avalanche detection system. It uses infrasound technology, so we can't hear it, but it detects avalanches in motion via sound. Within the AK DOT, just 2 employees manage 200 miles of road. This will help even out their workload. One will be located in the right of way near Bird Flats, two will be located in Chugach State Park. They will avoid the INHT. The challenge with this system is that there is a lot of noise and power lines along the highway. A system was tested last winter for 4 months and worked well. Rohn towers are communication towers, about 10 feet tall, aluminum base that sits on grade with a small fence and rocks stacked to hold tower in place. Minimal ground disturbance. One station will be able to listen to 7 paths, providing alerts and information about where and when it happens.

An older technology geophone system is outside the park south of Girdwood. However, the phone went off 1000 times in 2 days and picked up wind, rain, etc. Infrasound can pick up specific avalanche sound. This new infrasound tech advances our knowledge because we know when avalanches are happening. Tim's analogy: they're like pack animals, once one happens the

rest happen. Infrasound will tell which starting zone released into a specific path so they know whether they need to mitigate other paths or zones.

Rob asked if these projects are available for public consumption. The web page dashboard is available to the public (search Alaska DOT&PF Avalanche Dashboard). Hopefully this infrasound technology will be imbedded into the dashboard automatically but that might take some time. For reference, there were 30 days of avalanche delays on AK roads during the 2024-2025 winter. The systems are solar-powered with a battery box.

Trailer-mounted gas-detonated systems can be used but probably won't be used this year within the Park. This technology may be used with drones that are brought online this year. Permits were issued last year for Turnagain Pass and Hatcher Pass. They mitigate snow avalanches, not rock or ice.

When asked about future uses for this technology, Tim said that federal funding pauses have resulted in less potential uses at this time. There will be a detection tower on Kenai Lake at MP21, which will measure the velocity then send signal to flashing lights to warn drivers on road. Video demonstrating this was shown.

The DART (Drone Avalanche Reduction Tool, now MONTUS due to licensing issues) artillery currently used is in short supply. The Army no longer supports it and there are fewer qualified personnel to operate the equipment. The AKDOT was the first agency to use drones for avalanche mitigation work. They also team with the railroad. Drone pilots are DOT employees. There are contingency plans in place for unexploded ordinances. Question asked: what's left after an explosion? Tim said that everything is vaporized. The new system uses PVC instead of metal, they are all 3D printed parts. Testing areas were on the railroad and hasn't been used in the park yet but will be used this year.

Next phase: air blast which is the most effective way to use explosives on snow. 2-5 meters above snow surface. ALTAX is US made. Can fly two 5-pounders 1 mile (3000 feet) or one 5-pounder 2 miles (5000 feet). This tech won't be used from MP 100-90 along Seward Highway because it isn't efficient enough yet. Right now, there isn't as much of a cost savings because the technology is so new but soon it will be much cheaper than a helicopter. Helicopters are about \$4,000/hour. Once they get the whole program implemented it just costs employee time and explosives. Because Hatcher is recreational, remote avalanche control systems will replace artillery.

Tyndall asked about frequency of maintenance. There is a proposition for a tower from Switzerland that has a drill base with plate (think very small lift tower), small footprint, less than 3x3 feet but 20-30 feet tall, and o visual impact. The tower is there year-round, deployment box gets picked up with helicopter, reloaded in the spring, then replaced in the fall. It contains a 12-shot magazine like a revolver, which is more than enough for that area. They will be seeking a permit within the next 6-8 months.

8. CSP Staff Report: Justin Dipaola-Allen, Ella Fitzwater, Law Enforcement Report from Kellan

Staff Report: Turnagain Arm Trail erosion around rockfall area. There will be trail changes, but the rocks need to fall by the end of summer for crews to safely work. Not closed yet.

Prospect Heights was paved! Gate installed today. Bird Creek Trailhead had some good improvements with latrine.

There is an ongoing issue with park users getting locked in latrines due to locked handles/hinges. The park is under 100% spending freeze and cannot replace hinges to outhouses, but can pump the latrines. The handles are \$400 and specific to the CXT brand outhouse, therefore Justin will not be ordering more. Before the freeze they were able to replace more hinges.

Park specialists are doing training. Lots of illegal dump sites and vandalism.

Campground hosts at all sites. Eklutna celebration of life resulted in another death in the outhouse (not related to hinges being stuck on outhouses).

New equipment for SARs and maintenance.

Tomorrow begins Interior Trails starting work on the Crow Pass Trail. Gus is helping the helicopter get out there to kick off work. NFER parking lot will be closed for the day and trailhead is closed for the day.

Gus added that last Wednesday CSP Rangers logged out from ERNC to Crow Pass.

Law Enforcement Report: Last week Seward Highway was driven and the officers cleared out squatters and vehicles. Arrest at Bird Creek parking lot for fentanyl use.

Wildlife: moose calf kill at Rainbow Trailhead at Turnagain Arm Trail. Normally in this situation, the carcass would be moved at least 200 yards off trail. Due to the busyness of that trail, the calf was taken to a dumpster under the direction of ADFG.

Bear and three cubs at McHugh. Some users were stuck on the trail. Kellan escorted them past the huffing sow.

Game cams were purchased before the spending freeze and are incredibly helpful for vandalism and dumping.

With the closure of Davis Park, they anticipate more squatters heading into CSP. There was a vehicle evicted from Mile 113 of Seward Highway that ended up at Eagle River Campground and was evicted again.

There was a search and rescue at Flat Top: adult male with injured leg.

Joint patrol with BLM via ATV where unauthorized ATV use goes into the park.

9. Committee Reports:

a. Access (Bill): N/A

b. Budget (Tyndall): Turo tax was passed through the legislature. Not sure how much revenue we'll get from that. They are trying to find money in the budget to give stipends to campground hosts for food, etc, which was vetoed by the governor. He encouraged us to keep that in mind when we interact with campground hosts.

c. Nomination (Gus): Allison Smith's application was discussed, and they decided to bring it to the Board. 25 years of land management experience and has been in AK since 1981. She has a background in planning and is also on the MOA Parks and Rec board. She also has extensive experience with Connors Bog area and is involved with many other organizations. Was recommended by Bill Britt. Motioned by Gus, seconded by Tyndall. There is one more vacancy now that Stephanie is gone and Gus reminded us that that users of the park (and therefore CAB members) can reside outside Anchorage. A more diverse board would be helpful.

d. Seward Highway Design (Stephanie): Tyndall commented that he got an email from Nancy Pease regarding concerns that we are or are not following up with land acquisitions and concerned with the 200 ft cliffs which are more dangerous than the current 75 ft ones. Impacts to Turnagain Arm Trail are minimal. T

e. Trails (Gabrielle): Volunteer Opportunities coming up this summer for those interested

f. Chugach Park Fund (Kyle): Great event on ay 22nd. Considering collaboration with huddle on native names. ADFG likely has extra game cams to help LEOs.

g. Wildlife (Gus): Conversation with Corey while reporting a very angry cow moose. Proposal will be put forth to game board to expand number of permits for sheep in the rainbow area.

h. Planning (Stephanie): N/A

i. Outreach (Rob): N/A

j. Ram Valley (Rob): N/A

10. Adjournment: Gus moved/Tyndall seconded.

Attachment 1: Brad Mieklejohn

Dear Superintendent DiPaola-Allen and Chugach Park Advisory Board,

I am writing to express my opposition to any further expansion of mountain biking in Chugach State Park, and my determined opposition to the idea of a mountain biking trail in the Ship Creek Wilderness, and to explain why.

I was recently knocked down by a mountain biker riding illegally on the South Fork Trail on Hiland Road in Eagle River. On this occasion the biker was moving so fast that I was unable to get out of the way. The rider was completely unapologetic; she claimed it was my fault for not getting out of her way. She argued against me when I pointed out that hikers, not bikers, have the right of way.

I have lived on Hiland Road for 30 years and have seen a steady increase in stealthy, illegal biking on the South Fork Trail. I have even encountered bikers on the Hanging Valley Trail, and I have seen bike tracks on the ridges on both sides of the Hiland Valley. On the occasions when I have encountered illegal bikers and have not been outright knocked down, to a person they have been smug, indifferent, unapologetic, rude, or abusive. None have shown any remorse for riding on a closed trail. Very few bikers understand that hikers have the right-of-way and they ride as if they expect hikers to step aside.

When Chugach State Parks constructed the Muktuk Marston trail and modified the Hunter Pass Trail, the South Fork Community was very unhappy with the design and the lack of community engagement. (See: [New trail will increase access to alpine terrain in Chugach State Park but draws objections from residents of South Fork Valley - Anchorage Daily News](#))

One of the major concerns of the South Fork Community is that it is only a matter of time before the Muktuk Marston/Hunter Pass trails are opened to mountain bikes. While we were assured by State Parks Director Ricky Gease and State Park Superintendent Ben Corwin that those trails will remain closed to mountain bikes, the community is skeptical and vigilant.

Now comes the outrageous proposal to transform the Ship Creek valley wilderness with a high-grade bike trail. No, absolutely not.

The Ship Creek wilderness is a vital sanctuary for the wildlife that is a symbol of pride for Anchorage. The moose, bears, wolves, wolverine and lynx that thrill residents and visitors need Ship Creek as a refugia where they can evade human harassment and safely breed. Animals like moose and bears don't take kindly to surprises, and a biker going four times faster than a hiker is four times more likely to surprise a bear or moose. While this may be amusing for the biker, it is stressful to the animals.

E-bikes have proliferated in recent years, for better and sometimes for worse. The theory behind e-bikes is that they would allow elder bikers more freedom and help our transition away from carbon. But a segment of the mountain bike community has adopted e-bikes as a way to go faster, farther and steeper. I regularly see young bikers on e-bikes whizzing along faster than ever or using them for steep hill climbs. (Check out Devil's Pass or Resurrection Pass, two trails supposedly off-limits to e-bikes) Many e-bikes are now indistinguishable from non-motorized bikes, so there is no realistic way to restrict e-bikes as a distinct class. The mountain bike community has been feckless in policing its own ranks to prevent the proliferation of e-bikes where they are theoretically banned.

The concept of the Ship Creek mountain bike trail is paved with good intentions, but it would lead directly to the introduction of motorized vehicles into the Ship Creek Wilderness. Once open to mountain bikes, there would be no way to prevent e-bikes from using it. E-bikes are motorcycles and must never find their way into Wilderness, no matter how inadvertently.

The mountain bike community, as represented by the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA), has long been hostile to federally-designated Wilderness because mountain bikes are not allowed. In some cases, IMBA has actively opposed the protection of additional Wilderness and has worked to weaken the Wilderness Act to allow mountain bikes in Wilderness. We should be skeptical of any claims that the mountain bike community are good stewards or advocates for conservation. They are not interested in what is good - only what is good for them. Opening up the Ship Creek Wilderness is a

sneaky way to advance their agenda of undermining the protections of Wilderness more broadly.

The Ship Creek mountain biking trail proposal would require a re-classification of the Muktuk Marston trail to allow the use of bikes. If that were to happen, it would negate the commitment made to the South Fork community, and it would all-but-guarantee that mountain bikes would soon appear on the Hunter Pass Trail.

The mountain biking community shows no signs of being satiated with what they already have. New trails continue to fragment important wildlife habitat at Kincaid and the Hillside and yet they continue to push for more. A segment of the mountain biking community is disrespectful of other users and chooses to illegally bike on closed trails and across fragile mountain tundra.

Until the mountain bike community demonstrates a commitment to conservation and an effectiveness at policing themselves, I say "no more."

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Attachment 2:

Dear Justin and the Chugach Park Citizens Advisory Board,

Thank you for the opportunity to attend your meeting this evening (June 9th, 2025) and to offer comment opposing the proposed bike trail through the Ship Creek Wilderness.

I want to register a few thoughts with you all in light of the discussion that took place.

First, the Master Plan for Chugach Park should be hard, costly, and time-consuming to amend because it represents the will of the public. Think of it as the Constitution for Chugach State Park. As noted, the Master Plan resulted from hundreds of meetings and thousands of comments. From that we can take the assurance that the Master Plan is an accurate reflection of public sentiment. The difficulty in amending the Master Plan is a protection against actions that go against the will of public. It is a feature, not a bug to be circumvented.

Second, setting aside parts of the Park as Wilderness was the original compromise when the Park was established in 1970. To attempt to modify that compromise now does violence to the original authorizing intent for the Park and those who fought to create it in the first place. They intended that a significant portion of the Park would not be subject to passing fancies of technology and public demand.

Third, Wilderness is a timeless virtue, just like dignity, honor, and integrity. We know what these terms mean, and we should not seek to degrade them through sleights of hand or modern upgrades. Wilderness is not about us; it is about NOT US. Wilderness, like virginity, should not require legalese to define what is and is not permissible. Quibbling over the definition of terms like "rudimentary" and "primitive" and "incompatible" is simply a word game to evade the restraint that Wilderness asks of us. The word "Wilderness" should tell us all that we need to know - we should know what belongs there, what is right, what is proper and what is good. We miss the point of Wilderness when we rationalize, justify, twist and distort to make Wilderness bend to modern technology or the needs of the day.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of a biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." - Aldo Leopold

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