

CHUGACH STATE PARK CITIZEN ADVISORY BOARD

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

DRAFT--Minutes of the May 13, 2024 Meeting

REGULAR MEETING # 5

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

2. **Roll Call & Introductions:**

Present: Haley Johnston, Claire LeClair, Gus Gustafson, Mark Miner, Kyle Shedd, Tyndall Ellis, Rob Clark, Bill Britt, Irene Turletes

Excused: Dave Hart, Jeff Bidingier, Stephanie Rice

Absent: Ted Phelps

Staff: Ben Corwin, Chugach State Park

Public: Sean Sexton

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

4. **Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes:** Minutes of the April 8, 2024 meeting were approved as written on motion made by Shedd/Miner.

5. **Public Comments:**

- Sean Sexton concerned about rubbish being dumped at the Ptarmigan Valley Trailhead.

6. **Old Business:**

- a. **Ram Valley-(Haley)-**She attended the ERVCC and brought updated map that shows the four access points and five possible alignments being studied; she also visited with the board and staff of the Eagle River Nature Center. The CAB's Ram Valley committee met last week and came up with ten criteria: 1- does the route have legal access, 2-parking (at or near the TH location and if there is parking will it be sufficient), 3-physical challenge of trail (length and grade), 4-neighborhood impacts, 5-sustainable alignment, 6-cost, 7-opportunities for connectivity, 8-impacts to wildlife (ADF&G species of concern in the area= Dall sheep), 9- safety (e.g., exposure to avalanche), 10-is year-round use possible. Outreach to occur this summer via a static presentation at the Eagle River Nature Center where input and opinions will be directed towards Alaska Trails. Additional outreach will occur with Community Councils and the Mountaineering Club in the Fall. Haley also presented a map showing relative concentrations of areas that sheep use in Ram Valley; take home from the ADF&G biologist is to route the trail so that hikers come in at as low an elevation as possible into the valley. Haley described a couple parcels for sale in the subdivision created by Eklutna Inc., both of which have some potential for providing parking and a trailhead. There was discussion about process to date. Haley gave a general overview of the access points and the trail alignments being considered using an Anchorage Muni map for illustration. The response from the Eagle River Valley Community Council to date was also summarized.

7. New Business: None

8. Staff Report: Ben Corwin

Updates:

- All snowmachine areas are closed for the season; the extended fat tire bike season also closed.
- Invitation to bid for the park's new snow machines has gone out, two vendors bid on the items;
- Eklutna ATV lot expansion is underway. The lot and trail are closed to ATV's by Director's Order for construction and lack of legal or available parking for vehicles and trailers, or safe access to the trail;
- Eagle River Campground PUCs are under construction. The latrine upgrades are still underway. They should be completed mid-May;
- At McHugh, contractor starting to clean up/complete the outhouse project; DOT's project to replace culvert should be wrapped up sometime this summer; (they encountered large boulders when they tried to ram a new culvert, now they are digging a big trench in order to replace the culvert);
- All day-use sites along Turnagain Arm are open;
- Bird Creek Campground opened 5/3 and Eagle River and Eklutna are slated to open at the end of the week 5/17; Bird Creek Overflow campground will be closed through mid-June, electric utilities using that space for sling loading material to sites along the transmission lines;
- Casey Durand and Alaskan Glamping are getting set up in the Eklutna Canyon site with a few amendments to their permit because of the existence of a non-restrictive use easement held by AWWU on this parcel; amendments have since been made to the easement for the operation of the locking gate, AWWU and MOA have been added as additionally insured on Casey's commercial insurance, he also moved the site of the tents to a location that is not on AWWU's buried pipeline and access trail;
- Staff has been working very well and removing hazard trees from the campgrounds and trails and getting everything ready for summer operations;

Staff:

- Tim and Kellan are progressing well at the DPS Academy. Their graduation is Friday, May 24th. After a well-deserved week off, all of the new rangers will be participating in a two-week ranger transition course down on the Kenai. Then on to 8+ weeks of Field Training around the State;
- Ranger Levi Schmidt took a job with APD, his last day with CSP will be 5/24; Ben may re-classify this ranger position to a park specialist position in order to better focus the remaining park ranger positions on patrol and law enforcement;
- Spencer and Leo were down in Juneau training SE area staff on chainsaw use;
- ACC trail crew begins on 5/20. (Genevieve leaving for DEC, one new ACC begins Monday 5/13);
- Host updates:

- Troy and Jennifer Balke are set up in Bird Creek Overflow, South Dakota by way of El Paso
- Locals Jim and Anne Picard returning to Eklutna Lake Campground for year ...6 or 7?
- Peter Pondolino up from CA, moving into McHugh Creek Tuesday 5/14
- Jane Powell and Jonalu Johnstone up from Oklahoma, moving into Glen Alps caretaker cabin (soon)
- Michelle Carton, a teacher from Palmer, will be hosting at Eagle River CG

Law Enforcement:

- Rangers have been busy with the uptick in use.
- Ranger Schmidt has an eluding case from Thunderbird Falls, charges forwarded to DA;
- Ranger Schmidt has had several other agency assists with eluding cases, a stolen SXS, and a suicidal individual;
- Ranger Schmidt has been issuing many fee warning and several fee citations.
- Mile 7 Old Glenn squatters' camp issue. Posted 30-day eviction notice. Adjacent property owner has been selling power to the people living on state park lands;
- Homelessness along the highway increasing along the Seward Highway pullouts (Potter trailhead, dumped vehicles, camp south of the scales);
- Supt. Corwin has an intentional feeding of wildlife case (someone feeding Dall sheep). Search warrant obtained for seized evidence.
- Uptick in illegal bonfires at North Fork Eagle River;
- Ranger Schmidt issued several speeding citations

Wildlife incidents of note:

- 4/16 Defensive brown bear with cubs charged runners on Turnagain Arm trail. Bear was sprayed pepper spray;
- 5/1 Surprised black bear charged a runner on Turnagain Arm trail. Teeth gnashing (suspect bear had cub but none seen);
- Suspected sheep poaching on Falls Creek trail. Quartered carcass found, carcass had been scavenged by wolverine;
- Wolf pack seen in area of Dew Mound Trail, North Fork Eagle River day use area and on Eagle River near Falling Water Creek. Curious unleashed dog nipped on Dew Mound.
- Brown Bear traffic jams along MP10.5 Eagle River Road near ERNC and Falling Water Creek (upwards to 30 cars), sow and 2 yo cub hanging out near guardrail;
- The two bears moved from the road and down the trails south of the Nature Center on Mother's Day; three hikers along Rodak Nature Trail encountered bears in close proximity and shot at the bears; it appears neither bear was wounded; trail closure in place.

Eklutna Hydro

Owners submitted their plan to the Governor as did Native Village of Eklutna (NVE). Parties to the 1991 Agreement have 60 days to submit comments and any alternative recommendations to the governor, then the project owners have 30 days to submit responses to the Governor.

NVE's two-phased plan, would, under Phase 1, refill a pool upstream of the dam with water siphoned from the lake, and then use a pump house to allow water either through a spillway or a gate, Phase 2 would be to remove the dam completely. Issues with the pumphouse plan would be relying on mechanical method to re-water (chance of failure could mean loss of fish and other biological resources) and also location of the infrastructure (access road, pump house, pipeline and other utilities) would be on LDA land which is encumbered by LWCF. Dam removal would mean removing 600,000 cubic yards of fill would constitute a disposal since the fill would be leaving the park.

Plan submitted by the owners would use a fixed wheel gate which could be used to let water out quickly during high water events which would help preserve the trail along the lakeshore. The owner's plan does not include monitoring of recreational resources nor a commitment to remediate future damage to the trail that may result from the management of water levels.

Discussion regarding number of sockeye would possibly spawn in the lake if they had access to that habitat via full dam removal; studies of the lake's sediment resulted in barely detectible signal of sockeye salmon in core samples; the study could not rule out a population size of anything under 30,000 fish over the course of several thousand years;

Additional Projects in the Park

- Briggs Bridge in poor shape from winter;
- Prospect Heights paving still no schedule;
- Bird Valley TH paving going out to bid;
- Eklutna's main ATV lot also set to get paved this summer;
- Geotech work on Canyon Road this summer also.

9. Committee Reports:

- **Access (Dave/Jeff):** Haley shared Heritage Land Bank's schedule for work sessions with Dave;
- **Budget (Tyndall):** Truro bill cleared both Senate and the House, should increase the amount of vehicle rental tax available for appropriation by about \$1 million; Capital budget currently includes \$500,000 for Flattop trail, \$175,000 feasibility study for expanded parking at Arctic Valley; \$1 million for summer trail on Ship Creek; \$1 million for trail and trailhead Ram Valley; and \$425,000 for Chugach PUCs; \$60,000 for design work at Peters Creek trailhead; \$450,000 to Anchorage Muni for Canyon Road upgrades (this may take care of the gap between the Muni's project and the LWCF project on Canyon Road);

- **Nomination (Dave):** N/A
- **Seward Highway Design (Irene):** Team working on list of impacted properties and starting to look at replacement properties;
- **Trails (Irene):** Jon Underwood working under contract on two projects in the park: July 8 through August 23 at Eklutna and Indian Valley from August 26 to October 18. Hoping to have a presentation at September CAB meeting on Indian Valley. Question to Ben about Muktuk Marston trail was closed by Arctic Valley/Anchorage Ski Club. Ben's response: they can control access within the core operating zone but not outside of that, he doesn't know if the overlook trail is within their core operating area. Ben also reported that Department of Defense is discussing construction of a fence along all areas where DoD and state park lands abut. Ben and Haley will get more information and potentially place this topic on the agenda for the next meeting. Irene encouraged CAB members to volunteer for any of the volunteer trail events held by Alaska Trails this summer: <https://www.alaska-trails.org/current-volunteer-opportunities>
- **Chugach Park Fund (Haley/Claire):** Actively raising funds for the Hidden Lake project, designing a sign to place at the project once it is finished and looking for a trails professional who can conduct assessments on a variety of trails on the hillside (Conoco-Phillips granted funds specifically for the trail assessments).
- **Wildlife (no chair):** N/A
- **Planning (Jeff):** Stephanie found a recent subdivision in the Eagle River area and forwarded it to Ben who submitted comments to the Muni, using the Chugach Access Plan.
- **Outreach (Rob):** Rob will present some ideas for expanding outreach for the CAB at the June meeting.
- **Ram Valley (Haley):** (see item under "Old Business")

Schedule for CAB meetings: there will be meeting in June and no meetings in July and August.

10. Adjournment: Motion made and seconded (Ellis/Turletes) and approved with no objection 7:59PM.