

TURNAGAIN ARM PLANNING UNIT

SETTING

This southernmost unit contains 97,000 acres (39,285 hectares) including approximately 13,000 acres (5,265 hectares) of tidelands and waters of Turnagain Arm. Near the southeastern boundary are the communities of Rainbow, Indian, Bird Creek and Girdwood. Near Girdwood and just outside the park's boundary is the State's largest downhill ski area, Alyeska Resort. Chugach National Forest and Municipal lands form the eastern boundary of the park. The southwestern portion of this unit is crossed by the Seward Highway and the Alaska Railroad.

Annual precipitation is more abundant and winter temperatures are higher along the Turnagain arm than other areas of the park due primarily to the flow of marine air from the Gulf of Alaska and Prince William Sound. Winds are typically strong and persistent as they flow down Turnagain Arm toward Anchorage.

Nearly all creeks flow in a southerly direction beginning and ending within the planning unit. Beginning with the most westerly drainage, they include Potter, McHugh, Rainbow, Falls, Indian, and Bird Creeks. As the waters of these creeks flow into Turnagain Arm they cut several well defined but shallow and constantly shifting channels in the glacial silt. Currently, one main channel approaches the north shore between Bird Point and Glacier Creek and another between McHugh and Falls Creeks.

Mountain hemlock, Sitka spruce, Alaska paper birch, and cottonwood are the dominant tree species along the Arm. This unit's Sitka spruce forests are normally identified with the moderate temperatures and high rainfall of Southeast Alaska. Vegetation patterns and species throughout the rest of the unit are typical of the remainder of the park.

Indian, Bird and Penguin Creeks are all spawning streams for pink salmon, a few king salmon and Dolly Varden, which causes the area to receive very heavy seasonal sport fishing pressure, frequently exceeding the capacity of existing parking during the summer.

Occasional beluga whales, harbor seals and sea lions enter Turnagain Arm during summer in search of eulachon, a small marine fish related to smelt, also called candlefish or hooligan. Eulachon appear in great abundance during late spring and early summer and are an important dip-net sport fishery at Twenty Mile and Placer rivers.

Large mammals in this unit include mountain goat, Dall sheep, brown and black bear, and moose. There are frequent sightings of Dall sheep along the Seward Highway between late spring and fall where south-facing slopes and meadows provide good habitat.

Important archaeological finds have recently been made along the north shore of Turnagain Arm at Bird Creek, Beluga Point and other locations. This area will play an important role in the park interpretive program.

EXISTING USES AND TRENDS

Of historic interest in this unit are the sites of the Iditarod Trail, Johnson Trail and the Alaska Railroad. The Johnson Trail

was believed to have been cut by survey crews for the railroad around 1911 and may have served as a mail and supply route along Turnagain Arm prior to the completion of the railroad in 1918. The Iditarod Trail paralleled the north shoreline from Girdwood to Indian Creek where it turned north over Indian Creek Pass. This trail was used between 1908 and 1918. The exact alignment of the trail from Indian north is difficult to determine in many places because it has not been maintained. The alignment along the shoreline has been overlain by the highway and railroad, obliterating this section completely. After the 1964 earthquake which subsided and destroyed most of the railroad bed, a minor realignment was made and fill was added to raise the tracks to their present level.

The Seward Highway is part of a transportation corridor which extends for 25 miles (40 kilometers) through the southern part of this unit. The Alaska Railroad right-of-way also shares this corridor. There are numerous vehicle turnouts along the highway where motorists gain access to the park.

There are several locations along the highway designated as official access points to the park. These include Potter, McHugh Creek, Falls Creek, Indian Creek, Bird Ridge trail, Bird Creek and Bird Point, among others.

The access at Potter has an inadequate parking area at this time. There is, however, a trailhead sign marking the start of the Johnson Trail. The trail course runs along the north shore of Turnagain Arm and is being reestablished for foot travel as far as Bird Creek. The trail will be 15-20 miles (24-32 kilometers) in length. Some sections are still visible near Indian where highway and railroad construction have not destroyed the trail.

McHugh Creek Picnic Wayside is the most highly developed picnic area in the unit. It is a 20 minute drive from Anchorage and consequently receives heavy use during the summer months. It has 30 picnic units, paved parking, toilets and trailheads to Johnson and McHugh Creek trails.

Falls Creek access is little more than a wide spot in the highway where a few cars can pull off. There is a trail up Falls Creek leading to one of many waterfalls along this creek.

Indian Creek access serves as a terminus point for hikers and cross-country skiers using Powerline Pass between Indian and Glen Alps access or the Iditarod Trail between Indian and Ship Creek near Arctic Valley ski area.

The Bird Creek-Bird Ridge area has limited parking on the north side of the road to accommodate the sport fishery and trails up Bird Creek. Bird Creek Campground is located on the south side of the highway and has 24 overnight camping units, 14 picnic units, toilets, drinking water and a shelter. This is the only camping area in the Turnagain Arm planning unit and it receives heavy use throughout the summer.

Across the Seward Highway to the north of the Bird Creek Campground is a 2,265 acre (917 hectares) wooded area owned by the Municipality of Anchorage and managed under an agreement by the State Division of Parks as part of Chugach State Park. If developed with the proper facilities, this area could satisfy camping, picnicking and recreation needs of many more park visitors. Presently, there is an extensive system of old roads and trails in this area which now serve as off-road vehicle trails in the summer and snow machine trails in the winter.

Increasing use of the above-mentioned facilities indicates a need to increase accessibility and facilities along the highway. New facility needs include additional parking, camping and picnicking areas and additional trail access into the park. Additional facilities for visitor information, public convenience and additional ranger supervision would help accommodate these needs.

Conflicts

There appear to be no significant use conflicts at this time. As additional camping facilities are developed in the Bird Creek

Valley, there may be a use conflict between summer camping activities and use of off-road vehicles, which are currently permitted in the valley. Access roads leading from the Seward Highway into Bird Creek may require some right-of-way acquisition and State maintenance before facilities are constructed in this valley.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Seward Highway Reconstruction

Due to the existence of a major road and rail transportation corridor through this unit, many experience the park only visually. It is therefore important that any reconstruction or alterations within this transportation corridor complement and enhance visual experiences along this route.

The corridor should be accessible and safely useable by bicyclists and pedestrians. Bicycle use along the corridor is increasing. This is due to the increased interest in bicycling in general, the bike trail construction programs of the State Department of Transportation and the Municipality of Anchorage, and the scenic attractions along Turnagain Arm.

Private Lands

Private lands and rights-of-way within this unit should be developed in such a way as to enhance and complement recreational opportunity and public enjoyment of the park. An example of compatible development is the subdivision in Rainbow Valley in which the residents have combined low density developments with minimum disturbance of natural features and vegetation. Though not within the park boundary, another good example is the Bird Creek community (USS No. 1069). The 20 acre community of 9 log cabins is almost totally self sufficient, heating with wood, drawing their water from Bird Creek and not using commercial electricity. Tree cutting or terrain alterations require a majority vote of the community. During the summer months the community is almost completely hidden by vegetation.

Management

In order to properly manage the increased use that is expected, the area should be more accessible to park rangers. This can be accomplished by either providing year-round park ranger quarters near heavily used areas or increasing the number and availability of rangers who reside nearby. This will help satisfy an increasing need to protect, aid and inform park users and to interpret and protect park resources in this unit.

Public Concerns

In April 1977, a public workshop was held at Indian to hear the concerns and ideas of local residents on future park developments and existing problems. The following is a summarized list of those concerns:

- Off-road vehicles should be restricted to the Bird Creek area where they are currently allowed to operate on old logging roads.
- Keep all park developments on the fringes of the park.
- Trails should be marked more clearly.
- Adequate signing and parking are necessary at selected points along the Seward Highway.

- Access points should be within eye-sight of the road.
- Do not develop a public access point at Rainbow valley.
- More regulation enforcement is needed in the park.
- Trapping should be limited to a small number of people who hold permits.
- Dall sheep viewing areas should be encouraged.

Hazards

Avalanches and rock slides occur at various times along the Seward Highway and along the drainages near the highway. This creates a hazard to those passing through or recreating in the area. There is a great need for better information and protection from this hazard, including a series of highway hazards signs to help protect the public.

There are numerous places along the highway where motorists use inadequate pull-outs and road shoulders for parking. This is a dangerous practice and should be discouraged by proper redesign and minimal signing of the most dangerous areas.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Based upon the unit's resources, current and anticipated use and public input, the following unit objectives have been developed:

1. Establish a permanent visitor center/ranger station along Turnagain Arm.
2. Encourage developments along and within the transportation corridor which will provide for optimum enjoyment, access to the park, outdoor recreation opportunities and safety of all visitors along this route.
3. Establish more camping and picnicking areas.
4. Establish more parking areas, sign existing trailheads and establish new trailheads and trails.
5. Preserve, interpret and improve the route of the Iditarod and Johnson Trails.
6. Interpret historic, archaeological, natural and scenic values of Turnagain Arm.
7. Establish a program to adequately educate and advise park users as to the hazards associated with avalanches along the Seward Highway and the valleys along Turnagain Arm.

70 MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
33	B ₁	Johnson trailhead near Potter	Paradise Valley Road at Johnson Trail	Parking area for 10-15 cars, bulletin boards, trailhead sign, latrine. Annual contribution by State should be made to help maintain private roads.	Establishment of northernmost areas to Johnson trail. Without this area, cars will continue to park in the road and create congestion for local traffic.
34	B ₁	Rabbit Lake trail	McHugh Creek to Rabbit Lake	7-8 miles (11-13 kilometers) of marked and maintained trail.	Connect trails between McHugh Creek and Rabbit Creek access points. This will serve an important and interesting trail loop between Anchorage's Hillside and Turnagain Arm.
35	A	Beluga Point	Beluga Point Interpretive Site	Parking for 30 cars, paved surface and physical separation between roadway and parking area and between parking area and railroad. Interpretive signs.	This is a 6000 year old archaeological site. It is the most significant archaeological find to date in the Upper Cook Inlet and should be a prime interpretive feature in the park. Site has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
36	B ₁	Johnson trailhead at Rainbow Valley	Immediately east of Rainbow Creek	Parking for 10-15 cars, latrine, bulletin boards, trailhead signs.	Provide off-road parking that will keep vehicles off private property in Rainbow Valley and provide access to the Johnson Trail.
37	B ₃	Falls Creek trailhead	Falls Creek	Parking area for 10-15 cars, bulletin board, trailhead sign, toilets. Parking to occur on north side of roadway.	This site will serve both the Falls Creek Trail and the Johnson Trail. Both trails already receive use, particularly during the summer months when Dall sheep viewing is a popular activity.
	A	Seward Highway rock climbing areas	Along Seward Highway	Designate safe areas off the Highway for rock climbing.	This is the only known area close to Anchorage with easy access with suitable rock faces for climbing.
37	B ₃	Falls Creek trail	Along Falls Creek	Mark and maintain approximately 5 miles (8 kilometers) of trail.	Increasing use of the unmaintained existing trail.

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38	B ₂	Indian Creek trailhead	Near Indian at junction of powerline and Seward Highway	Construct parking area for 15-20 cars, bulletin board, trailhead sign, toilets. Fill material from highway reconstruction may be used to construct parking area.	This area will provide parking where none exists. Cars now park illegally on private property. The trailhead will serve both the Indian Creek and Johnson trails.
38	B ₂	Indian Creek trail	Indian Creek to Indian Creek Pass	Improve and construct 8-9 miles (14 kilometers) of trail with signing.	The route is well traveled between Arctic Valley and Indian Creek. Marking the trail will enhance visitor safety.
	B ₁	Johnson Trail	Potter to Bird Creek	Reestablishment of 15-20 miles (24-32 kilometers) of historic trail, signing.	This trail has historical significance to the Anchorage area. Its re-establishment will allow use of a gentle trail along Turnagain Arm.
40	C ₁	Visitor center/ranger station	Bird Creek Vicinity	Construct facilities for interpretive displays, indoor and outdoor program area, storage of emergency medical supplies, park supplies, toilets, telephone, radio, office space, and temporary quarters for a ranger	The establishment of a major facility approximately 30 miles (48 kilometers) from Anchorage will improve management capability for the proposed camping area and the entire Arm. It will reduce the amount of travel required by rangers now based in Anchorage.
40	C ₁	Bird Creek picnic area	Existing Bird Creek Campground on Seward Highway	Convert existing campground to picnic area with 25-40 picnic sites with parking area for 40-50 cars. Conversion to a picnic area will happen in conjunction with the establishment of a visitor center/ranger station at this site.	Proximity to Seward Highway creates a noise problem making the area less than desirable for overnight camping. Site well suited for picnicking with views of mountains and Turnagain Arm.
41	C ₁	Bird Creek campground	Between Bird and Penguin Creeks 1-2 miles (1.5-3 kilometers) north of Seward Highway.	Construct 40-50 unit campground, 1½ miles (2½ kilometers) of road construction, 100-200 foot (30-60 meters) bridge (over Penguin Creek), toilets, water pump, fire pits, wood bin, outdoor program area. Annual contribution by State to help maintain public or private road.	Establish (by relocating) campground in park away from road noise and traffic. This expansion will serve the increasing demand for camping in the southern end of the park.

Map No.	Devel. Phase	Proposal	Location	Scope	Justification
41	C ₁	Campground trailhead	Bird Creek Campground	Construct parking area for 15-20 cars to serve nature trail and backcountry users, bulletin board, trailhead sign, latrine.	To provide off-road parking for nature trail and backcountry users' vehicles.
41	C ₁	Bird Creek nature trail	Bird Creek Campground	Construct 2-5 miles (3-8 kilometers) of gentle grade gravel-based trail with interpretive signing. Trail forms loop to preclude necessity of retracing steps back to trailhead.	To provide interpretive recreation opportunities for campground users
39	B ₁	Bird Ridge trail	Bird Creek Bridge (northside)	Construct 5-7 miles (8-11 kilometers) of marked and maintained trail leading up Bird Ridge.	Mark and maintain existing route.
39	B ₁	Bird Creek fishing area/trailhead	Adjacent to Bird Creek Bridge (south side)	Construct parking for 30-50 cars, portables latrines (during summer) bulletin board, trailhead sign, dumpster.	This site is heavily used as a fishing access point to Bird Creek. The site is the best fishing access point in the southern area of the park.
39	C ₁	Access trail	Bird Creek Bridge to campground	Construct 2-3 miles (3-5 kilometers) of trail with signs.	The trail will connect the fishing access point with the proposed campground.
42	B	Bird Point turnout	Bird Point south of highway	Construct parking for 10-20 cars, interpretive signs for tides and the historical use of ferries. Toilets and bulletin board.	Scenic turnout provides vistas of Turnagain Arm, Chugach State Park and Kenai Mountains. Site was used during gold rush era.
43	D ₁	California Creek trailhead	California Creek near road	Construct parking for 10-15 cars, bulletin board, trailhead sign, toilets. Annual contribution by State may be desirable for privately maintained roads.	Will make area readily accessible to nearby Girdwood residents. Remnants of gold mining activity and high scenic qualities provide attraction for this area.
43	D ₁	California Creek trail	California Creek trailhead leading up the valley	Construct parking for 10-15 cars, toilets, trailhead sign and bulletin board.	Public request and making many of the historic remnants accessible to hikers and skiers.