

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The Chugach Trail Plan is an access plan to the interior of Chugach State Park. Most of this extremely rugged, mountain park has not yielded to the building of roads which span its exterior boundaries in all but the eastern perimeter. Trails are and always will be the principal means of getting around this magnificent glaciated landscape.

The Alaska Outdoor Recreation Plan of 1981 shows trail-related activities to be the largest category of recreational use in Alaska. This accounts for the present popularity of the park to area residents. Statistics suggest that its use will continue to grow faster than the general population growth of Anchorage and vicinity.

Because there are so many different trail user groups that have an interest in Chugach State Park, it was considered necessary to develop a comprehensive trail management plan for the park which examines the many, oftentimes competing uses, to arrive at a system that provides access and recreational opportunities as well as protection of the park resources. Many of those user groups have requested permission of the park management staff to build trails that serve their own needs. Among these groups are the Nordic skiers, equestrians, hikers and snowmobilers. This pressure has been greatest in the Hillside Unit of the park, but this is not the only area.

Trails mean many different things to different people. In discussing the subject with members of the Chugach State Park Advisory Board and other knowledgeable users of the park, it became apparent that there are many different thoughts on managing trails there.

One school of thought suggests that no new trails should be built in Chugach State Park. "People can find their own way into and around the park." Even people who "professionally" advocate further trail construction often privately hold the view that no new trails should be built. This attitude shows their acute concern that the very special wild country values and scenic resources of the park should not be diminished.

Another group urges development of a much more comprehensive network of trails, and perhaps a greater number of wide trails. Still another group or individuals urge that the park be totally opened to the use of motorized vehicles of all types. Through analysis, the reasoned middle ground can hopefully be arrived at - a system that provides reasonable access to all user groups within the constraints of resource protection that most users agree is so important.

Purpose and Scope

This plan establishes guidelines for the future use and development of trails in Chugach State Park. It is based on an analysis of existing access points and trails, the park environment, and current and anticipated trends in recreational use.

The primary purposes of this plan are to provide:

1. A trail system which allows for optimum recreational use of the area while preserving the natural environment of the park for future generations.
2. A consistent set of principles and policies for trail management.
3. A basis for future funding (CIP prioritization).
4. A roadmap for the trail building and maintenance efforts of volunteer organizations.

As with all master plans, periodic review will be necessary to insure that the concepts and recommendations of this trail plan reflect the changing needs of the public.

This plan will examine trailheads, patterns of trail use (about which much is still to be learned), and existing plans such as the Chugach State Park Master Plan, the Alaska Recreation Trail Plan, and the Anchorage Trails Plan, (1984). Land ownership and land status will be reviewed as well as urban growth patterns along the park boundary. Analysis of this information and public and citizen advisory board comments will provide the direction needed to recommend new trailheads, new trails, improvements or upgrading, and trails that should possibly be closed or relocated.

Management Units

In the Chugach State Park Master Plan (1980), the park has been divided into five units which correspond roughly with important geographic units. The recommendations of this plan will be made within these same planning units. They are:

1. Eklutna-Peters Creek;
2. Eagle River;
3. Ship Creek;
4. Hillside;
5. Turnagain Arm.

On the other hand, policies pertaining to the entire park are included within the areawide section of the trail plan. The Goals and Objectives of this plan are identical with those enumerated in the Chugach State Park Master Plan with the emphasis of this plan being towards access and trails. In a few cases this plan may recommend an amendment to the master plan in order to accommodate trail related activities that are considered to be in the best interests of the park and its users. Land acquisitions will also be recommended in several instances to facilitate access into and within the park. In a number of cases, the Municipality of Anchorage will be asked to provide platted access to the park through properties that are undergoing subdivision along the park's boundaries. This will require close coordination of municipal and state interests.

Land Management Status

There are a number of private inholdings within the legislatively designated boundaries of Chugach State Park. Several of these, particularly in Rabbit Creek Valley, Peters Creek, and the South Fork of Eagle River, are complicating or blocking the logical access to these portions of the park. In

addition, since the Chugach State Park Master Plan was published in 1980, the North Anchorage Land Agreement (NALA) has returned some 40,000 acres of Eklutna Village lands to the management of Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in the Eklutna Valley - Peters Creek areas. This is vital to the management of the park as a cohesive unit.

The land ownership status of the park is a complex issue which can best be understood by studying the Land Ownership Map included for reference.

Chugach State Park Land Use Zones

The master plan for the park established three land use classification zones which apply according to the physical suitability of the area and Alaska Statute 41.20, the park enabling legislation. These can be referred to in greater detail on pages 27, 28, and 29 of the Chugach State Park Master Plan. Briefly, they are:

- * Recreation Development Zone - to meet intensive recreation needs by providing well developed access points and facilities.
- * Natural Environment Zone - to provide for low-impact recreation needs of a general nature.
- * Wilderness Zone - to promote, perpetuate and restore the wilderness character of the land. No motorized vehicles of any type are allowed in this zone.