

Outreach, Education & Interpretation

Goal: Build a strong identity and broad public support with high-quality education and interpretive programs and innovative communication strategies.

The tourism industry in Alaska is robust and growing. The industry is successful by marketing to its customers Alaska's heritage, natural beauty and wildlife, much of which is found within the state park system. However, to many visitors and even residents, Alaska's state parks remain a relatively undiscovered resource. By encouraging responsible, public participation in the enjoyment and protection of natural resources through improved outreach, the division will increase public awareness of Alaska's outdoor recreation opportunities.

As reflected by the public input on the 2004 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and during the scoping period of this strategic planning process, there is strong support for the division to devote more resources toward increasing visitor's knowledge of the unique attributes of Alaska's state parks. Visitors gain appreciation through education. The division should play a leading role in providing outstanding education and interpretive programs such as nature walks and campfire programs for children, the future stewards of Alaska's outdoor recreation, natural and cultural resources, and also for adults.

Objectives and actions will be tailored to establish long-term connections with visitors. Information will be developed and targeted to those who currently do not use the parks and are not aware of division programs and resources. Existing visitors will be encouraged to support the division and become lifelong advocates for its programs and services. The division will convey the message in terms of programs, deliverables, and what they mean in terms of jobs, economic stability, and management of cultural, natural and other resources.

The division also plays a key role in providing education programs that extend beyond the state park system's borders. Federal grant money has allowed the division to provide statewide education programs such as those that promote boating safety and historic preservation. These programs have been successful by increasing public awareness. The division should continue to pursue opportunities to participate in education programs of this nature, particularly those that encourage fun, safe, courteous and responsible outdoor recreation experiences throughout Alaska.



Interpretive guided walks and educational program



Objective I:

Broaden the division's visibility including the unique attributes of state parks and the contributions they make.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop and implement a marketing policy that prescribes a consistent theme, image and message for the division and its programs by May 2007. As part of this policy, display the appropriate division logos on all park vehicles, equipment and agency internal and external communications. Post on each of the fee collection sites signs that read, "All fees collected at this site are used to operate and maintain Alaska State Parks."
2. Work cooperatively with convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development, and tourism trade organizations to market Alaska's state parks, particularly those areas and facilities that are underutilized. The division should join local convention and visitor bureaus that provide information about the parks and include links to the division on their websites.
3. Develop, maintain and increase the distribution of effective websites and brochures describing the opportunities available in each of the park units and system-wide.
4. Complete the sign inventory project and update the system-wide park sign standards to effectively meet the need for consistent, simple signage for park visitors. Park entrance signs and other signs with the Alaska State Parks' eagle logo will be funded and installed at the entrance of all parks.
5. Help policymakers understand specific programs and gain on-the-ground perspective by being prompt and responsive to inquiries. Each year, citizen's advisory boards will offer legislative briefings for their local representatives.
6. Develop and distribute activity reports to the legislature, park supporters and other interested parties highlighting the division's accomplishments, recent park improvements, current challenges and issues, etc. The reports would include highlights of a few park areas in each issue and describe current challenges, opportunities, and key features of the park unit.
7. Identify, cosponsor and participate in high profile community events annually to promote Alaska's state park areas, healthy living, family-oriented recreation, cultural resource stewardship, outdoor safety, and outdoor recreation opportunities.
8. For those events taking place in units of the state park system that are consistent with the division's mission and vision, require that the division be listed as a co-sponsor as a condition for permitting the event.
9. Initiate an "I support Alaska State Parks" campaign by distributing free stickers with this phrase along with annual parking passes.

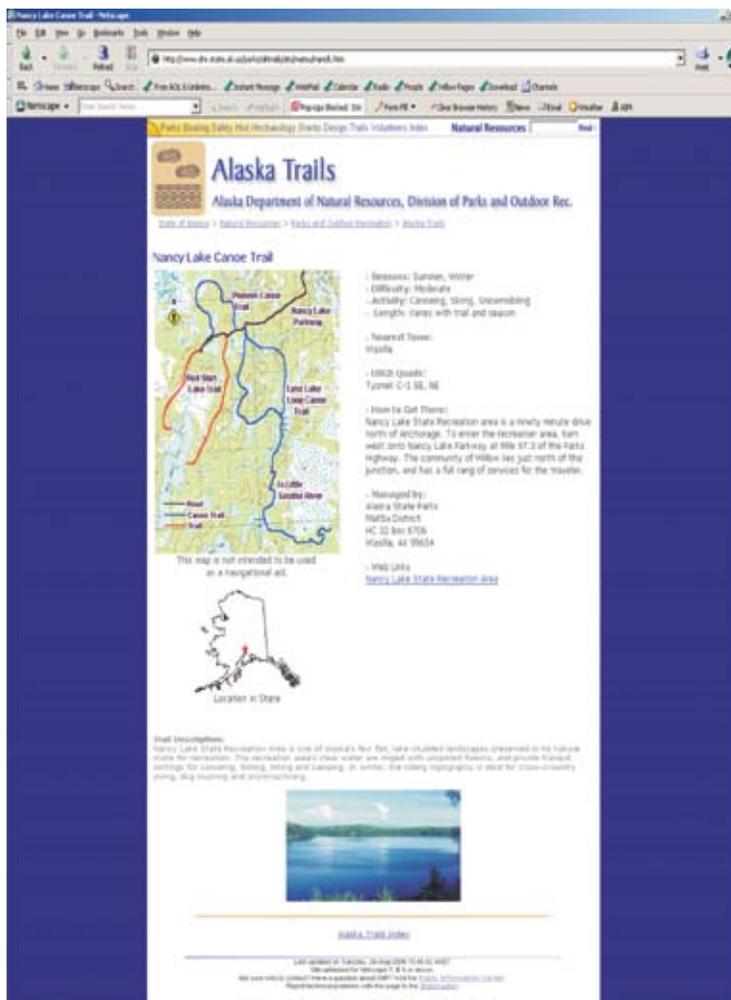


Objective II.

Create connections to the outdoors, Alaska's history and opportunities for discovery that will inspire existing and potential park visitors to experience Alaska State Parks.

Action Strategies:

1. By 2009, create an interactive trails web site accessible to the general public, user groups and all government entities. The web site would have a statewide inventory map of all maintained trails in the state park system, general trail information, and information on trail planning, management and monitoring. The web site would provide a way that trail users and division staff could post updated information about trail conditions, scheduled events, work parties and other information for the benefit of users and managers. As part of this effort, explore providing wireless internet options at park areas.
2. By 2009, produce and/or update trail brochures for each park unit showing trails within and connecting to the units. In some areas, produce brochures in conjunction with other agencies that include descriptions and maps of trails in the vicinity of the park unit. Such brochures should be offered for free or for a nominal fee.
3. In addition to the existing visitor centers, develop new centers in parks with high visitation such as Denali State Park, Kachemak Bay State Park, Chugach State Park and the Chena River State Recreation Area.
4. Develop and conduct an ongoing marketing campaign that targets infrequent state park users and promotes the wide range of activities and health benefits available in state parks.
5. To attract first-time users, encourage the larger state park units and division program areas to host at least one public event annually.

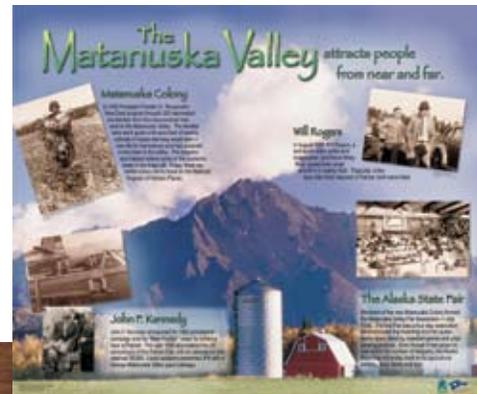


Objective III.

Increase public awareness of the value and importance of Alaska's natural, archaeological and historic resources and promote the health benefits of recreation.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop and implement by 2010 a statewide, five-year Interpretation and Environmental Education plan to identify interpretive and educational opportunities and techniques. The program should provide organized educational programs, interpretative facilities and materials. Start with a pilot program in three park areas and after an evaluation, implement the program in the remaining areas.
2. Identify and use public events such as Alaska Archaeology Week/Month, Historic Preservation Week, 50 year statehood anniversary, and Earth Day to increase the visibility of our environmental and cultural resources. Seek opportunities for celebrations, ribbon cutting and ground breaking ceremonies, to either commemorate important events, or to give thanks to those who participated in making projects happen.
3. Encourage interpretation of archaeological, historic and natural features to educate the public by supporting the development of elementary, secondary and post-secondary programs about Alaska's environmental, archaeological and historic resources. As part of this effort, encourage and continue to provide opportunities to school, educational and youth groups to use the state park system for educational purposes and provide interpretative programs for hotels, tour boats etc. as appropriate.
4. Encourage accuracy of information about state park units, local historic places and archaeological sites.
5. Commemorate important themes, periods, and people in Alaska's history by designating state and National Heritage Areas (similar to the proposed designation for the Kenai Mountains).
6. Improve and standardize management of interpretive and educational materials and programs to ensure quality programs and materials are developed and delivered to the public.



Objective IV.

Serve as a resource for technical expertise on outdoor recreational and cultural projects and programs.

Action Strategies:

1. Make available technical information and assistance on caring for historic and archaeological properties.
2. Promote the division's technical expertise and oversight on recreation-related facility design, engineering, construction, management, and design of outdoor safety and education programs.
3. Become a statewide resource for all types of trail design and use. As part of this effort, build a strong comprehensive trails section within the division by 2009 to provide technical expertise that will help the division become a model agency for sustainable trail management.



Educational programs, Independence Mine, Hatcher Pass



Boating Safety staff with school group

Objective V.

Encourage safe, courteous and environmentally and culturally aware outdoor recreation behaviors throughout Alaska.

Action Strategies:

1. Continue to promote the safety of persons and property connected with the use, operation, and equipping of non-commercial boats by increasing public awareness of boating risks and improving boater behaviors to reduce the incidence of boating deaths, injuries and property damage, and to maximize public enjoyment of the waterways through the Boating Safety Program.
2. Develop outdoor recreation education and interpretive programs, modeled after the Alaska Boating Safety Program to address other outdoor activities with a high incidence of injuries/ fatalities such as backcountry skiing, snowboarding, ATV riding and snowmachining. This program would begin by compiling available research and conducting studies to measure areas of high risk, and then designing and delivering programs that increase public awareness and encourage behaviors to reduce risks. The program would also provide information on how to maximize personal enjoyment of outdoor activities, while maintaining the quality of Alaska's outdoor recreation resources.
3. Encourage protection of historic and archaeological resources by distributing information about disturbing and damaging sites, collecting, transporting, selling, trading, and purchasing artifacts.
4. Utilize interpretive and education management techniques to avoid regulatory and enforcement techniques when possible.

