

Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ORTAB)

MINUTES

FEBRUARY 15 & 16, 2022

8:00 AM– 4:00 PM

TELE & VIDEO CONFERENCE

MEETING CALLED BY	Department of Natural Resources: Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation (DPOR)
TYPE OF MEETING	Grant Applications for Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Recreational Trails Program (RTP) Funding Recommendations and Rankings
FACILITATOR	Joel Del Rosario, Administrative Operations Manager
NOTE TAKER	Jean Ayers, DPOR Grants Administrator
TIMEKEEPER	all
ATTENDEES	ORTAB members 7 of 8 immediately present: Mike Sirofchuck, Ron Lurk, Bryant Wright, Christy Gentemann, Libby Kugel, Lang Van Dommelen, and Sally Anderson. Jeff Budd joined by 8:45 AM. Staff Present: Ricky Gease, Director; Joel Del Rosario, Admin Ops Manager; Rys Miranda, Chief, Design & Construction section; Jean Ayers, Grants Administrator

8:00 AM. Meeting was called to order by the Chair, Mike Sirofchuck. Roll call was taken and a quorum established with ORTAB members representing motorized, non-motorized and diversified user groups. Staff, ORTAB members, and members of the public introduced themselves over the phone and MS Teams connections. Director Gease welcomed attendees. He also noted one RTP application had been inadvertently omitted from the ORTAB packets. DPOR would disperse it this afternoon, ORTAB members would read it tonight and be ready to discuss it tomorrow with the other applications.

ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Motion to Approve/Amend Agenda	Motion: Libby Gentemann
Motion approved unanimously.	Second: Sally Anderson

Agenda topic: LWCF Applications (8 State, 0 Local Sponsors)

DISCUSSION	<p>Rys Miranda provided a synopsis of the 8 LWCF applications.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anchor River SRA Sanitation Improvements. DPOR Kenai Region. Project would install 6 new CXT concrete double vaulted toilets and demolish the 6 existing deteriorated units. The project will also address ancillary site work associated with the new toilets, new barrier rocks as required for access management, and installing facility/site signage. Request: \$350,000. Chena Pump SRS Facility Improvements. DPOR Northern Region. Project would pave approximately 70,000 square feet of circulation roads and parking areas; stripe finished pavement; replace and update site signage; improve drainage; construct 1 orientation kiosk; replace 2 picnic shelters. Request: \$475,000. Upper Huffman Trailhead. DPOR Chugach Region. Project consists of paving approximately 50,000 square feet of existing roadway, parking, and connector trails; striping the finished pavement; replacing site signage. Request: \$219,000. Denali State Park: K'esugi Ken Campground Water System. DPOR Mat-Su Region. Construct 2-total well-house structures, mechanical pump assemblies and components, and hose-bib/water spigot fixtures for water distribution/collection at 2-total existing on-site well locations. One at Walk-in Campground Loop, the other at the RV Campground Loop. Installation and extension of existing electrical utilities is also required to properly power proposed mechanical systems. Install site signage and various site amenities. Request: \$125,000. Funter Bay State Marine Park Facility Improvement Plan. DPOR SE Region. Create development plan with interpretive and concept site plans; conduct a historical and cultural survey of the project area; create site survey with boundary, topographic, and as-built data for areas with potential for development. Request: \$100,000. Kasilof River SRS Parking Improvements. DPOR Kenai Region. Project consists of paving approximately 85,000 square feet of existing roadway, parking, and connector trails; striping the finished pavement; replacing site signage. Request: \$300,000. Nancy Lake SRA: South Rolly Campground Facility Improvements. DPOR Mat-Su Region This project would refurbish approximately 70 campsites and replace site signage. Request: \$350,000.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McHugh Creek Sanitation Improvements. DPOR Chugach Region. Project consists of installing 3 new CXT Single Concrete Vaulted Toilets to replace 3 dilapidated vault toilet structures; install new barrier rocks as required for access management; install facility/site signage as required.
COMMENTS & CONCERNS	<p>ORTAB members noted that many of these sites are older and heavily used, even more so during the pandemic. Sites needed improvements and were well worth funding. Members noted that parking, water, and sanitation facilities are basic and welcome needs in public parks statewide. Concerns included getting a sense of how many people these projects affect and getting “bang for the buck.” ORTAB also expressed the need for Funter Bay planning to ensure responsible development, such as separating hunting activities from sensitive cultural sites like the cemetery, and to recognize and protect the cultural and national historic significance of the WWII internment site.</p>
ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Director Gease stated that ORTAB would not need to rank the LWCF applications. Both NPS and DPOR were staffing up after pandemic slow-downs and disruptions. LWCF annual apportionments were expected to increase, and DPOR was just queuing up projects with that in mind.	Motion: N/A

Agenda topic: Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

DISCUSSION	<p>Director Gease stated that the National Park Service (NPS) requires States to update a SCORP every 5 years to remain eligible for LWCF grant assistance. For the 2023-2027 SCORP, DPOR is partnering with the Recreational Trails and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program through NPS, and with Alaska Trails to set up a statewide advisory board and regional advisory groups. They include federal, state and local agencies: BLM, US Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Health and Social Services, DOT, and funders, such as Rasmuson Foundation, Denali Commission, AIDEA, and Native organizations such as the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium. The new SCORP will function as an investment document to encourage people to invest in the outdoor recreation sector in Alaska. Gease stated that in Alaska, the recreation sector is larger, in terms of budget, than mining--an important and growing factor in the State's economy. So, the SCORP will focus on economic benefits, work force development, the types of and demand for outdoor recreation. To determine a baseline on numbers of people visiting parks or trails, DPOR's contractor is gathering GPS data on cell phones. Contractors will analyze the cell phone data from 5 regions (Kenai, Anchorage, Mat-Su, Denali, and Fairbanks) and match it with GIS mapping of those State Park units along the road corridor. In a few years, with more time and funding, more parts of Alaska would be studied. The SCORP will also cover supply and management, where the State embeds our stewardship and conservation principles. DPOR is conducting an inventory of outdoor rec infrastructure such as parking areas, toilets, picnic shelters, and trails and assessing the condition of each. Finally, the SCORP will examine the public health and wellness benefits of outdoor recreation, not just as a remedy to illness or injury, but in a proactive manner.</p> <p>Answering ORTAB's questions, Gease stated that DPOR plans to deliver the SCORP to NPS by December 2022, and the database may be available for public viewing or queries after development. In the future, DPOR would like to include or encourage other land managers (cities, tribes, etc) to conduct or share similar GIS data on outdoor recreation.</p>
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Agenda topic: 11:00 AM Time Certain: Public Comments

COMMENTS	<p>ORTAB Chair Sirofchuck opened the public comment period at 11:00 AM. He stated that everyone would have the opportunity to speak, and the recorder would like people to say and spell their name prior to commenting. Each person would have about 3 minutes to speak, and any grant applicants on the line would also have an opportunity to give a brief, one-minute summary of their project to ORTAB as their project came up on the agenda later. Many applicants on the line stated they would wait until their project came up on the agenda to speak.</p> <p>Steve Cleary with Alaska Trails stated that he did not have an application in this round. However, he had sent a letter to ORTAB and DPOR offering improvements to the application process. He was concerned that State Parks and Federal Highways had new staff, and grants were approved too late in the year for local agencies to conduct the planned work in accord with their timelines. He stated that the application process seemed opaque or murky, and applicants were often unsure of where they were in the process. He was concerned that apps were further delayed when questions arose later about environmental reviews. He suggested DPOR create a flowchart or other method to help applicants understand the process better, as RTP is a vital funding source for Alaska projects.</p> <p>Michele Stevens asked whether the Alaska Snowmachine Alliance application had been received since she didn't see it on the agenda. She explained that 15 clubs came together and coordinated for 3 months to ensure permitting and other issues were addressed. Director Gease explained that DPOR had lost several long-time staff and this application was inadvertently omitted earlier. He stated DPOR was scanning it now to email to ORTAB members before the meeting concluded today. Chair Sirofchuck assured Ms. Stevens that ORTAB members would make time tonight to read the proposal and discuss it tomorrow with the other RTP Motorized applications.</p> <p>Sylvia Shelton with Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers stated she was listening in, as she wanted to learn more about the program, and may be interested in becoming a board member in the future. Shelton added later that she supports Stevens' efforts, and encourages ORTAB to fully consider the Alaska Snowmachine Alliance application.</p> <p>Doug Inglis stated he's listening in to learn more about the board processes and grant availability, especially the Safety and Education grants. His organization, Snowmads, runs a snowmachine safety course with 2 or 3 local elementary schools.</p>
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	Michele Stevens also spoke about the Snowcat House grant application. She stated it was for an important multi-purpose building for the Petersville community. Not only would it house the snowcats, but it would provide an area for EMS to transfer patients and an area to conduct public education activities, as well.
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Agenda topic: 5 RTP Safety & Education Applications (3 State, 2 Local Sponsors)

DISCUSSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASP Brochure & Trailhead: Indigenous Messaging. DPOR. Update brochures and trailhead signage in Kodiak and Juneau areas to educate the public about indigenous people of the area, incorporate a welcome message and land acknowledgement. Request: \$43,813.43. <i>(Ranked 4: Score 83.25)</i> • SE Region Orientation and Safety. DPOR SE Region. Create new orientation panels and bulletin boards informationals at 5 sites in Haines, Sitka, and Juneau, Request: \$57,890. <i>(Ranked 1: Score 86.38)</i> • Trail Maintenance Training. DPOR Kenai Region. Develop and implement trail maintenance trainings for the Homer community. Present trainings via an online meeting platform and/or in person and include a "hands on" field portion to apply the skills learned. Classroom portion will be recorded and posted online for future use. Apply knowledge learned in Kachemak Bay State Park. Request: \$23,862. <i>(Ranked 5: Score 80.75)</i> • Video Trail Guide to Chugach State Park. Anchorage Park Foundation. Create a video trail guide (VTG) to provide education, safety tips and navigation to help new and diverse users discover Chugach State Park (CSP) in the Anchorage area. Feature safety, trail etiquette and details about Anchorage multi-use trails and trailheads with a few "curated experiences" for people to try, including Mountains to the Sea—linking Chugach State Park to Far North Bicentennial Park and the Moose Loop trail. Request: \$14,409.18. <i>(Ranked 3: 83.50)</i> • Shoup Bay Trail: Field Guide. Valdez Adventure Alliance. Create a "field guide" of flora and fauna that can be found along Shoup Bay Trail. Special focus will be given to traditional Native uses. The guide will be made available online and several laminated copies provided at the trailhead each season for locals and tourists. Request: \$21,219.70. <i>(Ranked 2: Score 86.25)</i>
COMMENTS & CONCERNS	Director Gease noted that DPOR had far more in requests for assistance than known available funding. (\$137,570.93 in requests vs \$50-70,000 available for Safety & Ed.) ORTAB's ranking of these RTP projects was beneficial. DPOR would ascertain the actual amount available after meeting with FHWA and prioritize to best fit available funding and other necessary considerations. (See above for ORTAB ranking and average scores.)

Agenda topic: 2:00 PM Public Comments

COMMENTS	<p>Harry Holt with Lake Louise Snowmachine Club stated that they submitted 2 applications, one for Cindy & Crosswinds West Trail that was a repeat from last year but now had clarified last year's questions on easements. The other was for a much-needed new groomer. Holt was concerned about Buy America provisions and whether waivers were available so they could purchase the type of equipment that could actually perform the needed job, even though some components of that brand were not made in America. Mr. Holt also stated full support for the Snow Machine Alliance application.</p> <p>Sylvia Shelton with Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers stated she hoped their grant writer Jeff Leete would make it in later to speak about their application for grooming equipment. Shelton added again that she supports Stevens' efforts on the Alaska Snowmachine Alliance application.</p> <p>Responding to Holt's concern, Director Gease said the Buy America issue was something Congress needed to address, as the federal requirement to buy only American-made steel products affected many sectors, not just RTP and DPOR. Forestry workers needed to buy reliable chain saws for fighting fires, boating safety needed personal floatation devices, etc. Letters to the Congressional delegation probably wouldn't help during this grant round, but making the delegation and FHWA aware of the problem for future action may help.</p> <p>Jeff Leete announced that he was now online and available, as needed.</p>
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Agenda topic: 12 RTP Motorized Applications (3 State, 9 Local Sponsors)

DISCUSSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird Valley Trail Improvements. DPOR Chugach Region. Restore the ATV and snowmobile trail located in Bird, Alaska, to its design specifications. Existing trail infrastructure and signage will be updated, and equipment purchased for clearing brush and grooming. Request: \$201,865.50. <i>(Ranked 7: Score 81.13) P</i> • Peters Creek Valley Trail Improvements. DPOR Chugach Region. Restore the Peters Creek Valley Trail, a popular snowmobile trail, to its design specifications outlined in the Chugach State Park Management Plan. Update existing trail infrastructure and signage, and purchase equipment for clearing brush and grooming. Request: \$187,711.20. <i>(Ranked 9: Score 77.13) P</i> • East Cook Inlet ATV Use, Phase 1. DPOR Interpretation & Ed. Improve and expand dune fencing, wood slat fencing, and log barriers to improve ATV beach access lanes and lessen impact of ATV use on habitat at Deep Creek SRA. Beach posts with emergency locator information and other signage will be added to primary beach
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access areas. Update existing bulletin boards and one orientation kiosk to address conservation concerns. Create a small brochure to address ATV safety, regulations, and local impacts. Request: \$203,583. (Ranked 3: Score 89.00) C

- **CHS Boardwalk Trail/Caribou Lake Trail Rehab. Snowmads, Inc.** Rehabilitate severely degraded Caribou Lake Trail, known locally as the Boardwalk Trail. Addresses Trail Segment 1 (upland soils) or the first 1.9 miles of trail. Clear & clean-up a 24' wide corridor, install geotextile and import 8" of sized road topping for an 8' wide trail bed, and taper to a 6' wide finished trail tread. \$193,678. (Ranked 5: Score 85.25) C
- **Grooming Drags Purchase. Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers.** Purchase 2 new Arrowhead Ultra 11' x 20' grooming drags. New, lighter drags will decrease fuel consumption (lower operating costs, emissions), and help prolong the life of CHCH Piston Bully groomers by being less strain on that equipment. Request: \$72,244.48. (Ranked 1: Score 91.88) C
- **Cindy & Crosswinds West Trail Improvements. Lake Louise Snowmachine Club, LLC.** Improve winter trail accessibility and safety by clearing encroaching brush, placing signage on, and regularly grooming the Cindy Trail from the Crosswinds West to the Crosswinds East Trail, and approximately 10 miles of the Crosswind West Trail, north from the junction of the Cindy Trail to the junction of the Big Bay Trail. Request: \$58,322. (Ranked 6: Score 84.88) P
- **Lake Louise & Copper River Area Winter Trail Groomer. Lake Louise Snowmachine Club, LLC.** Purchase a new winter trail groomer. Request: \$270,000. (Ranked 8: Score 77.75) C

Feb 15, 2022. 3:58 PM: Adjourn for the Day.

Feb 16, 2022. 8:01 AM: Reconvene. Jean Ayers took roll call. Quorum was established with all ORTAB members present. Chair Sirofchuck began by thanking the Board and staff for yesterday's productive meeting. He added that ORTAB would resume discussion where we left off on the Motorized grant applications. Similar to yesterday, ORTAB would prefer to discuss applications in order of appearance on the agenda and give applicants an opportunity to provide a brief summary of their proposal. If an applicant was not present on line, ORTAB may move on to the next proposal, so that people who were available could speak to their projects, then return later to the other ones.

- **Denali Highway Trail Groomer. Denali Hwy Trail Club.** Purchase a Tucker Snowcat to groom trail on the 135-mile Denali Highway for snowmachine, cross-country skiers, bikers and other users. Request: 194,775. (Ranked 2: Score 67.38) C
- **Haley Creek Trail Terminus Rehab. Ahtna, Inc.** Address sanitation, parking, erosion control, protections for stream bank and historic properties, safety and maneuvering issues at Haley Creek in the Chitna area. Install new sanitation facilities and decommission old outhouse; install stream bank habitat protection boardwalks and signage; create a safe turn-around point and parking area at Haley Creek trail end; create a plan for phase 2 to install erosion control measures to protect infrastructure and the historic Haley Creek Trestle, as well as plan for additional camping and day use areas. Request: \$299,999. (Ranked 2: Score 91.00) C
- **Snowcat House. Petersville Comm Non-Profit Corp.** Build a 40'x 40' maintenance facility for 2 Piston Bully Snowcats to perform maintenance on them in winter and keep one inside, warm and emergency ready for Petersville Search and Rescue. Provide a place for storing delineators for marking trails for safety, EMS supplies and other items needed for the trails. Base facility at mile 9.5 Petersville Road. Request: \$300,000. (Ranked 11: Score 68.25) C
- **South Denali Winter Use Trails. Curry Ridge Riders.** Acquire 1 Universal Truck Co "Ultimate Junior Groomer" MODEL GD-J-100) and 7 Bison brand track repair belts for motorized snow vehicles (aka "snowcats") to pull grooming drag for maintaining South Denali winter-use trails. Request: \$47,749.50. (Ranked 4: Score 88.00) C
- **Operations Grooming. Alaska Snowmachine Alliance.** Provide funds for grooming to each of the snowmachine clubs that have applied for the SnowTRAC program. These funds will be disbursed in a similar manor as the SnowTRAC program. Organize an advisory board, set standards for equipment used for grooming and length of trails groomed. Make recommendations to ASA Board and distribute funds amongst Non-Profits and Clubs that regularly groom. Request: \$203,583. (Ranked 10: Score 71.50) O

Each applicant spoke briefly about their proposal as it came up on the agenda. Chair Sirofchuck reminded all that ORTAB members could ask direct questions of applicants during board discussion, as needed, for clarification.

Throughout the discussion, ORTAB members questioned or commented on the following issues:

1. DPOR needs to clarify who/what is deemed "a representative of the local governing body" signaling support for an application: Mayor? Borough/City manager? Assembly resolution? Citizens Advisory Board?
2. Buy America requirements may void some applications. Could FHWA issue waivers?
3. What overlaps are there with Alliance and other applications being reviewed?
4. Future apps should require applicants to include a bank letter of credit assuring "upfront funding" if needed.
5. Photos of conditions, clear maps very helpful.
6. Posting on social media (FB group) alone isn't sufficient public notice. Need broad-based public postings.
7. Are indirect costs allowed, as shown in the Ahtna and Cindy apps?

COMMENTS & CONCERNS

	<p>8. Is grooming eligible? It may differ depending on regular, routine grooming versus clearing/brushing/grooming as a one-time action when part of constructing a new trail or realigning or upgrading a trail.</p> <p>9. Operational funding requests versus capital requests. Director Gease asked ORTAB to categorize the RTP Motorized requests by capital, operational, or partial. (See above for “C” “O” or “P” categories.)</p>
ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Motion to certify action: recommend rankings from ORTAB.	Motion: Libby Kugel
Motion approved unanimously.	Second: Jeff Budd

Agenda topics: Miscellany

DISCUSSION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open ORTAB Seat. DPOR would like to recruit for an open seat representing motorized users. Also, Mike Sirofchuck is in his 3rd term. Mike expressed interest in re-applying, if he were allowed to do so. His current seat represents non-motorized users. DPOR will check ORTAB by-laws on term limits, waivers, and re-applying in different capacities. • Timeframes for Application Submittal, ORTAB Review and Meeting. Optimal timeframe: DPOR holds open grant application period September 15—November 15. Applicants have 60 days to compile application, including posting their 30-day public notices within that timeframe. DPOR staff review apps Nov 15—Dec 15, then transmit to ORTAB. ORTAB members review apps through Jan 15 and before end of Jan. Next meeting set for January 17 & 18, 2023. • Training on Applications. Former DPOR staff had conducted helpful call-in training sessions for potential RTP and LWCF applicants. Tara had also created a 4-hour Youtube on applying for RTP, which helped applicants learn about complex Buy America requirements or Environmental Compliance Reviews. A table of contents for the Youtube would benefit folks who wanted to view a particular topic of the 4-hour session. • Make RTP Application & Review More User-Friendly. Checklist helps. Match up score sheet and grant app for consistency. Make “Buy America” Pass/Fail on the score sheet, rather than a point score. Ensure staff have time to preview, screen out problems, and notify applicants of missing pieces prior to sending to ORTAB. • Meeting: In-person vs Tele. Members stated that they miss the in-person contact, but acknowledged that teleconference/MSTeams/Zoom saved money and may be more efficient. Director Gease offered that, depending on funding, the group might meet in-person every other year, or, meet in conjunction with a larger gathering such as conferences held by Alaska Trails, or the Alaska Outdoor Alliance Confluence. ORTAB appreciated these ideas, citing benefits and synergy of being part of a larger group, as well.
ACTION ITEMS	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
Motion to adjourn at 11:34 am.	Motion: Jeff Budd
Motion approved unanimously.	Second: Libby Kugel