

Seward State Parks Citizen Advisory board
Minutes
Wednesday, September 15, 2021 5:30 – 7:00 pm
Telephonic

I. Call to Order

- A. Call to order by Chair Griswold: 5:35 pm
- B. Minutes taker: Tess Tulley
- C. Roll Call: Paul Paquette, Nick Jordan, Carol Griswold, Tess Tulley, Mark Luttrell
- D. Absent: Bob Barnwell, Cliff Reid, Kat Sorensen
- E. State Park Staff: District Ranger Jack Ransom, Park Specialist Mike Burmeister
- F. Public Present: Mica Van Buskirk
- G. Minute Approval: April 28, 2021 minutes were previously approved by email
- H. Agenda Changes and Approval: None. Unanimous approval

II. Public Comment: Mica Van Buskirk submitted her application to join the Board. She is an avid user of the park and president of the Lowell Point Community Council. Jack noted that he will forward her application to the director for approval. Carol asked if the Council was aware that the road is blocked just past the tsunami evacuation sign on the north end of Border Drive by the railcar. The road is private so Nick, a member of the Lowell Point Fire Department, will remove and store the sign.

III. Board Contact and Correspondence with Public: Nick said he was asked by park users if the creek through the Tonsina Trail (before the top of switchbacks) was going to get fixed. He told them there were plans to fix it. Paul heard lots of positive feedback from his guests.

IV. Reports:

A. Staff (Jack): It was a good summer where the park staff went above and beyond to get a lot of field work finished. They had some mechanical issues with the main state park vessel early in the season but were able to use the smaller skiff. The team cleared a lot of trees that were downed by heavy snow and wind along the trails at CHSRA to keep them safe and clear. Mike replaced some rotten beams at the Thumb Cove public-use cabin to protect park assets and visitors.

ACC hire Eric accomplished many maintenance issues including latrine rot, LPSRS signs and sign posts, drainage and trail improvements on the trail between the upper and lower parking lots, and assisted with interpretation signage installation at the Fort.

Jack appreciated the help of Karl Van Buskirk and a lot of Boy Scouts, and logistical and maintenance support from Karl with his company, Storm Chasers.

Tonsina North Fork Bridge continues to be threatened by bank erosion. Mike wrote a \$250K Recreational Trails Program grant proposal for repairs including bank armament and extension of bridge about 60' south on pilings to accommodate future, inevitable erosion at the site. Engineers plan to visit soon to design the project. The Park received \$350K last week!

Mike and Eric brushed entire Alpine Trail. After many delays, Mike secured a \$45K RTP grant funding trail crew and helicopter support to improve the trail next summer.

The Fort McGilvray 2018 KMTA grant was delayed due to COVID. Jack and Mike plan to out to the Fort tomorrow to close out the rest of the projects. This will include signage installation and a new kiosk at the South Beach trail junction. Jack hopes to share photos with the Board.

A team of six historians from the archaeology department just left after surveying Caines Head and Rocky Point for the National Historic Register nomination. They survived some pretty nasty weather, and camped at the Ranger station and in tents. Jack shared photos, historic documents and a survey to help with the process, and gave them a tour. Hopefully we will see a report and application completed this winter. H&A feels optimistic that it will be nominated.

Use/visitation at the park this summer was up several thousand this year from last year! Many of the visitors were from Anchorage. Last year most visitors were Alaskans, but this year included a lot from out-of-state.

There was a handful of medical calls. The bearproof trash can was placed closer to the beach at LPSRS. Carol noted that the LPSRS bear can was hard to open and people seemed to struggling with it. Jack said he would check it out.

Mica reported that she hiked to the waterfall two weeks ago and it didn't look like any active mining was taking place. She didn't see any gas cans. There is a cautionary bear sign at the trail head and was curious how long it has been up. Jack said he would take it down because its been up for a while. Carol suggested that bear signs include dates in the future so people have a better idea of when a bear was spotted.

V. Community Reports

A. Tonsina Gold Mining: The new DMLW permit was issued in June. Jack hasn't seen Mr. Luck around for about a month. There was a new tent and the ATV parked at the beach all summer, not hidden in the woods as hoped. He noted the usual litter there. He also noted there are two snow machines still in the woods from the previous miner and would try to help move them and other stuff out. Carol asked if his permit allowed him to be there year-round? Jack said he does go there in winter. Access cannot be restricted. Mark suggested we talk with him and get an idea of what his plans are for the fall/winter. Jack agreed and said he would be happy to touch base with him. Carol wanted to know if his permit expires; Jack said it may be annual but was not sure. Carol also noted the inclusion of the Tonsina watershed into the Park is a CAB goal.

B. Local Issues

1. Parking continues to be a major issue with a lot of vehicles parking on Pinnacle Road and along the upper parking lot access, blocking access. Mica noted that the community is very anxious to fix the parking issue. Once this summer a fire truck and ambulance couldn't get through to respond to a medical emergency due to illegally parked cars.

The LP Community Council has sent various letters to the borough, and called the borough and troopers all summer. The Council was told there is a lack of manpower. Mark was curious if the LP Council had come up with any solutions? She said the Council tried using a shuttle but it didn't work. No one is willing to sell land.

Mica thought the area east of the lower parking lot in the EVOS conservation area might still be eligible for parking lot expansion as a safety issue. Carol was curious how many park spaces it would add. Mica wasn't sure.

Mica asked about the park land on the south side of Border Avenue. Jack agreed that the area might work, however there is a well on it. Other than being on top of well water Jack wasn't sure what other permitting would be needed. It, like the LP Fire Hall is too far.

Vehicles are also parking illegally on the recently cleared electric utility easement along Pinnacle. Might the borough permit that be improved with pit run and used for parking?

Jack noted there are 25 curb bumpers in the upper parking lot and 21 vehicles can squeeze into the poorly designed lower parking lot. More signs could be installed. Community support and collaboration are needed to make real change.

Mark noted this has been an issue for the Board for the past seven years. He suggested that we come up with a couple options for parking to be shared at the next meeting. We could then discuss and move forward with one and seek community support. Jack agreed.

Carol would like the Board to make parking a primary goal. Mark said maybe not primary but definitely start collecting all the information we can. Nick supports goal.

Jack will get CAB maps of the EVOS agreement, easement and legal documents for Board to look at.

2. Illegal beach vehicles: Nick said he witnessed a few cars, dirt bikes, and motorcycles on the beach this summer. Jack didn't hear anything about that and it doesn't sound like anyone was ticketed. Paul encountered some rude people on four dirt bikes that came speeding down Lowell Point Road, straight through the lower parking lot and rode around the beach before returning to town. Carol witnessed the tracks all over the beach. Nick suggested re-establishing the rocks at the boat launch annually by lifting them up and closing the gaps to help keep most vehicles out. Some people just don't care and can't be stopped.

3. Tsunami alert: Nick noted that during the late evening July 28 tsunami warning the state park saw a lot of action; the upper lot was jam-packed, a few 100 vehicles parked along his driveway, and at the fire station which opened up. Fortunately, the tsunami did not arrive, but it served as a good practice and caution to keep the upper parking access and lot clear year-round.

VI. Old Business:

1. Fish & Game "No salmon fishing" signs for North Fork Tonsina Creek have not been posted.

VII. New Business:

1. 21-22 Direction: Parking will be an important topic. Ran out of time for further discussion.

VIII. Public Comments: Mica noted the Boy Scouts appreciated visiting the Fort and the brochure that explains the history.

IX. Board Comments:

Nick said that he is really excited about the bridge appropriation and Alpine Trail funding. He wondered about a trail connection to Bear Glacier and Lagoon, a trip noted on FB Seward Trails. He would like to see installation of more tent platforms to protect beach habitat; Fox Spit is very popular.

Mark and Ann hiked to the Fort and were really impressed with the trail.

Paul mentioned he joined us from the beach where it will be quiet for the next 8 months. He was appreciative of the trail maintenance; the park looks a lot sharper this year, with evidence of a lot of work on the trails, brushed parking lots, and maintenance of latrines. Visitors tend to visit Tonsina their first day, and Exit Glacier the second. He saw a lot of use. Parking along the road remains an issue. While he supports more off-street parking, he wants to keep it as natural as possible.

Tess noted that Exit Glacier had the most visitors ever this summer. She thanked the staff for their hard work.

- X. **Adjournment:** Paul motion to adjourn, Nick second. Unanimous at 7:10. The next meeting will be October 20, 2021 from 5:30 to 7:00 pm, telephonic.