

CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION

Priorities for Trails and Access

Setting priorities for trails and access in Chugach State Park is necessary to properly allocate state funds which are always far less than the amount that is needed to meet even a fraction of the projects listed below. The priorities fall into three groupings with Priority No. 1 projects being the most important. This does not mean that the schedule must be slavishly adhered to, especially regarding projects for volunteer organizations: volunteers frequently have greater capability and interest to undertake Priority No. 2 projects, which should be made available to them when they are ready to work.

The highest priorities are the threat of irretrievable loss and public safety. The threat of irretrievable loss may be the acquisition of a park inholding which if not acquired, might be developed residentially resulting in the blockage of thousands of acres of park land for public use; or it may be the potential loss of alpine vegetation due to trampling damage that might require 50 years to regrow. The threat to public safety may be a needed cable at the ford of a rushing river or guardrails at a popular overlook.

Priority No. 1: Threat of Irretrievable Loss

- A. Loss of natural features (vegetation, soils, wildlife) from destructive use: Consolidation of numerous trail routes leading to a common feature may be the best solution, or hardening of an existing trail.
- B. Loss of human life and threats to public safety from hazardous conditions. Trails which would contribute to this problem should be eliminated, rerouted or repaired to a safe standard. In some cases, an entirely new trail or no trail would be the best solution.
- C. Loss of vital parkland due to development of an inholding (private property). To prevent a vital access corridor from being lost; to prevent blockage of an entire drainage; to prevent loss of scenic qualities, wildlife, air and water quality, it may be necessary to purchase a parcel or acquire development rights on it, or trade for other state land elsewhere.

Priority No. 2: Sustaining Level

- A. Repair and rebuild existing trails; defense of the existing system, adequate maintenance, and improving the present trail network with brushing, tread improvement, and better signing.
- B. Build new trails from an existing trailhead that has excellent design and capacity but little use. A good trail system can provide a little used trailhead with a reason to exist, and reduce pressure at nearby overused trailheads.
- C. Build linkages into the existing trail system to form loop trails and a more useful, flexible system by constructing short, new sections of trail between existing trails.

Priority No. 3: Increasing Recreational Opportunities

- A. Interpretive nature trails which provide visitors with a better understanding and appreciation of park resources and protection.
- B. New trails into backcountry areas of the park which may include new destinations and low standard trails and routes within the wilderness zone of the park.
- C. Trail-related structures which provide visitors with overnight shelter and comfort facilities.

It is quite likely that the existing trails in the park are not being adequately managed and maintained. There are several reasons for this. First, there is no funding to maintain trails at the present time, and, secondly, the present level of staffing is barely adequate to maintain facilities for which maintenance monies are available. Before any new trails and trailheads are developed, the existing trails must be upgraded and maintained. A staffing increase or a shift in emphasis with present staffing would be required in most instances to rebuild and maintain existing trails and those that are proposed for future construction. These facts underscore the importance of identifying projects in Priority No. 1 and Priority No. 2 until staffing levels increase (see Trail Crews in Chapter 5, Implementation).

The Ten Top Trail Projects

THUNDERBIRD FALLS STATE TRAIL ACCESS AND REHABILITATION

Description: Acquire and pave existing parking lot, build stairway at beginning and end with viewing platform, build a single vault latrine, upgrade existing surface with 6' wide D-1 gravel, install handrails on cliff exposure areas. The existing parking lot is on private land. Needed signs will be installed.

This project is necessary to provide public safety along a dangerous cliff area, to protect the natural features from erosion, and to provide the public with their expectation of seeing the falls. At this time, it is impossible to see the falls from the end of the trail without endangering lives or getting wet. Over 100,000 visits were recorded on this trail in 1984.

GLEN ALPS REHABILITATION

Description: This project will rehabilitate severe resource damage to alpine soils and vegetation by consolidating trailheads from an established parking lot, establishing a good hardened trail to Flattop Mountain and relocating a bridge crossing over the South Fork of Campbell Creek. Also included will be the hardening of an existing trail to an Anchorage bowl overlook with treadway surfacing, handrails, benches and viewing platform. Comprehensive signing and closure of undesirable trails or areas will be made as well.

This project will conserve deteriorating land values by providing a low impact trail to Alaska's most commonly hiked mountain with scenic overlooks of Denali, Cook Inlet and Anchorage bowl. It will also rehabilitate damaged soils and vegetation lost due to indiscriminant hiking pressure in a fragile alpine environment.

EAGLE RIVER VISITOR CENTER ACCESS DEVELOPMENT

Description: Construct by-pass road around parking lot, expand and pave existing parking lot, and build two miles of new trail to access Ram Valley.

This project is necessary to protect the visitors from hazardous traffic flow through the parking lot, and to establish the visitor center as the main trailhead. Trails are needed to open public access to Ram Valley and Peters Creek (which is one of the largest single valleys in the park). This would provide an alternative to the Iditarod Trail which is currently the only maintained trail in a major valley open to the average hiker. Some trail equipment would be needed such as a ski tracksetter and a small tractor for trail maintenance.

RABBIT CREEK ACQUISITION AND ACCESS DEVELOPMENT

Description: Acquire through trade and purchase, the private lands within Sections 4 and 5 in T11N, R2W, S.M. Develop trailhead at park boundary with parking for 15 vehicles. Install bulletin board and signing.

This project is necessary to protect a fragile tundra area from increasing and deliberate damage by 4-wheel drive and 3-wheel drive vehicles. Because of its remote and difficult access, the public is afraid to confront offenders, and many cases of vandalism to parked cars and local homeowners have been reported. This area would provide an alternative to people wishing to gain access to high alpine tundra.

UPPER HUFFMAN TRAILHEAD ACCESS IMPROVEMENT

Description: This project will provide a new major winter/summer trailhead access and trail loop to the alpine zone. It will improve the existing winter snowvehicle route to the upper Campbell Creek Valley. The project will also provide a new signing plan and its implementation for trails and the trailhead as well as provide a greatly needed loading/unloading facility for snowvehicles.

This area has existing paved access maintained by DOT/PF and provides key winter/summer recreation opportunities. It receives the most visitor use of any designated snowvehicle area in the Anchorage bowl. If improved, this facility could be a major tourist destination for Anchorage visitors as well as residents for winter/summer use.

OLD JOHNSON TRAIL IMPROVEMENTS

Description: This project would provide construction of bridges and improved trails from new parking access along the Seward Highway at Potter, Rainbow and Windy Corner. Trails would be hardened the first 200 yards and handrails installed as needed. Trailhead and trail signing would be implemented.

The Old Johnson Trail along the Seward Highway at Turnagain Arm is easily accessible to residents and tourists by vehicle or tour bus. However, the trail is impassable at certain locations due to washouts of the treadway. New bridges would provide access to areas of historic significance, tremendous

scenic splendor and wildlife viewing overlooks. Relocation of portions to its historic grade would enhance its integrity.

ARCTIC VALLEY

Description: This project would establish the Arctic Valley access as a bonafide Chugach State Park Trailhead. Trailhead construction would include highway approach signing, an interpretive kiosk, a route to Rendezvous Pass and a new trail up the Ship Creek drainage. The project would provide trail maintenance on the lower four miles of the Ship Creek Valley Trail.

This project would provide legal access into Chugach State Park, whereas presently trail access is across Fort Richardson. Clearly marked and maintained trails would greatly reduce the number of lost hikers and skiers using this area each year. New trail construction would allow for trail use year-round up the Ship Creek drainage and provide hiking access into the South Fork of Eagle River.

EAGLE RIVER TRAIL ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

Description: Purchase private land from Eklutna, Inc., in order to develop a trail from the south side of Eagle River Campground to the Eagle River canoe/raft takeout point. This is necessary in order for river floaters to have a safe takeout before they encounter dangerous rapids a short distance downstream.

PETERS CREEK ACQUISITION AND TRAILHEAD DEVELOPMENT

Description: Establish three trailheads and parking areas beyond private lands up Four Mile Creek and Peters Creek. Construct the Peters Creek non-motorized trail (#116) to provide a separate corridor for non-motorized users which now shun the area (on state park land). These trails would provide access to the upper valley and loops to Thunderbird Falls and Eagle River Visitor Center. Trail #116 will require acquisition of private land on the north side of Peters Creek in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 15, T15N, R1W, S.M., to provide legal access to a well-used existing trail.

SOUTH FORK OF EAGLE RIVER ACCESS DEVELOPMENT

Description: This project is needed to provide legal and safe access into one of the main valleys of the park. A 10- to 20-car parking area and informational bulletin board with appropriate barriers will allow vehicles to have safe and legal parking off the existing subdivision road. A new trail will be needed for about two miles to connect the new trailhead with the old jeep trail in the middle of the valley. A small bridge across the stream should also be built. This trail will connect with the Arctic Valley Trail (#305).

Land Acquisition Needs

The following land acquisition needs are recommended to identify private inholdings that are blocking access into major valleys in Chugach State Park, or which are blocking the best and most logical trail route into a major valley:

1. Rabbit Creek Valley - Hillside Planning Unit, Two parcels within Sec. 5 and Sec. 4 completely straddle the valley. While road access through the parcels is presently possible, it is very steep and rocky, and not negotiable in normal road vehicles in winter and because of extensive glaciating ice. The area along the road is above timberline. The best summer-winter trail location is along Rabbit Creek itself both within and outside of the private inholdings, where mountain hemlock trees provide a pleasant park-like setting for a major trail. If these parcels are developed for residential uses, a quality creekside trail corridor would no longer be possible. Such an action would constitute an irretrievable loss of recreation opportunities in what is arguably the most beautiful alpine valley in the Hillside unit. Consequently, these inholdings should be acquired to provide for this vital addition to Chugach State Park.

The Municipality of Anchorage is planning to develop a major trailhead for the Rabbit Creek Greenbelt at the state park boundary. This would also be the best trailhead for access into the state park within Rabbit Creek Valley. This trail would continue within the municipal greenbelt to Hillside Drive. Consequently, it is very important that no boundary changes are made which would undermine this concept (within the 80 acre "projection" S $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Sec. 31). The Flattop Mountain Trail and Trailhead on Rabbit Creek Road in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 31 is also an important access within an important boundary projection that should be retained.

2. South Fork of Eagle River Valley - Eagle River Planning Unit. The private inholdings within Sec. 15 block the most logical access to this valley. Because Section 15 is above timberline, the inholding is a particularly sensitive alpine landscape. Several options to establish a trailhead in this area could be explored. First, the municipal platting authority, at our request, could designate public access through the parcel during the subdivision process to a trailhead within the park. Secondly, a public corridor several hundred feet wide could be acquired by the park to serve road access and buffer needs. Third, in the unlikely event that funds were appropriated to purchase the parcel, a trailhead could be developed within the parcel; or the parcel could be acquired through a land trade for developable state land elsewhere.
3. Thunderbird Falls - Eklutna-Peters Creek Planning Unit. The parking area which constitutes the trailhead belongs to the Eklutna Native Corporation. Acquisition of several acres of land will be needed to guarantee continue public access and to provide for future improvements or expansion of the trailhead. A management agreement or land trade between Alaska State Parks and the Native corporation may also be an option to assure continued public access to Thunderbird Falls.
4. Peters Creek Valley - Peters Creek - Eklutna Valley Planning Unit. The private inholdings within Sections 13, 18, and 19 could block or complicate access to this major valley. A road through the

private parcel presently permits access to a trailhead at the upper end of the private land. However, development of this parcel for residential uses could jeopardize the new ski trail (No. 116) or even the existing trail (No. 117) for snowmobile use. Also, a major private development of this extent could threaten park resources such as water quality and scenic values, as well as block opportunities for access up Four Mile Creek (trail No. 118).

5. **Eagle River Visitor Center Trails - Eagle River Planning Unit.** The private inholdings within Sec. 15 south of the visitor center would be a desirable acquisition (in spite of its present development) to free the area for trail development of the Mountain Meadows Trail (No. 210), and to return to public ownership an area logically part of the park. Road access to this parcel across park land is not a desirable situation.
6. **North Ridge of Blueberry Knob between Upper Huffman Road and Glen Alps Trailheads - Hillside Unit.** This 25-acre proposed acquisition abuts two of the park's exterior boundaries in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ Sec. 30. Although not an inholding per se, it projects into a gentle, wet valley of open spruce and tundra which has always been regarded by users as "park land". It is also this area which would serve as the vital link for the new snowmobile access corridor (trail No. 412). Much of the area is unsuitable for residential development because of the high water table yet it is vital as a landscape zone for this part of the park.
7. **Ram Valley Trail Access - Eagle River Planning Unit.** The private land within Section 33 north of the Eagle River Visitor Center presently blocks access between Prudhoe Bay Road and the park boundary. The municipal platting authority, at our request, could designate public access through the parcel during the subdivision process to a trailhead within the park. Another option would be to acquire several lots between the subdivision road and park boundary in an area suitable for a small trailhead. A third option would be to establish a trailhead near Eagle River Road and utilize the section line 33/4. No land acquisition would be required but the visitor would start hiking at 500 feet elevation instead of 2,000 feet elevation as in the first two options. This may not be a realistic situation for users who know of the road and want to use it. An upper elevation trailhead should be the ultimate goal.
8. **Mile High Subdivision - Eagle River Planning Unit.** The private land within section 14 has blocked legal access between the subdivision road and state park land which includes destinations to Mount Magnificent and upper Meadow Creek Valley. The municipal platting authority, at our request, could designate public access through the parcel during the subdivision process to a trailhead within the park. Other options include purchasing land or a broad trail corridor between the road and park boundary. A trailhead at the upper park boundary should be a goal in this area.
9. **Meadow Creek - Eagle River Planning Unit.** Private land is blocking access into the road accessible lower end of Meadow Creek

Valley. Land acquisition for an access corridor may be necessary to establish a small, local trailhead here for the use of local residents. The municipal platting process could provide an access corridor if further subdivision occurs here.

10. North Fork of Campbell Creek - Hillside Planning Unit. The homestead entry in the NW¼ Sec. 5 blocks trail access into one of the Hillside's most primitive valleys. The homestead entry is above timberline, on steep terrain and highly visible to the northwest. It is also in the Watershed Zone. This parcel should be traded for other state land outside of the park.
11. Eagle River Campground Canoe and Raft Takeout. This 3 to 5 acre acquisition from Eklutna, Inc., also includes six existing campsites.

This completes the list of trail-related recommended park acquisitions.

Phasing

It is generally suggested that development start at the trailhead - the access point - and work inward toward the center of the park, opening trails in the timbered and brushy areas of the park and working into the alpine areas last - unless of course a management crisis has developed there, such as at Glen Alps/Flattop Trails.

Another aspect of the phasing process that should not be overlooked is that when a new trailhead is developed, the trails that originate there should be developed concurrently and designed to emanate smoothly and logically from the trailhead. Otherwise, the trailhead loses much of its useful function. It is also important to coordinate with the municipal government to achieve important trail connections with their programmed development, and to utilize the municipal platting process to obtain needed access points through private lands undergoing subdivision along the park boundary or within inholdings. The district staff should also be prepared to utilize the efforts of volunteer trail organizations in the best way possible to achieve sequential trail development.

Trail Crews

A special trail ranger (Park Ranger II) position should be established on Chugach District to supervise and direct trail maintenance, signing and construction activities in Chugach State Park. This ranger would supervise inmate crews, volunteer trail crews, and a core park crew.

The Chugach Trail Crew would consist of four to six permanent employees whose sole job is trail maintenance, new trail construction, signing and construction/repair of trail-related structures. A target of five years of trail projects should be anticipated at this level to repair and construct trails. After this time, a review of accomplishments may allow for a reduction of this workforce.

The special trail ranger would be the resource person responsible for targeting, prioritizing, coordinating, training and providing logistical support for the trail crew. This person would also be responsible for coordinating projects parkwide for volunteer groups, park staff, and inmates. Other responsibilities would be resource inventories, documentation of resource degradation and determining use patterns and trends.

Sign Plan

A sign plan for Chugach State Park should be prepared to function on all maintained trails and access points. A sign plan is necessary to coordinate the very complex task of providing adequate information to trail users regarding destinations, distances, permitted activities (or those not permitted), potential hazards, and degree of difficulty. Special opportunities or interpretive features could also be provided. The signing scheme should be kept current with new trails as they are built and must accurately reflect park regulations in all locations. This task could be assigned to the special trail ranger. The sign plan should be prepared soon after the adoption of this plan.

Recreation Opportunity Guide

A recreation opportunity guide should also be prepared for the park. While not an essential item, this catalogue would function as an index to interested recreationists. It would feature updated information on exact trail location on a map, trail conditions, trail distances and a general description including potential hazards. This guide could be removed from a detachable binder and copied for public use. The guide could answer many questions from the general public which otherwise requires considerable office staff time.