

## **APPENDIX D: PUBLIC COMMENT**

A press release was issued September 17, 2002 announcing the Chugach Park Access Analysis. The public was invited to provide information and comments on access needs and opportunities until October 18, 2002. The public was provided an opportunity to view the working maps being used by Chugach State Park staff at the Potter Section House between September 17 and October 18 on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 2-4 PM. Chugach State Park staff made every effort to accommodate those who came to the Potter Section House at other times during the comment period.

On September 25, 2002 a media release was issued inviting the public to an open house to identify and discuss the need for public access to Chugach State Park. An open house was held at the Atwood Building on October 1 from 5:00 until 9:00 PM in order to provide an additional opportunity for people having difficulty getting to the Potter Section House.

On October 1, 2002 a media release was issued announcing the availability on the web of generalized maps and a comment form which the public was invited to download, and use to submit comments to the Chugach State Park Access project.

In this inventory, Chugach State Park is attempting to identify existing access as well as traditional or informal access routinely used by the public. The public was asked to provide information regarding access to Chugach State Park including the location of traditional access points as well as comments, concerns, or suggestions they might have regarding previously identified access points.

The majority of those responding expressed concern about the loss of traditional access in areas such as Arctic Valley, Stuckagain Heights, South Anchorage, Ram Valley, and Eagle River and expressed a desire to see traditional access preserved and/or restored. Many respondents offered suggestions specific to particular sites and those comments will be included in Park records associated with these sites.

Some respondents expressed general concern regarding issues associated with vehicular access to the Park such as lack of designated parking, poor roads, impacts to local road service areas, inadequate snow removal, and traffic. There were however, very few complaints about vandalism and nuisance crimes. Several respondents felt that smaller, dispersed access points along the western boundary of the Park would alleviate problems associated with traffic and disperse Park use.

There were over 200 comments referencing access to specific locations within Chugach State Park. In summary:

- Stuckagain Heights was mentioned by over 20% of those responding as an area in which they would like to see access restored.

- The McHugh Peak Complex in South Anchorage was requested by over 20% of those responding as an area in which they would like to see a variety of traditional access points including Bear Valley, “Baldy” and the Stewart Road preserved.
- Ram Valley in Eagle River was another area in which people expressed an interest in restoring traditional access.
- South Anchorage was also mentioned as an area experiencing increased development pressures and additional reserved public access was requested in the area between Rabbit Creek and Potter Valley. Numerous suggestions have been made which focus on the McHugh Peak Complex (mentioned above), Rabbit Lakes and the Suicides as well as the backside of Flattop.
- Connectivity to existing Municipality of Anchorage Trails and Parks was a need expressed by several respondents. In particular connectivity to the Rabbit Creek Greenbelt and Section 36 as well as the North Fork of Campbell Creek were mentioned as being highly desirable. In addition, several respondents voiced support for the development of Park to coast connectivity particularly along the Tour of Anchorage route and in South Anchorage.
- Some respondents suggested creating trailheads at local bus stops in order to reduce vehicular congestion at trailheads and provide access for those residents without vehicles.
- Access was also requested in Girdwood with special emphasis on California Creek and Crow Pass.
- The South Fork of Eagle River is another area in which lack of reasonable access appears to be a serious concern. The improved access is often crowded and the traditional access points identified have a variety of problems associated with them including risk of avalanche, lack of parking, and conflicts with adjacent landowners.
- Based upon the responses received, Eagle River is an area experiencing increased development pressure and a reduction in potential available access.
- Arctic Valley area is an area about which a great many respondents have concerns regarding future access. Access in this area is through military lands controlled by the U.S. Army. Some respondents have been locked in by gate closures and a general fear of losing this important access point prevails.
- Quite a few respondents specifically requested that the municipality through the platting process require developers to provide pedestrian access and extend streets and pedestrian easements to the Park boundary rather than creating cul-de-sacs which block access to the Park.

***Summary:***

The vast majority of respondents are very concerned about the loss of traditional access to Chugach State Park. They have specifically requested that the State and Municipality take steps to ensure that access can be restored in areas where access has recently been lost and secure those access points that remain. There is a demand for secure, reserved public access to Chugach State Park. Park users do not want to trespass yet they feel they have a right to access their park.

## APPENDIX E: LOST USE – CASE STUDIES

### *Ram Valley Homestead*

Ram Valley is a scenic hanging glacier scoured valley near the Eagle River Nature Center. The Access trail to Ram Valley in Eagle River crosses a 160-acre homestead without an easement. For many years public use of the trail was tolerated by the landowner. The area is often visited by persons seeking a more remote type of experience that does not require a great deal of backcountry travel time to access.

In 2000, an Anchorage resident approached the Park superintendent and informed him that the 160-acre parcel was for sale at an asking price of \$220,000. The resident said he wanted to buy the western half, and he understood that State Parks was interested in the eastern half that contained the existing trail. The resident had a purchase agreement at the asking price. The purchase agreement was good for 30 days. The resident suggested that the State go in with him in a joint purchase, as he did not have the money to buy the entire parcel.

The Park superintendent and the resident spent some time researching the land title history and determined that the road to the homestead crossed another parcel of private land on a private road easement. This private road easement gave the owner(s) of the homestead the right to use the road. Therefore, if the State became an owner of the homestead, this private access right would accrue to the public. There was a significant added benefit to the State in becoming an owner of the homestead.

The Park superintendent liked the idea and suggested that an appraisal determine the value of each half of the homestead. However, the Park superintendent informed the resident that State Parks did not have the money for acquisition but that funds could possibly be found through a non-profit conservation group or a group of Park supporters.

The Park superintendent and the resident verbally agreed on the joint purchase if the Park superintendent could find a source of funding. The superintendent contacted several prominent land conservation organizations and some Park supporters who might have the financial resources to purchase the State's half of the homestead. It was understood that if the State failed to pay back the "investors", they would keep their share of the property.

The concept of conservation subdivision was also considered. A conservation subdivision would include identifying the publicly needed land interest; platting private parcels with conservation oriented covenants, then surveying, platting and selling off the private parcel to pay for the publicly acquired parcel.

The Park superintendent was not able to locate funds for the acquisition and he regretfully notified the resident of this. The resident informed the seller and he was able to get his earnest money back before the end of the 30-day time period. A few weeks later, the resident phoned the Park superintendent and said the parcel had been sold to a

couple who planned to build a house on the property. Access to Ram Valley has been closed.

### ***Upper Potter Valley***

The Park trail plan, adopted in 1986, calls for a Potter Creek Trailhead with parking to be built on existing state parkland. The trail would provide access at timberline to the large McHugh Peak complex. Obtaining road access to the site for the parking lot would require that the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) require road easements to be placed on undeveloped private land to the north as these lands are subdivided.

In January of 2000, Park staff learned that a landowner to the north had submitted a plat to the MOA for approval. Park staff revisited the proposed trailhead site and identified three alternative road routes to access the future trailhead from Potter Valley Road. The most feasible road route crossed the private parcel being replatted. A road easement was requested in a letter from the Park superintendent to the MOA Platting Officer. MOA planning staff concurred with State Park's requested easement.

The MOA Platting Board, when faced with the landowner's objection to the requested easement, directed staff to review the request. Staff reconfirmed their recommendation that the plat include a public road easement to provide access to Chugach State Park. At the next meeting of the platting board, the landowner convinced the platting board to vote down the request. The platting board voted not to place the easement on the plat.