

Program Study Report

Data for trail use, vehicle use, projections for future trail and vehicle use, visitor use surveys, and environmental education programming are detailed in the “Analysis Results Report” written by Peter Holck, Ph.D. in 2009 (see Appendix B and C). A summary of those items is included below, along with a summary of other existing conditions.

Visitor Analysis

Number of Visitors

The Eagle River Nature Center welcomes over 40,000 visitors annually, mostly adults and families with children. Visitors are attracted by the natural beauty of the area, recreational opportunities, and the diversity of environmental education programming offered at the center.

According to the “Analysis Results Report,” nearly 4,000 students attended formal programming offered at the center or off-site by nature center staff in 2007 and 2008. The report also states that many programming requests are turned down each year due to limited capacity at the center. See Appendix C for more detailed information.

Demographics

According to visitor surveys conducted November 2007 through November 2008 (633 surveys completed), 33% of respondents were from other parts of the U.S.; less than 2% were international visitors (see Appendix B for survey). During winter, only 12% of visitors are estimated to be from out of state.

The majority of resident visitors (about 93%) come from Anchorage and the Eagle River/Chugiak area, while those from the Mat-Su area (5%) and other parts of Alaska comprise the rest.

Non-resident visitors were not likely to visit the center multiple times; in contrast, Anchorage and Eagle River/Chugiak respondents were likely to visit 11 or more times per year.

The “Analysis Results Report” estimates future projections for visitation based on estimates for projected populations for the Anchorage and Eagle River/Chugiak regions. The report estimates a 10.4% and 7.2% growth in summer and winter visitation respectively by 2015 and 25% increase in summer visitation by 2025.

Activities

According to the 2007-2008 visitor survey, walking/running/snowshoeing are the most popular activities, while wildlife viewing and public programming are second and third (wildlife viewing was more popular than public programming during summer and vice versa during winter).

See Appendix C for more detailed information.

Services Offered and Staffing

Staffing

The nature center has four permanent staff members and approximately five seasonal, part-time staff. The Friends of Eagle River Nature Center is overseen by a board of directors. Volunteers also play a large role in the success of the center; volunteers act in a variety of capacities, including trail workers, greeters, and naturalists.

Services Offered

The Eagle River Nature Center is a year-round facility that offers recreational and educational opportunities for the public. The center provides extensive programming for visitors of all ages, including school field trips, naturalist-led hikes, off-site classroom presentations, and much more.

The 10-mile trail system offers opportunities for exercise and nature study. The main trail network also connects with the Crow Pass/Iditarod Historic Trail, one of the most popular traverses in Chugach State Park.

The center also manages volunteer housing and three public-use cabins/yurts and a classroom structure.

See Appendix G, “Interpretive Prospectus,” for more detailed information about the center’s public and interpretive program offerings.

Road and Trail Access

The nature center is located at the end of Eagle River Road, approximately 12 miles from its intersection with Eagle River Loop Road, and is the only vehicular route to the nature center. Its current parking area has a maximum capacity of 65 vehicles (includes staff/volunteer parking and 20+ spaces in the road right-of-way); overflow parking is available, however, access is via a one-lane, loose-gravel track that is steep and not safe for many vehicles, including recreational vehicles and trucks with trailers.

A private access road goes around the outer edge of the parking area, through the staff parking lot, and alongside the Rodak Nature Trail.

A daily parking fee is required and annual passes can be purchased. The Rodak Nature Trail provides an accessible route to the greater trail system and is accessed directly behind the nature center.

The “Analysis Results Report” concludes that peak vehicular traffic typically occurs near early or mid afternoon. The report assumes that the average vehicle is parked in the lot for three hours and concludes that the data is correlated with trail user data. Of the 139 days of the 331 days recorded (42%), 250 or more vehicles were counted entering the nature center area throughout the day. The heavier usage days were more likely to occur on weekends or Fridays (59%) than during the weekdays. Interestingly, the report describes that in 76 of the 331 days of data [report says 330 but it is likely a typographical error; all other references to data collection give 331 days], the three-

hour maximum count was at 100 or more vehicles, meaning that 35 or more vehicles attempting to park at the center were unable to because of insufficient parking.

In reference to future projections, the report concludes that if the number of vehicles increases in line with the increased visitation projections, by 2015 30% of the days will have a 3-hour period during the day with more than 100 vehicles, and by 2025, the percentage would increase to 38%.

See Appendix C for more detailed information.

Public Perceptions

See Appendix A for a summary of public comments received during the planning process.

Trail System and Interpretation

Approximately 10 miles of trail are maintained by nature center volunteers; the Rodak Nature Trail (3/4 mile), Albert Loop Trail (3-mile loop), and the Dew Mound Trail (1/2 mile to 6 miles) originate from the nature center. The trails are used for hiking, wildlife viewing, environmental education programming, skiing, and snowshoeing. The center also provides access to the Crow Pass/ Iditarod Historic Trail, which stretches over 20 miles to Crow Pass.

According the “Analysis Results Report,” there were more than 140 trail users per day on average during May through August of 2008, and 17% of the days had 150 or more trail users. Trail use is estimated to increase in the future. By 2015, 20% of the days recorded will have 150 or more trail users and by 2025, 27% of days are expected to have more than 150 trail users.

See Appendix C for more detailed information on data collected.