



Recreation Solutions

Quality Professional Services,
Beyond the Boundaries

Kenai Winter Access EIS IDT Meeting Chugach National Forest April 5-7, 2005

**Tuesday, April 5
Seward City Hall**

Present: Bill Jackson, Michelle Dragoo, Eric Johansen, Paula Cote, Lesli Schick, Anne Davy, Lisa Crone, Dean Davidson, Dave Blanchet, Jason Aigeldinger, Rebecca Talbott (PM)

INTRODUCTIONS (All)

The meeting began with a round robin introduction. Everyone introduced himself or herself, including where they worked, position held, and their specialty for the Kenai Winter Access EIS.

Bill Jackson, IDT Leader, Recreation Solutions, SO
Lisa Crone, Social/Economic, Rec. Sol., Troy, MT
Dean Davidson, Soil, SO
Dave Blanchet, Air/Water, SO
Michelle Dragoo (for Mary Ann Benoit), Wildlife, Seward

Eric Johansen, Fisheries, Seward
Paula Coté, Recreation, Rec. Sol., Troy, MT
Lesli Schick, Archaeology, Seward
Anne Davy, Writer/Editor, Rec. Sol., Sonora, CA

Jason Aigeldinger (FS employee (Seward) taking notes for a news article – not a member of the IDT)

Other members not present:

Elizabeth Bella, Botany, Seward
Mary Ann Benoit, Wildlife, Seward
Karen O'Leary, Lands/Special Uses, Seward

Pat O'Leary, Recreation, Seward
Paula Smith, GIS, SO
Dan Golden, Project Record, SO

Additional staff assigned by the Forest Supervisor:

Steve Hennig, Forest Landscape Architect, SO
Susan Rutherford, Public Services, SO
Karen Kromrey, Public Services, Seward

Rebecca Talbott, Public Affairs, SO
Sharon Randall, Planning Staff, SO

REVIEW AGENDA (Bill Jackson)

Bill provided an overview of the 3-day agenda; reviewing the major topics for each day. Changes proposed and accepted included:

- Anne's topics scheduled for Thursday (EIS format and Specialist Reports) would be dropped in order to have additional time to work on the Proposed Action.

It was also noted that preliminary issues and alternatives will be discussed at the next IDT meeting May 10-12 after the first phase of content analysis is carried out.

PROJECT OVERVIEW (Bill Jackson)

History (How we got to this point)

- The 1984 Forest Plan was revised and the Record of Decision (ROD) signed in May 2002.
- Fifty substantive appeals were filed: 30-35 related to the decision to close the Carter-Crescent area to winter motorized use.
- Because the ROD did not support the decision to close the area, the Regional Forester withdrew that portion of the decision and asked the Chugach to look at it again utilizing a local collaborative effort.
- In 2004, a team was formed to complete an EA for the Carter-Crescent area only. During the scoping period, the public was very vocal that the area to be considered needed to be expanded beyond the Carter-Crescent polygon in order to find a solution.
- The Forest requested, and received, approval from the Regional Forester to expand to the area defined generally as south of Summit Lake.
- Consultants Walker and Daniels were hired to lead the Forest and the public through an extensive collaborative learning process. Two months of workshops and meetings were held.
- This is the first IDT meeting with the expanded area.

The original acres for the Carter-Crescent EA were approximately 30,000 acres.

Regional Forester/Forest Supervisor direction

- We are to come up with a winter access plan for the entire Seward District.
- WINTER ONLY (December 1 – April 30)
- This is a high Forest and District priority.
- This should be a truly collaborative effort; using local knowledge and input.
- The final decision is to be released in October 2005.
- The team is not revisiting previous decisions (Iditarod, Heli-ski, etc.).
- Depending on the outcome of this project, exploratory heli-ski areas currently not permitted may change (See heli-ski decision language).

REVIEW PROJECT INITIATION LETTER, NEPA PROCESS, AND TIMELINE (Bill Jackson)

Bill reviewed the project initiation letter that provides some history, proposed action, purpose and need, preliminary issues, as well as the roles and responsibilities of team members. This has been signed by the Forest Supervisor.

DNR/state lands are the gateway to many NFS lands. We need to make sure they are involved to the degree they want to be. They have received all correspondence, but are not a "Cooperating Agency" (NEPA term).

We have an agreement with power company (Snug Harbor Road) to build a snow machine parking area (FS easement on State lands). [Part of FERC relicensing]. Some additional discussion about the general NEPA process occurred, but the remainder of the discussion focused on the project timeline.

The team did start a discussion about avalanches and winter safety. The team was informed that avalanche advisories or forecasts do not occur on the peninsula. However, there is a Type 3 Avalanche Center that reports current snowpack conditions for some areas of the Kenai. Contact Carl Skustad for more information.

COLLABORATION WORKSHOPS AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS PLAN (Rebecca Talbott)

Rebecca gave the team a thorough overview of the collaborative workshops. She began with a brief history of the previous Carter-Crescent EA and the listening sessions that took place for that project. The public made it clear that they would be willing to work together if we opened the area up. The Forest took them up on the offer, brought in a third party (Walker and Daniels), and held several meetings. An update of the entire process followed. Walker and Daniel's next step is to return in 5 weeks to meet with the communities to brief them and again after the DEIS is completed.

Follow-up Thank You letters are in the process of being completed. They will be out April 15.

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS, CONSTRAINTS, AND WORKSHOP MAPS (Team)

A handout was provided with planning assumptions and constraints. The first collaborative workshops used this handout as they proceeded through the process. The workshops also generated 18 maps of proposals from the public. The team took some time at this point in the meeting to hang the maps and begin reviewing and discussing them. (They are looked at in much more depth on Day 3.)

RESOURCE-BY-RESOURCE DISCUSSIONS (Team)

The following is general discussion that took place for each of the resources represented. It was simply a cursory look at potential issues, data needs, and the like presented in bullet form. The team also began compiling a list of past actions and reasonably foreseeable future actions for our cumulative effects analysis. This listing is at the end of this document.

1. Air/Water (Dave Blanchet)

- Will look at annual precipitation and snow pack
- Low elevation areas are snow free many years
- 2-cycle engines

2. Soils (Dean Davidson)

- Concerned mostly with trailheads
- Soil productivity and possibly erosion
- Location of new trail heads, relocation of old trailheads
- Duration of snow cover
- Some direction on how to make these access sites more durable
- Data needs – where are the trailheads, what are the conditions of these trailheads, are there proposals for new ones.
- Will use primarily observations for his analysis

Wednesday, April 6
Moose Pass Community Hall

Present: Bill Jackson, Michelle Dragoo, Eric Johansen, Paula Coté, Lesli Schick, Anne Davy, Lisa Crone, Jason Aigelinger, Dan Golden, Pat O'Leary (AM)

3. Recreation (Paula Coté and Pat O'Leary)

Data and information needs:

1. Trail access points – INFRA
2. Level of maintenance during different seasons
3. Easements – where they are and where they aren't
4. Cabins, campgrounds (NRRS), and outfitter/guides
5. Aaron Poe's data – winter wildlife/recreation study
6. GIS layer for concentrated winter use (talk to Trey Schillie (Seward))
7. Visitor use patterns by trail, duration, destination, and seasonality
8. Need some examples of side-by-side winter access trails (e.g. White River NF, Rabbit Ear's Pass, Kenai Wildlife Refuge, Flathead NF, Hatchers Pass State park)
9. Percent compliance on closure areas
10. Subsistence (this may be outside the scope of the analysis)
11. Snow River proposed WSR river – 2 segments (wild and scenic)
12. Russian River – 2 segments (wild and scenic)
13. ANILCA
14. What is the Forest's niche?
15. National Historic Trails (Iditarod, Resurrection Pass). Need to talk to Susan Rutherford, Steve Zemke, and Steve Hennig re: Resurrection Pass trail. Need to ensure we remain consistent with Forest interpretation.
16. Scenic Byway
17. DOT plows trailheads, except for Lost Lake (we contract that)

4. Fisheries (Eric Johansen)

- Ice fishing
- Crossing anadromous streams
- Localized stream crossings that continue to grow (site specific)
- There are no listed species
- 2 MIS species, but no approved protocols for monitoring

5. Wildlife (Michelle Dragoo (for Mary Ann Benoit))

1. Brown Bear MA may need seasonal restrictions at the end of the winter (starting April 1), as recreation can be disturbing to bears coming out of dens with young and looking for food. Locate research on this.
2. Goats and sheep – there is a standard and guideline for them. Table on 3-28 of the Forest Plan. The table does not include spring foraging for brown bear, wolverine, etc.
3. Find MOU
4. Wolverine is sensitive to winter recreation. There is plenty of research on this. It is a species of special interest. 5-mile buffer for habitat. We do not have this info on the forest.

5. Carter-Crescent is an area of concern, although seasonal restrictions could minimize that. Resurrection Pass also a concern. Animals do become somewhat habituated to motorized use, so swapping years could be problematic.
6. Lynx?
7. Increasing motorized access will increase access to hunting and trapping (more trails). We may want to have a discussion with the DNR (possible displacement).
8. Winter congregation for moose – GIS? “moose yards”
9. Trumpeter swans

6. Vegetation and Botany (Elizabeth Bella via Eric)

- Damage to vegetation and cutting of vegetation during low snow
- Litter
- Parking areas – litter and safety of users
- TES and MIS.
- Invasive spp.

7. Heritage Resources (Lesli Schick)

1. Increase in ground disturbing activities
2. Vandalism and looting, primarily with 3 standing cabins – One is on the National Register and has documented vandalism – skiers and snow machines and two are eligible
3. Erosion from machines (low-snow years, late season)
4. Original trail tread (historical) – some better than others. If it's near a trailhead, it's likely to be damaged from snow machines (low-snow years, late season)
5. Large mining sites – can walk off with more items on a snow machine than when skiing. One is on the National Register.
6. Archeological district (by Russian River) with over 100 sites
7. Russian River land agreement (CIRI)
8. Interpretive center (Native Alaskan-run)
9. May have SHPO concern if Fresno area is open to motorized use (mine)
10. Upper Summit Lake – People camping in the cemetery in summer.
11. No winter data, except for people contacting us about problems
12. Will contact Park Service on data for effects of snow machines
13. No guidelines, GIS layer, or predictive model.
14. 10% surveyed (really 2% since the 10% includes glaciers/snow field)

8. Social/Economic (Lisa Crone)

- Social more than economic
- Pollution – This will be difficult. Lengthy discussion about how to do the economic analysis, especially when we don't have use figures.
- Noise
- Moose Pass study (APU)
- Quality of life and rate of change

SEVERAL ITEMS OF NOTE CAME OUT REGARDING WHO WILL COMPLETE CERTAIN ANALYSES:

Recreation will cover recreational fishing and hunting

Fish will cover fish biology and habitat

Wildlife will cover wildlife habitat

In addition, on the topic of "pollution", Dave will cover the physical aspect of pollution while Lisa will analyze the social effects

AGENDA TOPICS NOT COVERED TODAY

1. Cumulative effects analysis area for each resource
2. GIS mapping needs

For note taker's reference only:

CAC – Chugach Alaska Corporation

CPG – Chugach Powder Guides

Thursday, April 7
Cooper Landing Community Hall

Present: Bill Jackson, Michelle Dragoo, Eric Johansen, Paula Coté, Lesli Schick (AM), Anne Davy, Lisa Crone, Dan Golden, Bill Schuster (PM)

PROPOSED ACTION (Team)

For the first 2-3 hours, the team watched video tapes of the collaborative workshops (Soldotna and Seward). The videos included all the team presentations of proposed actions as depicted on a large map. (These are the 18 maps the team began reviewing on Day 1). The team found these tapes very useful, often rewinding and watching again to ensure we understood. The team also spent considerable time after each video discussing the presentation.

Key points from the videos:

1. Keep cabin availability possible regardless of management system
2. Resolve safety issues – Lost Lake Trail, Carter-Crescent (not resource safety, but people to people)
3. Keep quality terrain open regardless of closures
4. Keep travel corridors open regardless of closures
5. Minimize confusion for the user – make sure any closures are easy to understand both in time and space
6. Protect wildlife habitat – bears, goats, and sheep
7. Allow for special use permits in typically non-motorized area – Grant Lake for example
8. Noise is an issue
9. Carter-Crescent is different from the other areas.

After viewing the videos and discussing what we saw and heard, the team began developing a tentative Proposed Action in the afternoon. At the end of the day, the team had tentatively developed 2-3 Proposed Actions on large maps to be presented to the Forest for a decision

The following is a listing of past actions and reasonably foreseeable future actions for use in the cumulative effects analysis. The list will need to be double-checked for completeness and accuracy by several Forest employees.

Past Actions

1. Foot trail around Bear lake
2. Major reconstruction on the Russian Lakes Trail
3. Major reconstruction on several more trails. See Pat O'Leary
4. Russian River angler trail
5. Trailhead enhancements (adding toilets)
6. Wildlife viewing area (may be future action)
7. RV parking at Granite Creek
8. FERC pipeline

Reasonably Foreseeable Future Actions

1. Stream restoration on Resurrection Creek
2. Hydropower relicensing (FERC) – Cooper Lake parking lot? Gated winter-only 50 cars. To be built within two years of license (2009-10).
3. Iditarod Trail connector from Golden Fin back to Primrose and tie in with Long Lake Trail – nonmotorized.
4. Maintenance on Primrose and Lost Lake trail
5. Mount Adair Trail new construction (combo winter/summer)
6. Hut-to-Hut
7. Whistle Stop
8. Heli-Ski
9. Fuels reduction (will need list with maps – Sheila Spores, Trey Schillie)
10. Three cabin replacements
11. Water diversion pipeline (FERC)
12. CG – reconstructing Trail River CG
13. CG – Tenderfoot Creek Reconstruction
14. CG – Porcupine reconstruction
15. Carter Lake Trail reconstruction (survey and design) summer/winter use.
16. CPG – need to find out more about this
17. Winter O&G – Teresa Paquet (Glacier) (Chugach Powder Guides.)
18. Talk to Karen O'Leary (lands, may have an exchange) State easements and how much jurisdiction/control. Always becomes an issue (14H1 easements – little jurisdiction or access), but don't have any of those right now. We have full jurisdiction
19. Hazardous fuels
20. Harvest layers (GIS)
21. Land conveyances? Talk to boroughs. Could change dynamics of population.
22. Seward Highway changes
23. Sterling Highway realignment

Next IDT Meeting is May 10-12, 2005