

TRAILS WORKING GROUP

“The Trails Working Group will systematically evaluate all trails in Juneau to develop a common vision for agency management to guide commercial use of trails, reduce conflicts between commercial and non-commercial users, and minimize natural resource degradation to provide and preserve quality experiences for all trail users.”

Mission Statement adopted 11/16/99

PROBLEM STATEMENT:

Increasing commercial use on trails is diminishing the experience of non-commercial users, with no area wide review of cumulative impacts, and commercial operators have no area wide guidance for commercial activities on trails.

ACTION STEPS:

1. Review and update recommendations for agency management of commercial use of trails and carrying capacity

Agenda
Trails Working Group
Wednesday, January 14, 2004
12:05pm – 2:00pm
Downtown Library

- I. Approval of the Agenda
- II. Approval of the 12/17/03, 01/08/04 Minutes
- III. Public comment on non-agenda items
- IV. Action Items
 - 1) Review and make recommendations for:
 - Outer Point/Rainforest Trail System
 - New Amalga Meadows Trail
 - Earnest Gruening State Historical Site and other state facilities
 - DZ Trail System
 - Granite Creek
 - Perseverance
 - Mt. Roberts
 - Treadwell Mine Historic Trail
 - Eaglecrest alpine trails
 - Kax and Dimond Park Bridge
 - Fritz Cove Road parking area
 - Commercial bird watching areas
- V. Next meeting?

Trails Working Group
December 17, 2003

New member: Merrill Sanford CBJ

In Attendance:

Alice Rarig, Chair	Gary Mendivil	Paul Swanson
Sandy Warner, Co-Chair	Kim Kiefer	Cindi Lagoudakis
James King	Bob Grochow	Paul Zahasky
Merrill Sanford	Larry Johannsen	Bob Garrison/ Public

James: stated the Mission statement is from last year. Changed action steps.

James: Agenda is for the rest of winter; we'll start at top of the list and work down.

Eaglecrest is at the top.

Summary:

Focus on Eaglecrest, presented by Gary Mendivil
Dogsled (wheeled) tours, for commercial and public use
Rainforest Canopy Walkway
Outcome: No Disagreement as to Desirability

J

Gary gave a brief history of the reasons for and the focus for the Eaglecrest projects. Their business plan looks at Eaglecrest as a recreation center.

They are not trying to increase revenues at any cost or without looking toward benefiting the community. The consensus of the Eaglecrest board and the Assembly that there is a benefit is most important.

They are looking at two initial projects: Offering commercial wheeled dogsled tours and building a rainforest canopy walkway.

Wheeled Dogsled Tours

- Would involve hardening the existing Nordic trail at the bottom end. The hardened trail would be available to the public when not in commercial use
- The staging area would be the trail parking lot. Need the building to greet tourists and to let them pet cuddly puppies. (?)
- The question came up as to the possibility of providing electricity on the trail, suggesting that the way to do it would be to lay fabric down on the muskeg first then electrical conduit then the finer rock on top. It was dismissed as prohibitively expensive due to the loop nature of the trail.
- To encourage people to stay on the trail, it was suggested that appropriate barriers and signs be put up.
- One of the pluses of the dogsled trail project would be that it would extend the usable ski season 'immensely', that skiing would be possible with as little as six inches of snow.

- Since it would involve muskeg, it would be necessary to obtain wetlands permits.
- The hardening of the trail would be done by laying fabric over the muskeg terrain and then rock. That method was used at the Lake Creek trail with success. And in Sitka, where it was also used, the shot rock used was clean. The finer rock was put on top.
- Cindi noted that in a Restoration Class she attended they were not happy with how Alaska does hydrologic jobs.

Rainforest Canopy Walkway

- Visualize a Rainforest Week for the schools, just as there is now a Sea Week.
- A name is needed to differentiate this destination from other rainforest sites.
- There will be interpreters present whenever the canopy trail is open.
- The view into a canopy from above is unique and the creatures of the forest are special.
- Off season the walkway can be taken down or it can be designed to fold up.
- To address slipperiness, some sites, such as in Montana which has its second generation walkway, they are now using aircraft cable and stippled aluminum instead of rope and wood.
- Rainforest canopy trail would have controlled access.
- Propose that the rainforest walkway be accessed by use of a short trail that would climb to the ridge at top of a steep ravine at two locations. (Demonstrated on map)
- It would extend from ridge to ridge. There would be a small tower or tree as starting points with platforms for interpretive talks.
- The depth is 70 feet from highest point. Sections of 250 feet with a total of 700 feet, plus 800 feet of trail. Would go back over another ridge. We're looking at other trails to connect to. We would upgrade an existing small section of trail.
- It was proposed that there is a need to differentiate this from a rain forest walk, suggesting that theatrical presentations could be added, offering both entertainment and education- Dave Hunsaker and others would be excellent. Mini forest creatures could be displayed, possibly with prerecorded messages, to turn it into something with added value, different from anything else.
- Wheelchair accessibility would have to be looked at with consideration to cost and terrain.

James reminded the Group that in the past each trail was carefully evaluated to see what social, ecology, neighborhood and area wide impact would be created by commercial use. Some of the specific items under these larger categories included considering impacts to existing users, plants and animals, neighborhood traffic, parking areas trail conditions and other criteria.”

Kim noted that in our 2001 plan we had listed “Eaglecrest trails are included in areas recommended for commercial use eligibility because of current commercial winter activity, low neighborhood impact and existing infrastructure for parking, restrooms, etc. Trail development is necessary for non winter use.”

Sandy: Which of the two projects will be more expensive?

Gary: Six of one, half dozen of the other. The dogsled tours trail project could be more expensive but if we make the trails wide enough that full size dump trucks can be used, it will go much faster, making it much cheaper. The trails will be 14-16 feet wide.

Alice: In what stage is the conceptual plan?

Gary: Due in January

Sandy: When would the project be built?

Gary: In the summertime

Gary: If there is a second channel crossing, it would be great to be poised to take advantage of it.

Future:

- Building trails from day lodge to top of mountain.
- Funding for new chairlift to handle foot traffic.
- Getting electricity eventually will be a big deal.
- Convert warming hut to a public use cabin.
- Upgrade existing trails from early '80s so commercial use could be done.
- Might Eagles Nest be available for guided commercial use?

Two questions:

- Is there need for additional facilities?
- Is it appropriate to build new trails for commercial use?

Miscellaneous

- There should be easy trails with interpreters close to the lodge for people who cannot get to more difficult sites. Need side walking kinds of things for less energetic people to look at.
- Natural is different from Wilderness. It has to be recognized that this is not a wilderness experience, but we need to keep it as natural as possible. We need to give it the feel of a wilderness experience. Keep interpretive signs low profile. Designing it has to have the wild component.
- Build trails so people stay on them, or it will cause ongoing, permanent damage. If you build a proper trail, people are inclined to stay on them, be self-governing.
- For the future there could be a fully accessible cabin on the hardened trail. It is flat and with funding it would be easy to build.
- Six years ago with public comment we made recommendations for additional or expanded use on existing trails.
- This area is a lot easier than in alpine areas.

- More options we have the better. Projecting looking at younger group. Eventually there will be no old people, everyone will think of themselves as young. Demand will increase. Will need to provide more and more active things.
- Another generation of visitors will be coming, the more areas they can go the happier they'll be. Perseverance Trail could expand 60% but no one wants that. Eaglecrest is the logical place for a number of reasons.
- Bob J was asked if Eaglecrest fills his needs and he said, Yes, especially since the road is paved.
- If cash is coming in, Eaglecrest will continue growing.

James: Is everyone in agreement that we need to look for additional commercial use facilities?

Alice: We need to protect wildlife and natural features.

Kim: What new ones do we have- we need to look at what we already have out there.

Merrill: CBJ wants to get Eaglecrest on stronger footing with year round use

Alice: In addition to dogsled and Nordic trails and walkway. Anything else? Are we basically saying in preliminaries, it's OK to keep Dogsled and Canopy on the list?

Nods all around.

Alice: Public use cabins?

Gary: Starting with warming hut. Already has electricity. Add bunks and tables and water storage. Capacity for 8 or 10 people. Don't want year round use. Some of the fees can go for ongoing maintenance.

Cindi: Cabins most heavily used are not the salt water cabins but those on the road system.

Possibly a cabin on the Nordic trail at Splinter Lake.

Gary: Warming hut cabin would come first since it's already there.

Janes: Eagles Nest is in a case by itself. Eaglecrest should be in charge of that.

Construction of new cabins more to be considered as to whether commercial use or not.

Sandy: Would you be using the warming hut before trails are built?

Gary: No, not until trails are built or upgraded.

Alice: With these improvements, maybe we ought to see how much local public use fills them up.

Gary: We have to consider what revenues will be coming in. Eagles Nest will go for a slightly higher price.

James: Public use cabins are mostly weekend use. Maybe during the week they could be used commercially?

In those focus groups, one thing proposed was a hut to hut system. Northern end of Douglas Island is mostly owned by native corporations. The hut to hut system could be accessed coming from Eaglecrest.

Gary: Some budget could be used to support these systems. Looking for largest possible usage base. We have to support ourselves.

Paul Z: Some cabins could be commercial, some not. Can keep both groups happy.

Bob G: Any interest in commercial only cabin or small lodge off the road?

Gary: That has been discussed some years ago as a yurt to yurt system. Outside groups have said if we provide the land they will build it.

Bob G: Mixed uses

Paul S: Gabe George has building planned. Any electricity? They are going to be talking.

Merrill: It bothers me to say “exclusively public, exclusively commercial”. I’d like to see mixed use.

Gary: Exclusive refers to hours and seasons. If dogsleds come through every half hour, I’m not going to be comfortable having my child on the trail in a stroller. On the other hand, after hours and off season (is different).

Garrison: Years ago, the Swedes built concrete cabins. Not labor intensive and you can camouflage them so you can’t even see them.

Paul S: Elevated walkway would not be strictly commercial, be open and closed.

Dogsled trails would be a disappointment if the trail could not be open to public for hiking, biking, wheelchair use.

Larry: We have to look at marketing, staff, planning. Allocation of space, prebooking, good idea of base requirements. Flexibility – weather will affect use load. Mixed use is way to go.

Cindi: mixed use

Gary: Cruise lines are already very efficient. They know what factors affect use.

Cindi: If operators found that it (a proposed trail or site) is not effectually usable- too long to get there, for instance- is that figured in?

Gary: Some things we’ll know, but some things won’t be known until they’re in use.

Load and revenues

Alice: Do none of us object to either of these proposals? We don’t need to make recommend-actions as to group sizes and hours, that kind of thing, today.

- On the upper trails it is proposed that an Eaglecrest Trail Pass might be the way to go. It would go toward upkeep and payment for the Ranger that will have to be available. Perhaps an honor system.

Gary Mendivil: “North Douglas Recreation Hub”

Next meeting: Thursday, January 8, 2004 at 12:05 PM.

Meeting Notes by Elva Bontrager 586-9001
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Trails Working Group
January 8, 2004

In Attendance:

Alice Rarig, Chair
Sandy Warner, Co-Chair
James King
Merrill Sanford

Gary Mendivil
Kim Kiefer(late)
Bob Grochow (late)
Larry Johansen

Cindi Lagoudakis (late)
Ron Schonenbach
Bob Janes
Pete Griffen

Review of December 17, 2003 minutes postponed in the interests of time

***Discussion of James King's planned trip to Washington DC regarding funding of proposed trails.** The Thunder Mountain trail project to create a paved pathway from Mendenhall Visitor Center along the base of Thunder Mountain to the McNugget intersection had been supported and adopted by the Assembly. It was submitted two years ago for TRAAK funding and made the list in '05. However, in 2003 the funding for TRAAK grants was eliminated. James is going to Washington DC to meet with staff of Senator Ted Stevens and make a pitch for federal money through direct appropriation. *He will also be seeking federal funding for the million dollars to repair the first mile of Perseverance Trail.

The question came up as to how to present the problem to the Assembly for more money. The advice was to be direct. Discussed donating miles for James's trip to Washington DC / Sandy offered some of her miles.

***Pete Griffen gave an update on commercial use on Forest Service trails and planned work. This update is attached.**

Steep Creek Trail will be done this construction season. It was noted that on the Thunder Mountain side there is a trail that is being affected by the creek that is moving into new paths. Pete agreed they will be looking at that.

Montana Creek Right of Way. It was noted that the Forest Service is not interested at this time in taking over its management. However, stabilizing the stream bank is tapped for upcoming season.

There is only a conditional use permit required for stabling horses there and no permit as such required for the commercial horse operation. James got their agreement to voluntarily give Trail Mix \$2,500 annually to offset costs.

Treadwell Ditch. There is some consternation regarding the cultural resource survey -we have been doing it piecemeal, looking at how we can widen some spots. This year we have coordinated with SHPO. Forest Service is enthusiastic about more multi-agency approach.

It was noted that some are interested in using different designations for trails such as 'primitive', 'unimproved', etc. Forest Service said it has not used them.

Forest Service noted that the numbers of guided tours are still below permitted levels. Bob Janes said that the permitted level is adequate at this point but wondered whether the question would be revisited in the next couple of years. Forest Service said they don't revisit unless a request is made in response to increased load, and added that they have not recently looked at trail capacity. Rafting and canoeing operations have asked about potential increases but it has not been looked at to this point.

There was discussion about a Spine Trail running from Amalga Harbor to Eagle Beach that is to be built in this coming season.

James asked if any state forest use needs to be discussed. Ron said, No. Bob Janes said he and Larry will talk about their needs for Outer Point to get more information before the next meeting.

Kim will bring a map of the Amalga to Eagle Beach area to the next meeting which will be helpful in seeing the overall plan.

Cindi was concerned as to the problem statement and whether there was a change of recommendations in light of the fact that the public was adamant in its position. Alice responded that the current recommendations are that they are learning about degrees of usage and the issues may have to be revisited as discoveries are made, that the group is getting a sense of what is happening.

Summary:

Outer Point Trail discussion postponed until next meeting

Later, it was noted that some parts of the trail are very slippery. Bob Jane suggested the possibility of power washing but there was some concern expressed as to whether it would remove the planking treatment.

Discussed

- **Thunder Mountain Trail-** James King will try to find funding
- **Herbert River Glacier Trail-** Request for Change
- **West Glacier Trail-** Some improvement is planned
- **Moraine Ecology Trail-** Probably a good place for commercial use
- **East Glacier Trail-** Current designations seem to be working.
- **Photo Point Trail-** Discussed possibility of signage
- **Sunshine Cove-** No great demand. Need to talk about spacing and group size.
- **Amalga Meadows Beach Access Trail-** There is demand for a loop trail.
- **Nugget Creek Trail-** No discussion, no commercial use
- **Trail to the Waterfall-** No discussion
- **Trail of Time-** A possibility of Forest Service money to create pullouts
- **Auke Lake Trail -** No changes needed.
- **Montana Creek Right of Way- Catch 22**
- **Alice suggested that at the next meeting there will be a discussion of Amalga Harbor kayaking launch.** (Harbor people want commercial use to be on main ramp. Commercial users will use new dock, off to the side.)

Trail Discussion Amplification

- **Herbert River Glacier Trail**

Previous recommendation: group size 15, groups per day 4, no weekends, Monday-Thursday consistent with current permits.

Bob Janes explained that the Monday through Thursday designation came about because at that time they didn't need Friday permits. He requested taking another look at the M-Thursday designation is because of requests from small groups of independent travelers who are in town over the weekend. Gastineau Guiding has received some requests for information on weekends on their website.

“A current and continuing push in trying to attract the independent market – the mini-stays, the Bed and Breakfast travelers- is hampered by not being able to offer Fridays. There's not enough to do on weekends. They would be off the trail before 6:00 PM anyway. We might want to look at what Fridays are offering to the community. The cruise ship passengers would not be affected by increasing to Fridays- the distance is too far, the time involved too long. But the independent travelers have no easy way of getting out to Herbert- and Gastineau Guiding would offer that service.”

James King: proposed adding Fridays to the existing recommendation of 15 people per group and 4 groups per day and adding 1 group per day on weekends, 8 people max.

The question was asked as to what standards the trails will meet when they are rebuilt in 2005. When it was first submitted, the idea was to create relatively wide trails to accommodate bike traffic as the terrain is relatively level with few hills. If built to that standard, the trail would accommodate more commercial use. Pete said he can't yet say. The design narrative will be done first, may have been already done.

Gary noted that mountain bikers and hikers will be in conflict if trail upgraded.

Alice suggested recording Request for Change

Bob Jane suggested that it might be feasible to look at some trails and back off on some numbers, to look at needs as they come up and go either direction, looking at big picture, not just adding numbers all the time, noting that Herbert Glacier Trail didn't have commercial use at all last summer.

The suggestion was made that it might be feasible to rotate trail use and times during the season, wherein commercial operators would not designate which trail would be offered for use at any specific time so that either commercial or local use could be flexible.

Response was that that consistency is preferred by most people and that there is a need to keep it uncomplicated.

Forest Service will be doing a Survey and Design looking to improve the trail, see what needs to be done, and how much it will cost. The figures go into the budget for next year and 2005 would be when the project would be carried out. The reconstruction of the trail would not be very expensive if no reconfiguring is needed. It's done in house.

- **West Glacier Trail**

Group size: 15, up to x4, 45 people per day max, off by 6:00, no weekends. Needs improved parking. Signage system would help people who don't know where to park. There are some complaints at the condition of the trail. James: said that West Glacier Trail is scheduled for work at the bridge. Pete said that improvements are planned but is not familiar with proposals.

Gastineau guiding is the only commercial trail user on East and West Glacier Trails

Recommendation for better parking, signage and trail improvements.

- **Moraine Ecology Trail**

Group size: 15, x4, no spacing restrictions, out by 6:00 pm, all week.

Suggestion to improve trail in order to minimize side trails. Probably a good place for commercial use if request was made.

East Glacier Trail

Group size: 15, x4, no other restrictions, seems to be working.

Some days at capacity but about 3 days a week no commercial use at all.

- **Photo Point Trail**

No limits, tour guides' interpretation allowed when Forest Service interpreter is not present. No commercial use on sandbar.

Recommendation to build a trail from Photo Point to the waterfall.

Discussed possibility of signage to prevent visitors' impact on bird nesting sites. Signs could give specifics for various parts of the trail and at specific times. Given a reason for instructions, people tend to honor signs. Pete is reluctant to post signs requesting people to avoid areas at specific times; he would hesitate to give the public the idea that it is OK at some times. A Forest Service agent is usually there.

Question as to whether to recommend construction of the trail to allow commercial use. Pete said that they would have to update their master plan for the visitors center before they could decide on whether to build a trail.

Sunshine Cove

Need to talk about spacing and group size. There's not a huge demand at this point. 1 group per day, currently. We need to make sure that they use the correct trail. Kim said they know there are diving groups that are going out without permitting. Kim has contacted the people who are using it without a permit.

Recommendation that commercial use be confined to new trail and number of groups be increased to 2 per day.

Amalga Meadows Beach Access Trail

There is demand for a loop trail, starting at Saga Lodge connecting to the Boy Scout trail. Already limited commercial use in the area, very limited commercial kayaking. There needs to be discussion as to how new trails will be affected. Current recommendation okay.

Nugget Creek Trail

No discussion, no commercial use in past year.

Trail of Time

No limits, commercial use allowed with no interpretation

Pullouts on the trail would enhance the trail experience, especially if the brush is cleared. Forest Service said there is a possibility of money to create pullouts, although not sure how quickly. Fee Demo Board is in place. Idea of fees is being considered across the country; it's more highly thought of than originally. An annual report is made by Forest Service. 85-95% of the fee money stays in the community. Over ½ million dollars is garnered annually from Mendenhall Visitor Center alone. The money is used for interpretive staff, some trail management, some displays, some improvements in immediate area.

This is the whole area from the visitor center, the trails, the viewing platforms, all of it.

Recommendation to create turnouts along the trail for large groups to receive interpretation.

Auke Lake Trail

Plenty of parking:

Getting some use from kayakers, not guided. There is no rental facility there; people are dropped off. No changes needed. No current issues from residents.

Next meeting: Wednesday January 14, 2004 at 12:05 PM.

Will email location

Meeting Notes by Elva Bontrager 586-9001
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