

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
Thursday January 8, 2004
12:00pm – 2:00pm
City Hall Assembly Chambers

- I. Approval of the Agenda
- II. Approval of the 12/17/03 Minutes
- III. Public comment on non-agenda items
- IV. Action Items
 - 1) Review of National Forest Trails
 - 2) Review and make recommendations for the Outer Point/Rainforest Trail System
 - 3) Review and make recommendations for all of the trails listed in the 12/05/03 minutes in the order they appear.
- 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 effectively 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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Eaglecrest Ski Area

Group Size: TBA in Future

Frequency: TBA in Future

Days: TBA in Future

Recommendations: Conceptual approval was given for two projects. The first is to create an 8 to 14 foot wide, mile long gravel pathway around the cross country ski track in the lower meadow near the parking lot for summer wheeled dog sled use.

Recommendations are to allow general use when the dog tours are not using the trail and to take precautions to preserve the surrounding muskeg during construction and during the summer use season. The second project is to create a canopy walk that leaves from the lodge and does a loop up into the drainages above the lodge. This trail would have sections elevated up to 80 feet off the ground and would require a guide for use. Anyone wishing to use the trail would be welcome as long as they paid the fee for the accompanying guide and the trail was open for use.

Eaglecrest will give a future presentation on proposed cabins and trails above the lodge.