

JUNEAU TRAILS PLAN USER GROUP MEETING AGENDA

Thursday, November 12, 2020

9:30 am Zoom Meeting

Attendees

Planning committee

Allison Eddins - CBJ Community Development

Alexandra Pierce - CBJ Planning Department

George Schaaf - CBJ Parks and Rec

Michele Elfers - CBJ Parks and Rec

Lauren Verrelli - CBJ Parks and Rec

Ryan O'Shaughnessy - Trail Mix, Inc

Kate McWilliams - Trail Mix, Inc

Preston Kroes - AK State Parks

User Groups

Mike Wallisch - Alaska Travel Adventures (ATA)

Alicia Leamer - Travel Juneau (TJ)

Sierra Gadaire - Gastineau Guiding (GG)

Alex Beebe Giudice - Above and Beyond Alaska (ABAK)

I. Welcome and Brief Description of the Purpose and Scope of the Juneau Trails Plan

George (CBJ): JMTP - most recently trail plan was published in the 90s, we've been moving towards a new one since then and have a document that has been used for grant applications, etc.

But the 2021 Master plan will take a good look at the trail infrastructure, will involve City/State/USFS/TMIX to identify where the gaps are and where future improvements and investments are being made.

How trails will be used is an important part of the conversation, commercial use *will* be discussed- interagency effort!

II. Introductions – tell us a little bit about yourself and the group you are representing

Alex (ABAK): Typically 6 clients and 1 guide, sometimes 14 people total. ABAK practices responsible use of trails, small groups, LNT, low impact. We work primarily with industry. travelers.

Sierra (GG): Exclusively serves cruise ship passengers, decreasingly recreation-hearty clientele

Mike (ATA): Having trouble connecting

Alicia (TJ): We market to independent travelers, a diff clientele than ABAK and GG. We often give recommendations to people who have done their homework prior to coming- and can gauge in a case by case basis if someone wants a walk or hike

III. Group Discussion

A.) What are your company's priorities for the next 5 -10 tourist seasons?

Sierra (GG):

Interested in facilitating a conversation w/ public about how commercial use can exist alongside public. Capacity will inevitably increase. It's important [for process] to be open with the public about how we're defining and allowing commercial use.

Anti-tourism sentiment growing in the community

CBJ master planning meeting about small cruise ship infrastructure this week and surprised to hear that this is a huge concern for people who are attending these planning events- feeling that Juneau needs to limit tourism

Treadwell and Rainforest have been an issue because Gastineau was having issues using Rainforest Trail- issue with people not understanding that they have permission

GG had a permit for Treadwell and in 2019, their permit was adjusted so they could no longer use Treadwell- even though they want to take people to see the totem pole (we need more totem poles around, incorporating more native history in their tours)

Infrastructure is for everybody- all the work that's being done in the downtown corridor ISNT just for tourists and that's a mindset that needs to change for the public

Getting public involved i.e. maybe 20% of the use is for commercial

B. What amenities make a trail attractive to your group and what amenities are missing?

Alex (ABAK): trash, parking, restrooms. West Glacier has a good set-up.

West Glacier trail is a higher risk trail for tourists- maybe groups could help maintain these higher maintenance trails that are always changing. ABAK would participate in trail maintenance events in the future, but hard to coordinate, developing a collaborative work group would be really cool.

Sierra (GG): Having clear eating areas is critical, especially on long hikes. Benefit of having a guiding experience, we can enforce that. EVC has a nice balance with picnic tables at the lodge. Drinking and food experiences are a big trend with cruises right now.

B.a.) Are amenities more important than tread?

Sierra (GG): NO, because of liability, tread is most important. People often don't know what they're getting themselves into.

C.) What improvements could be made over the next 20 years to help support your goals?

Sierra (GG): We want loop trails and trails away from the crowds, that's getting harder to do. Customers want that authentic experience. People come to Alaska because Alaska's brand is remote, natural- sound and smell is an important part of the experience. Juneau is the middle ground to Denali hiking, and a less athletic clientele still deserves to have that outdoor experience

Alicia (TJ) : When it comes to individual travelers, trails do not rank #1 as an attraction but definitely top 5 (more interest in hiking than mountain biking) Alaska has done a great job of branding as a wilderness place but not everyone wants to rent a car when they come to town (traveler's fitness and activity level is a factor here).

Sierra (GG): JEDC's Visitor Products Cluster Working Group working on an initiative to incentivize individual travelers and small cruise ship coalition because these individual visitors spend more money in town!

Dan Blanchord with Uncruise is a good contact because they're good about getting guest feedback.

Cruise ships and visitor guides all agree on three classifications of trails:

Easy- wheelchair, walker

Medium- flat, improved trail (i.e. Lorraine ecology trail)

Strenuous- anything else.

D. Which trails or paths does your group frequent the most, and why?

Sierra (GG): Perseverance is amazing because it provides variety for multigenerational groups to use (families choose Alaska over the Caribbean)

Number of people on West Glacier trail diminishes every year, we're not pushing it anymore because you can't see the glacier as much.

Alex (ABAK): channeling people more toward kayak tours than hiking to see Glacier

Lauren (CBJ): trends in commercial trail use permits? More demand for flatter trails. Recent requests include quick stop-and-photo-opp and requests for new businesses focused on guiding strenuous tours (i.e. Mt. Jumbo)

Sierra (GG): GG hasn't pursued new permits because there hasn't been new infrastructure! 3 years ago, USFS had a directive for companies to pay a portion of their fee through in-kind infrastructure work. GG would absolutely help out with infrastructure work!

E. What partnerships does your group currently have or might be interested in?

Alex (ABAK): Amalga meadows community is fiercely protective of their area. Commercial users need to show a sense of stewardship to show that they care about these areas- not just in speaking out at meetings, but also putting their money where their mouth is i.e. helping with general maintenance or picking up trash.

Michele (CBJ): a majority of the fees being (George Schaaf “120%”) paid by commercial users goes to Tmix for maintenance

Sierra (GG): Many tourism workers that move to Juneau for the season don't have enough work to keep them busy for the first couple weeks- especially likely as we recover from COVID. It would be great to get them involved with trail improvements, maintenance.

Mike (ATA): ATA does not have tour programs using trail because they mostly use parking and trailheads for staging areas but ATA would be happy to partner with user groups to work on trails. Looking at last chance basin erosion.

F. Commercial Use Regulations?

Michele (CBJ): The first round of written comments on the proposed changes were accepted through January 15, 2020. Solicited feedback through public process. Paused with COVID. Hoped to get that in front of assembly in spring. We anticipate passing the regulation and then soliciting more feedback.

G. What are your groups BIG trail goals?

Sierra (GG): More space [accommodate increasing capacity]. More loop trails. Moderate trails that provide authentic wilderness away from crowds. GG has relied heavily on the Moraine Ecology Trail at MGRA. That will be paved soon, per MGRA master plan.

Alex (ABAK): We seek intimate wild experiences- i.e. West Glacier, Admiralty Island. Not looking for the quite the same thing as GG.

Alicia (TJ): Accessibility to trailheads. Closer to downtown so that they can pack more into a short stay. Good descriptions!

Allison (CBJ): 35 miles of trail on Douglas. 39 miles of trail in downtown.... so the issue of trails in close proximity to downtown may be an issue of signage and wayfinding.

Mike (ATA): while we don't utilize the trails, we do use parking and staging areas adjacent to trailheads. We'd benefit from parking, trash, and bathrooms at those trail heads.

H. Anything else you'd like to see or benefit from at trailheads?

Sierra (GG): Really specific signage about how to drop off guests - avoid confusing drop-offs (i.e. tour buses).

Mike (ATA): ATA guests have benefitted from the upgrades to the w glacier parking area, especially during peak hours.

Kate (TMIX): Are interpretive trail signs things that visitors are looking for on the trails for information about the trails, history, and Native culture?

Alex (ABAK): state parks has learned interpretive panels are far more likely to be used by independent trail users because commercial users are using their own guides but independent users are far more likely to rank that as a priority.

I. Other Comments?

Sierra (GG): communication is so important especially because guides and cruises plan hikes 2 years in advance so if they can plan/price hike that is super important. Trail improvements for MGRA design has fizzled.

Mike (ATA): strongly agrees with Sierra's comment regarding timing of notification of price/fee hikes

Alex (ABAK): wants to make sure the waterways are included in the JMTP because we have world-class waterways

Preston (State Parks): RTP applications to build out water trails, unsuccessful in attempt to secure grant funding to improve signage and camping along water trails- worth another try!

IV. Wrap –up and Discussion of Next Steps

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS FROM USER GROUPS (Include name and group affiliation!)