

# CHAPTER 9

## PARKS, RECREATION, TRAILS AND NATURAL AREA RESOURCES

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The forms of recreation chosen by residents and visitors in the CBJ are as diverse as the population. Many people choose to recreate in developed parks and facilities, both indoor and outdoor. Others choose to spend time in natural areas where the existence of minimal improved facilities is the most important element. Therefore, planning for the future of parks and recreation facilities involves provision for both organized recreation in urban level facilities, dispersed recreation where improvements are limited to trail systems and, perhaps, destination cabins or, simply, public access to a creek or shoreline. It should be recognized that providing a broad range of recreational experiences involves a cooperative effort between local, state and federal government agencies.

In 1996, the CBJ adopted the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan*, which identified community needs, issues, recommended parks and natural area improvements and development standards. In 2007, the Parks and Recreation Department (P&RD) updated Chapter Eight of the *Plan*, which identified recommendations for parks and natural area acquisitions and improvements. From time to time the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan* will be updated and amended to keep its policies, guidelines, standards and development plans current and reflective of community needs and desires. That *Plan* contains specific resource information, development standards and recommended improvements for neighborhoods identified by subarea. Each amendment of the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan* is reviewed for consistency with this CBJ *Comprehensive Plan* and, therefore, should be reviewed and considered when recommending capital improvements and when reviewing building and use permit applications. Reviewers should also consult the following CBJ-adopted plans when developing or reviewing proposals for parks, open space/natural areas, trails, recreation facilities, capital improvement plans or permit applications:

1. The 2007 Chapter Eight revision to the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan*;
2. The 1993 *Juneau Trails Plan*;
3. The 2009 *Juneau Non-Motorized Transportation Plan*; and
4. The 1986 *West Mendenhall Valley Greenbelt Plan*.

Other plans relating to non-motorized transportation or circulation, including the *Safe Routes to Schools Plan*, should also be consulted, although their recommendations do not carry the same weight as those in adopted plans.

In planning for the dispersed portion of recreational opportunities, the P&RD has worked closely with the State of Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, multiple resident groups and individuals to produce the *Juneau Trails Plan*. As a comprehensive evaluation of all the trails in the CBJ area, regardless of land ownership or management authority, this document identifies a wide spectrum of actions from improvement of existing trail conditions to suggestions for construction of new trails or back-country cabins. The general nature of the plan and its long-term look at trail-related issues makes it an appropriate document to include as a companion to this *Comprehensive Plan*.

There has been substantial commercial use of some public trails and destinations in connection with the CBJ's robust visitor industry. This use has resulted in overcrowded conditions and greater maintenance costs on some trails. There is a need to regulate this use and mitigate associated adverse impacts in order to protect the resource

and the quality of the recreation experience for local residents and visitors alike. The P&RD facilitated a Trails Working Group which, in June 2001, published a report entitled *Commercial Use of Trails, Recommendations by the Trails Working Group* that identified which trails within each subarea should be allowed commercial use and the type of use the trail could accommodate; the Trails Working Group provided new recommendations for commercial use of trails in 2004. That report should be updated as needed and reviewed for consistency when considering commercial use permits for CBJ trails.

There continues to be a lack of adequate neighborhood and community parks and facilities in major areas, including the East Mendenhall Valley, Lemon Creek and Switzer Creek areas. While recreational programs are in great demand in the community, the number of facilities to support these programs is insufficient. Planning underway by the P&RD should be coordinated with the Juneau School District, with the involvement of the CDD.

The Eaglecrest ski area, located on Douglas Island, is an important winter recreational resource to many Juneau families. The management of the facility is seeking ways to provide year-round recreational activities for residents and visitors to make more efficient use of its resources.

The Capital Improvement Program Six-Year *Plan* includes a prioritized listing of Parks and Recreation, Eaglecrest, and Centennial Hall projects. Funding is provided primarily through the CBJ budget, with occasional state funding through the legislative process. Other sources of funding should continue to be pursued.

Although Juneau contains a wide variety of outdoor recreational resources, more park and recreational facilities, both indoor and outdoor, should be provided within the urban area. During the community outreach effort of the 2008 *Plan Update*, residents of all neighborhoods (some for different reasons) supported the following new recreational facilities: a swimming pool in the Valley; a performing arts center; and a dedicated ATV/snowmobile course. The Dimond Park Aquatic Center opened to the public in 2011, fulfilling the identified desire for a Mendenhall Valley pool.

## **Parks and Recreation Facilities**

**POLICY 9.1. TO PROVIDE QUALITY DISPERSED OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND TO ACQUIRE AND DEVELOP SUFFICIENT LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES IN LOCATIONS CONVENIENT TO ALL AREAS OF THE CBJ. PLACES GIVEN PRIORITY FOR NEW FACILITIES INCLUDE RAPIDLY DEVELOPING AREAS AND CURRENTLY DEVELOPED AREAS THAT LACK ADEQUATE PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES.**

### **Standard Operating Procedures**

- 9.1 - SOP1 Monitor trends in community demographics and incorporate activities specifically related to under-served populations.
- 9.1 - SOP2 Pursue interdepartmental, interagency and community planning efforts necessary to protect and enhance recreational opportunities in the borough.
- 9.1 - SOP3 Pursue funding for acquisition and development of parks and recreation facilities through traditional funding mechanisms such as the Capital Improvement Program, the state legislative process, and federal funding opportunities. Maximize the use of federal and state matching funds. Investigate creative and innovative funding mechanisms for the acquisition and development of parks, facilities, trails and programs. Explore cooperative management agreements, joint ventures, private/public partnerships or other protocols to facilitate progress.
- 9.1 - SOP4 Cooperate with the School District and Parks and Recreation Department to plan for joint use of neighborhood and community parks, community and school facilities, and sports fields by the students and general public.
- 9.1 - SOP5 Provide outreach programs directly to youth; bring programs to the neighborhoods.
- 9.1 - SOP6 Support and seek to expand resources for Youth Activity Grants and scholarships for this program.

- 9.1 - SOP7 Officially welcome participants and otherwise encourage large regional sporting or athletic events such as the Gold Medal Basketball Tournament.
- 9.1 – SOP8 Utilize a permit system for commercial use of public lands that includes commercial user fees as part of the funding source for dispersed recreation development and maintenance costs. Consider the cost of operation and maintenance of the resource, when establishing or revising a commercial user fee.
- 9.1 – SOP9 Work with local non-profit, volunteer, and advocacy groups to efficiently provide supportive services and maintenance of trails and other recreational facilities in the community. In the event that such groups are unable to continue to provide the current level of support, consider community needs and available resources before providing or eliminating the provision of needed support.

### **Development Guideline**

- 9.1 - DG1 Ensure that proposed commercial use of public trails and their environs is consistent with the P&RD *Commercial Use of Trails* report.

### **Implementing Actions**

- 9.1 - IA1 CDD staff should work with P&RD staff and interested parties to develop thresholds and standards in the Land Use Code for construction of playgrounds and trail linkages by developers to serve their proposed new subdivisions and residential developments, taking into account existing facilities within the area, proposed development population play and recreation needs, and size of the proposed development. CDD and the P&RD should work with developers to address neighborhood park needs. P&RD and CDD staff should work cooperatively to monitor commitments by developers of new residential developments that may fulfill a condition of the development. These may include construction of new trails and playgrounds. CDD should work with P&RD to monitor existing community improvements in permitted residential developments.
- 9.1 - IA2 Establish one or more discrete zoning districts in the CBJ Title 49 Land Use Code for CBJ-owned lands dedicated to parks and recreation and natural area uses. These new zoning districts would correspond to the CA (Conservation Area), SC (Stream Protection Corridor), and NP (Natural Area Park) land use designations of this *Plan*. Amend the zoning map to place those zoning designations on the CBJ-owned lands dedicated to those uses.
- 9.1 - IA3 Initiate a needs assessment with state, CBJ and federal agencies to assess recreational needs; of particular concern are the expressed needs for (1) lighted cross-country ski trails where snowmobiles are not permitted; (2) an off-road-vehicle track and trail network, and (3) a performing arts center in downtown Juneau.
- 9.1 - IA4 Provide a centralized recreation program registration venue at a location that is convenient to residents, that is accessible by all modes of transport, and is provided with adequate parking.
- 9.1 - IA5 The P&RD should participate in the planning for new school development to ensure maximum community recreation utility in the design of community rooms, gymnasiums, playgrounds, and sports fields.
- 9.1 - IA6 Ensure that new facilities, programs, and equipment are designed to meet the needs of the disabled community, and that the facilities provide a variety of services for all people with disabilities.
- 9.1 - IA7 Identify traditional and high quality waterfront access areas, recreational anchorages and beaches, beach trail opportunities, boat launch areas, and waterfront park sites. Coordinate with the CBJ Docks and Harbors, Land & Resources, CDD, and State of Alaska to assure that public access to water is provided.
- 9.1 - IA8 CDD and P&RD should work to permanently protect CBJ's Natural Area Parks and Conservation areas. P&RD should initiate a pilot Forever Wild program.

- 9.1 - IA9 Identify locations within the borough that provide good, publicly-accessible night sky viewing opportunities and develop those locations with seating, parking and other facilities and protect those locations from light pollution and intrusion.
- 9.1 - IA10 Complete a camping plan for the borough that identifies a range of camping facilities including highly developed RV campgrounds, remote cabin sites, and primitive campsites.
- 9.1 - IA11 Investigate the location and number of mini-parks needed in the community and construct new mini-parks as needed.
- 9.1 - IA12 Seek location and construction for an ATV/snowmobile course with a programmed riding course as well as trails.
- 9.1 - IA13 Re-establish the Trails Working Group , or an equivalent group, to address commercial activities on CBJ park land.
- 9.1 - IA14 Support the establishment of dog parks, per the P&RD Dog Task Force’s recommendations.
- 9.1 - IA15 Identify all parks with signage.
- 9.1 - IA16 Implement the replacement schedule for playground equipment and include accessible equipment in all new purchases.
- 9.1 - IA17 Plan park renovation projects to address changing recreational needs.
- 9.1 - IA18 Enhance the beauty and livability of the community by augmenting the CBJ landscaping program.
- 9.1 - IA19 Work cooperatively with agencies such as the Alaska State Museum, the Historic Resources Advisory Committee, and Gastineau Channel Historical Society to manage activities at the City Museum, the Last Chance Basin Mining Museum, the University of Alaska Southeast, the Alaska State Museum, and other similar venues.
- 9.1 - IA20 Promote development of a performing arts facility that will meet a wide variety of needs.
- 9.1 - IA21 Incorporate park lands in developing areas through designation of publicly owned lands, acquisition of private lands, or dedication of lands during the subdivision process.
- 9.1 - IA22 Develop a GIS map layer that clearly labels developed or designated open space/natural areas, greenbelts, parks, playgrounds and beach access points.
- 9.1 - IA23 Develop parks and recreation facilities, for both urban level and dispersed recreation, based on the community’s unique characteristics, needs, and traditions. In developing dispersed recreation opportunities such as fish and wildlife viewing areas and increased sport fishing opportunities, recognize the importance of habitat and sensitive area protection.
- 9.1 - IA24 Encourage development of additional facilities at, and provision of electric energy from the CBJ’s existing electrical grid, to the Eaglecrest ski area.
- 9.1 - IA25 Consider options for enhancing shoreside recreational fishing opportunities when planning new city parks, docks, trails, infrastructure, and related developments.

## **Interconnected Trail System**

One of the most frequent responses to the community values and opinion surveys conducted as part of the 2008 *Plan Update* was the desire for access to nature in the uplands, forests and the waterways. This access was desired for both human travel and enjoyment and for the health, welfare and sustainability of fish and wildlife. Residents suggested that an un-fragmented trail system located in both developed and undeveloped areas could be sited and designed in such a way as to assure access for fish and wildlife (flora and fauna) from the icefields to the sea, while providing non-motorized trails for local residents and visitors. The fish and wildlife portion of the system could follow the various anadromous fish streams linking the icefield, through the forested areas, to the sea. Those fish and wildlife corridors could be intersected by a regional non-motorized trail system, thereby assuring access

to nature for all residents, human and non-human. This dual-purpose recreational trail/fish and wildlife corridor would assure the most critical habitat for fish and wildlife and could be a receiving area for habitat mitigation. Land outside these corridors and this trail system could then be considered “buildable,” if properly mitigated.

**POLICY 9.2. TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN AN INTERCONNECTED NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL SYSTEM THAT IS COMPLEMENTARY WITH, AND MAY BE CONTIGUOUS WITH, UN-FRAGMENTED FISH AND WILDLIFE CORRIDORS ALONG ANADROMOUS FISH STREAMS WITHIN THE ROADED AREA THAT PROVIDES FISH AND WILDLIFE AND HUMAN ACCESS TO THE SEA FROM THE UPLANDS.**

**Standard Operating Procedures**

- 9.2 - SOP1 Consider the impacts of new development on trails identified in the *Juneau Trails Plan* when reviewing Capital Improvement Plans and permit applications. Seek to implement the *Plan’s* recommendations to establish an un-fragmented trail system throughout the roaded area of the CBJ.
- 9.2 - SOP2 Cooperate with the State of Alaska and the U.S. Forest Service to encourage the establishment of recreational and open space/natural areas facilities and areas.

**Implementing Actions**

- 9.2 - IA1 Working with state and federal agencies, create a GIS trail map. On the CBJ GIS system, identify un-fragmented fish and wildlife corridors along the adopted CBJ list of anadromous fish streams that extends from the Juneau Icefield and other upland areas to the sea. Within the roaded areas of the borough, and when compatible with wildlife passage within the corridors, identify an un-fragmented trail network for non-motorized travel by humans within these wildlife corridors.
- 9.2 - IA2 When reviewing capital improvement plans and building or use permit applications, seek to protect lands necessary to establish and/or maintain the un-fragmented fish and wildlife corridors and trail network. This may include the dedication of conservation easements or “no build” zones within a development as well as dedication provision of public access through the trail easements.
- 9.2 - IA3 Improve and expand the community’s trail system to provide an un-fragmented trail system that offers opportunities for a wide range of experiences, safety of the users, and protection of fish and wildlife habitat.
- 9.2 - IA4 Prioritize construction and maintenance of existing trails including: repair of unsafe conditions, repair of resource degradation; enhancements that allow for greater utilization; construction of new trails that provide connections and construction of new trails in anticipation of future needs.
- 9.2 - IA5 Continue partnering with federal, state and local agencies in the maintenance and development of trails through the non-profit organization, Trail Mix, Inc., or its equivalent.
- 9.2 - IA6 Implement the tri-agency *Juneau Trails Plan* and update it as necessary.
- 9.2 - IA7 Implement adopted *Non-Motorized Transportation Plan* items in subareas, and update as new subdivisions are constructed.
- 9.2 - IA8 Work with the ADOT&PF, the CDD, the Engineering Department, and other relevant agencies to ensure that future right-of-way construction includes adequate pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and that existing neighborhoods are connected by a network of non-motorized corridors.
- 9.2 - IA9 Support the designation of federal funds for trail development, as provided for by MAP-21 or other federal apportionments and allowances.

## Natural Areas

Natural, undeveloped areas (formerly referred to as “open space”) are an essential component of the CBJ’s community form and identity. They should be maintained and enhanced. Shoreline areas are a major coastal fish and wildlife habitat, offer a valued view corridor, and can function as valuable natural recreational resources; most are publicly owned. Among the most dramatic, and often visited, locales to enjoy spectacular views of scenic destinations are the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center, the Mount Roberts Tram, and the view of the Mendenhall Glacier from the waterfront roadway from the North Douglas boat launch facility to False Outer Point. These vista points should be preserved and enhanced with low-impact visitor facilities such as parking areas, bike paths and trails.

The West Mendenhall Valley Greenbelt has been established, beach access routes have been identified and signs put in place, and there have been improvements made for recreational access to Echo Cove and Amalga Harbor.

The CBJ government should maintain awareness of, and educate the public to, the importance of natural areas in land use and development decisions. Valuable habitat areas within the borough require retention of vegetation and water resources. Inadequately regulated development degrades habitat values and scenic resources. The quality of residential developments is enhanced by standards and policies to preserve natural areas. Demand for outdoor recreational opportunities is generated by both resident and visitor populations. Some of the valued community assets most frequently expressed by residents during the 2007 *Plan Update* public opinion survey were (1) preservation of the community’s natural beauty and scenery; (2) provision of public access to the water and wilderness areas; and (3) protection of streams and wildlife corridors.

### **POLICY 9.3. TO PRESERVE AS PUBLIC NATURAL AREAS THOSE PUBLICLY-OWNED LANDS AND SHORELINE AREAS THAT POSSESS IMPORTANT RECREATIONAL, SCENIC, FISH AND WILDLIFE, AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITIES OR ARE SUBJECT TO NATURAL HAZARDS.**

#### **Standard Operating Procedures**

- 9.3 - SOP1 Designate public areas and sites recommended in the 2007 Update of Chapter 8 of the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan* for permanent public access and use. Work toward acquiring privately-owned land through dedication, donation or purchase. Develop legal descriptions and revise the zoning map accordingly.
- 9.3 - SOP2 Acquire land or regulate its use as necessary to protect the public from natural hazards and to preserve sensitive natural resources.
- 9.3 - SOP3 Encourage relevant state agencies to adopt open space/natural areas management policies for state land and tidelands indicated in the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan*. Initiate cooperative management agreements proposed in the plan.

#### **Implementing Actions**

- 9.3 - IA1 Where regulatory actions are inappropriate, acquire easements through dedication, donation, or purchase of privately-owned streamside lands and other areas indicated in the *Juneau Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan*.
- 9.3 - IA2 Revise the Land Use Code to establish a Scenic Corridor/View Overlay District that would be mapped to include the lands designated on the Comprehensive Plan Land Use Maps with the Scenic Corridor/Viewshed (SCV) land use designation.