

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this plan is to establish guidelines for the development and management of the lower Eagle River Valley portion of Chugach State Park. The foundation of the plan has been developed from public comments; historical information, current and anticipated trends of recreational use and demand; resource inventory of the area; the Municipality of Anchorage Eagle River Greenbelt Plan; and, the Chugach State Park Master Plan.

The specific purposes of the plan are to:

1. Describe the environment of the Eagle River Greenbelt as it relates to specific management issues and resource protection needs.
2. Provide management direction to the Eagle River Greenbelt as a supplement and update to the Chugach State Park Master Plan.
3. Protect the flora, fauna and inherent scenic value of the area.
4. Describe the social and economic elements affecting the area, including recreational demands.
5. Provide a staged implementation schedule for the development plan.

A. **Eagle River Greenbelt Overview (size, location, setting, existing recreational uses)**

For the purpose of this management plan the boundary area for the Eagle River Greenbelt is defined as all lands in the 1987 Eklutna, Inc. land exchange with the State of Alaska plus existing State Land at the Eagle River Campground, the South Fork Waterfall Site, up-river to the Eagle River Visitor Center. Adjacent Municipal and private lands, although not incorporated into the Eagle River Greenbelt boundary, are considered in the management plans of the Greenbelt for plan continuity and resource protection. The total acreage for the greenbelt is 3,505 acres. (Figure 1&2)

The Eagle River Greenbelt stretches for approximately 10 miles (18 river miles) from the Eagle River Campground near the Glenn Highway to the Eagle River Visitor Center at mile 12 on Eagle River Road. The greenbelt is north of Anchorage approximately 10 miles on the Glenn Highway.

The Eagle River Greenbelt varies in width from 1/2 mile wide, located in the lower valley, to approximately 5 miles across, located adjacent to the Eagle River Visitor Center.

Recreational use of the greenbelt is considered heavy although exact figures are not known due to the lack of defined access points along the 12 miles of road. During the summer months the area is popular for hiking, wildlife viewing, canoeing, and kayaking. The Eagle River Campground has 38 vehicle camping spaces plus an overflow area. In winter the area is used by cross-country skiers, hikers, dog mushers, snowmachine and ATV enthusiasts.

B. Existing Plans & Amendments

1. Chugach State Park Master Plan

In January of 1980, after two years of inventorying the park's features, resources, and use patterns; determining management options; conducting eight public meetings, numerous public presentations and copious reviews, the Chugach State Park Master Plan was adopted. The plan provides necessary information and recommendations for the management, use, development and protection of Chugach State Park. The Eagle River Greenbelt was included in this plan as a specific planning unit. Six unit objectives were developed based upon the unit's resources, current and anticipated use and public input to guide formulation of development recommendations for the unit. These included:

- a. Establishment of a visitor center/ranger station to provide necessary visitor services in the Eagle River Valley.
- b. Designation of riverside access points with provisions for parking to facilitate use of the Eagle River.
- c. Provide for the interpretation of unique natural features.

- d. Establishment of trailheads and trails for hiking, cross-country skiing and snowmachining and other recreational pursuits.
- e. Establishment of a wildlife viewing area in the Eagle River drainage.
- f. Provide state contribution toward maintenance of privately maintained roads leading to established park access points as appropriate to the amount of traffic generated.

Some of these objectives have already been met while others could be accomplished when adequate funding becomes available. The Master Plan further addressed a development and phasing plan (Appendix A). While many of the recommendations have already been achieved others have been incorporated into the Issues and Recommendations section of the Eagle River Greenbelt Management Plan.

The Chugach State Park Master Plan will continue to act as an overall guide to the management of the area.

2. Anchorage Municipal Eagle River Greenbelt Plan

In 1985, the Municipality of Anchorage adopted a plan for the Eagle River Greenbelt. Seven key recommendations were listed. These included:

- * Upon adoption by the Anchorage Assembly of the Eagle River Greenbelt Plan, the Municipality should enter into negotiations with Eklutna, Inc. and the three other private landowners to acquire the greenbelt land together with the six recreation sites, other than the Eagle River Campground Expansion site, as soon as possible.
- * A mix of acquisition techniques should be used rather than a reliance upon a single approach. All of the techniques described in the text can contribute in varying degrees and should be woven together in an acquisition strategy. A high degree of cooperation and support between the Municipality and state agencies is necessary and must be cultivated and maintained. Consideration should be given to first negotiate an "umbrella agreement" to guide

negotiation on the manner and basis for incorporation of Eklutna, Inc.-owned land into the greenbelt.

- * Development should follow acquisition in the creation of the Eagle River Greenbelt. Upon greenbelt acquisition, Municipal Department of Parks and Recreation should then begin the process of site and trail development with a development priority that includes:
 1. the six recreation sites;
 2. the greenbelt lands from the South Fork Park site downstream to the Eagle River Campground and including the South Fork Greenbelt link between the Park site and Waterfalls site; and,
 3. the remaining greenbelt lands from South Fork upstream to Chugach State Park.

A detailed plan of management and operation should be prepared with involvement of user groups to accommodate the variety of recreational needs. The potential for effective integration of such a plan with the proposed Eagle River Greenbelt Trust should be seriously considered. The proposed continuous trail system should be established under the general guidance of the plan as well as the more specific direction of the management plan.

- * The Municipality should take the lead in exploring the potential of creating an Eagle River Greenbelt Trust. Such a Trust could serve not only as a vehicle for securing corporate and foundation funds leading to acquisition and management, but could serve as a community "watchdog" to ensure the integrity of the greenbelt is maintained.
- * The State of Alaska, through the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, should pursue acquisition of land adjacent to the Eagle River Campground site from Eklutna, Inc. as an expansion to the existing campground.
- * Chugach State Park trails should be connected with those Municipal trails/routes as indicated in the plan.

- * The Eagle River Greenbelt Plan is consistent with the goals and policies of the Anchorage Coastal Management Plan which has identified most of the greenbelt as Freshwater Marsh and Wetlands under designation of Preservation Environment Coastal Resource Policy Unit.
- * The Eagle River Greenbelt land exchange concluded between the State and Eklutna, Inc. restored these greenbelt lands to public ownership within the boundaries of Chugach State Park. The Municipality's plan was considered to be the interim management plan until this plan was completed.

3. Chugach State Park Master Plan Amendments

On October 9, 1987, the Commissioner of DNR, Judith M. Brady, signed the Chugach State Park Master Plan Amendments. These amendments dealt with three issues: Resort Development in Chugach State Park; Helicopter Landings within Chugach State Park; and, the newly acquired Eagle River Greenbelt land.

The Master Plan Amendments further stated that:

The division shall establish a planning team to develop a detailed management plan for the lower Eagle River Valley (Eagle River Greenbelt) portion of Chugach State Park. The team shall be comprised of representatives from the park's citizen advisory board, local community councils and organizations, state and local agencies, and others. The Lower Eagle River Planning Unit is established from within the existing Eagle River Planning Unit to focus planning and management efforts on this important portion of the park. It is comprised of the lands acquired by the State from Eklutna, Inc., in a land exchange and existing park lands in T13N, R1E, SM. The existing park lands in T13N, R1E, SM that are to be included in the Lower Eagle River Planning Unit include all lands in the valley bottom and a portion of the valley sideslopes from the former Eklutna, Inc. land to the Eagle River Visitor Center. The planning team shall prepare a base map that determines the exact boundaries of the planning unit. The unit may be renamed by the director after receiving nominations from the park advisory board.

Prior to the completion of the management plan, the Municipality of Anchorage's greenbelt plan was adopted and followed as an interim plan.

Interim management of the unit under the Municipality's plan and the development of the management plan shall adhere to the following policies:

- a. Trails shall be developed as determined appropriate in the detailed management plan for the area. Recreational access sites may be developed as identified in the MOA plan or the management plan which is to be prepared. When possible, facilities shall be buffered or screened from view of the river. The Eagle River Campground may be expanded if appropriate.
- b. Facilities will be phased so as to satisfy existing recreational demand and anticipated demands of the near-term future.
- c. Motorized recreational activities (including boats, snowmachines and ATVs) are prohibited.
- d. Commercial activities shall be limited in number through concession contracts rather than through park use permits. Activities related to the possible development of a downhill ski area may be allowed but shall be controlled to insure that the natural and recreational resource values of the unit are maintained. The management plan shall determine the carrying capacity of the river for both commercial and non-commercial uses.
- e. Pursuant to AS 41.21.022, the division shall seek the concurrence of the Board of Game to close the unit to hunting and designate it a wildlife viewing area. The division and the planning team shall make wildlife viewing and wildlife education a goal of the area.
- f. Motorized vehicle access on the existing 1D9 (Homestead Road) right-of-way is allowed for use by local residents and others. The road may be relocated, redesigned and upgraded so long as natural and recreational values of the unit are maintained. Special park use permits may be issued under 11 AAC 18.010 (8) to provide nearby

landowners with access to the 1D9 road. Authorization for public utilities to be located in or across park lands and water shall be under the permitting process authorized by 11 AAC 18.010. The division shall work closely with DOT/PF and the Municipality of Anchorage to insure that the proposed Eagle Loop Road connection to Hiland Road/Glenn Highway crossing of the greenbelt minimizes adverse impacts on the unit.

- g. Modification of the river to enhance boater safety or improve whitewater kayaking should only be considered after a thorough review of impacts and coordination with appropriate agencies (i.e. ADF&G, Corps of Engineers, Municipality of Anchorage, etc.). This issue should be addressed during the development of the management plan.

C. Eagle River Greenbelt Planning Process

1. **Planning Team.** To aid in the management plan process a planning team comprised of 14 individuals from the private sector, special interest groups, and governmental agencies were assembled. The planning team has the task of reviewing all draft and final management plan documents, suggesting management strategies on major issues and concerns, giving direction to park staff and if necessary, advising the Director of Parks and Outdoor Recreation in any management decision. The team met three times discussing issues and formulating alternatives for various park uses. The Planning Team met on November 17, 1988; December 1, 1988; and, December 20, 1988.
2. **Public Meetings.** The first round of public meetings were held as follows:

Anchorage: Monday, October 17, 1988
Loussac Library - Wilda Marston Theater
7:00 p.m.

Eagle River: Wednesday, October 19, 1988
Chugiak/Eagle River Public Library
7:00 p.m.

3. **Public Comment Period.** The public comment period on the BACKGROUND information ended November 15, 1988.

Public Meetings. Public meetings on the DRAFT Eagle River Greenbelt Management Plan were held as follows:

Eagle River: Tuesday, February 21, 1989
Chugiak/Eagle River Public Library
7:00 p.m.

Anchorage: Wednesday, February 22, 1989
Loussac Library - Wilda Marston Theater
7:00 p.m.

Public Comment Period. The public comment period on the DRAFT management plan began February 10, 1989 and ended March 13, 1989.