

1 Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

2 Background

3 Much of the trail management effort in Chugach State Park until recently has been directed
4 to the management of trails that were inherited when the park was established or trails that
5 emerged through use. While the previous 1986 trail plan was comprehensive and provided
6 general trail management direction, little funding was available to implement it and so the
7 basic trail network in the park has generally remained the same. Since then, the thinking on
8 overall trail construction and management philosophy has evolved nationwide as most trail
9 management agencies, like State Parks, have struggled to keep trails in acceptable condition.
10 In order to provide good trail experiences, it became clear that best management practices
11 needed to be upgraded to create a system where trails could be managed to enhance
12 recreational opportunities, provide greater resource protection and most importantly given
13 the availability of trail resources, require minimal maintenance.

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15 In March 2009 the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation finalized a Trail Management
16 Policy that provides direction on how the Division will manage, develop, maintain and assess
17 the condition of state park trails. The policy provides goals and trail management concepts
18 for sustainable and responsible trail development and management. This trail plan was
19 developed consistent with the concepts in the Trail Management Policy and will serve as the
20 framework for management and trail development within Chugach State Park. The use of
21 sustainable design will create important long-term benefits, principally a reduced need for
22 regular maintenance and repairs into the future. The use of the recently developed
23 interagency trail classification system will enable the Division to better coordinate with
24 partners, share resources and allow for greater efficiency and seamless trail connectivity.

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26 Accommodating a variety of recreational uses and trail user groups is a challenge within the
27 park because topography influences use patterns and park users are frequently competing
28 with each other to use the “best” areas. Under this Plan, sustainable construction and trail
29 maintenance practices will be utilized on all future trail management activities including both
30 trail-related project work and regular trail maintenance. The trail system will remain multi-
31 use in nature but will abide by the standards in the new Trail Classification System. This
32 system defines trail standards and design parameters by a trail’s designed and managed uses.

33 34 Plan Purpose

35 The Chugach State Park Trail Management Plan is needed as a strategic tool to plot the
36 course of trail management in the coming years. It is based on an analysis of existing access
37 points, trails, the park environment and resources, land ownership and status, and current and
38 anticipated trends in recreational use. The plan identifies management objectives and
39 establishes guidelines for the future use and development of trails in Chugach State Park.
40 The primary purposes of this plan are to provide:

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- 1 1. A trail system which allows for optimum recreational use of the area while protecting
- 2 the natural resources of the park.
- 3 2. A consistent set of principles and policies for trail management.
- 4 3. A basis for future funding.
- 5 4. A roadmap for the trail building and maintenance efforts.
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7 **Planning Process**

8 The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) began the planning process to revise the 1986
9 Chugach State Park Trail Plan in April of 2008. Public scoping workshops were held in
10 Anchorage, Indian and Eagle River to gather information and identify issues and concerns.
11 Many comments were received during the scoping phase of the process that focused on trails
12 and trail maintenance. To learn more specific details about how people use the park and
13 would like to use the park, additional focus group meetings were held throughout the
14 remainder of the year with a variety of user groups. The information gathered was used to
15 prepare and evaluate management alternatives. Analysis of this information and public
16 comments provided the direction needed to recommend new trails and trailheads,
17 improvements or upgrading, and trails that should possibly be closed or relocated. With the
18 help of the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board, the planning team drafted this plan
19 for public review and comment. Once the public comment period is over, DNR staff will
20 review comments and revise the plan as needed. A final plan is then prepared and approved
21 that will guide trail management decisions within the park.

22 **Trail Inventory Process**

23 In the Spring of 2007, a Trail Inventory and Assessment Project began as a pilot program in
24 Chugach State Park that has proven to be a major asset in the development of this plan. The
25 pilot program was initiated by the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board using the
26 National Park Service's (NPS) River Trails and Conservation Assistance Program resources.
27 It was a collaborative effort between State Parks, the US Forest Service (USFS), and the
28 Alaska Department of Natural Resources' Land Records Information Section. The project
29 objective was to demonstrate the feasibility of a comprehensive trail assessment and
30 condition survey for a subset of Chugach State Park (CSP) front-range trails, provide project
31 data and maps, and ultimately evaluate applicability as a management tool for use in all State
32 Park units with trails.

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35 The project plan was to map existing CSP front-range trail centerlines as accurately as
36 possible while recording basic trail condition and associated constructed features found
37 directly adjacent to the trail using Global Positioning System (GPS) receivers, and processing
38 and archiving these data in a Geographical Information System (GIS). Over two summers
39 the field mapping crew used GPS units with sub-meter accuracy and basic trail inventory
40 equipment to collect data for approximately 265 miles of trails. The crew collected
41 information based on uniform standards similar to those adopted by the USFS and utilized by
42 the NPS and the Municipality of Anchorage. The data included trail centerlines; trail
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1 condition information such as amount of brush, erosion, trail width, grade, and surface type;
2 trail structures such as bridges, culverts, boardwalks, and signs; trailheads and associated
3 features including gates, kiosks, parking, fee stations, and toilets; physical features such as
4 ford sites and viewpoints; and photographs with spatial coordinates to create photo links.
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6 For the first time, accurate trail alignments and distances are known for a large portion of the
7 trails within the park and the condition of the trails and associated structures are documented.
8 In the future this information can be used to make further assessments and prescription
9 decisions, to generate maps and trail websites, to help in securing grant funding, and for
10 further planning purposes.
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12 **Use and Users**

13 Perhaps the most heavily used resource within Chugach State Park is the trail system. Park
14 trails offer a wide variety of recreational opportunities year-round for residents and out-of-
15 state visitors alike. Summer uses include hiking, mountaineering, bicycling, trapping,
16 fishing, running, horseback riding, orienteering, kayaking, rafting, canoeing, packrafting,
17 riding ATVs, paragliding, berry picking, nature walking, sightseeing, and hunting. Winter
18 activities include skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, dog mushing,
19 skijoring, winter biking, and ice-boating. Demands for organized events within the park such
20 as bike races, mountain races, fund raisers and other gatherings continue to grow as does
21 commercial use of the park. The differing skill levels of park users and the multitude of
22 competing interests and uses often overlap seasonally and geographically. This plan seeks to
23 lay the framework for a network of trails that over time will provide diverse trail
24 opportunities and experiences for a wide variety of park users.
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