
CHAPTER 3 — CHUGIAK-EAGLE RIVER TRAILS

Chugiak-Eagle River covers the area from Muldoon Road north to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough boundary and from Knik Arm to Chugach State Park. The main road through the area is the New Glenn Highway.

I. PEDESTRIAN AND RELATED USES

The rural character of much of Chugiak-Eagle River has resulted in development that is largely without pedestrian facilities. However, sidewalks and walkways have been and are being required in the urban areas through the subdivision process. Urban areas have a planned residential density of 3-6 dwelling units per acre and are zoned R-1, R-2, R-3, or R-4, or are in areas zoned for commercial or industrial uses.

A. EXISTING FACILITIES

Many of the available pedestrian facilities are within the developed areas of Eagle River. However, many of the older portions of the urban core of Eagle River do not have sidewalks. There is a trail along portions of the Old Glenn Highway in Eagle River that can be used by pedestrians.

Almost all rural neighborhoods are devoid of any pedestrian facilities. Pedestrians must walk down roadways to get to bus stops or other destinations.

B. ISSUES

Sidewalks are needed along all commercial core areas where they do not currently exist. While much of the urban area in Eagle River is in a strip configuration, portions of the town center, especially in the Business Boulevard area, need sidewalks. A 1993 survey showed that pedestrian safety was the greatest concern of citizens in this area.

A system of trails, including sidewalks, should be established along collectors in the Chugiak-Eagle River area. These would provide pedestrian access to streets that are served by transit, as well as provide better access to schools, recreation areas, and the urban area. Homestead and Ravenwood Elementary Schools, in particular, have problems with pedestrian access.

There is the need for a separated multi-use paved trail along the Old Glenn Highway from Eagle River to Peters Creek. This trail would tie into with existing trail along the New Glenn Highway at South Birchwood and North Birchwood Loops. There is also a need for safe pedestrian crossings of the Old Glenn Highway in Eagle River and Chugiak, especially at the intersection of North Eagle River Loop Road and at Chugiak Elementary School.

A separated multi-use paved trail along the segment of Eagle River Loop Road from the Old Glenn Highway to Eagle River Road is needed. The grade of Eagle River Loop Road from Eagle River Road to the Briggs Bridge is approximately seven percent, which is too steep to meet accessibility guidelines. For this reason, it is not possible to safely accommodate a continuous trail to the Briggs Bridge on both sides of the road. Trail improvements were developed as part of the Eagle River Loop Road to Hiland Road Connection project. On the east side of the road, a sidewalk extends south of Eagle River Road to the new over-crossing near Hidden Falls Avenue. In addition, there is a pedestrian undercrossing provided at Mills Bay Drive. Due to the steep grade, the trail on the east side forks, directing users either to the over-crossing or through the neighborhood.

A continuous trail extends from Eagle River Loop Road to the Briggs Bridge on the west side of the road. The 12-foot sidewalk along the bridge connects to a 10-foot shoulder that extends to the Hiland Road interchange at the Glenn Highway. The Hiland Road interchange includes a trail on the north side.

Birchwood Loop Road serves as a bus transit route. It would be appropriate and safer to provide a separated trail along this roadway that is suitable for use by pedestrians disembarking from buses, rather than the current practice of walking within the roadway.

There are some large areas in the Chugiak-Eagle River that are designated as Mixed Development in the *Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan*. Trails will be needed, but where the trails should be located can not be determined at this time. Guidelines are necessary to ensure that trails are provided for future residents.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Sidewalks should be provided in all core commercial areas where they do not now exist, including along Business Blvd. in Eagle River and Oberg Road/Old Glenn Highway in Peters Creek.
2. It is preferred that trails along collectors be separated. However, separated trails should be provided along all streets classified arterial and above and along all transit routes. Recommended routes include:
 - Eagle River Loop Road,
 - Eagle River Road extended to the Visitor Center,
 - North and South Birchwood Loops,
 - Old Glenn Highway.
3. Priorities for pedestrian facilities should include the following:
 - Connections from Eagle River Road to the Eagle River Greenbelt;
 - Pedestrian access to schools including Homestead, Ravenwood, Mirror Lake, Birchwood, and Alpenglow/Parkview Terrace
 - Pedestrian connections from residential areas northeast of Business Boulevard to the commercial area;
 - Pedestrian connections in downtown Eagle River between the Old Glenn Highway and Business Blvd.;
 - Pedestrian crossings of the Old Glenn Highway with reduced speed signs and flashing lights
 - Sidewalks in the Eagle River business district, especially along Business Blvd.
 - Trails along collectors and arterials; and,
 - Trails along transit routes.
4. In the Mixed Development areas, as designated in the *Chugiak-Eagle River Comprehensive Plan*, the following guidelines shall be followed:
 - A separated multi-use paved trail shall be constructed adjacent to every road of collector status or greater.
 - A non-motorized trail, in addition to the stream protection setback, shall be established along every stream where stream protection setbacks are required.
 - When major existing trails are eliminated through development of the surrounding area, they shall be replaced by equivalent trails *in the same area* and be located in protected parks or greenbelts or new subdivisions, with connections as close to school sites as possible. These trails must be integrated through design so that pedestrian access is maintained and enhanced.
5. An unpaved multi-use trail should be constructed from Alpenglow Elementary School to Ravenwood Elementary School and from Golden Eagle Drive to Mount Baldy.

II. BICYCLE USE

The number of persons now residing and projected to reside in Chugiak-Eagle River warrants the development of an areawide bike trail system to serve both transportation and recreational purposes. The needs of the commuter and the racer should be incorporated to create an effective and usable bike trail system.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

The New Glenn Highway trail that parallels the New Glenn Highway from Anchorage to North Birchwood and the Eagle River Road trail from the Old Glenn Highway to Preuss Road are the two trails that currently exist in Eagle River.

Another trail winds through the Eaglewood Subdivision just south of Eagle River Road, but does not connect to the Eagle River Road trail. A trail connects Gruening Junior High School with the Eagle River Road trail, and provides a link to residential neighborhoods north of Eagle River Road. A trail connects the Fire Lake Recreation Center to the Old Glenn Highway and down to Northgate Drive in Eagle River. Also, there is a trail from Meadow Creek to the Eagle River Elementary School.

The southern portion of the New Glenn Highway trail, from the North Eagle River Access Road to Anchorage, was constructed in 1982. It provides a valuable link between Eagle River and Anchorage, as well as a beautiful open space corridor for recreational riders.

B. ISSUES

The section of the New Glenn Highway trail between the north Eagle River Road Access and Peters Creek is in very poor condition. There are breaks in the pavement, as well as an insufficient width. Additionally, insufficient separation from the New Glenn Highway at points between South Birchwood and North Birchwood causes significant maintenance, safety and enjoyment problems. These problems should be corrected when the highway is resurfaced.

The trail along the New Glenn Highway experiences problems at the entrance to the landfill due to conflicts between trail users, automobiles, and trucks, including those vehicles leaving the landfill and those turning left to use the southbound on-ramp.

The Eagle River Road trail leaves the Old Glenn Highway in downtown Eagle River and terminates at its intersection with Preuss Road. It crosses private driveways along its entire length, posing a potential hazard as bicyclists are confronted with automobiles making turns across the bike trail. To minimize this existing safety problem, signs should be posted warning motorists of the cyclists' right-of-way, and lines should be painted on either side of the bike trail so that the trail itself will become more visually apparent.

Construction of the coastal trail would link Beach Lake and Edmonds Lake Regional Parks and local neighborhood parks, residential neighborhoods, Chugiak High School, Birchwood Elementary School, and Mirror Lake Middle/Junior High School.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The New Glenn Highway trail from the north Eagle River access to North Birchwood should be upgraded and maintained to accommodate all types of non-motorized uses.
2. As sites for new elementary and junior high schools are chosen, bicycle trail access from the school sites to adjacent residential areas must be identified.
3. Priorities for planned trails include the following:
 - extension of the Glenn Highway trail to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough along the east side of the highway
 - extension of the Eagle River Road trail to the Visitors Center
 - separated trail along the Old Glenn Highway
 - trail connection from the New Glenn Highway to the transit park-and-ride facility in downtown Eagle River
 - trail along Fire Creek connecting to the planned coastal trail

- trail system along the Eagle River Greenbelt with connections to Hiland Drive, Eagle River Loop Road and Eagle River Road
- connection from Briggs Bridge to the existing Glenn Highway trail
- gravel multi-purpose trail along the mountain contours from Little Peters trailhead to the Fire Lake Recreation Center
- separated trail along Birchwood Loop Road
- separated trails along streets of classification collector or above

III. RUNNING/JOGGING/PHYSICAL FITNESS USERS

Lack of extensive trails or pedestrian facilities limits the availability to runners in Chugiak-Eagle River.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Paved multi-use trails and unpaved trails used by cross-country skiers and equestrians serve as jogging trails. Such trails include the New Glenn Highway trail, the Eagle River Road trail, and Beach Lake Park trails.

There is a physical fitness trail at Birchwood Elementary School.

B. ISSUES

The planned Coastal Trail from Ship Creek to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough boundary will provide runners with views of the Knik Arm and Alaska Range. Care should be taken to incorporate runners' desires into the trail location process. Connections to the Chugiak High and Birchwood Elementary Schools will provide access to these school running facilities.

The planned trail along the Eagle River Greenbelt corridor will offer a running trail in summer, with connections to Ravenwood Elementary School and unpaved trails at the Chugach State Park Visitors Center.

Meadow Creek offers some hiking and cross-country running potential with access into Chugach State Park. However Meadow Creek valley is very damp for many months of the year. This trail would need a trailhead in the proximity of the water tanks on Eagle River Loop Road. Additionally agreements for access through private property must be obtained.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Some trails should be packed for walkers and runners during the winter. Locations for this type of trail would include the New Glenn Highway trail, the Eagle River Road trail, and the planned Eagle River Loop Road trail.
2. Milepost signs should be placed along designated bike and running trails. Trails that would be appropriate for such signing would include the New Glenn Highway trail and Eagle River Road trail. These signs should be relevant for either direction of travel. The New Glenn Highway trail should have a mileage count beginning in Anchorage and another that begins at the Eagle River Interchange.
3. A trailhead should be provided to allow access to Meadow Creek as a hiking/jogging trail.
4. Priorities for running/jogging/fitness trails should include:
 - Signing of New Glenn Highway trail
 - Packing of New Glenn Highway trail for winter use

IV. INTERPRETIVE TRAIL USERS

Chugiak-Eagle River provides opportunities to interpret local geologic and other natural events. The area provides markedly different topographic features from that of Anchorage.

A. EXISTING TRAILS AND FACILITIES:

The Eagle River Visitor's Center operated by the State of Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is one of the best-known interpretive facilities in the Municipality of Anchorage. This facility offers opportunities to interpret a full range of natural features in a dramatic setting. The Albert Loop Geology Trail is a particularly interesting example of an interpretive trail.

B. ISSUES

While the Eagle River Visitor Center provides a well-used facility, additional opportunities for interpretation of natural features are needed along other trails.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Interpretive trails should be signed, when possible and where appropriate, to interpret natural features.
2. All community or regional parks should be considered for construction of interpretive trails.
3. Potential locations for interpretive displays include:
 - Eagle River, at the campground — glacial river
 - Eagle River Center — wetlands habitat
 - Coastal Trail — coastal habitats
 - Edmonds Lake Park — wetland bog and upland vegetation
 - Eklutna Lake — alpine lake
 - Peters Creek Park — riparian vegetation

V. SNOWMOBILES AND OTHER MOTORIZED USERS

The Chugiak-Eagle River area has several extensive areas open for snowmobiling and one area open to motorized users.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Off-road vehicles and all-terrain vehicles use the Eklutna Lake trail in the Chugiak-Eagle River area.

In Chugach State Park, all but one of the valley bottoms are open to some degree of snowmobiling. Restrictions exist in terms of operating times, area restrictions, or limitations imposed by the lack of trailheads in some valleys.

Eagle River is open to snowmobiling between the banks of the river from the Glenn Highway to Icicle Creek.

Peters Creek is open to snowmobiling to the wilderness boundary across the top third of the valley. The present access trail traverses private property. There is no developed trailhead.

Little Peters Creek, also known as Ptarmigan Valley, is open and is well suited to snowmobiling. The open area is well defined by the ridgelines. Snowmobilers feel it is an excellent location for family rides or for a short outing, as space there is limited. There is presently no developed trailhead.

Eklutna Lake is open to snowmobiling on certain days of the week, alternating with non-motorized uses.

B. ISSUES

Peters Creek is open and a trailhead is planned, but is not developed. There is legal parking for only a few vehicles towing trailers and this causes problems for residents. State Park officials are working toward acquisition of private property to build a parking area.

Little Peters Creek has virtually no parking, so users must park on the roadway, sometimes blocking access for residents and making turnarounds difficult. The Heritage Land Bank owns land adjacent to the park on Jasmine Road and has issued a permit to develop a trailhead, but the Department of Natural Resources has yet to secure funding. Part of the current access trail traverses private property, which has become a point of contention. A survey in 1994 by the Chugach State Park Citizens Advisory Board identified a new route that may be used to access the valley once a parking lot and trailhead are developed on municipal land.

Eagle River itself provides snowmobiling opportunities. Users are restricted to the area east of Icicle Creek on the riverbed. The new parking area at the Hiland/Briggs Bridge will provide safe access to the river. The new State Park parking area at mile 7.5 Eagle River Road can also provide access to the river.

The Eklutna lake Trail provides for mixed use with limitations on motorized use imposed on certain days of the week. This has worked satisfactorily for the most part.

The Eklutna River bottom downhill from Eklutna Lake could provide snowmobiling all the way to the Eklutna Water Treatment Plant. At that point it is possible to follow a switchback road to the Eklutna Valley Road and travel on the intersection of an old roadbed with the Old Glenn Highway. This could be the route for a multi-use, all season trail in the Eklutna River Valley.

A snowmobile trail has been proposed on the west side of the highway in the right-of-way from Eagle River to the Matanuska-Susitna Boundary. This trail would require approval by the Alaska Department of Transportation/Public Facilities. There may be some difficulties in establishing such a route because there is adjacent residential use and, especially in the Peters Creek area, there may not be sufficient right-of-way. Additionally, the Glenn Highway corridor in the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge is closed to snowmachines.

There are many trails in the Chugiak-Eagle River areas that are used illegally. Current ordinances prohibit the operation of snowmobiles in other designated areas.

Summer motorized riders often follow the Old Glenn Highway or other local roads from residences. Motorized riders have requested an area dedicated to recreational and competitive use. Possible sites include old gravel pits. A motor-sports park might be located on Fort Richardson land, should land become available.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Municipality should assist the Alaska Department of Natural Resources with planning and possible dedication or acquisition of a trailhead for Peters Creek.
2. The Municipality should fund and develop the Little Peters Creek trailhead on the municipal land adjacent to Jasmine Road.
3. The Municipality should work with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Army, and the Anchorage Snowmobile Club to investigate the feasibility of a snowmobile route within the right-of-way of the Glenn Highway or on military land on the east side of the highway from Centennial Park to Eagle River.
4. The Anchorage Snowmobile Club should work with the Trails Oversight Committee to develop a schedule for use of the Eklutna River bottom trail when that trail is designated.

5. The Anchorage Snowmobile Club should work with affected citizens, Chugiak-Eagle River Community Councils, and the Department of Cultural and Recreational Services to investigate the feasibility of designating local “traditional” trails for snowmobile use.
6. The possibility of creating a recreation and competition area for summer motorized use should be investigated.

VI. CROSS-COUNTRY SKI USERS

There are few groomed trails in the Chugiak-Eagle River area, however, there is an abundance of backcountry trails, including river bottoms, creek corridors and alpine and sub-alpine skiing.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Beach Lake provides the most developed system of trails for cross-country skiers in the Chugiak-Eagle River area (see Figure 3.1). Beach Lake provides approximately 15 kilometers of groomed trail with loops of 1, 2, 4, 6, and 11 kilometers. The 4-kilometer loop is currently lighted.

Edmonds Lake Park provides 14.5 kilometers of cross-country ski trail with loops of 2, 5, and 7.5 kilometers.

There is cross-country skiing on the trail along Eklutna Lake. Cross-country skiers alternate days of use with motorized users.

The New Glenn Highway and Eagle River Road trails can be used for cross-country skiing. The Alaska State Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation has trails that begin at the Eagle River Visitors Center and lead into the park; these trails are used by cross-country skiers in winter. Cross-country ski trails also exist in Loretta French Park.

B. ISSUES

The potential for cross-country skiing exists within Chugach State Park. Trails leading into the park should include an Eklutna River trail, a Meadow Creek trail, a South Fork trail, the Eagle River Greenbelt corridor, and the Hillside trail.

The Eagle River Greenbelt, the Hillside Corridor, the Fire Creek trail, and the coastal trail have the potential to be exceptional non-motorized trail systems with spectacular views of Knik Arm and the Alaska Range. These trails would provide a skiing experience that would satisfy all ability levels.

With the selection of the new junior high school site adjacent to Edmonds Lake Park, the cutting and development of a ski trail system within the park suitable for grooming and lighting would enhance the physical education program of that school, in addition to providing alternative ski trails for the community. Development and use of this trail system by students participating in cross-country ski programs, in addition to anticipated increase in public use, warrants designation of these ski trails for cross-country skiing only during the winter months.

The Eagle River Greenbelt will be in demand for multi-use in the winter months. Due to the incompatibility between snowmobiles, dog sleds, and skiers, it is important that trails for these uses remain separate and distinct and designated only for their specific use.

The Mental Health Trust land on the south side of Hiland Road, across the Eagle River Loop Road from the old dump site, is an ideal location for cross-country ski trails with the potential to be developed to the same caliber as Kincaid or Hillside park, according to the Chugiak-Eagle River Nordic Ski Club. A section of this area was selected in the past during Anchorage’s bid for the Winter Olympics as an ideal site for a Nordic ski jump. Acquisition of this land by the Municipality for future development as a Nordic ski center would benefit the Chugiak-Eagle River Greenbelt and will be in demand for multi-use in the winter months.

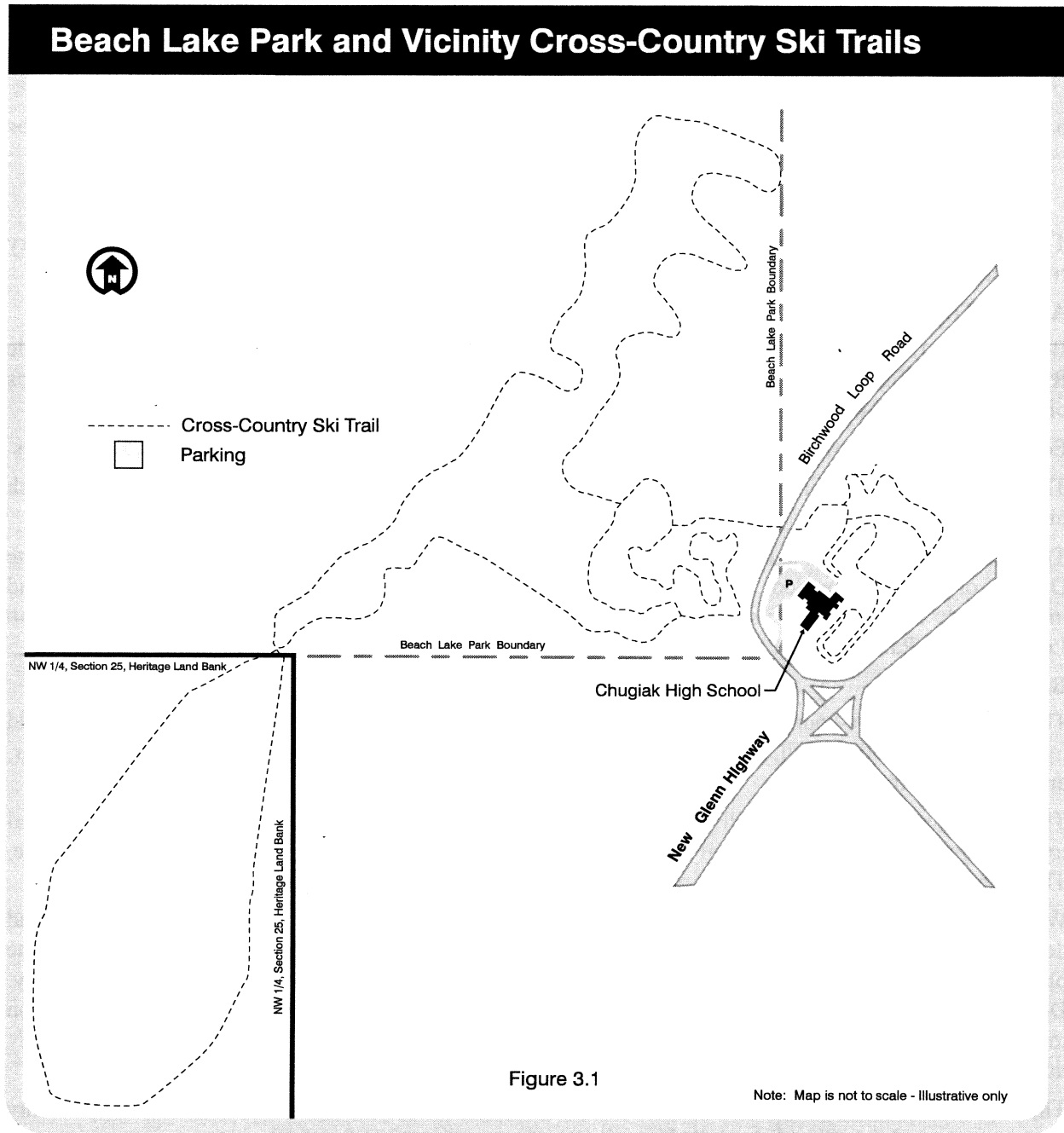


Figure 3.1

Note: Map is not to scale - Illustrative only

Mount Baldy has been traditionally used as a hiking area during the summer and fall seasons and for ski touring during the winter months. Access to this area is through private land along Golden Eagle Drive and, at this time, access has not been a problem since most of the land is still undeveloped. Future development of these lands could restrict access to trails on Baldy connecting to potential ski touring areas.

Undeveloped land exists between Alpenglow Elementary and Ravenwood Elementary School that could potentially be developed with a trail physically linking the two schools. This trail could be used in the winter as a groomed ski trail. Continuation of this trail to the Eagle River Greenbelt would link both schools to the Eagle River ski trail.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Paved trails should be designated for cross-country ski use in winter. Existing trails include the New Glenn Highway trail and Eagle River Road trail.
2. The integrity of the ski trails at Beach Lake and Edmonds Lake Park should be protected. Easements should be established if trails are not currently dedicated and protected, especially for those trails extending into the Heritage Land Bank lands in the northwest quarter of Section 25.
3. There should be additional lighting at the Beach Lake trails to provide at least a 10 kilometer lighted trail. Lighting should also be provided for the existing 5-kilometer loop at Edmonds Lake Park.
4. Priorities for construction of ski trails include the following:
 - Coastal Trail
 - Alpenglow to Ravenwood trail
 - Fire Creek Trail
 - Eagle River Greenbelt trail
 - Hillside Corridor Trail
 - Beach Lake ski trails to Fire Creek trail
 - Junior High/Edmonds Lake Park trail system

VII. EQUESTRIAN USERS

Today's residential development is rapidly consuming the space available for equestrian use. Because of the current rate of growth, it is critical that corridors for equestrian use be identified and preserved now. All equestrian trails are to be unpaved trails. Equestrian trails are available for other uses.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Equestrians in the Chugiak-Eagle River area currently ride in the following areas: the power line north of Fire Lake and south of Peters Creek between the New and Old Glenn Highways, a trail from Birchwood Airstrip to Beach Lake (also used as a dog sledding trail in winter), on the dog sledding and ski trails in Beach Lake Park in the summer, Peters Creek from Peters Creek Park to Chugach State Park, along Eagle River, and on trails originating at the Chugach State Park Visitors Center. Loretta French Park on the Old Glenn Highway provides an arena and riding trails for equestrians.

B. ISSUES

Equestrians currently ride on trails that are shown in the adopted Anchorage Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facility Plan, Volume 2 of 4: "Eagle River-Chugiak-Eklutna." Many of these trails are on unsubdivided parcels that are owned by private individuals and corporations. It is intended that these trails or replacement trails be incorporated into subdivision layout at the time of subdivision. Such action would provide appropriate trails within subdivided residential lands and provide for historical use.

The Hillside Corridor is a proposed unpaved trail along the foothills of the Chugach Mountains from the Fire Lake Recreation Center to the Little Peters Creek trailhead with a connection to Edmonds Lake Park. Most portions of the trail could be located on Municipal and Chugach State Park land. The Hillside Corridor would serve as an equestrian and hiking trail in summer and a cross-country skiing trail in winter.

The Eklutna waterline provides a potential equestrian corridor along much of its length. Efforts should be made to provide a continuous corridor for horseback riding along the length of the utility. Some jogs will be necessary along roads in order to provide a continuous route.

An unpaved trail within the Eagle River Greenbelt will provide equestrian opportunities in the corridor.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Trails along Eklutna River, Little Peters Creek, Peters Creek, Fire Creek, and Eagle River should be formally designated for equestrian use in the summer and trailheads should be established for equestrians.
2. Easements should be acquired to accommodate existing equestrian trails near the Birchwood Airport and along utility easements west of the New Glenn Highway.
3. Unpaved cross-country ski trails and dog mushing trails that are dry and well drained should be designated for equestrian use from June 1 to November 1. Trails belonging in this category include the Hillside Corridor, Fire Creek, the Peters Creek Greenbelt east of the New Glenn Highway, the unpaved portions of the coastal trail, the South Fork of Eagle River, and the dog mushing/equestrian trail within the Eagle River Greenbelt Corridor. However, in Beach Lake Park, equestrian use should be discontinued by August 1.
4. Agreements with utilities and landowners should be acquired to provide equestrian use of the Eklutna Water Line utility corridor.
5. Priorities for equestrian facilities include:
 - Access and trails into Chugach State Park
 - Dedication of trails in the Eklutna waterline easement
 - Dedication of trails in the Birchwood area
 - Connections to Loretta French Park
 - Hillside Corridor

VIII. SLED DOG MUSHING TRAIL USERS

Dog mushing is an important activity to many people in Chugiak-Eagle River. The large lot sizes predominant in the area and the rural character of development provide opportunities to keep dog teams. Dog mushing is also an important commercial activity to many people in Eagle River. Dog mushing is a component of the tourism market and area merchants enjoy secondary effects through the sale of food and gear.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Regularly used mushing areas include Eagle River, Birchwood Airstrip to South Birchwood Loop, Beach Lake Park, Eklutna Lake and Clunie Lake.

The Chugiak Sled Dog Mushers Association has constructed over 20 miles of trail in the Beach Lake area. In addition to these 20 miles of trail, loops of trail extend into Fort Richardson where the military controls permission for their utilization. As part of these 20 miles, loops extend south out of Beach Lake Park to Clunie Lake and east out of Beach Lake Park to the mouth of Fire Creek.

The Beach Lake sled dog trails extending from Beach Lake Park to the south end of Clunie Lake are groomed with non-profit grant fund (see Figure 3.2). In addition to daily winter use by mushers and weekend use for organized races, these trails support the annual Eagle River Classic Sled Dog Race, the run operated in conjunction with Eagle River's Bear Paw Festival, and will support the Arctic Winter Games.

B. ISSUES

Snowmobiles are not permitted on Beach Lake trails. Their use creates moguls that injure the shoulders and wrists of dogs. Also, snowmobiles have collided with dog teams. Snowmobiles must be restricted from traveling onto Beach Lake trails.

Beach Lake Park and Vicinity Sled Dog Trails

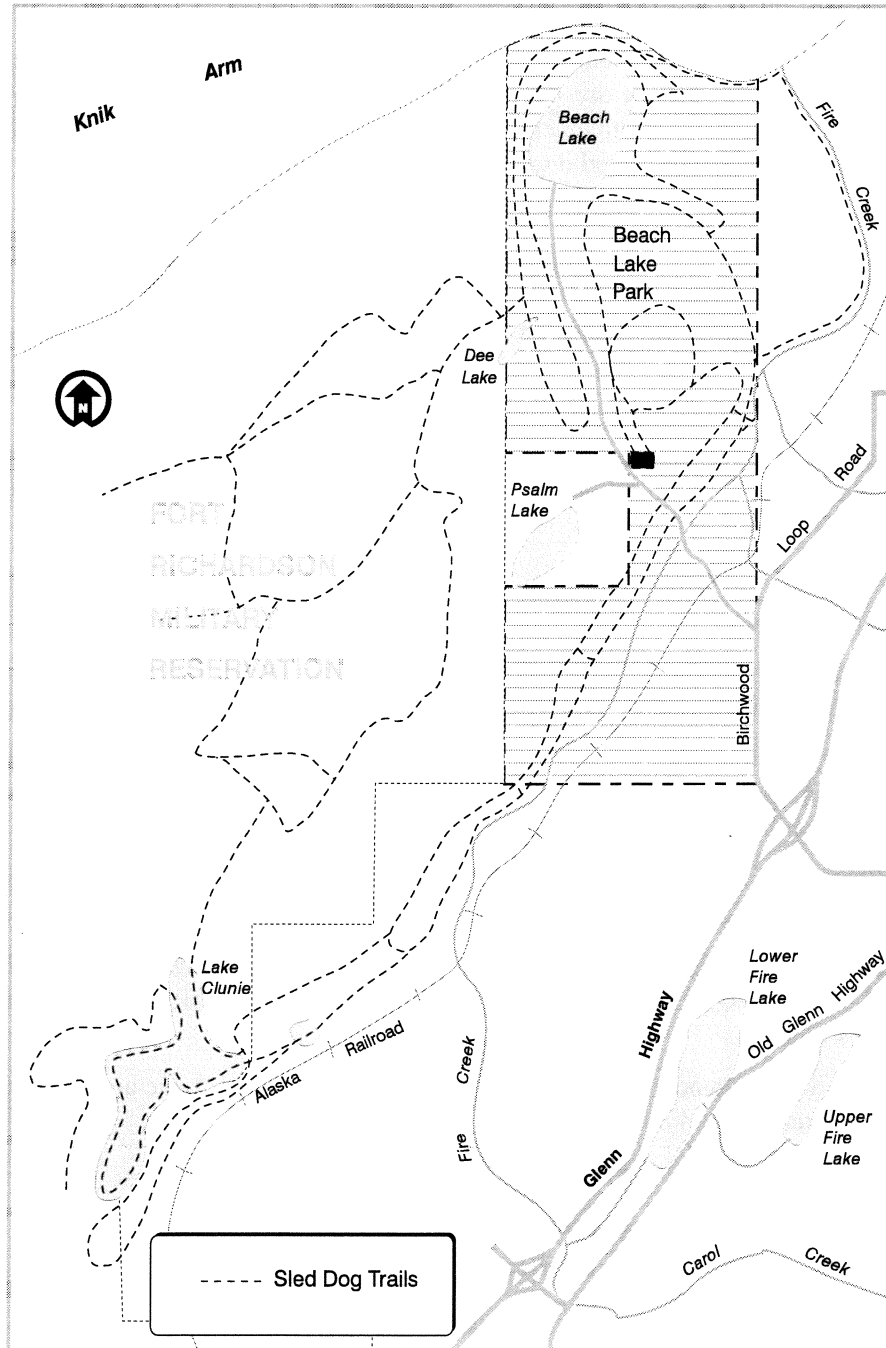


Figure 3.2

Note: Map is not to scale - Illustrative only

Conflicts within Beach Lake Park between cross-country skiers and dog mushers have been an issue for a long period of time. Skiers wish to use portions of the park north of the Alaska Railroad track. The ‘Use Agreement’ for Beach Lake Park currently held with the Chugiak Dog Mushers Association and the Municipality of Anchorage, Chugiak-Eagle River Division of Parks and Recreation states: “Use of the facility is for existing sled dog trails and the future expansion of sled dog trails in Beach Lake Park. Use includes summer and fall cart training on a portion of the sled dog trails and use of the entire network in winter months. Summer and fall use are compatible with other non-motorized uses. Winter use is not compatible with any other use. This agreement includes the undeveloped wetlands along Fire Creek. This area will be used for future routing of sled dog trails.”

While joint use of an area may be possible where sight distance would allow visibility, the topography and vegetation prevent adequate sight distance in Beach Lake Park. The railroad provides a strong demarcation between the users and should be maintained as the separation between skiers and mushers within the park.

The planned Fire Creek Greenbelt would provide a ski trail that passes close to the railroad tracks within the northern portion of Beach Lake Park currently being used exclusively by mushers in the winter. Such a trail will require careful siting to avoid possible conflicts with dog teams.

The Beach Lake sled dog trail system that extends from Beach Lake Park to the south end of Clunie Lake and back into the Park should be dedicated in its entirety. This is a priority for dog mushers in the Chugiak-Eagle River area.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The trail system and visitors’ center and staging area within Beach Lake Park should continue to be designated by the Municipal Department of Cultural and Recreational Services for dog mushing.
2. Signs should be added along the west boundary of Beach Lake Park to let snowmobilers know that they are no longer on Fort Richardson. Signs must also be maintained in Beach Lake Park indicating that motorized use is prohibited.
3. Until underground culverts are installed, the organization sponsoring dog sled events is responsible for providing road guards to stop traffic when teams are present during dog mushing races.
4. Sufficient interests in land should be acquired to accommodate the dog-mushing trail from the South Birchwood Loop to Birchwood Airport. Eklutna, Inc. and the Alaska Railroad presently own most of the land in this vicinity.
5. The loops of trail that extend out of Beach Lake Park south to Clunie Lake and northeast to Fire Creek should be dedicated for sled dog use.
6. Priorities for sled dog mushing improvements include:
 - Grade-separated crossings in Beach Lake Park
 - Staging facilities in the Eagle River area.

IX. SKIJORING

Skijoring has enjoyed rapid growth in Chugiak-Eagle River, as it has in the rest of the municipality. Addressing incompatibilities of this sport with other trail users will require close coordination.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Skijors use the eastern portions of Edmonds Lake Park (see Figure 3.3). Some trails have been constructed. Though Edmonds Lake Park has great potential for skijoring, the lack of safe road crossings has led to diminished use of its trail system in recent years. Skijors also use the Eagle River multi-use corridors for sponsored races down the river that are held nearly annually.

Edmonds Lake Skijoring Trails

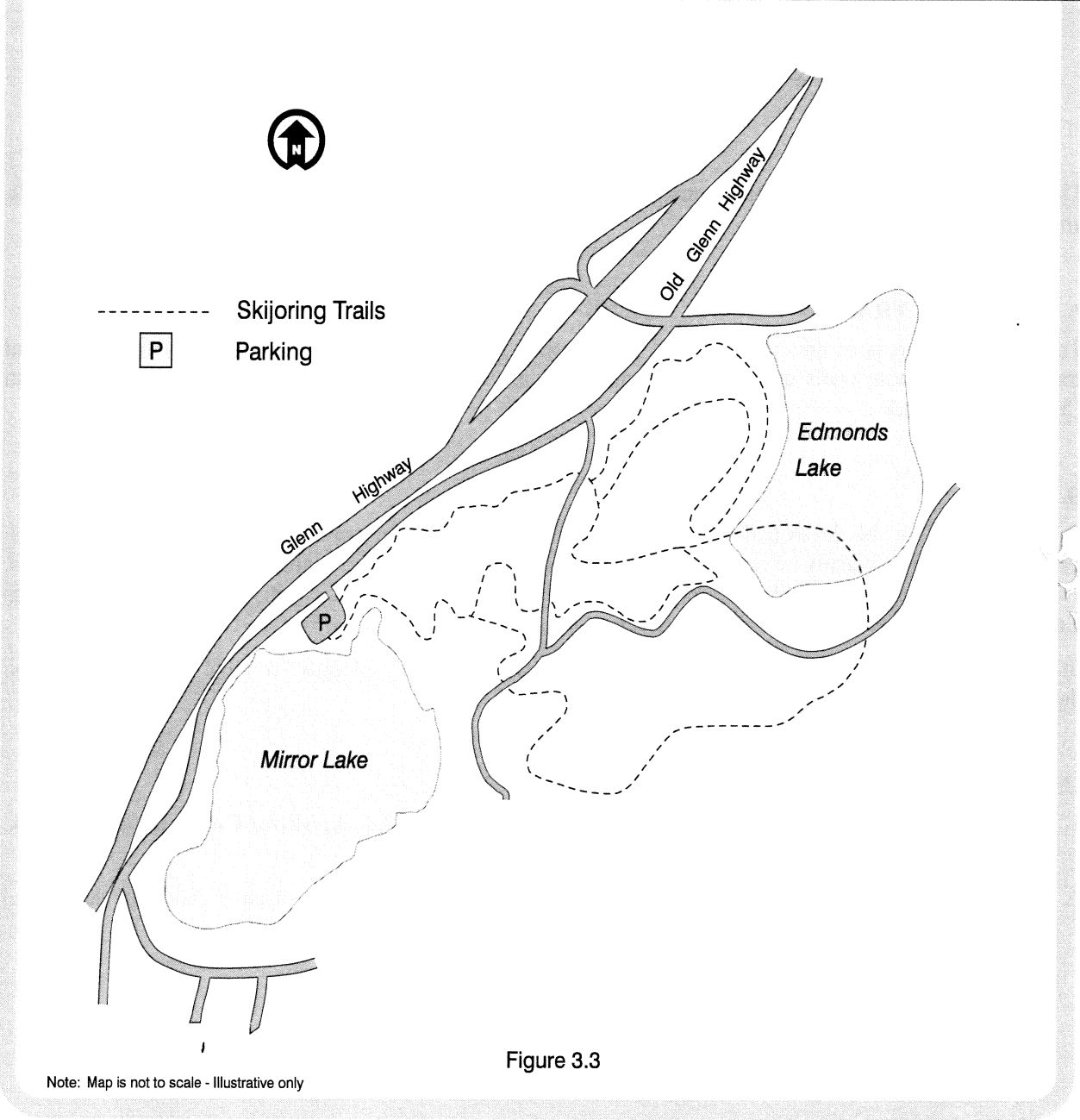


Figure 3.3

Note: Map is not to scale - Illustrative only

B. ISSUES

Skijors desire a safe and secure area. This is made more difficult because of the number of other users who present varying levels of compatibility. Skijors are compatible with many non-motorized uses, such as cross-country skiing, but require passing room to avoid conflict. Skijoring is not compatible with motorized uses except in areas with outstanding visibility. Safety at existing road crossings must be addressed.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Priorities for skijoring facilities include:

- Additional trails in Edmonds Lake Park
- Signing of existing trails to inform users of skijoring use
- Trails such as the New Glenn Highway trail should be packed to allow skijoring use.

X. NATURAL TRAILS

The Chugiak-Eagle River area has many natural trails that provide the opportunity for hiking, orienteering and other “trail-like” activities.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

There are large areas of undeveloped land throughout Chugiak-Eagle River that currently contain natural trails. Some of these trails cross private land, some are on Heritage Land Bank land, and many are in Chugach State Park.

B. ISSUES

A process needs to be developed whereby some of these pre-existing trails are retained as natural trails. These trails can most easily be retained in areas along streams and wetlands and in steep topographic areas. Examples of areas that would accommodate natural trails include Peters Creek, Mirror Creek, Edmonds Creek, Meadow Creek, and the Eklutna River.

In the Eagle River Greenbelt, an approximately 14 mile natural trail is planned from the South Fork Park on the south side of the river.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Natural trails should be provided and maintained along Peters Creek, Mirror Creek, Edmonds Creek, Meadow Creek, South Fork, and the Eklutna Creek.
2. The trail on the south side of Eagle River from South Fork to the Visitors Center should be designated a natural trail.

XI. WATER TRAILS

Water trails are popular in the Chugiak-Eagle River area. Eagle River is likely the most used water trail in the Municipality. The Knik Kanoers and Kayackers who represent a large organized user group have recognized the river as one of the most heavily used whitewater rivers in Alaska. Its proximity and access make ideal for organized races, guided raft trips and individual enjoyment.

A. EXISTING TRAILS

Eagle River is extensively used as a water trail for canoeing, kayaking, and rafting. The river is about 25 miles in length from Eagle Glacier to Knik Arm. The primary use is between the Eagle River Visitors Center and the Glenn Highway. Four access points to the sports fishery that are being developed on Eagle River are also available for put-in and take-out points. An important take-out point is at the Eagle River campground, just above the rapids.

The Knik River between the Old Glenn Highway and the New Glenn Highway is also used for kayaking and rafting. The Knik River is also fed by a glacier and is wider and navigable by power boats. This river is heavily influenced by tidal actions in its lower reaches.

B. ISSUES

As with other water trails throughout the Municipality, the primary issues of concern are the levels of water quality and the access points. Without adequate access points, people may trespass on private property and erode the stream bank.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

Access points to Eagle River should be limited to those access points being provided for the sports fishery's program.

