

Girdwood

Boundaries and Gateways:

Located along the southern edge of the Municipality, Girdwood straddles the mouth of Glacier Creek. Of the towns along Turnagain Arm Girdwood has the highest population, though like most resort towns, most residents are not permanent. The Alyeska Highway connects the old town and Seward Highway with Alyeska Resort. Additional points of interest exist, including Crow Creek Pass Trail and local eateries. The major boundaries are the Chugach State Park to the North and East, and Turnagain Arm to the South and West. The Alaska Railroad and Seward Highways act as gateways. Hiking and fishing are very popular in the region, as well as biking and skiing.

History:

The Turnagain chapter has an expanded history of the rest of the Arm. This section relates specifically to the Glacier Valley and Glacier City, later Girdwood.

Prehistory

The Dena'ina call Turnagain Arm *Tutl'uh*, or "Backwater" because it was the "headwaters" of Cook Inlet. Its swift and large tides cause destructive bore tides, which the Dena'ina call the *nudidghu*. They took care when boating down the Arm except harvest fish and berries. Kari found no recorded prehistoric names for the Glacier Valleys, although early surveys suggest trails through the valleys and mountains from *Tutl'uh* (Sunrise/Hope) to *Iglughet* (Knik).

European Exploration

Russian and European explorers made only a handful of voyages into the upper Cook Inlet, but learnt of trade routes and place names from the natives living there.

Gold Rush

After discovery of gold in Resurrection and Six Mile Creeks on the South shore of the Arm in 1895 prospectors rushed to the area from Seward, then the main port for the Territory. Trails snaked from Seward to Anchorage, through the mountains and along Turnagain Arm. Glacier City, now Girdwood, began sometime after Sunrise and Hope in the Glacier Valley on the North side of the Arm, as more prospectors arrived to mine the Crow, California, and Winner Creeks.

Homesteaders and prospectors in the Indian and Crow Creek Valleys discovered gold, and installed placer mines. Crow Creek, mined since 1896, had the only profitable mines on the North side of the Arm, and produced 40 000 ounces of gold in the early 20th century. The two major mines were the Monarch lode mine near Crow Creek Pass and the Crow Creek placer mine in the valley, the first was the largest and the second the most profitable. Crow Creek Mine and the Girdwood Mining Company's placer mine farther down the valley still produce gold, but remnants and ruins of the former mines exist along Crow Creek Trail. Around 1900, Axel Linblad extended the Kelly Trail from Twentymile River to his mining claims on Winner Creek, near then-Glacier City.

The National Historic Iditarod Trail snakes through the lower Turnagain Arm region. A portion of the trail from Portage to then-Glacier City was substantial by the early 1900s. The trail split at then-Glacier City with one section ascending Crow Pass and the other continuing to Indian. Travel over Crow Creek Pass was infrequent before 1900. The difficult terrain spurred the Road Commission to reroute the trail over Crow Pass and improve the road. Nevertheless, avalanches often blocked the trail, making the Indian Creek Pass more popular.

The town grew with more prospectors arriving by trail or boat. Originally, it had an informal layout of streets, but the 1916 platting of the town formalized the streets and properties. All buildings were wood-framed or log. The creek that ran through the town went by several names, which may lend a degree of confusion for the histories of Turnagain Arm. Early maps refer to the creek as "Twenty mile", not the contemporary "Glacier". The Alaska Central Railroad operated a supply store, even though the tracks ended at Kern Creek, four miles to the South. Colonel James Girdwood was successful on his Crow Creek mines, started in 1900, but struggled with the rough terrain and rocky conditions. After his success, in 1907 the town name changed in his honor.

Infrastructure Development – 1914–1959

The Alaska Engineering Commission platted the informal town in 1916 while completing the railroad link to Seward in 1918, passing along the North edge of Glacier City town site. Girdwood was important to the railroad construction, but its proximity to the mining town was a hindrance to workmen's sobriety and efficiency. The Girdwood Section House stood along the tracks just West of the old town site from 1940 until 1990. Originally, the one-storey building was at the maintenance Section at Kern Creek, and likely was constructed in 1918. The building housed crewman and a foreman or the foreman and his family, as was likely for the Girdwood building until the 1980s.

Good Friday Earthquake (Effects of the Earthquake)

In March 1964, the Good Friday (or Great Alaskan) Earthquake forever changed the Turnagain landscape. Because of the geology of Glacier Valley, the land subsided an additional three feet to the general 5 feet of subsidence. Although no tsunami moved up Turnagain Arm, the subduction allowed a tidal surge to inundate low areas, especially at Portage. The 9.2 quake destroyed the Seward Highway and Alaska Railroad, and flooded the towns of Girdwood and Portage. The quake triggered landslides and avalanches. Open ground fissures spewed water and mud as the soil shifted. The Southern half of the Girdwood Town site sank into the mud, as did the new Highway. The ground movement twisted the railroad lines, as well. The shaking caused little damage, but a consequent fire destroyed some structures. After the earthquake, residents moved some buildings to higher ground, including the Crow Creek Mercantile, and a new town was platted farther up the valley.

Modern Era

Girdwood today is mostly a resort town today. The expansion of the Alyeska Ski Resort and Hotel attracts skiers from the Municipality and Outside. The resort began in 1956 with 160 acres at the base of Mt Alyeska. Ernie Baumann, a WWII 10th Mountain Division veteran, selected the site, then unnamed, for a resort. In the land auction on 4 June 1956, a different corporation, the Alyeska Ski Corp., outbid Baumann's Mountain Sports Development Corp. Alyeska adapted its name from the Aleut word for Alaska, *Alaxsag*. François de Gunzburg, a French aristocrat, provided additional funding to the corporation to keep the resort solvent. With those funds, the corporation built trails, Chair 1, and a day lodge by 1960. The Roundhouse opened soon after at the top of Chair 1. Local architect Edward Gendzwill designed the iconic summit structure in 1960, and in 2003 it received listing on the National Register of Historic Places. To raise funds for the resort, Gunzburg bought additional lands and subdivided them, prompting resort-related and commercial growth. The Double Musky opened in 1962. Through the 1960s, '70s, and '80s Alyeska hosted several national and international alpine skiing events.

Yoshiaki Tsutsumi, owner of the Japanese leisure company Seibu Group, bought the resort in 1980 from Chris von Imhof. The Group invested heavily in development of the resort, planning a hotel, tram, and other amenities. The tram opened in 1992, and the hotel opened in 1994. Hiking and biking trails developed along creeks and former mining roads. Recently, Alyeska has become popular with downhill bikers. The original alignment of the Bird-to-Gird Trail, a multi-use trail on the former Seward Highway alignment, begins in Girdwood.

Beginning in 1988, parties expressed interest in relocating the Girdwood Section House including the Alaska Railroad. Of the three organizations vying for the structure, Challenge Alaska seemed most suited and had sufficient funding. However, the ski school was an affiliate of Alyeska Resort, and the owners, the Seibu Corporation, required approval. This delayed the procedure for so long that Challenge Alaska forfeited its agreement in 1989, and the second party, Eklutna, Inc., planned for its relocation to Eklutna Village. Likely, the corporation moved the building in 1990, and allegorically the contractors cut the building into two parts for transport. Today, the derelict building sits on masonry blocks alongside Eklutna Village Road. Whether during the relocation in 1990 or sometime after, the building suffered severe damage that rendered it unoccupied.

Character Summary and Character Defining Features

The Turnagain Arm is a ruggedly beautiful landscape, earning the Seward Highway its National Scenic Byway distinction. Wildlife inhabit the mountains, cliffs, streams, and ocean, and the meandering highway has several overlooks. The weather in the Arm can be extreme and unique. Hurricane-force winds are common, and snow and rain levels are greater than in the Bowl. The architecture, like the people, is hardy and utilitarian, not much given to ornament. The fish runs, salmon and hooligan, attract hordes of anglers and in winter ice climbers ascend the roadside cliffs. Skiers venture into the backcountry or shred the slopes at Alyeska Resort. Runners and hikers enjoy the trails along the ridges and creeks. Even surfers brave the frigid and swift waters of the Arm to ride the frequent bore tides.

Natural Features

The Chugach Mountains rise steeply from the Arm, mirrored to the South by the Kenai Mountains. Several streams drain from valleys along the Arm, and many of those support salmon runs. Three rivers feed the southern end of the Arm, the 20-Mile, the Portage, and the Placer Rivers. Avalanches are common along the road and the winters are long and dark. The Alaska Wildlife Conservatory at Portage attracts visitors and cares for many species including wood bison, reindeer, and brown bears.

Opportunities for Preservation

Places of Significance

Several buildings, trails, and places are locally and nationally significant.

- * Crow Creek mining district
- * Mining buildings and prospector cabins
- * Seward Highway original alignment
- * Crow Creek (SEW-01237), Crow Pass (ANC-00214), Johnson Pass, and Kelly trails
- * National Historic Iditarod Trail original alignment (along Glacier Creek)
- * Monarch Mine structures and implements (ANC-00271)
- * Glacier City Hall (Fire Station)
- * Alyeska Roundhouse (SEW-00997)
- * Double Musky Restaurant
- * Well-preserved examples of Chalet Style and A-Frame houses from the 1950s and 1960s

Challenges

- * Developing and growing town without losing character
- * Avoiding high-impact tourist effects
- * Inadequate funding for public and private development

- * Multiple land holders in areas of proposed development
- * Heavy traffic on the Alyeska Highway
- * Resort expansion

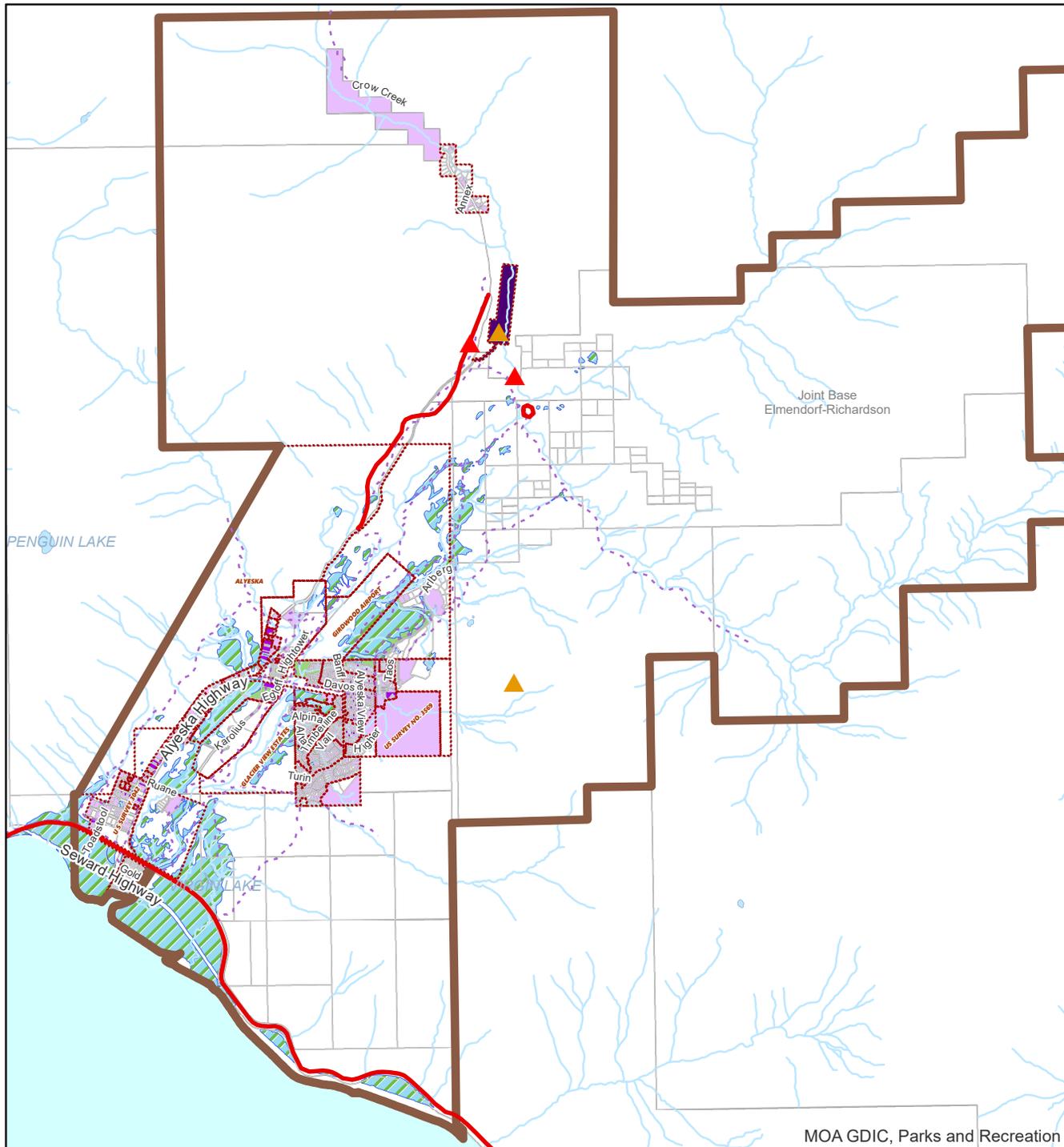
Any Specific Policies/ Implementation Items

- * Girdwood South Townsite Area Master Plan (2014)
 - o Make efforts to develop signage and art that relates the unique history and character of the town
 - o Maintain the New Girdwood Town site as the primary town center and develop it to match the trend of live, work, play
 - o Retain small-town character through attention to scale, views, the natural environment, and pedestrians
 - o Redevelop the intersection of Engloff Drive and the Alyeska Highway to better connect the North and South parts of [new] town site
 - o Encourage diverse commercial and housing development around the intersection of Engloff Dr. and the Alyeska Hwy
 - o Create pedestrian public spaces
 - o Develop town-center with street-edged buildings
 - o Develop affordable and modestly-priced housing options near the town site
 - o Plan development around non-vehicular and future transportation, bikes, skis, or public transit
- * Girdwood-Iditarod Trail Route Study (1997)
 - o Create a multiuse path along an abandoned wagon road, believed to be the Iditarod National Historic Trail, parallel to Glacier Creek, complete with underpasses below major roads and bridges over creeks
- * Girdwood Area Plan (1995)
 - o Buffer or reroute popular and historic trails to avoid new development
 - o Assess municipal land holdings to form master plans for development; these will identify park, trail, and significant historic resource locations, and designate land uses
- * Turnagain Arm Management Plan (1994)
 - o Develop recreational trails, amenities, ski resort, and commercial and residential areas in the lands along Glacier, Winner, and Crow Creeks near the Glacier/Winner Creek massif while maintaining backcountry character
 - o Design roads and infrastructure to be efficient and aesthetically pleasing
 - o Develop means of coordinating contemporary mining with the historic Crow Creek mining district
 - o Develop trailhead access to the California Creek Trail and other local trails
- * Interpretive Plan for the Seward Highway Scenic Byway (1993)
 - o Develop boardwalk and interpretive sites on Girdwood flats

DRAFT

Girdwood Community Council

Draft 3/2/18



Age of Primary Structure

- >100 yrs old
- >50 yrs old
- <40 yrs old

Community Council Boundary

Parks

Trails

Wetlands

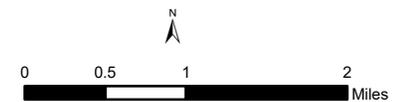
National Register of Historic Places

Site eligible for National Register of Historic Places

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Site eligible for National Register of Historic Places

Districts recommended for further study





124 EGLOFF DR - GARAGE - GLACIER CITY HALL



139 KITZBUHEL RD - AFRAME



164 BILLY'S ALLEY ROAD - LOG



168 BILLY'S ALLEY ROAD - BUNG



181 BANFF CIR - CHALET



213 MAIN STREET - MOD



214 BRIGHTON RD - CHALET



225 MAIN STREET - CABIN



228 BRIGHTON RD - ALPINE



242 BRIGHTON RD - CHALET



257 CORTINA RD - CABIN



274 BRIGHTON RD - ALPINE



282 HIGHTOWER RD - TRAILER



286 MAIN STREET - CABIN



287 MAIN STREET - GAMBREL



295 MAIN STREET - LOG



301 MT HOOD DR - HANGAR



301 MT HOOD DR - SHED



305 OLD DAWSON ROAD - 2VLV



325 MT HOOD DR - HANGAR



360 BORETIDE RD - CABIN



500 BORETIDE RD - CABIN



571 MT HOOD DR - COM



599 MT HOOD DR - COM - ALPINE AIR ALASKA



663 ALYESKA VIEW AVE - ALPINE



ALYESKA VIEW AVE



CABIN REMAINS



CABIN REMAINS



CROW CREEK MINE - SIGN



GIRDWOOD AIRPORT - GATE



GIRDWOOD AIRPORT - HANGARS



GIRDWOOD AIRPORT - RUNWAY



GIRDWOOD AIRPORT - SIGN



GIRDWOOD SIGN



INTERSECTION ALYESKA VIEW AVE ASPEN MOUNTAIN RD



MT ALYESKA



ROUNDHOUSE - ALYESKA



TURNAGAIN ARM - FROM ROUNDHOUSE