

Far North Bicentennial Park Trail Improvement Plan  
**January 2008 Meeting Notes**

**Background and Assumptions**

The most significant issue going in seemed to be how to best balance the desires of all users. Specifically, how to design a system which would accommodate the current and future needs, while separating incompatible uses, and protecting the resource.

Through this process, we are to develop the following items: TMOs; trail (design and) construction standards; objectives and timeframes (action plan); and classifications. The Muni is expecting that user groups will do the bulk of construction and maintenance, but intends to set standards that they must follow.

One item noted at the outset as missing is beginner multi-use snow trails connecting the TOA and near Hillside trails. Other items/issues arose repeatedly through the stakeholder meetings. Those include: 1) The desire for an off-road hardened trail along Campbell Airstrip Road; 2) The potential to largely separate users into different areas of the park should be examined; 3) The Bivouac trailheads should be altered and improved; 4) The TOA trail should have more tread maintenance and its bridges replaced or repaired; 5) A formal trailhead should be installed at the northeasternmost entry to the park; and 6) More improvements should be made to the Abbott Loop Community Park trailhead.

**TMOs (Trail Management Objectives)**

The purposes and foundations of the TMOs will be to lead to the implementation (installation/construction) of new trails, not just as an inventory of the existing trails. They will form a basis for who does what – specifically with regard to funding, construction, management and maintenance.

1. With regard to existing inventory, should look at width, clearing, turn radii, surface materials and conditions, including consistency and/or change within particular trails and systems/areas.
2. Current use patterns – can and should be used for future use and planning, and to identify conflicts and problems to resolve.
3. Should list permitting agencies and requirements.
4. Environmental aspects to consider: agency application and review; FNBP plan mandates; other/informal review – non-profit entities, other interested groups (stakeholders), and the public generally.

## **Trail Standards**

- Should be used and adopted as a basis, but ONLY as a starting point; NOT as a fixed rule.

## **Funding**

- For planning and design, general trail construction, structures/surface materials, amenities, signage. (Include signage objectives, but not necessarily details.)

## **STEERING COMMITTEE, STAKEHOLDER, AND OTHER MEETING NOTES**

Notes from the first round of meetings with Stakeholders, including the Steering Committee, have been summarized below. In some cases, they are sorted into five general categories (Trails, Tread, Trailheads, Structures, and Other), while in others the comments were more limited, thus these categorizations have not been employed. Some notes are in bullet form, while others are in paragraph form.

### **Steering Committee Meeting**

*January 28, 2008 (3:00pm – 5:00pm)*

Committee members: Bruce Talbot; Gordon Wetzel; Janice Tower; Fran Pekar/Ken Ford; Mike Mitchell; John McCleary; Holly Spoth-Torres

### **Trails**

- One route (#8) was indicated on the map as a way to get users off the steep, straight, and boring Gas Line trail. An issue was how to get a multi-use trail to work while crossing the existing Spencer Loop trail.
- A separated and hardened trail is desirable along Campbell Airstrip Road from the north entry to the park down to at least the Bivouac trailheads. Should also consider creating additional connector trails from the Stuckagain Heights neighborhood to FNBP, as well as using the old jeep trail as a connector from Bivouac South to Chugach State Park.
- Make sure to get the Fort Richardson trails included in the plan so they are not forgotten.
- Consider lengthening the tunnel north of the Rendezvous trailhead, and creating hard-surface trails on both sides of the road in the area, so that they can serve multi-use.

### **Tread**

- More gravel and finish work is needed on the TOA trail north toward 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue to fix drainage (wider) each year.

### **Trailheads**

- The group agreed that more lights at trailheads would help reduce crime, and adding security cameras may also help.
- Should look at paving the Hillside trailhead, and possibly creating an overflow parking area.
- An improved trailhead at the most Northeast entry to FNBP should be considered
- Should clean up and block informal trailheads within the park which are frequented by partiers and vandals.

## **Structures**

- Both bridges on the TOA trail south of 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue should be repaired or replaced. They should span the entire wetland/floodplain area.
- The bridge below the South Bivouac trailhead is deteriorating and should also be repaired or replaced.

## **Other**

- In the future, users will want easier access to the park, will want to be able to connect without having to drive, and will want safe road crossings to get into the park.
- Consider lighting the multi-use trails along Abbott, but also consider lighting in relation to the use of headlamps. Also consider adding lights in other areas to encourage use.
- Make sure to involve surrounding communities when considering possible new connecting points.

## **ASDRA Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 29, 2008 (10:30am – 11:30am)*

Attendees: Fran Pekar

## **Trails**

- The Shields trail is critical to keep, and all trails should be kept about 10' wide.

## **Tread**

- Once trails in wet areas are frozen, then they are useable for dog mushing. The dog sled trails have been moved into wetland areas by the roadway construction projects, it has not been by choice.
- Heavy multi-use in summer deteriorates some sections so that roots come up and make it more difficult to groom.
- Future plan is to simply maintain what they have (no new trails), and keep them mush-only in the winter, and, where multi-use, make sure that use does not deteriorate or change trail such that it's more difficult to maintain for mush use.

## **Trailheads**

- Currently have about a 10 acre area. The rectangular shape works well for their use.

## **Structures**

- They encounter problems with bridge maintenance due to cost and labor, access when the ground is not frozen, and theft of decking.

## **Signage**

- Could use more signage to inform other users about mushing-only trails – about the speeds and dangers involved, and the need to yield to teams.
- The intersection of the TOA and Old Rondy trails is an ongoing problem area. More signage could help reduce conflicts.

## **Other**

- Identification of dog mushing trail projects in an established plan will allow them to apply for Recreational Trails grants.
- HLB owned lands- dog mushing trails are on HLB land and they are concerned about properties going away.
- If they move their operations from Tozier Track to another site, they would have to build another building that was up to municipal code.
- Current location has high visibility on Tudor Road, which is a positive aspect.
- Race distances: specific mileages; (IFSDS)

## **NSAA (Nordic Skiing) Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 29, 2008 (1:30pm – 2:30pm)*

Attendees: Gordon Wetzel, Brian Looney, Ben Powell

## **Trails**

- They groom about 45k of trail in the Hillside area, about 20k of which is ski-only.
- As far as new trails, would like to see small recreational loops from each trailhead, as well as a smaller (shorter) loop from the Hillside area. Trails such as these would allow for more non-ski use, thus taking pressure off the ski-only trails.
- They would like to add a loop to the existing classic-only trail.
- Connection from Gas Line to Prospect Heights (State Park trailhead): multi-use trail, 10' tread width, with single direction in the winter and either direction in non-winter; gentle slopes and minimal interference with the Spencer Loop.
- Beginner Level Trails: develop beginner trails from the Abbott Loop Community Park Area; approximately 3 km of new trail would be appropriate.
- Extension of the Classic-only Trails: add another leg to the connecting trail of Richter Loop to Randy's Loop in order to create a loop trail.
- An Equestrian loop connecting to the Lore Road trailhead.
- Lighting the multi-use Abbott Trail would offer an alternative for foot traffic.
- A new multi-use trail from the gas line to Prospect Heights would also offer alternatives for hikers and bikers.

## **Tread**

- They need a 50' turning radius to groom well. Biggest grooming problem is repairing pock marks from horses. They also need better sight distances to accommodate multi-use.
- Would like to gravel/harden from Birch Road in the High School area to Bivouac, and improve the trail from the northeast corner of the park (North Gasline/Powerline) down to the tank trail to link to Bivouac. This should be a "rough" link, rather than a wide groomer, and would work well for bikes and other users as well.
- Maintenance: ski trail groomed by NSAA would like them to be a smooth surface with a flat to slightly crowned cross section to allow for grooming with low snow cover.
- Trails needing maintenance: Junior Nordic Loop, the Old Rony section of the TOA Trail, the multi-use trail from South Bivouac to Service, the Spencer Loop in all the steep sections and the Ridge Loop.

## **Trailheads**

- The trail from Abbott Loop Trailhead is too steep for the first few hundred feet. Should also do a loop around the back of the ballfields and to the parking lot, to connect the residential area to the south. Also add more lights.
- Access
  - The multi-use trail from Bivouac Trailhead to Hilltop needs to be lighted and it should be upgraded to a four-season trail.
  - The trail along the utility corridor adjacent to the Fort Rich boundary needs to be upgraded.
  - Parking needs to be improved as a trailhead in northeastern portion of park - possibly at Klutina Street.

## **Signage**

- More signs should be installed to keep off-leash dog area separate.

## **Structures**

- Would like to see a grade-separated road crossing by North Gasline Trail east of the North Bivouac Trailhead.
- Grade-separated crossing at Campbell Airstrip Trailhead from east side of Campbell Airstrip Road.
- Also need work on both northernmost TOA bridges.

## **Other**

- The group has been grooming for about 25 years, and has about a \$350k annual budget.

## **Arctic Orienteering Club Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 29, 2008 (3:00pm – 4:00pm)*

Attendees: Eric Follett

- Trails are good for beginning orienteers, but bad for advanced users. Intermediates can effectively use trails – cross them – for self-locating.
- Their preference is to keep the northeast central area as trail-free as possible.
- A problem they have seen is the construction of new narrow trails by bikers and hikers in response to the widening of other trails.
- This is the best practice area in a city in the entire United States. Their season is May through September.

## **Alaska Botanical Garden (ABG) Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 29, 2008 (4:15pm – 4:45pm)*

Attendees: Julianna McGinnis

- The garden has a perimeter trail outside the moose fence (which is the re-routed dog mushing trail), and trails on the inside of the fencing.
- No dogs are allowed inside, but that rule is not well respected.

- The garden is in favor of the Campbell Airstrip Road Trail, and more designated off-leash areas.

### **Anchorage Unleashed Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 29, 2008 (5:00pm – 5:30pm)*

Attendees: Kayla Epstein

- This group would like the one off-leash trail to be expanded as a loop, and would also like a larger cleared/open area for dog training. They recognize they are not a good mix with other users.
- Would like to see more signage, especially with bear warnings at trailheads/entries to the park, and space on kiosks for brochures and notices.

### **Anchorage Trails & Greenways Coalition (ATGC) Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 30, 2008 (8:00am – 9:00am)*

Attendees: Mike Mitchell

- ATGC is more issues-oriented; less on-the-ground.
- Try to legitimize Fort Rich trails.
- More directional and informational signage should be installed.
- Trails in favor of: new connector trail from North Gasline to Stuckagain Heights entrance; Chugach Park from Spencer Loop to Wolverine; connections of off-street trail along Campbell Airstrip Road.
- Trailhead issues: Develop 48<sup>th</sup> and Chuck Albrecht Ballfields for trailhead use, and provide more neighborhood access along entire perimeter of FNBP.
- Also consider constructing an indoor community center/warming area/kid dropoff spot at the Abbott Loop Community Park trailhead.

### **Hilltop Ski Area Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 30, 2008 (9:00am – 10:00am)*

Attendees: Steve Remme

- Concerns over the future of their expansion plans v. Spencer Loop advocates. Aware they need to please skiers, but are not sure how to best accommodate them.
- Questions the viability of the freeride park, especially with regard to running a lift in the summer. (Too slow, too expensive.)
- Their expansion plan has been approved by the Assembly and the voters, but they do not have final Muni approval or the money to implement the plan.

## **Anchorage Skijor Club Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 30, 2008 (1:30pm – 2:30pm)*

Attendees: Lulie Williams, Bruce Talbot, John McCasky

### **Trails**

- A couple of corners on the Tour of Anchorage (TOA) Trail could use some clearing to improve sight lines.
- #1 priority: Mellan's Way (a.k.a. Run Rover Run) has become a washboarded mudhole that could use improvement. Soils are an issue – they hold water a long time.
- Rovers, TOA, Abbott loop is a popular route, but not working on Rovers.
- NPS RTCA will assess the condition of rovers and survey it.
- There is a call to limb/clear lowest 6' of twisty trails to improve sightlines.
- They would like to improve the 2.5/4.5 loops and area to use. Right now, it's too narrow and concave to skate on.
- Moose Ridge trail: a portion of the northeast segment is too steep and should be rerouted.
- Make sure Campbell Airstrip Road north side trail continues all the way. Make it hard surface, but not necessarily paved. Just wide and smooth.
- Powerline Trail in Chugach should be rerouted from Stuckagain down to make it more aesthetic.

### **Tread**

- There is an 18" minimum restriction of snow depth for grooming these trails.
- On Run Rover trail where it intersects with North Gasline, the trail location is too low, and tends to ice over in the late fall/early winter.
- Also should replace the small bridge in that area that is deteriorating.
- If not fix Rover, fix Moose Meadow trail, and then it would work well for skijours.
- Rover through wetland (lower) needs to be realigned higher up hillside out of the wet.
- There are many times of the year FNBP/Hillside has skiing but Kincaid does not.

### **Trailheads**

- Change Campbell Airstrip trailhead from triangle to a rectangle shape to enhance parking spaces.

### **Structures**

- Should open (with clear signage) Campbell Airstrip Road tunnel just north of Campbell Airstrip trailhead to multi-use for about 10-11 months of year mushers don't use it.
- Would like to see improvements to the two bridges on the tour trail.
- Overhead beams on bridges, like the Campbell Airstrip/BLM bridge, leave bumps on bridge tread.
- There is a tough/busy intersection just beyond that.

### **Other**

- Anchorage Skijor Club has about 80 to 100 members, but there are far more non-members out skiing with dogs. Some think club is mostly for racers.

## **Single Track Advocates (STA) Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 30, 2008 (2:45pm – 3:45pm)*

Attendees: Janice Tower, Rose Austin, Ed Kamienski

### **Trails**

- Brown Bear trail beloved for technical roughness; also loved by runners.
- Allows access to more trails w/o poaching ski-only trails.
- Generally don't like improvements to trails, but understand why sometimes necessary in order to accommodate other groups.
- Building their own system will help quell the disappointment from trails like TOA becoming "sanitized," and to stop or quell the const of renegade trails as a result.
- Concerned about hindering/trashing it for the orienteers.
- Priorities not to change: Moose Ridge, 2.5 and 4.5 loops.
- Mostly want narrow, intimate trails.
- Complete Campbell Airstrip Road parallel trail, off grade crossings at Campbell Airstrip and Bivouac, and lights from Bivouac to Hilltop – the skijorers would have a big loop, using it with Gasline and Abbott, Homestead, Viewpoint, etc. as a loop.
- Moose 4.5, 2.5 are great intermediate/beginner mt. bike trails – leave as are.
- Would like to work with Bill Spencer on making sure Nordic has room to go from Gasline trail to Chugach (north of gorge) while leaving room for STA trails.
- STA new trails to be multi-use.
- Llama trail into Chugach is to be designated a mountain bike trail.

### **Trailheads**

- Not necessarily in favor of more trailhead parking lots that take away park land.

### **Signage**

- Need more directional signage.

### **Structures**

- Possibly share mushing tunnel (make it multi-use) North of Campbell Airstrip.

### **Other**

- Like idea of Muni having standards that all users are bound to respect and follow.
- Regarding the number of users, there are far more mountain bikers than competitive skijorers.



### **Anchorage Bike Park Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 30, 2008 (4:00pm – 5:00pm)*

Attendees: Jamin Hall, Jared Stewart

- The intention is to create an amenity for locals and tourists. The plan includes a freeride park, lift-served downhill trails, including a dual-slalom course, a shuttle into Chugach State Park for a downhill route on the Gasline, a BMX track by the lower parking lot, wooden features in the woods, a dirt jump park, and a pump track.
- They would like to make use of the Chalet and other existing structures and amenities. The Chalet would be used for bike rentals, food and drinks.
- They expect to hire a planner, then do all construction themselves and with volunteer labor. They believe this would pull renegade trail builders off/out of other areas of the park.

### **Equestrian Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 31, 2008 (9:00am – 10:00am)*

Attendees: Sue Brosnahan (F-Bar-J Ranch); Robin Holm (Hillside Equestrian)

#### **Conflicts and issues**

- Difficulty with safely crossing the road.
- Need more horse tie-up areas at trailheads.
- Lower TOA trail should not be lost to skiers – was originally an equestrian trail.
- Manure – some find difficult to dismount and clean.
- Holes in trails from horse hooves.
- Skiers and skijorers are biggest conflicts.

#### **Other**

- Upper Hilltop parking area good because it's dirt and has plenty of area to turn around trailers.
- Most riders remain near BLM area.
- Some would like a horse-only trail, but fear that 1) others would take it, and 2) they would be expected by other groups to stay just on "their" trail.
- Wide trails with good sight lines are useful for letting horses run, but they appreciate the wilderness experience from narrow trails.

### **Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Stakeholder Meeting**

*January 31, 2008 (10:30am – 11:30am)*

Attendees: Kevin Keeler

#### **Issues:**

- Brown Bear trail is not adequate, unfinished, and should be completed properly. Needs to have roots armored, log retaining walls installed to increase turn radii, and "stunts" removed.
- Would like to reroute users to keep them off airstrip.
- Unleashed dogs are a problem. They have an officer to enforce.

**Recommendations:**

- A connector trail across to Chugach should be created.
- BLM's Lynx trail is "basically perfect," and should be used as an example.
- Abutment maintenance is due at the big bridge at the end of the airstrip.
- Should open the mushing trails to others when mushers are not using them.
- Install more signage directing users to the leash-free area.
- The "smokejumper" trailhead is heavily used and should be enlarged.
- Should use E1 gravel with geoblock to more permanently harden trails.
- Consider zoning the park, identifying different zones for different levels of trail development/density, and develop TMOs based on that zoning.
- BLM would like to supply tools for weeknight work sessions.

**Other Comments:**

- Counters show approximately 120k users/year, with an increase of 5%/year.
- There is no real trail plan within the BLM land; they are simply trying to be responsive to trail users.

**Anchorage Parks & Recreation Debrief Meeting**

*January 31, 2008 (1:00pm – 3:00pm)*

Attendees: Monique Anderson, Holly Spoth-Torres

- Want to create partnerships with user groups for maintenance.
- Working with user groups to gain consensus on issues, standards, signage and education, classifications, and trail watch.
- Goals are to see more recreational trail use, educate users on the importance of trails, get more youth employment in parks and trails.
- They currently have a snowshoeing program and plant walks, but want to explore more programming opportunities.
- Would like to make more use of the Hilltop ski facilities, including its buildings and parking lots.
- Should deal with the issue of a trailhead at the northeasternmost entrance to the park.
- Consider a north-south transportation trail for intermediate users.
- The proposed trail alongside Campbell Airstrip Road will have to interface (and avoid) the mushing trails.
- The trail system would be better for programming if the Hillside area were reengineered, all trailheads were lighted, and gates were installed. Should also consider trailhead camp hosts.
- Fort Rich trails should be "formalized" so that they remain.
- Teach groups and individuals in the city the nuts and bolts of trail building.
- Do better signage from roadways to trailheads, especially in winter when snowbanks may obscure existing signs.
- Need more signage on trails, especially in the north area.

## Summary of Notes from Meetings: Top Goals

- 1. Provide ongoing opportunities for all users.**
- 2. Identify existing routes, and decide how to manage into future.**
  - Eliminate?
  - Improve/change?
  - Leave as is?
- 3. Identify new routes.**
  - Connectivity – within FNBP
    - to trailheads
    - to other trails
    - to landmarks, points, amenities, positive controls, etc. within the park.
  - Connectivity – to outside FNBP
    - to other trails
    - to trailheads
    - to neighborhoods (for direct, non-trailhead access)
    - to other points – e.g. parks, schools, commercial areas.
- 3. Reduce user conflicts**
  - Between different user groups
    - a. routing/directional trails
    - b. odd/even or other controls
  - As numbers grow in some groups
    - provide more routes
    - provide for different experience levels
      - length
      - technical level
      - experiential
- 4. Maintain some untouched areas**
  - For orienteers, wildlife, etc.
- 5. Consider/contemplate future uses/impacts**
- 6. Consider concurrency/timing – when add what where?**
- 7. Funding**
  - From developers for:
    - demands on infrastructure (new and existing) from new development [impact fees]
    - residential
      - as commuters (instead of or in addition to roads)
      - for recreational purposes
    - Commercial
      - accommodate commuters
      - recreational use
    - hotel/tourism – impacts on recreational facilities these projects generate.