

Executive Summary – Girdwood Trails Plan Stakeholder Interviews

OBJECTIVES

Huddle AK worked in partnership with the Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee to develop a list of stakeholders and trail users to participate in interviews. The stakeholder group was selected to represent the variety of uses occurring on the trail system and their different perspectives of many trail users. The objective of the stakeholder conversations was to establish a baseline and better understand the current conditions of the trail system as well as varying goals and visions for the future to ensure a trails plan provides something for everyone in the Girdwood community.

METHODOLOGY

Stakeholder interviews were conducted over 60-minutes via online meeting platforms. The following set of questions was used to begin and guide each conversation:

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails, parks, and permitted uses on public lands?
- What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

Huddle AK captured each conversation and provided the stakeholders a summary to review for accuracy. The interview summaries were compiled for review by the Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee and inclusion in the public record.

Based upon the key findings of the stakeholder interviews, an existing condition report, and a Girdwood Trail Plan Working Group work session, a vision statement for the Trails Plan process will be developed. This statement will help to focus and guide the process by creating a shared vision for the trail system informed by viewpoints and information shared by all user groups.

PARTICIPANTS

Girdwild
Alyeska Resort
Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
MTB Alliance

Ascending Path
Landowners and Managers
General Trail Users: Jonathan Lee, Carolyn Brodin, Paul Crews

KEY THEMES

Girdwood is a Trail Town and Residents Value Access to Trail-Based Recreation

Many Girdwood residents were drawn to the town due to the nature of the small community and its access to trail-based recreation. Given Girdwood's proximity to Anchorage, residents value having trail access from their front door on-foot and providing recreation opportunities within the community is important to all.

Girdwood residents and trail system users value the variety of activities that are possible within the trail system (i.e. hiking, biking, skijoring, downhill skiing, cross country skiing, etc.). The accessibility of the trail system, whether it be from residents' front door, or visitors having easy access from Alyeska Resort, is something the community of Girdwood appreciates and cited often.

The presence of Alyeska Resort, recreational opportunities, and natural beauty draws tourists year-round. There is a perception that the Girdwood trail system has the foundation, location, and potential to be a world-class trail system. With adequate public involvement in the trails planning process and a shared vision, investments in trail maintenance, improved connectivity, access, and amenities would be beneficial for residents and visitors alike.

The Girdwood Trail System Should be Equitable and Balanced

Level of Difficulty

Bearing in mind that outdoor recreation in Alaska is somewhat more 'extreme' than one might find in other places, the opportunities within the Girdwood trail system still seem to skew towards a more experienced outdoor recreator. There is a desire for trails that are accessible and safe for hikers, bikers, and skiers of all levels. Creating opportunities at all levels of difficulty is especially important as the number of youth and tourists engaging in recreation is on the rise. As with all recreation, there is a certain level of risk to be expected. However, clearly indicating trail difficulty and conditions on maps and trailhead kiosks will offer clear expectations and yield more prepared trail users who experience less injury or accidents. As the balance of trail classifications is diversified this will become increasingly important. Tourists or out of town guests may assume that a Class 4 trail poses little risk due to being well maintained and formalized and may be ill prepared for the risks of trail-based recreation.

Allowed Uses

Due to the growing popularity of various trail-based activities such as biking and skiing, the balance as well as clear indication of allowed uses on a trail is needed. There is some user conflict between hikers and bikers and their desired trail experiences. However, bikers and non-bikers alike agree that more bike specific trails and areas are needed. Trails which are not designed and built for bikers sustain damage and result in increased maintenance requirements and costs.

The construction of the Nordic 5k Loop through the efforts of the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club has created a designated area of allowed use for Nordic skiers that is generally removed from other trail users

experience that is well-marked, and well-maintained. The Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance is pursuing similar efforts to create trail opportunities for bikers through the proper planning and channels. The possibility of zoning within the trail system will be explored as it may alleviate tension between user groups and maintain areas for specific uses and desired trail experiences.

As the designation and creation of areas for allowed uses progresses, the wayfinding, signage, and mapping should be clear and well planned to create easy to follow routes and loops. It is difficult for residents and visitors alike to understand where allowed uses change. Due to the nature of the development in the Girdwood trail system so far without a master plan, the system is incohesive. Allowed uses change frequently with little marking creating a fractured, confusing experience when a trail user must change or question whether their mode of travel is allowed on a trail. One example of this is the North Face Trail at the top of Mt. Alyeska, when the trail is open to bikers, hikers get cut off and must turn around.

Range of Opportunities for All People

Offering opportunities for every type of resident or visitor is something that the community of Girdwood values and feels is important. Whether that is the tourist seeking a photo opportunity with very little hiking, the individual pushing a stroller or using a wheelchair, those who seek a more primitive experience in a natural space, or any other variety of trail user, the Girdwood trail system can provide options for all through proper planning. Each trail cannot cater to all, but the planning process will help determine which opportunities are already provided and what updates or additions may be made to trails to create a diverse trail system that offers something for everyone.

Balance of Trail Classifications throughout the System

There is significant diversity in the experience that trail users wish to have when using the Girdwood trail system. In order to best meet this diversity in demand, the trail system should be comprised of trails of various classifications. Girdwood residents' value the diversity among types of trails and experiences as much as they value the ability to engage in many forms of trail-based recreation. They appreciate and see the need for access to class 1 (minimally developed) trails as well as class 4 (fully developed) trails. The Bird to Gird and Nordic 5k Trails are formalized, well-maintained trails that are valued by many community members to the same degree that undeveloped, primitive trail experiences are. There was interest expressed in formalization and clearer marking of some social trail networks. Formalizing select social trails will preserve the natural environment by making it clear where trail users should travel and funneling traffic onto fewer trails. Clearer marking of the formalized trail system will prevent visitors from wandering down social trails and accidentally arriving in residents' backyards rather than their intended destination. A trail system with a balance of trail classifications will lend itself well to providing opportunities for the novice as well as advanced hiker and creating a broad range of outdoor and recreation experiences.

Areas for No Trail Development

While it will be vital to provide a variety of trails when it comes to difficulty, use, and trail classification, it will also be necessary to designate areas where no trail development will occur. Recent trail development and increased use within the Girdwood trail system have altered treasured primitive trail experiences. Many residents and user groups value having access to pristine wilderness areas that are

minimally developed. The Girdwood valley is vast and with proper planning and public involvement, spaces and experiences for all user groups are possible. Areas for no trail development must still follow the proper process and channels that new trail development is subject to. It should be clear why the area has been selected, how it will be accessed, and what (if any) level of enforcement, maintenance, or involvement will be needed.

Trail Access

There are many wonderful trails within the Girdwood trail system that are missing formal access, wayfinding, or amenities. The thought of the Girdwood trail system inundated by out of town guests is difficult for many long-time residents. The process by which trail access is created will require community input and the benefit of improved trail access for safety and rescue should be kept in mind.

While the Girdwood trail system is a valued asset of the community, the trails do not benefit from being kept a secret. Striking a balance between overuse and having enough eyes on the trail for safety and maintenance is crucial. Through conversation and planning, Girdwood may consider upgrading certain trails to support higher levels of traffic and promoting them accordingly (i.e. Winner Creek Trail). Certain trails that are not yet to that standard or do not have easy access may not be as heavily promoted. The trails that are selected for tourism and promotion should be chosen by the community and clearly marked on promotional materials and maps. This communication around access, use, and level of trail development will create a clear expectation as to the type of trail experience one can expect.

Commonly cited examples such as Wagon Trail, a historic experience that many residents value, cannot be shared or promoted with visitors due to having no trailhead at either end. Upper Virgin Creek Falls is a very popular destination that is promoted well and receives high traffic but does not have parking or restrooms to accommodate visitors. Providing easy access, formal trailheads, as well as appropriate amenities and parking for the level of use anticipated on a given trail will help to alleviate many of the current issues.

Priority Projects

- Hand Tram
- Virgin Creek Trailhead
- Max's Mountain
- Iditarod Trail
- Winner Creek Improvements
- Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance Development
- Dedicated Areas for No New Trail Development
- Increased Connectivity between existing trails (Abe's Trail and California Creek)
- Wagon Trail Access and Tread
- Beaver Pond Maintenance and Improvements
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Trail Maintenance

While all stakeholders understand that both the coordination and cost of maintenance have been challenging, the desired level of maintenance moving forward varies among trail users due to

preference and desired trail experience. Trail classification and allowed use designation will be helpful in determining the level of maintenance on given trails.

Brushing out trails, grooming, and general trail maintenance (removing fallen trees, tread, bridges, etc.) should all be considered. Trails designated for hiking or biking with a tendency to become overgrown (such as Beaver Pond) should be brushed out with some regularity. Most seem to be content with the level of grooming happening and would like to hold community conversations to reach maintenance agreements for additional grooming. General trail maintenance could be conducted more regularly, but due to financial burden the Girdwood trail system relies heavily on volunteers to conduct these activities. Areas that are designated for no trail development should be relatively unmaintained to provide a more primitive trail experience and preserve natural spaces for those who seek that.

The level of trail maintenance required, anticipated funding, and volunteer commitment should be discussed in the initial planning stages of all new trail development. Many interviewees felt that new trail projects should not be pursued until existing trails are up to date on maintenance.

Connectivity

While many are excited about the prospect of new trails and expansion of allowed uses, there is consensus among those interviewed that the trail system would benefit from increased connectivity between existing trails. Creating connectivity among existing trails may consist of new trail development to close 'missing connections' as well as formalization of social trails where hikers have taken it upon themselves to establish connections.

A framework for creating access to the trail system and connectivity among current trails should exist before additional trails and new development is pursued to avoid trail relocation in the future. There is a desire for connectivity through town and around the valley, which is bifurcated by Glacier Creek and Alyeska Highway. Creek crossings will need to be addressed eventually to create the desired valley-wide connectivity. There is interest in filling in gaps to create out and back loops. One such connection is between Abe's Trail and California Creek, creating a loop would only require a small portion of trail to be formalized.

Creating connectivity among the trail system would create a more cohesive experience and additional opportunities to travel through Girdwood. With so many residents valuing the ability to travel without a car, a connected trail system utilizing the city's infrastructure is a key part of that.

Project Approval Processes

The project approval process should be transparent and understood by all. There should be adequate public involvement opportunities and communication between all parties. There is frustration among the community around an arduous trails approval process while landowners and managers are sympathetic of this and working to simplify the process. This trails plan will provide some clarity around that process, establish a shared vision, and result in a community supported and adopted document that may be referenced during future trail development.

Topics that may be discussed and considered with all new trails and natural space projects include:

- Viewshed
- Land Ownership

- Trail Maintenance (level required, current funding available, maintenance agreements)
- Access
- Trailhead Amenities (parking, restrooms, trashcans, dog stations, etc.)
- Connectivity to Nearby Trails
- Wayfinding and Signage
- Trail Classification (Class 1-4)
- Desired Level of Awareness and Use

APPENDIX – Detailed Interview Summaries

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interview: Alyeska
March 16, 2020
Summary Report

Attendees: Holly Spoth-Torres, Brian Burnett, Taylor Smith
Conducted via phone

QUESTIONS

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
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SUMMARY

Alyeska feels that the trail system in Girdwood is a great start but for a developing resort town there are a lot of improvements possible. Alyeska values the proximity of the trail system to the resort. Additionally, the operational aspect is amazing – volunteers and land managers make the trail system work. The 5k Nordic Loop is a well-signed and easy to access asset for the resort. Moose Meadows is also a nice asset during high snow years, but the meadows are challenging to access in the lower snow years.

There are aspects of the trail system that are well-maintained, well-constructed, and well-signed – the Winner Creek Trail and the Hand Tram for example. This is attributed to the Forest Service, MUNI, and volunteers. Alyeska and Girdwood Nordic Ski Club share grooming of the Nordic 5k loop.

Alyeska shared about the trail extension from Fairview to the Hotel in 2011 as an example of wanting to develop a trail in one place and realigning that trail or replacing it with a higher quality trail somewhere else – an example of what the community can do working together. A trail that meets everybody's needs but built to a better standard.

Challenges around the trail system are getting approvals to build new trails, funding new construction, and maintaining the trails that already exist. Maintenance and drainage are two key issues due to Girdwood's climate – there is only so much ground that is appropriate on which to build (i.e. wetlands

and bogs are not appropriate). Sustainable terrain is not available for multiple reasons (planning, ownership, etc.).

Trail conflicts exist on Winner Creek – you used to be able to bike on the trail and it can no longer support that use due to traffic during peak times. Alyeska would support grooming Winner Creek in the winter to allow snow biking, however there is some resistance to that idea.

Over the next 15 years, the most significant challenge the trail system will face is meeting demand, especially in the vicinity of the resort. Winner Creek – Hand Tram – Crow Creek is consistently rated one of the best trails in Alaska and it's very busy.

Most trails in Alaska developed as game trails or transportation routes to resources, resulting in routes that are not the most sustainable – the trails are straight and follow the valley floor without much elevation gain or loss. More single-track bike trails would be good in Girdwood, there are a lot of hiking and running trails so a focus on bikeable or multi-use trails would be good. In the next 15-20 years it is important to have a diverse mix of sustainable trails for a diversity of uses.

The multi-use path is such a huge benefit. The trail creates access from the Resort to a lot of trails. Trails that provide connectivity to and from and within neighborhoods are important.

Projects that should be completed:

- Within the perimeter from the hotel, Winner Creek, back down the valley, across the hand tram, down on Iditarod/Beaver Pond, the bike trail coming back to Forest Service, down on the lower Iditarod to Alyeska highway -- Everything inside this loop should be allowed to be developed for more trail use.
- Starting on Beaver Pond heading down the Valley - between California Creek and Abe's trail – there's a branch off and there is a plateau between 2 trails. A few kilometers of single-track bike trails through the forest with 3-4K of trails that would be accessible to more residents and those who don't live in the Alyeska subdivision. It's very flat and it would support a Kincaid-style single-track alignment.
- Alyeska resort is going to continue to develop trails on its 400 acres that are available to both the community and guests. Alyeska is committed to creating trails that are accessible for all levels. Alyeska is beginning a master planning phase – creating a 10-year plan for the mountain. This master plan will likely propose new trails - hiking, biking, multi-use, with varying degrees of difficulty and user experiences.

Interactions between the public and Alyeska guests on Alyeska's trails has been good. Through signage and active management, the community has respected the downhill bike paths without impacting guests or hiking crowd.

Winter trail grooming has been taken on by the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club – this is a vital community service. There are improvements to be made with summer maintenance. The advent of singletrack trails has shown that the Girdwood Mountain Biking Alliance has the capacity to maintain trails, especially in the summer.

The current management plan does not allow spending public dollars on trails that don't have easements or trailheads – the Virgin Creek project conflicts with this policy but is a community issue that must be solved.

Currently, there are agreements in place in order to minimize parking issues. For example, Alyeska's parking lots are used for access to the 5K Nordic Loop, single track, etc. However, these agreements won't be in place forever – alternative, safe parking solutions that meet trail demands (more than 8-10 vehicles) need to be explored.

Alyeska is hopeful for this collaborative process that requires everyone to work together. As a prominent ski resort, Alyeska hopes to see plans for a trail system that resembles other resort/trail towns (Bend, Park City, Sun Valley) to elevate Girdwood to a level that is economically competitive with other resort towns. It's unlikely that anyone will look back and think "what were we thinking building all these trails"?

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interview
Ascending Path
March 26th, 2020 at 3:30pm
Attendees: Nicole Geils, GM of AP
Huddle AK: Holly Spoth-Torres, Taylor Smith

QUESTIONS

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails? What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

SUMMARY

Ascending Path (AP) loves the trails of Girdwood. AP has a positive working relationship with all parties involved in the use of the trails. The trails are in good condition. When AP is out on the trail and encounters issues, they send an email to the appropriate entity and the problem is addressed quickly – whether it's trees down, overflow issues, or something else.

AP operates in both the summer and winter. Winter snowshoe trips are guided if the conditions allow. AP is a boutique tour operator that guides small groups. The group ratio for their snowshoe and nature hikes is 10 or less clients to 1 guide.

AP most values the accessibility of Girdwood's trail system. Winner Creek is a trail that they use year-round. It is convenient to have trailhead access at Alyeska Resort. AP appreciates the various volunteers that maintain and provide services on Girdwood's trail system. AP values the care that the Girdwood community has for the trails. One can often see trail users picking up trash, curating the trails, and keeping them well maintained for everybody to enjoy.

AP feels that the response to various hazards on the trail is handled well, especially on heavily used trails. Some of the trails in Girdwood's system are very accessible while others could have better accessibility, parking, trash cans, and other amenities.

Virgin Creek is a problem trail due to parking, trash, and hikers not staying on the trail to avoid wet areas. Residents in nearby houses often get blocked in their driveways due to overflow parking. Virgin Creek is a very popular and easy trail which results in heavy traffic. Improvements and maintenance are

needed to accommodate the level of use. It seems that most people who visit just want a social media photo opportunity with the beautiful falls. They want to park, hike for 5 minutes, get a photo and leave. People often drive from Anchorage and after a 45-minute drive they need to use the restroom. When facilities are not provided at the trailhead, it creates an issue with TP and litter.

Crow Pass and Winner Creek provide parking, bathrooms, and trash cans.

The Lower Iditarod trail improvements look great! The Iditarod Trail is currently in the process of being updated, and maybe future update projects could include amenities such as parking, bathrooms, trash cans, and other services.

There is a loop that begins on Beaver Pond with signage on how to enter just off the Bird to Gird trail. It's a beautiful trail that many people like to use it. There are many side trails along the loop that experienced users take to access various places. The average hiker from out of town may accidentally take one of these trails and end up in resident's driveways.

Girdwood has some amazing and beautiful trails but parking and facilities around a few more key trailheads would be beneficial.

The challenges the trail system faces varies. One might see hikers on Winner Creek wearing flip flops during the summer. Winner Creek is well marketed and trafficked in the summer, so the hand tram has become an attraction... and some visitors do not respect the hand tram. During peak season in July and August, the wait for the hand tram can be upwards of 2 hours.

There is not a lot of conflicts among user groups that AP has seen. Trail users are generally very respectful on multi-use trails, but dog poo can sometimes be an issue. It's common to see dog waste bagged and left along the trail. Perhaps doggy "dump" stations would help trail users dispose of waste.

Alaskan tourism was growing, everything looked promising for summer 2020. We'll assume that trend will continue after COVID-19. Over the next 15-20 years, tourism will grow, so improvements of the trailheads and maps are beneficial. A more comprehensive and user-friendly trail map would be helpful to visitors. With a good map, the trails we want people to use could be highlighted as well as the facilities and amenities available to provide a more curated experience for visitors. More primitive trails that the locals prefer to use could be omitted or not as strongly promoted. A good trail map would expand user groups and help to keep the state tourism economy going.

Hopefully, there is an understanding among locals that Girdwood wants visitors/tourists on the trails. A few of the more-developed trails with amenities could be selected to funnel visitors to.

It's clear when you're getting on a multi-use trail which user groups you're going to run into while out.

The 5k Nordic Loop is done well. In the wintertime it's single use for cross country skiers, no dogs or hikers allowed. The community respects that because the rules have been clearly communicated, thus empowering users to share the message and inform people who were "breaking the rules" in a kind and gentle way.

AP is sympathetic to the fact that Girdwood P&R Staff are constantly "on call" in case there's an emergency at the hand tram. Another arrangement should be pursued to ease this burden. I believe there are committees already working on the hand tram emergency response situation.

Keeping the Alaska caveat in mind -- everything here is a little more extreme -- there's a good selection of trails. The paved path to Alyeska resort is nice. People complain about the elevation gain and not having a lot of trails that are flat. When the Lower Iditarod updates are complete that trail will be a nice and flat option for folks. That improvement will provide a wider variety of trails for visitors to Girdwood who aren't as sure footed as the locals. The 5k Nordic loop in summer is a nice hike that can be accessed right from Alyeska Resort. It provides another option that alleviates pressure from Winner Creek.

In a perfect world (with a BIG budget) there would be a bridge in conjunction with the hand tram. People who would like to have the experience of the hand tram can wait in line while others can take the bridge and continue their day without the congestion of the hand tram.

Project to complete:

- An interesting project would be to install a webcam at/near the hand tram so users and emergency response individuals could check the status of the tram. A few cameras in key locations could give people an idea of what's going on, assist in emergency situations, and allow for checking wait times and traffic on the hand tram.

GTP Stakeholder Interview
1:1 General Trail User
March 30, 2020 @ 11:00am
Interviewee: Carolyn Brodin
Huddle AK: Holly Spoth-Torres, Taylor Smith

QUESTIONS

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SUMMARY

In general, we have a good trail system. Carolyn likes the mix of developed and primitive options on the trail system both in winter and summer. Creating/improving connections between some of the trails is needed.

Carolyn values that there are still primitive, quiet areas you can go to and access to less developed trails. She appreciates the ungroomed trails during winter, and during summer, trails like Abe's Trail and Stumpy's Summer Trail.

Winter and summer on the trail system are very different – a winter with significant snowfall brings out the best in the trails. Assuming we have significant snowfall, the trail system works well in winter.

In both winter and summer there are trails for all of the different types of users.

Bike use on the trails is growing quickly both winter and summer. In winter, the fat tire bikers have very limited places to go and perhaps grooming another trail (if there is community support for this) could give them more options. In summer, mountain bikers are damaging trails such as Abe's Trail that are not built to withstand bikes. The heavy bike use is damaging both the trail tread and the hiking experience. Developing more mountain biking trails such as the GMBA bike park will help with user conflicts and hopefully prevent further damage to some trails.

One of Carolyn's concerns with the Girdwood trail system is Upper Valley access. There is no longer trail access via airport property because the airport now enforces trespassing. The Upper Valley is accessible via Moose Meadows in the winter but not in the summer. Most Girdwood residents value not having to get in a car to access trails. Alyeska Resort is the only place to park and they have limited parking at times. Carolyn understands that airport access is not likely to be resolved with this trails plan. The loss of trail access through airport property has impacted many trail user's experience.

There is a desire by some people for an easier (than the 5k) multi-use trail for skiers that are not advanced, and dogs are allowed. Carolyn understands this idea but is unsure where a trail of this type could go due to terrain and impacts on surrounding areas.

Carolyn believes many Girdwood residents would be happier with a narrower multi-use trail maybe 8-10 ft. clearance max rather than 20ft. A trail of this type would provide a better experience both winter and summer than a wider trail. If a trail of this size and impact were considered, it's likely they would fit better and meet less community resistance.

The Lower Valley area is wet and probably not ideal for new trail development. The lower valley sees less snowfall than the upper valley and for economic development, proximity to the resort is beneficial for some. Connectivity to the other ski trails would be a problem.

Over the next 15-20 years Carolyn hopes Girdwood will continue to have trails that satisfy all users while preserving natural areas. The trail system should have a place for everybody.

Carolyn would like to see improved trail access and new bridges to tie some loops together. Iditarod Trail used to connect Girdwood from North and South before the trail was washed out and the connection was lost. There used to be a connection from the School to Beaver Pond before the flood of '94 took out the cottonwood tree bridge. Girdwood couldn't afford to replace the tree with a bridge.

Carolyn would also like to see attention paid to the lower valley trails.

The Wagon Trail has been all but forgotten by most because there isn't real access at either end. It's a beautiful historic trail. It needs a trailhead. It would be nice to somehow connect it to the Joe Danich trail to create a loop rather than walking on the railroad tracks which is not legal. There are other Girdwood trails that lack access.

Maintenance of current trails is a lot for the Trails Committee to manage. Hired summer crews and volunteer work parties have been helpful in recent years. The Trails Committee heavily relies on locals who use the trails to help with maintenance.

For maps to be effective, parking and trailheads must be addressed to accommodate the visitors and be easily accessible.

The Trails Committee is finishing a signage and waypoint project on Beaver Pond Trail with historic interpretive panels that will be unveiled end of May, 2020. The panels have historical information about the trails and surrounding area. The signs include emergency locator info to aid with rescue efforts. The Trails Committee hopes to set a standard for having similar signage throughout the system. While over-signing can detract from a trail experience, some signing is important.

Trail projects to complete:

- Rebuilding Virgin Creek Falls trail. This is the shortest and most popular trail in Girdwood that has been worn down by overuse.
- Lower Iditarod – Grant funds have been requested for this project.

Girdwood should keep focus on improving and maintaining existing trails as they see more users.

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interviews: Girdwild
March 16, 2020
Summary Report
Interviewee: Brenden Raymond-Yakoubian
Huddle AK: Holly Spoth-Torres, Taylor Smith
Conducted via Webex

QUESTIONS

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SUMMARY

Girdwild views this plan from the perspective of it being a trails and natural spaces plan.

The Girdwood trail system has positives and negatives – there is some poor trail building, illegal trail building, and environmental damage – but also some incredible trails. The Virgin Creek Falls trail is an iconic example of trail damage due to overuse.

The relationship between Winner Creek and 5k Nordic Loop is problematic – 5k is too viewable from Winner Creek and the trail is too wide in some areas (e.g. 90 ft. instead of 30 ft.). Mistakes made in the past should be fixed, but nobody should be penalized. Moving forward, there should be a better approval process and design standards created.

Girdwild would like to see a trail and natural spaces plan, and approval processes, that are clear and inclusive to everyone. Future trails should be held to standards that respect the diversity among users – not just one group. Girdwild will value a process and a plan where everybody gets something. It is possible to have natural spaces and a diversity of trails in Girdwood. It would also be possible to have in the 5K/Winner Creek area a great 5K, great mountain bike trails, and a forested Winner Creek Trail with a restored viewshed.

Girdwild is in favor of wild, natural areas, and primitive trails. Trails can in some cases help access natural areas. All trails should be low impact and beautiful. While Girdwild would love to see all primitive and wild/natural spaces, they understand the community's desires are diverse and require a

trail and natural spaces system that respects all user groups. Girdwood itself is gorgeous, but the trail system is not at this point. There are natural spaces in and around Girdwood. There are primitive experiences that are fantastic and should not be damaged.

If a set of principles and design guidelines could be agreed upon it could likely alleviate a lot of trail problems. For example, the principle of not seeing one trail from another would go a long way toward that; other things would likely happen by default if you followed that – low impact, beautiful trails that are not harming the area.

If the trails and natural spaces plan goes well, many challenges can be avoided over the next 15 years. If business as usual continues, it's going to be a challenge, because there may be battles about every trail-related proposal. It's not smart community planning to not have a plan and process for a diverse trails and natural spaces system that serves all the user groups. It's short and narrow-sighted. It's a missed opportunity to highlight the natural beauty that many value.

The trail system feels out of balance in terms of types of trails and natural space opportunities. There are some proposals for new trail work and existing projects which take away from the few remaining primitive experiences in the community of Girdwood.

Girdwild is not sure if there are too many people on the trails as is often stated. There are some days during high season where this might be true, but it doesn't seem to hold through the entire season, and Girdwild thinks this may be being used as a bad argument to build more trails.

Parking is potentially an issue, but there is a balance between protecting certain lands and creating access to them. Girdwild is hopeful that the Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee might answer this question – 'what should we do, what should we not do?'

Girdwild believes all user groups, themselves included, value not having to drive out of the community to access the types of trails and natural spaces they would like to use.

Concerned that "missing connections" may not be the right question to ask right off the bat as it potentially threatens natural spaces, and it misses the point that significant interconnections already exist. Girdwild suggests thinking about the trails themselves before thinking about how to connect them and thinking first about a system of diverse trails and wild natural spaces. Girdwild would be very concerned about proposals to build new trails through wild, natural, and primitive trail areas.

Primitive trails have a high value, and the existence of natural spaces without trails also have a high value. It is valuable to be able to view unimpacted natural spaces; they also have other values, e.g. existence value, habitat and ecosystem values, etc. Experiences on primitive trails in and near natural areas are also important. Girdwood's natural spaces are as close to pristine as it gets in a community.

Trail and natural space projects that need to be completed right now – the designation of protected wild/natural spaces; addressing overuse damage in the Virgin Creek Falls trail area; and remediation of problems of the 5K (especially the impacts of 5k on Winner Creek Trail viewshed, excessive clearing by the 5K, and the overuse of gravel for the 5K loop).

Grooming is good to have on certain trails but shouldn't necessarily be expanded unless there's an agreement around which trails. The qualities and values of primitive and other trails should be

considered, e.g. there are unfortunately now some trail experiences that are high impact, overly sterile, or road-like. Maintenance has the potential to constantly increase damage.

Wayfinding can lead to overuse but can also help with safety issues. A good signage system can be a protector of natural spaces and can foster ownership, and a sense of community.

**GirdWild - Girdwood Trails Plan Stakeholder Interview with HuddleAK -
Some supplemental notes and ideas**

- Our preference is for only preserved natural/wild spaces, and some beautiful primitive trails. Short of that, however, we are OK with the development of a beautiful, diverse, environmentally-friendly interconnected system of trails and natural/wild spaces.
- We should designate certain areas in and near the community as no-trail and primitive-trail only areas.
 - We should have a system of such wild/natural spaces
 - Some information about this has been/is being presented to the Girdwood Area Plan/Imagine!Girdwood team (January 2019 and March 2020); please see that for this project as well
 - Some candidates, among others:
 - Virgin Creek Area
 - Stumpy's Ridge/Forest/Meadows Area
 - Areas near Beaver Pond Trail
- Some Trails and Natural Spaces Principles would like to see adopted:
 - Should not be able to see one trail from another
 - All our trails should be beautiful
 - Trails should be as low impact as possible (width, materials, tree cutting, etc.)
 - Trails should not harm sensitive historical, cultural, and ecological features
 - Trails should not damage the qualities of the area they are going through
 - Trail development should be climate-resilient. For example, cutting down trees is shooting ourselves in the foot at many levels (natural beauty, harms the climate which sustains our unique economy, etc.). Building wider trails because of snow-cover issues is short-sighted and demonstrates poor leadership.
 - There are many values associated with the natural world and we should respect those. Key among those are those associated with wild and natural spaces, including ecological protection, primitive experiences, quiet, solitude, etc.

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interview
Jonathan Lee: General Trail User
Huddle AK: Holly Spoth-Torres, Taylor Smith
March 25, 2020 @ 3:30pm

QUESTIONS

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails? What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

SUMMARY

Jonathan is pleased with most of the Girdwood trail system outside of the 5k Nordic Loop. The location of the 5k loop is not necessarily a problem, however the process leading up to development and the way in which it was constructed were problematic.

The 5k loop looks like a road. The Nordic 5k loop is wider than a municipally maintained street and the trail is too close to Winner Creek trail. When people from out of town walk on Winner Creek, they ask 'what road/highway is that'? The width of the 5k loop is in violation of what was promised in writing and verbally before construction. The Nordic Ski Club said it would only be viewable from 1-2 places, but that's not the case.

What Jonathan values most about the trail system in Girdwood is that it provides easy to access wild nature without bush whacking. Youth and out of town guests require easier access for safety and a pleasant experience. The trail system makes it possible to access the backcountry. Exercise is not Jonathan's primary reason for using the trails. Going to the gym or running on the street provide exercise but being on the trails offers an experience out in nature. The trail system in Girdwood also provides access while protecting outdoor spaces from erosion. Social and informal trails can cause a lot of erosion. Nature is preserved by preventing people from walking anywhere they would like.

The North Face trail is beautiful as it allows you to get into high country, and the trail was done with little disruption. Upper Winner Creek Trail is very minimally disruptive, and the route gets you way out of town. The hand tram is accessible and given the huge numbers of people that go there, the impact to

the surrounding area is still minimal. The trail system in Girdwood allows low impact access to the backcountry. Girdwood has wonderful ungroomed trails that can be used all winter. There are opportunities to snowshoe, cross country ski, walk by the river, etc.. Overall, access to backcountry spaces with low impact is what Jonathan values most about Girdwood's trail system.

The level of maintenance and grooming that the Girdwood trail system receives currently is good. Maintenance is low impact and makes the trails accessible to people without creating lasting negative effects. Maintenance providers are not cutting down a lot of trees in order to groom so groomed trails look like ski trails. In the summertime, if you didn't know about a trail that's groomed in the winter then you would not notice it.

There are ungroomed trails for those who want to be in the trees and wild, natural spaces and for those that just want to ski can do that. The 5k Nordic Loop is good for the users it was built for and the skate skiers love it. The 5k came at a really high cost and cleared a huge piece of land. The 5k seems to be a commercial for Alyeska Resort to tout and advertise because it meets international racing standards.

Other than the challenges that came with the Nordic 5k, Jonathan loves the trail system in Girdwood. There are a lot of concerns about where the trail system might go from here and less concern about the state of the trail system right now. The current trails in Girdwood could be brushed out a little more, but there are funding restraints.

Over the next 15-20 years it will be important to consider preservation of the natural beauty that drew so many of Girdwood's residents to live there. Trails in general can create access to the backcountry or they can lead to the decimation of the backcountry. If a community continues to loop trail upon trail, eventually there are no longer natural spaces where you don't see gravel or development. Anchorage has those qualities but it's an urban environment, natural spaces are unique to Girdwood and should remain. Many Girdwood residents came a long way to live in a beautiful, natural place that looks much the same as it did 100 years ago. Girdwood is quite pristine. If natural spaces are not set aside, there may not be much remaining in the future. If you don't want natural spaces paved, there needs to be a boundary or designation.

Girdwood has some very natural trails that are minimally maintained (i.e. Stumpy's Trail) and those are really valued. There are concerns among the community about paving in general and having highly developed trails right next to primitive experiences. This same scenario unfolded with Winner Creek, which used to be primitive and quiet but provides a different experience now. It's a prime example of why the impact of new trails on the viewshed of existing trails should be thought about with trail development.

Establishing a trail on Max's Mountain will be difficult because of property ownership, but if a trail is not constructed people will continue to make trails. Erosion continues to happen in that area year after year. The formal trail starts at the end of Timberline. There is a very short 'official' trail to Virgin Creek and from that point people take off uphill. That Virgin Creek Falls area will continue to get trampled if a well-built trail isn't created.

The 5k loop was an example of how Jonathan thinks trails should not be constructed. Trails should be built by professional companies who specialize in building trails. Professional trail builders know what

the problems are and how to avoid what was done on the 5k. Hopefully in the future trails in Girdwood can be built by those who follow a code of ethics for trail building so trails are not built like roads.

By designating certain areas to be preserved (i.e. wetlands, the area surrounding Stumpy's trail) Girdwood can avoid pitfalls over the next 15-20 years. In 20 years, the wetlands and Stumpy's look a lot like they do now. A portion of what the Mountain Bike Alliance has planned will impact pristine areas. That mountain bike park may be better received by the community if placed somewhere that's already 'scorched earth' (i.e. near the 5k). A designated mountain bike park would be nice to keep bikers off the Winner Creek trail.

An accessible, class one, primitive-type trail that creates better access to the upper valley and preserves backcountry nature would be nice to have. Trails such as this would make the backcountry accessible without bushwhacking and make backcountry experiences possible for people who don't have the knowledge or skills to safely trudge through the rainforest with a compass. Over the years Girdwood will need more single use trails (hiking only, skiing only, etc.). Sharing trails is easy when there's not as many users. If use and population increase on the Girdwood trail system, more designated trails will be needed. People generally practice good trail etiquette, but tourists aren't sure of the rules and ride bikes very fast and don't acknowledge dogs or kids. Single use trails will need to happen in the future.

Balance among trail types and use is 'okay'. Biking and hiking only trails are already needed in Girdwood. Winner Creek trail has already reached the point of needing to be single use during the summer, especially on the weekends. Locals generally avoid Winner Creek during those times and a biking only trail nearby would be good. Single-use enforcement on trails is hard to do and unfair to the mountain biking community. If mountain bikers had a place to go, they would use it and enforcement wouldn't be too bad. It would be nice if the 5k Nordic Loop was open to dogs. Is it so crowded that it needs to be ski only and people can't pass around kids or dogs? Weekends are crowded on other trails and it's sometimes an issue with people passing or bumping into one another.

A missing connection that would be nice to tie together is the Lower Joe Danich trail along the riverbank. It could create more access but people who live near the trail like it disconnected. There is an access point from the end of Timberline Dr. in the cul-de-sac, the trail connects from that point to where the Upper & Lower Danich trails meet. Access right now is a little difficult and there's a need for a trailhead there, but there's no parking in the cul-de-sac to accommodate more traffic.

The tram is wonderful, but there have been injuries and a death. A bridge sounded like a great solution until the cost of construction came up. Grant opportunities would be good to evaluate the feasibility of a bridge in the hand tram's place. Ultimately, several bridges may be needed to cross and create connectivity. If a bridge is the solution, it should be done carefully and mindfully. The bridge should be cognizant of what the land looks like and should not destroy the natural beauty people come to see.

There are no trail projects that Girdwood needs to hurry to complete. Trail projects should slow down and take their time rather than ushering things through as has been done in the past. Bike trails should be completed, but not necessarily what's proposed now by the Mountain Bike Alliance right now. Most of what the Mountain Bike Master Plan proposed is good if time is taken to do the process right and construction is done well.

Maintenance on Girdwood's trails is great when it happens, some trails do go long periods without upkeep. It would be nice to see more energy invested in maintaining existing trails in Girdwood. That's part of building trails right, there needs to be money to maintain it in before construction happens. Beaver Pond has been good in recent years but still becomes overgrown even when it's brushed out. Upper Winner Creek has drainage and erosion issues that should be fixed. Those issues make the trail unusable and impact the landscape. Upper Winner Creek is not marked on the winter map because the trail gets into a hazardous avalanche zone quickly. Upper Winner Creek is shown on the summer map. The Iditarod Trail gets very little maintenance as you go up farther (parallel to Crow Creek). The Iditarod Trail gets harder to follow when you get to the alders and that area could be brushed out.

More wayfinding and signs could be useful if they are unobtrusive and don't detract from the landscape. Signs can be clear without being billboards. The intersection of the Beaver Pond and bike path is not well signed. Winner Creek is no bikes for the first .7 miles and that's not well marked. People from out of town who aren't using good etiquette may just be unaware because it isn't marked or signed. Most people will follow rules if they can see them.

Virgin Creek Falls trailhead needs the parking situation addressed. It's very difficult to build on because of its location and proximity to the canyon. Beaver Pond parking is good. California Creek trail parking was upgraded 10 years ago, and weekends are crowded but there is generally enough space. The rail depot provides a lot of parking and the 5k loop seems adequate as well. There's almost always enough parking near Alyeska Resort and users accessing the North Face. There is parking for the 5k (the maps are old and don't show the road that goes from Alyeska to the 5k loop), it could be outgrown in a few years but it seems good now.

Overall, there's a lot of energy that goes into new projects and the community of Girdwood has not invested enough into maintaining and taking care of what already exists.

A trails master plan with areas designated for wild spaces and Class 1-4 trails will go a long way towards peace and harmony in the valley. A good plan will help everyone panic less. People on both sides (those who want to preserve and those who want to develop) will know that there is space designated for both of those things.

Girdwood Trails Plan

Stakeholder Interviews

Landowners & Managers

April 13, 2020

Shelley Rowton (Heritage Land Bank), Matt Wedeking (Chugach State Park Operations Manager)

Huddle AK: Holly Spoth-Torres, Taylor Smith

Jason Stancil (USFS Chugach National Forest)

Kurt Hensel (Chugach State Park Superintendent) and Ben Corwin (Chugach State Park Chief Ranger) responded to the questions via email

QUESTIONS:

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails? What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

SUMMARY:

The Girdwood trail system is a very complicated network that traverses many land-owners making decision-making and project authorizations very complex. Communication between land management agencies and the community is relatively good.

The Girdwood trail system serves as a terminus, and destination of the Indian to Girdwood National Recreational Trail (Bird to Gird). The trail system provides connectivity (in Girdwood) to the Bird to Gird Trail, the Crow Pass (National Historic Iditarod Trail), and the Beaver Pond Trail. The trail system creates access into Chugach State Park from the California Creek Trailhead.

There are few options for accessing Chugach State Park using Girdwood's trail system. Abe's Trail and California Creek are relatively challenging hikes. Beaver Pond is an entry level trail that enters and leaves Chugach State Park. The Bird-to-Gird trail, a class 4 bike path managed by the State Park, is one of the most popular trails in the valley. The Girdwood trail system offers almost anything that a user would want to do (skiing, biking, snow shoeing, Nordic or skate skiing). Motorized use is not permitted on the Girdwood trail system. The Girdwood trail system has minimal parking areas and lacks formal trailheads. The Nordic 5k has the only formal trailhead within the system.

There are existing trails and trail building that are not formalized or documented in any way. Formalizing takes a lot of money, effort, and coordination. Landowners and managers do not intend or wish to slow

down trail progress. They are supporting the Mountain Bike (MTB) Alliance and would like to see the new bike trails be constructed this summer. Unfortunately, a lot of what agencies can do rests on the development of the Trail Plan. The final Trail Plan will provide a focused path forward for the community and land managers.

HLB would like this Trail Plan to identify some potential trail locations to improve system connectivity. If an identified connection is on property intended for residential development, a relocatable easement would likely be issued in order to avoid impeding future development by placing a trail in the wrong place. There is some risk for user groups because trails may need to be relocated. HLB has equitable title but not patent to a lot of our land in Girdwood. This means that HLB can authorize some things but land cannot be transferred. In order to plat out the trails on the Nordic 5k and transfer the trails to Parks and Recreation or a user group, it could cost millions of dollars. DNR requires a survey for HLB to receive patent. The entire parcel needs to be surveyed, not just the trail portion.

Cost of survey is the primary reason HLB does not have patent. The State of Alaska holds the patent and will sometimes tentatively approve the Municipality/HLB receiving land before the patent is received from the federal government. Trails and easements are considered a disposal.

The process to develop new trails currently follows this order: authorization for entry, construction, survey for the legal description, transfer of the easement. HLB is working to make this process easier and removing the requirement for survey-grade location of the trail.

Over the next 15-20 years, the major challenges for Girdwood's Trail System will be access, connectivity to Chugach State Park, planning for growth, maintenance, and revenue. It will be challenging to balance the growth of the trail system and the growth of the community.

The Chugach State Park follows recommendations applicable to the Girdwood area from the following planning documents: Chugach State Park Access Plan Draft (2010) p 72-74, and the Chugach State Park Trails Plan (2009) Chapter 4, p. 24. The Chugach Management Plan contains plans to create connectivity between Beaver Pond and Bird-to-Gird as well as plans to formalize the desire path between Abe's Trail and California Creek.

There is little State Park land that can be developed for trails due to topography. The MTB Alliance has made inquiries about suitable land. Beaver Pond trail can accommodate bikes, but Abe's Trail was not constructed for biking. A hiking route from Abe's Trail up to Penguin Ridge was proposed at one time as well as a bike trail into Bird Valley.

HLB's next steps are contingent upon this updated Trails Plan. The Nordic Ski Club has also paused their next step until the plan gets done. HLB is supportive of the MTB Alliance efforts as their projects within next few years are proposal within the Nordic 5k loop and because this project will not expand the footprint of the trail system.

Land managers support the designation of primitive areas but have concerns about how those spaces will be accessed. In order to set aside land for natural spaces and primitive experiences, landowners and managers need more information. Where specifically should be preserved and what is the rationale behind selecting that area?

Balance in the trail system right now may be skewed towards biking. Fat tire and downhill biking is happening everywhere. There are some user conflicts. Many people walk on the Nordic 5k trail. Abe's Trail generates a lot of reports of conflict between hikers and bikers. Most people in Girdwood have

their favorite secret meadows and trails, so there are plenty of spaces where trail users can be alone. Landowners and managers receive notice of snow machine use on park lands, near Beaver Pond, and in Moose Meadows.

The conditions in Girdwood make the trail system challenging to maintain. There are thin, poor soils that are subject to compaction and erosion and the climate is conducive to rapid vegetation growth that needs continual maintenance.

Access and parking are issues that need to be addressed at Virgin Creek Falls. If the community supports this idea, it is possible that in the future HLB could purchase and propose that the small lot across Alyeska Highway from Forest Service be designated trailhead parking. There is a large gravel area for parking down by the Depot and DOT that fills quickly. Beaver Pond is a popular access point. There were 5 new parking spaces put in when the road was widened, but it is not enough to meet demand. Moose Meadows could accommodate a parking lot extension into the soccer field area. That parking area could be bumped out to fit about 15 more spaces. There was a plan with the State Park to complete that addition at some point.

A solution for the Hand Tram is needed, especially as accidents have been fatal. Chugach State Park applied for a Forest Service program that will allow construction of a bridge using materials in the project area. A site has been selected, but funding has not been received. Construction of this bridge will not replace the hand tram but will provide another creek crossing alternative. It will stop the 1-2 hour wait that is believed to contribute to accidents.

The Nordic Trail parking lot is a prime example of “if you build it, they will come”. The parking lot is always full. Parking is the Planning Department’s primary concern with trail expansion in Girdwood. Planning wants to ensure that there is adequate parking to meet increased demand and use. The MTB Alliance has an informal agreement with Alyeska Resort about the last lot at the resort serving as overflow. Parking needs to be expanded before the trail system can grow.

There are several right-of-ways that could connect Alyeska to Beaver Pond and there are many social trails in that area. The social trails could be good connections for the lower valley.

Before any trail projects get completed within the Chugach State Park boundary, there should be a plan to address access, parking, and connectivity.

Other projects to complete:

- Take better care of what we have – maintain existing trails to a higher standard.
- Completion of the Upper and Lower Iditarod improvements
- Some sections of Winner Creek will need to be improved in the future due to heavy use
- Beaver Pond maintenance and improvements
- California Creek could be improved to meet the conditions of Abe’s Trail
- Wagon Trail tread and access improvements A connection across the top of Mt. Alyeska for hikers. When the North Face trail is open to bikers, hikers get cut off and must turn around
- A loop through the cemetery. This addition could connect into Iditarod Trail.
- Upper Virgin Creek

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interview
Mountain Bike Alliance

Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance: Dan Starr (GMBA-President), Nick Georgelos (GMBA-Vice President), Rich Peterson (CPG & GMBA Board member), Ben Kohler (GMBA member at-large)
Huddle AK: Holly Spoth-Torres, Taylor Smith

QUESTIONS

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails? What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

SUMMARY

Girdwood has a good trail system but there are not many mountain bike-specific trails and features. Beaver Pond has been accessible to mountain bikers for a while. There are small paths and some claim that it's an extensive network, but, it's not. The Mountain Bike (MTB) Alliance has added to the trail system, but there are still not many trails. The MTB alliance constructed 1.5 miles of trails and plans for future trails that would bring the total to 6 miles. The MTB Alliance includes plans for downhill specific trails as the uphill trails already exist by utilizing the Nordic trails. The 6 miles of trail is long term and part of the MTB Alliance Master Plan. In the Summer of 2020, we propose to add an additional ½ mile or so of trail will be added to what exists.

The MTB Alliance values the passionate community of trail users in Girdwood. There are a lot of people and volunteers that help the MTB Alliance and Girdwood in general. The trail system is well taken care of, but there is always room for improvement. The MTB Alliance values that the trails get used a lot and brushed out or maintained because one group or another takes on the responsibility to maintain the trails. Girdwood has a diverse set of trails ranging from very well-built mountain bike trails to rustic hiking and biking trails. Girdwood has a diverse user group and people tend to get along. During COVID, the amount of people using trails and getting along was great to see. In general people use all the trails in a multitude of ways.

Partnership and communication between the Trails Committee, Nordic Ski Club, and the City of Girdwood has been good. Those groups have encouraged MTB Alliance and there's been a lot of

support. The existing trail system is a decent start for utilizing corridors and creating connectivity. Changes to the trail system have established that Girdwood likes mountain biking as transportation in the valley. The number of people traveling to Girdwood to use the trails is a great start, but the potential to have a trail system for people who want to pedal is greater. Girdwood could become a destination or very well known within the mountain biking community.

The Girdwood trail system has some good corridors, but some pieces are poor quality due to certain trails not being used that much. The Iditarod Trail is an example of this. The lower portion of the trail is being improved but the upper section is not a great trail to ride. The upper section of the Iditarod Trail needs a lot of work that hasn't been done in years. Beaver Pond gets brushed out, but it needs drainage and trail maintenance work. Many of Girdwood's existing trails could use a helping hand to stay in better shape. Upper Iditarod and Beaver Pond Trails could probably be bikeable year-round with water mitigation, drainage work and maintenance year-round.

The process to develop trails is cumbersome from the MTB Alliance perspective. The process is long, unclear, and there are many agencies to go through. The MTB Alliance understands the need for public process but it goes through so many groups before even including the landowners. The key with this trails plan is that we all want the future plan to be nailed down. When we propose a trail there should be a clear path to do so. People are wasting their time trying to figure out what they need to do to get ready to build.

The next 15-20 years in Girdwood could go well regarding the trail system. The warmer the summers get the longer the summer biking season will be. This could result in increasing riders and desire for trails, the MTB community will just continue to grow in these conditions. Girdwood has a need for more trails (and better trails) to sustain an increase in MTB traffic. Improvement and development to summer trails specific to mountain biking will increase.

Nordic skiers are seeing more and more people on bikes and there is a good network with the 5k loop, with some additional infrastructure the trails could be used year-round for mountain biking within that network. Trails are a way to preserve our open spaces and the process tests Girdwood's ability to work together to move forward. Recreation has the potential to become part of conservation, rather than having untouchable spaces. People want to go out, explore nature, and have silence. Motorized equipment is used to groom the trail system in the winter, but not to recreate. Ideally Girdwood will have people exploring the spaces in different ways and utilizing the trail system in different ways year-round.

A track sled device can go places a snow machine can't. If MTB Alliance can build it, they can groom it – there's a lot of potential. With grooming you start to create more formal trails that connect neighborhoods. Girdwood residents could bike and ski to dinner or the post office instead of driving. When this idea of grooming trails was brought up to the Trails Committee last month the reaction was positive. The process by which to approve and do it correctly is not specific or clear.

In the future, creating a process for creating new trails that is fair and being good stewards of the land will be one of the greatest challenges. The sooner a process and plan are agreed upon that everyone can follow, the better it will be for the community.

The MTB Alliance does not groom the trails they've already built. The trails they currently have built require access through 5k Nordic loop which is ski-only. Until the Nordic Ski Club allows the MTB Alliance some form of access through that area, or there is another access point, grooming cannot be achieved.

A good test for any community is opening a process like this to public input. Just because people come regularly and say they don't want trails – what percentage of the population do they represent? What percentage does the MTB Alliance or tourists that come to visit the valley represent? If a survey finds that 90% of people want more developed trails, that response should drive decision making and development. How do you survey or get this data? There are enough people saying that they want trails and very few people saying that they don't – maybe the approach should be to add trails and feel out where the limit is. Designate and set aside some spaces where there will not be trails built and be good neighbors and stewards. The MTB Alliance is not telling those who don't want trails 'tough luck' – there's enough room in the Girdwood valley for both.

If you were to look at a satellite overlay of Girdwood that shows every snowshoe or other informal trail, the whole valley would be lit up. Those who say they don't want new trails might not need them. As a mountain biker, you need a trail or a groomed path in the winter. Mountain biking requires different conditions and maintenance than putting on snowshoes and going wherever you want. It's not a long distance to walk up Winner Creek until there's no trail. Realistically, we're talking about a small fraction of the Girdwood Valley that is developed with trails.

There is a group in Girdwood that doesn't want to see any new trails. If the MTB Alliance had to designate a place in the Girdwood valley for no new trail development, they would start with the wetlands. The wetlands are a lot of land that's usable in the wintertime, but not the other seasons. Moose Meadows to Glacier Creek creates a nice corridor. The MTB Alliance will not be disappointed if the proposed Forest Loop doesn't happen because it's not at the top of their list. GMBA would be more interested in Forest Connection trail from behind the church, along Glacier Creek to a connection with the Girdwood Bike Park at the CPG cat road. Girdwild is looking at the Forest Loop area, it's not a bad area to look at for preserving as natural space. More people want trails in that area than don't.

The MTB Alliance thinks it could be more productive to shift the conversation from trail vs. no trail to the density of trails. The community of Girdwood generally doesn't like trails that are large enough for grooming equipment. Girdwood tends to prefer trails that are large enough for people to travel on but not overly developed.

The MTB Alliance is not opposed to building in the Forest Loop/Stumpy's Trail area, but the Nordic Ski Club has taken that project on. If this project proceeds, the MTB Alliance encourages a connecting trail from the Forest Loop. The portion of the trail along the river and Stumpy's trail was very contentious. The trail goes North and crosses the Cat Track – it creates connectivity and access to the top of the MTB park. The trail is a highly valuable connection and useful loop. The Nordic Ski Club will drive the design of the Forest Loop since skiing requires a larger footprint.

During wintertime the wetland areas are connected, it would be great to have the same connectivity in the summertime. The proposed connection above would create summertime connectivity while keeping bikers out of the meadows. There are quite a few trails that cannot be used in the summertime, so there's less connectivity (i.e. CPG's cat road, Moose Meadows, Upper meadows nordic trails, Nordic 5k, part of the cat road out of wetlands).

The MTB Alliance Bike park is proposed on top of the 5k loop. The boundaries are the CPG Cat Road and Winner Creek Trail.

Upper Iditarod trail is not bikeable for most riders without improvement. MTB Alliance does not consider the trail part of the mountain bike system.

The MTB Alliance believes the more people on the trail system the better. We would like to see something better suited for bikes than the hand tram to cross Glacier Creek. The level of traffic for the hand tram is high. Development is likely to drive the installation of a bridge in the hand tram's place. New development near the school and along Iditarod Trail is anticipated soon. A connection across Glacier Creek north of the airport is desired. The lower Iditarod Trail has been updated and doesn't allow mountain biking. Losing this portion of trail cut off access to downtown. A connection that creates access from the middle or upper valley is a missing piece. Beaver Pond provides this to some degree but is not accessible by bikers of all levels.

Other trail projects that the MTB Alliance would prioritize:

- Finishing the current plans for MTB park
- Pump track
- Upgrade CPG's Cat Road corridor to allow summer traffic to access the bike park and equipment in to build more trails
- Crow Creek road corridor (Crow Creek neighborhood to Girdwood)
- Beaver Pond improvements
- Connect Glacier Creek to MTB Park
- Replace the hand tram with a bridge that allows bikes to cross
- Create bike access to highways in Turnagain Pass to connect to roadside paths (like Bird to Gird)
- Upgrade existing trail on at Alyeska Resort to create connection (wood features at resort need to be reconstructed with gravel)
- A second MTB park higher up in the valley

Providing amenities and signage to encourage use on more sustainably built trails will draw users off the trails in Girdwood where people would like to see less users and a more primitive experience maintained.

There has been illegal trail building for biking in the area between California Creek, Abe's Trail, and Beaver Pond that has created lasting issues. People hike and bike those three trails and the area a lot, but there are bike specific features that were constructed illegally that haven't been taken care of. Neither Chugach State Park nor the Municipality of Anchorage have addressed the illegal trail building. The MTB Alliance does not condone illegal trail building.

There is terrain in the Chugach State Park that's suitable for biking, especially near California Creek trail. The possibility of building bike specific trails in this area of Chugach State Park has not been pursued so it's unclear what the State's thoughts are on this development.

The MTB Alliance has spoken with the Chugach State Park Superintendent to obtain permission to groom Beaver Pond and portions of the meadow in winter to create better bike access. The State Park responded that their goal is to promote recreation, aside from a CUP (Conditional Use Permit) to

operate machinery, there was no hesitation to begin the process of issuing a permit for grooming those areas. Even with a permit and access granted from the State Park, it's likely that user conflicts would still exist between hikers and bikers in the Beaver Pond area.

The MTB Alliance has a Master Plan that outlines development for the mountain bike park. The Municipality of Anchorage expressed concerns about parking and placed the responsibility to develop parking on the MTB Alliance. If everyone uses the trails, why is the responsibility on one user group? We understand that parking needs to be part of the plan as it ties user groups and trails together for a functional system, but it doesn't seem fair for one user group alone to be responsible. Most of the bikers leave from their home to access trailheads and don't require parking. Relocating trailheads and providing adequate parking is a solution to the issues Girdwood is facing. There are plans and solutions to address the parking issue, but it's unclear who will pay for these plans. Alyeska Resort provides parking, but trailhead specific parking needs to be improved to accommodate the current level of use.

The MTB Alliance has installed signage on mountain biking trails. The US Forest Service is developing signage for Girdwood Trails. It makes sense to implement a universal wayfinding system across the valley for consistency.

CPG (Chugach Powder Guides) use of the trail system with the snow cat is key to their businesses. Due to changes at Alyeska Resort, new access to the trail system will be needed, especially as the valley continues to develop. Over the last 10 years, it has not been possible to operate the snow cats each year due to levels of snow fall. CPG and MTB Alliance would like to reroute the cat road so they are accessible with 4 ft. of snow. That reroute seems unlikely at this time. CPG would like to see the reroute happen in partnership with MTB Alliance, Nordic Ski Club, and the Trails Committee.

In the Glacier-Winner special use area that is state land, the process for awarding permits has been changed. The permits are no longer exclusive use for commercial recreation. The changes in permitting have deterred CPG from investing. It's positive that other people can use the area and CPG doesn't have to worry about losing the permit. However, it has changed CPG's outlook on making physical investments. If CPG were to invest in improvements, all commercial operators permitted in the area would benefit. CPG's plans for the special use area will depend on climate and other operators entering.

In reference to the winter and summer maps of the Girdwood trail system, the view needs to be expanded because most of the trails go much farther up valley. The map currently doesn't look at the whole valley. The marked Snow Cat trail is an informal trail. It's a clearing with no dirt work.

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interview
General Trail User: Paul Crews
April 6, 2020 at 10:30am

QUESTIONS

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails? What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

SUMMARY

Paul sees a lot of positive potential within the Girdwood trail system. He values the ability to access trails from his front door. The Girdwood trail system offers a little bit of something for everybody but needs improvements in accessibility, wayfinding, and signage.

Trail accessibility is a challenge for Girdwood. The Girdwood trail system does not have clear trailheads or access points. Local knowledge and many years of experience are required to find trailheads within the system. Trail users are unable to get information such as distance, difficulty, and route of a trail before they head out. There is no central clearinghouse for trail information. A simple website with trail details could be used to temporarily solve this issue. Issues with signage and accessibility seem easy to correct.

Over the next 15-20 years, Paul would like to see a better-connected trail system. There are many examples of residents and neighborhood kids taking trail building into their own hands to utilize spaces not easily accessible by trails. Girdwood has many unmanaged trails without clear easements. There are many trails and places which the community likes to use that should be formalized and better connected.

The process with HLB and the order of operations to designate trails should be clear to everyone. Trail planning is difficult without HLBs plans and intentions being clear. Over the years several subdivisions have been planned for, but their current status is not known. The community feels at a standstill for improving, proposing, and building trails. There is concern that the trails will need to be relocated in the future due to development.

Paul would like to better understand what result HLB and MOA Planning desire from this Trails Plan process. There are many acres in the valley that HLB wants to subdivide eventually, but there has been no recent report from the HLB as what the most current plans are. Should Girdwood establish rules about trails and subdivisions that should be sent to HLB? Utility easements could be designated trail easements so that if a subdivision comes in, the easements become trails.

Paul finds the process with HLB confusing because it is unclear what comes first. Is trail access reserved before land is subdivided for housing or are the processes concurrent? The process should be articulated and confirmed so that everyone understands. If Girdwood decides on the best place for a trail, could it be reserved and HLB builds around it?

Over the next 15-20 years the greatest challenge facing the Girdwood trail system is overuse (for some of the trails). The number of non-Girdwood residents using the trail system has increased in recent years. Anchorage and its 300,000 residents are just 50 minutes north and could cause inundation. Overuse and increased traffic have a significant impact on Girdwood and their responsibility for trail maintenance. Parking lots are not suited to handle this increase in traffic. A connection from the Arlberg lot up to Winner Creek trail would keep people out of the hotel parking lot. This connection would be especially helpful in the winter.

Zoning should be implemented regarding allowed uses on trails at some point. Mountain biking has steadily increased in popularity. Bikes on unhardened or partially hardened trails can be destructive. The financial burden to remediate the trails is growing.

Soil conditions must be considered for a mechanized area with bike trails or designated hardened trails. Some of Girdwood's trails (California and Abe's trail) need mechanized activities minimized or they will be ruined quickly. In the last 5 years Abe's Trail has changed radically due to bikers riding brakes down steep portions. The trail has experienced wear and tear and is eroding and getting muddy.

Beaver Pond is partially designed for bikers with its wide, hardened trails. If some improvements were made, it would be great trail riding for bikes. It creates a perfect loop route returning on Iditarod Trail. Girdwood should encourage and support improving Beaver Pond for bikes. The Mountain Bike Alliance used good trail building techniques with good drainage. The social bike trails are not good. They were put in steep areas and are not sustainable.

Paul feels that the trail system is balanced. Bikers would probably like to ride everywhere but the vegetation and precipitation in Girdwood prevents that. The soil and building conditions for trails are not the same in Girdwood as Anchorage. Trail planning and development processes in Girdwood need to be aware of bicycle enthusiasts' needs.

Paul supports that The Nordic Ski Club is pushing for more trails. The proposed Forest Loop would be a multi-use design without steep hills. The Forest Loop would offer a totally different atmosphere and options for a broader user group.

Projects that should happen:

- A trail from the proposed forest loop through Perpetual Meadow then along the glacier Creek Rim to Winner Creek Trail. This would provide a loop through the Arlberg Trailhead so hikers would not need to use the hand tram or double back on the same route.

- The Virgin Creek Trail updates
- Danich Trail Area Subdivision & Road – The area of land around Danich Trail is better than anything in the valley for a subdivision. A small road through that area connecting to the Seward Hwy South of Girdwood would offer an escape route in case of an emergency. HLB should determine which portion they would want for a subdivision and where a road might go. From that point, Girdwood could plan trails they would like in this area.
- Hand Tram – Bridge replacement. The hand tram creates a ‘bottle neck’ in the Girdwood trail system.
- Bike Trails and updates to 5k area for bikers. Zones should be considered – for example, from the Snow Cat Rd. to Winner Creek (East Valley) could be mechanized and from the Cat Rd. to Glacier Creek (West Valley) could be non-mechanized. Aside from the Forest Loop going in, this would be multi-use.

Paul’s observation is that a lot of people like to use the trails but not as many people volunteer to work on them. The need for maintenance is only going to increase as traffic and use increases. As Girdwood builds more trails, every trail will require more maintenance. Does Girdwood pay for it, lean on residents to maintain trails, or let the trails degrade? In the long-term, the community of Girdwood needs to think about the ability to maintain trails before they are built.

Paul’s wife shared a suggestion regarding airport access. The hangar gate is now locked as the airport enforces trespassing. There is some space above the road cut at the meadow. A trail parallel to the road with a footpath could give access through this area. The airport might make an exception for a footpath that stays away from the runway.

**Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
Stakeholder Interview**

Amendment:

On July 16, 2020, Deb Essex of the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club (GNSC) shared that they had made significant changes to their future plans. The GNSC will no longer pursue construction of the Forest Loop trail mentioned in this stakeholder interview. They will be preparing a long-term trail vision that aligns with the adopted Girdwood Trails Plan.

Please contact Deb Essex with further questions regarding these changes:

Deb Essex

deb@skigirdwood.org

Girdwood Trails Plan
Stakeholder Interview
Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
March 25, 2020 at 2:30pm
Attendees: Holly Spoth-Torres, Deb Essex, Taylor Smith
Conducted via GoTo Meeting

QUESTIONS

- What is your general perception of the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you value most about the Girdwood trail system?
- What do you feel the Girdwood trail system does well? What is working? What are the strengths of the system?
- Where do you feel the Girdwood trail system could be improved? What is not working? What are the challenges within the system?
- As you look ahead to the next 15-20 years, what are the most significant challenges and opportunities for the Girdwood trail system?
- How balanced do you feel the trail system is in terms of types of trails? What are the key issues facing the trail system?
- Are there any 'missing connections' that you know of?
- What other thoughts would you like to share about the Girdwood trail system's future?
- Are there trail projects that you think need to be completed?
- What do you think about existing trail conditions and maintenance?
- What do you think about trail amenities (signs, parking, trailheads, etc.)

SUMMARY

The trail system has improved significantly over the last 10 years. The Girdwood trail system has improved from a local's knowledge trail network to a system people outside the community can enjoy. Winner Creek, and the National Historic Iditarod Trail have been the best known trails and now smaller single-track trails are being mapped and gaining popularity. Through grant writing, invested user groups, the Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area, and the historic designation for the Iditarod Trail, trails have gone from local-only to something the community is showcasing. Girdwood is creating a network, and something for visitors to explore and share their experience. It's shifted from 'what do we want in Girdwood' to 'what experience do we want as user groups'? Trails are opening to more users on a year-round basis.

The Nordic Ski Club values that Girdwood residents can access a temperate rain-forest from their driveways. Almost everyone in town is 2 minutes, or less, from a trail. The proximity of trails and the lack of human influence are valued. Anchorage's trails have so many signs of the urban environment - there are telephone wires, easements, fences, etc. That infrastructure doesn't exist in Girdwood forests - you are instantly in the forest surrounded by spruce, hemlock, moss and listening to birds; that is unique to the Girdwood valley.

The strength of the trail system is that it caters to the local community. During COVID-19, while everything is shut down, including Alyeska Mountain, the Nordic Ski Club is still grooming every day. The trails are one of the only outlets people have for keeping their sanity and getting fresh air. The number of users went from 100 per day to 300-400 per day. The trail system is the lifeline for fitness. It's a vehicle for mental and physical health.

The Girdwood Nordic Ski Club provides maintained trails that any level of hiker, biker, skier, skijorer, can access- from beginner to advanced. Alyeska Resort used to groom all the multi-use trails once per month using a snow-cat but can not access meadows anymore and discontinued that service. More trails are accessible in Girdwood in the winter versus summer because the open meadows are frozen, and with accumulated snow, create open spaces to ski. Recreation and use of the meadows depend on snow levels, and it takes 2 feet of snow for the meadows to become accessible for grooming. Winter signage is another strength of the system. Today there's more focus on safety and accessibility in the trail system. Deb feels this is evidenced by more participation in the kid's program (from 20-30 kids a season up to 80 in the '19-'20 season). There are people who traditionally were downhill skiers adding cross country to their yearly routine because it's more accessible.

The Girdwood Trails Management Plan states connected and dedicated trails as a value. Existing trail conditions are working towards that goal. The entire Girdwood Valley is divided into quadrants by natural features and the road system (Glacier Creek, Crow Creek, and Glacier Creek) and the Alyeska Highway – this segments the valley into 4 quadrants. Connectivity could be improved by developing loops utilizing the out and back trails within these quadrants. Trails that are looped create better access for rescues and allow for more accessibility. There's a time lag between plans and action, and Girdwood Nordic Ski Club are listening to the community to provide the "missing pieces" for the desired user experience within the valley.

The 'missing pieces' and needed projects are:

- At the moment, there's no way to cross the Glacier Creek other than the hand tram. Recent accidents on the hand tram will probably result in a much needed bridge. The hand tram was not designed for its current level of use in mind, it is so loved that constant maintenance is required. The USFS maintains Iditarod and Winner Creek to a high standard – the hand tram is the link between the two trails.
- North of the airport property, the Nordic Ski Club has a proposal to develop a year-round multi-use trail system. This proposed development would do a few things: One, allow people using the Nordic 5k or Winner Creek to circle back to a different parking lot. Two, allow emergency crews better access to the hand tram area (8 ft trail vs. a 6 ft trail) and upper valley area. Three, provide a hard surface trail with an open canopy to allow more user days on a groomed multi-use trail system.

An informal survey conducted by the Nordic Ski Club a few years ago found that many of the surveyed people would like to see the additional connections described above. From that survey, we were surprised to learn that the #1 trail among community members use is the bike path along the Alyeska Highway, and a close second are the Alyeska Resort trails. There is an assumption among the community that trails like Winner Creek, or Iditarod Trail are the most used, but people surveyed showed they gravitate towards multi-use, accessible, more developed, higher grade trails. When the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club builds a trail (like the Tour of Anchorage- 10 ft. trail) where people can pass on a multi-

directional trail system, and users consider it safe with moderate grades, this trail would see a lot of use (according to survey results).

The Nordic Ski Club would like to see every hard-surfaced trail in Girdwood on a map. More users equal more stewardship. Trail users like trail systems and knowing how long it takes to walk that loop or route. Estimated trail times are now commonly part of trail signage and will be placed on the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club maps.

A challenge over the next 15-20 years will be building the forest loop and connections. The trail is in a temperate rainforest that 'eats' gravel. Building and construction will be tedious but constructing the 5k Nordic Loop taught the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club how to approach a capital trail project to ensure success and minimize damage. There is community support for the project at this time. The real challenge of these projects is messaging and communication before, during, and after construction. The Nordic Ski Club wants to work with the community, as the trails are for the community, and belong to the community. This new multi-use trail system will be like the Tour of Anchorage trail with fun, rolling hills that are open to everyone - including bikes and dogs.

If Girdwood's population was the size it was 20 years ago, these previously mentioned challenges wouldn't be arising. These are good conversations to be having as Girdwood is growing and opportunities for local recreation are growing at the same pace. The Nordic Ski Club has the chance to create a win-win situation. Their goal is to provide connection and a fun, safe experience for all user groups. Anytime someone can recreate in Girdwood without driving 30-45 minutes away from town (minimum) it's a win. Another unspoken win is the emergency services like the Girdwood Fire Department utilizing improved and maintained trail systems to reduce response times and increase their access injuries in remote areas.

The Girdwood community members used to walk at the airport taxi-way and runway as a "trail", but due to obvious safety precautions, the Girdwood Airport doesn't allow trespassing. The Airport Road is heavily used by recreationists that still walk under the airport fencing, but if an alternative route in the forest was developed, people may use those trails instead of the airport taxiway.

The process to develop trails is tedious but necessary. The Girdwood valley is confined, so the arduous process will make better trails in the end. There are many variables in the approval process, and the effectiveness of the community process often depends on how many people show up, who votes, etc.

Construction is expensive in Girdwood and as a result projects take more time and more money than planned. The 5 Kilometer Nordic Loop is a prime example. Even with the lessons learned from the 5K Loop, and cost-saving measures, the 4K loop and connections being planned will be expensive to construct. The trees in Girdwood are tall and extremely beautiful. The Spruce and Hemlock each bring their own challenges to both navigate around and fell with minimal impact to the surrounding area. It is difficult to visually assess Hemlock tree health. Trails must also be well constructed for drainage. If the trails are not constructed well, the tread won't drain water. If you don't control the water, the water will control the trail.

There is not much of user conflict among the Nordic community. The more people who use the trails, the better. Over the past few years the outlook on grooming conditions has changed – it used to be

frustrating when dogs and multiple-use activities destroyed freshly groomed trails, however now we view this positively – heavily-used multi-use trails means more people are outside being active.

The trailheads are at capacity every day with the number of users it currently sees. The parking lot at Moose Meadow could be expanded. Most people who live in Girdwood head out to the trails from their homes and don't need trailhead parking. People Mover has been pulled into discussions around trail head accessibility from homes (bike rack on the bus, a Nordic Ski pin for a free ride, etc.).

Many of the designated trail heads do not have infrastructure or amenities to support the current level of traffic. Previous agreements alleviated those pressures, but they dissolved with changes in property ownership. Some trail users park at the resort, but there is no data on how many, or the people accessing the backcountry from Resort property.

Membership in the Nordic Ski Club has been growing every year. The trail system is not about Nordic skiers, it's about all trail users. How can the Nordic Ski Club groom for bikers, hikers, and everyone? In the summer, Nordic trails have less mud, good lines of sight, and a sidewalk-like safety buffer. The summer trail use is on the rise with dog owners, moms with strollers, and bikers and hikers. Snowfall came later in the 2019-2020 season but there was still a lot of traffic on the Nordic trails as opposed to the meadows which were waiting for the two feet of snow accumulation. The goal of the Nordic Ski Club is to create healthy trails for a healthy community.

What does success look like?

What does success look like?						
	BALANCE	FUTURE LEGACY-IDENTITY - HERITAGE	USER EXPERIENCE	SUSTAINABLE	CONNECTED	
	Balanced experiences - developed and primitive and they don't impose on each other.	When I am 90 I will be able to easily access a wild and natural place (with your feet) close to home.	An interconnected, diverse, beautiful system of trails and natural spaces which well-serves and respects all the key user groups and their values in/near the community.	Carrying capacity isn't exceeded. Sustainable user experience balanced with economic pursuits and community valued resources		
	Balanced economic opportunity with conservation of community valued resources.	Future generations can enjoy what we enjoy today.	Continued opportunity for experiencing the wild.	The Girdwood Trail System is adequately funded.	Conservation & Recreation go hand in hand. Trails allow access to experience places.	
	Minimize user group friction.	We don't look like other places (trail and natural space system-wise). We are Girdwood-unique, and valley-appropriate.	Leave your house on foot and get to a trailhead safely.	Respectful and responsible recreational development as our community evolves.		
FUNDING				Resilient to changing climate		Girdwood plans adequately for future trail growth.
				Adaptive Management		

A successful Girdwood Trails Plan will...

PLAN	DEVELOP	MAINTAIN	REVIEW & EVALUATE	
designate/ensure diverse spaces	Roadmap for new trails	Maintain trails		
Pet friendly trails	build sustainable trails.	Roadmap for existing trails		
Represent all trail users	a roadmap for trail and natural spaces development and designation	Promote trail stewardship		
Trails for all user groups	design, fund and construct safe trails	Safety Plan for EMS		FUNDING
Will be in harmony with the area plan	Create a Wetland Conservation Area	make funding available long term		COMMUNICATE
Consistent with GAP	Funding for natural spaces			
Follow the GVTMP	Common set of Principles for Trail Development			
	In line with PTBA			
	guide the community as it grows			
	Result in consistent, adequate, and easily understood signage			