GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN

GIRDWOOD TRAILS
ALASKA

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ACRONYMS | COMMON TERMS

ABS - Alyeska Basin & South Valley Trails

AHC - Alyeska Highway Corridor

ARRC - Alaska Railroad Corporation

BC - Backcountry

DOT&PF - Department of Transportation & Public Facilities

DNR - Department of Natural Resources

DNR DMLW - Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land & Water

GAP - Girdwood Area Plan

GBOS - Girdwood Board of Supervisors

GCR1 - Girdwood Commercial Recreation

GOS - Girdwood Open Space

gR-3 - Residential Districts - Single-Family/Two-Family Residential

gR-5 - Residential Districts - Multiple-Family Residential

GTP - Girdwood Trails Plan

GVTMP - Girdwood Valley Trails Management Plan

GVSA - Girdwood Valley Service Area

HLB - Heritage Land Bank

INHT - Iditarod National Historic Trail

MOA - Municipality of Anchorage

ROW - Right of Way

SOA - State of Alaska

UDC - Urban Design Commission

USDA - United States Department of Agriculture

USFS - United States Forest Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLAN PURPOSE

The Girdwood Trails Plan (GTP) is a concerted effort that brought the community together for a holistic conversation about the future of the trail and natural space system. The GTP is a 10-15 year guiding document for the community, local trail and open space organizations, agencies, and elected officials that defines the Girdwood trail network and identifies trail and natural space projects that are supported by the community. The GTP is a framework with community-developed values, vision, and goals that local officials and partner organizations can use to make investment and project decisions.

GUIDE TO THE PLAN

The Girdwood Trails Plan is divided into two parts:

Part 1: Introduction and Existing Conditions

Part 1 of the Girdwood Trails Plan provides an overview of the existing trail system, summarizes community input, key themes, and needs.

Part 2: Recommendations & Implementation

Part 2 of the Girdwood Trails Plan identifies both broad aspirations and specific implementation actions to guide trail and natural space projects over the next 10 – 15 years that will achieve the trail and natural space system that Girdwood envisions.

PUBLIC INPUT & PLAN DEVELOPMENT

The Girdwood Trail Plan was collaboratively developed with Girdwood residents, stakeholders, Municipal Staff, and agency partners providing valuable input throughout the process. Community participation occurred over the duration of about one-year and participants engaged in challenging conversations to find consensus around planning for a trail and natural space system that is balanced, accessible, inclusive, and representative of Girdwood's community identity. Various public input strategies were employed including:

- Trail Plan Subcommittee – appointed by the Girdwood Trail Committee (11 meetings, 4 workshops, 1 special meeting)
- 10 stakeholder interviews
- 2 public meetings
- Online interactive map that allowed for site-specific comments
- Public review Draft Trail Plan available for comment via an online comment portal

KEY PLAN THEMES

Over the course of the existing condition analysis and stakeholder engagement the following themes emerged, and this plan works to address them through the proposed trail and natural space network, proposed projects, and implementation plan:

- Girdwood Residents Value Access to Trails and Natural Spaces
- The Girdwood Trail System Should be Equitable and Balanced
- Improve Connectivity and Access to Trails
- Sustainable Trail Management & Maintenance is Important
- Streamline the Project Approval Processes

VALUES, VISION, GOALS

Girdwood residents developed values, a vision statement, and plan goals that guided the development of the trail plan and will serve as the basis for future action and decision-making for Girdwood's trails and natural spaces.

GIRDWOOD TRAILS ALASKA

GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN

VALUES • VISION • GOALS

Girdwood residents developed values, a vision statement, and plan goals that guided the development of the trail plan and will serve as the basis for future action and decision-making for Girdwood's trails and natural spaces.

VALUES: VALUES ARE CORE PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE AND DIRECT WORK. VALUES GUIDE DECISION-MAKING AND ESTABLISH A STANDARD AGAINST WHICH ACTIONS CAN BE ASSESSED.

Access: Trails and natural spaces are easily accessible, provide safe access to outdoor recreation, everyday community destinations, and the alpine.

Health & Well-Being: Trails contribute to improved physical and emotional health by promoting outdoor activity and social connection.

Experience: Girdwood Trails provide a variety of outdoor experiences.

Community Identity: Trails are an essential part of Girdwood's community identity and cultural history.

Explore & Learn: Trails provide places for exploration, discovery, and education.

Natural World: Trails provide access to the natural world to experience wildlife, wilderness, natural spaces, and functioning ecosystems.

Stewardship: Trails and natural spaces are sustainable, well-planned, designed, constructed, and maintained now and for future generations.

Diversity & Inclusivity: There are a variety of diverse trail experiences for everyone.

Recreation: Trails and natural spaces provide safe, low-cost opportunities to get outdoors and recreate.

VISION: GIRDWOOD ASPIRES TO BE A WORLD-CLASS OUTDOOR RECREATION DESTINATION OFFERING RESIDENTS AND VISITORS A BALANCE OF TRAILS AND NATURAL SPACES THAT ARE INTERCONNECTED, DIVERSE, AND SUSTAINABLE. GIRDWOOD'S TRAILS AND NATURAL SPACES ARE VITAL TO OUR COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, IDENTITY, AND ECONOMY.

GOALS:

Goal 1: PLAN

Provide a balance and diversity of trail and natural area experiences that minimize user conflicts and are consistent with the Girdwood Area Plan and the Girdwood Valley Trail Management Plan.

Goal 2: CONSERVE

Identify, designate uses, and protect trails and natural spaces through proper processes.

Goal 3: DEVELOP

Build trails and establish natural spaces using sustainable design principles with a clear project approval process among landowners.

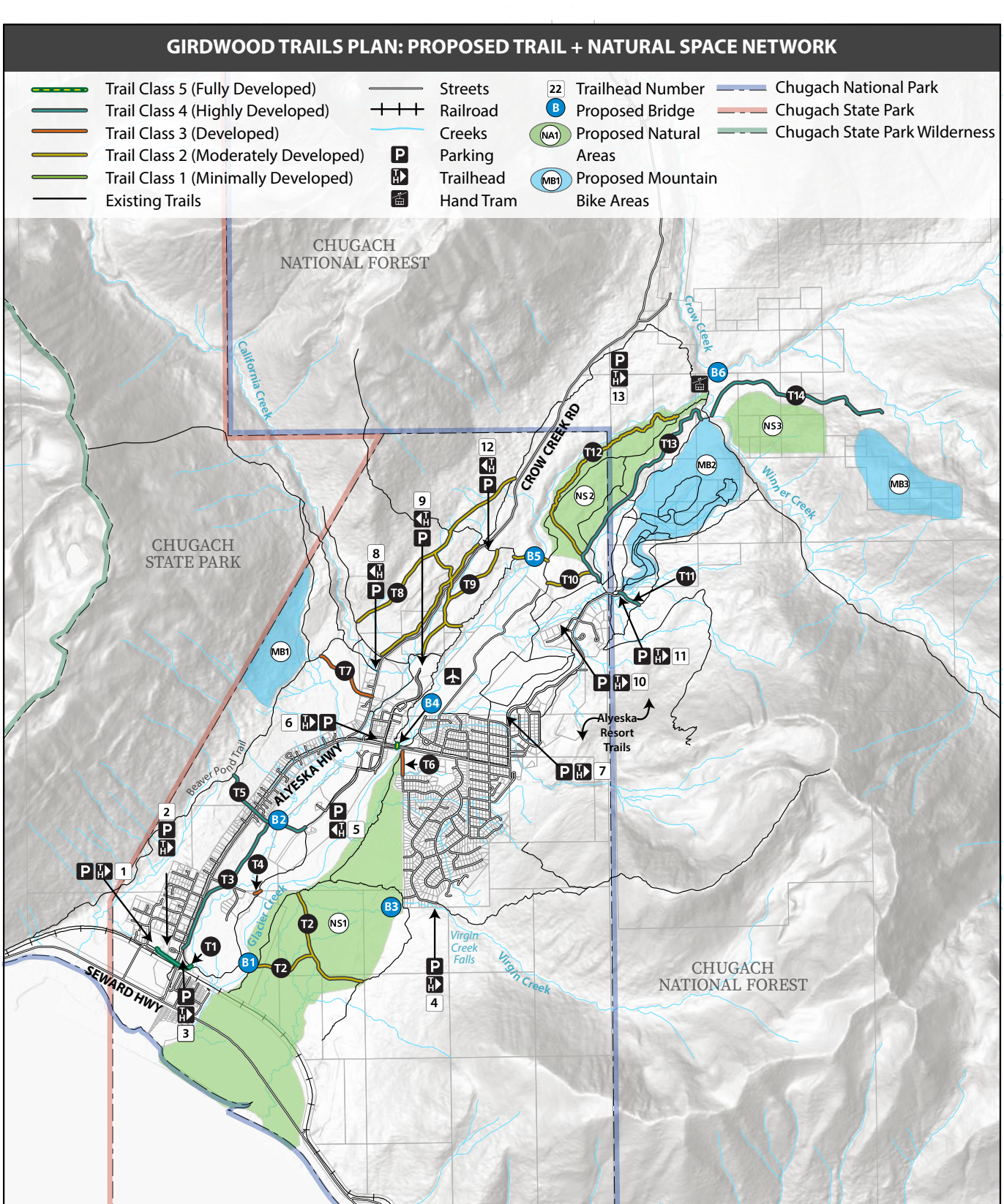
Goal 4: MAINTAIN

Trails and natural spaces are managed as needed for safety, the desired user experience, and to conserve natural resources.

Goal 5: SUSTAIN

Provide adequate funding, planning, support, and stewardship for trails and natural spaces.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: PROPOSED TRAIL + NATURAL SPACE NETWORK

NEW TRAILS

- T1 Separated Grade Crossing: Railroad Bridge at Alyeska Hwy (4)
- T2 Wagon Trail - Lower Danich Connection (2)
- T3 Lower Valley Trail Loop Connection (3)
- T4 Ruane Road Trail Connection to Lower Iditarod (3)
- T5 Beaver Pond to Lower Iditarod (3)
- T6 Barren Avenue to Alyeska Hwy (3)
- T7 Crow Creek Road to Beaver Pond Trail (3)
- T8 Toe Slope Trail-California Creek to Iditarod (2)
- T9 Crow Creek Neighborhood Trails (2-3)
- T10 Cross Valley Trail (2)
- T11 Arlberg Connection to Winner Creek Trail (4)
- T12 Glacier Canyon Rim Trail (2)
- T13 Upper Valley Multi-Use Trail (4)
- T14 Snowcat Trail Improvements(4)

TRAILHEADS

- 1 Girdwood Depot Trailhead Upgrades – with restroom
- 2 Glacier Ranger District
- 3 Lower Valley Trailhead
- 4 Virgin Creek Falls Access Study
- 5 Karolius Trailhead
- 6 Girdwood Town Center Trailhead Improvements – with restroom
- 7 Moose Meadows Trailhead Improvements
- 8 Beaver Pond Trailhead
- 9 Girdwood PreK-8 School – Parking Agreement
- 10 Alyeska Resort Parking Agreement
- 11 Arlberg Trailhead Expansion – with restroom
- 12 Middle Iditarod
- 13 Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead Expansion

BRIDGE PROJECTS

- B1 Glacier Creek Trail Bridge - Lower Valley
- B2 California Creek Bridge
- B3 Virgin Creek Bridge
- B4 Improve Connectivity at Glacier Creek Bridge at Alyeska Hwy
- B5 Glacier Creek Trail Bridge – Middle Valley – (north of airstrip)
- B6 Glacier Creek Trails Bridge - Upper Valley Hand Tram

PROPOSED NATURAL SPACES (NS)

- NS1 Virgin Creek Natural Space
- NS2 Stumpy's Natural Space
- NS3 Winner Creek Natural Space

PROPOSED MOUNTAIN BIKE AREAS (MB)

- MB1 Beaver Pond
- MB2 Near the Nordic 5K
- MB3 End of the Snowcat Trail

SPECIAL PROJECTS

SP1: Areawide Wayfinding (Not on Map)
SP2: Girdwood Valley Circum-Valley Loop
(See map on page XX)

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION + EXISTING CONDITIONS

INTRODUCTION

The community of Girdwood is nestled within the Glacier Valley in the Turnagain Arm of Southcentral Alaska. Girdwood is located at the tip of North America's northern-most temperate rainforest, and is surrounded by the rugged Chugach Mountains, capped with hanging glaciers that feed creeks and flow into Turnagain Arm. The town is bordered by Chugach State Park and Chugach National Forest land, which provide ample opportunity for outdoor activities year-round, including backcountry and resort skiing and snowboarding, biking, hiking, and pack rafting. The location, natural beauty and resort development draws residents and visitors alike.

Girdwood's location, scenic landscapes, snowfall, steep peaks, and recreation opportunities drive the use and desired development of the trail system. The Girdwood trail system offers recreation, transportation, connectivity, and is a key resource for the town's sense of place, economy, and culture.

Study Area

Although the public and stakeholder engagement process and trail planning analysis included trails on a variety of lands, the GTP only has the authority to make recommendations for trails, natural spaces, and related trail development on Municipal land. Other landowners and facility managers can use this document for reference when making trail decisions on their respective property.

Planning Context

To better understand the context of trails in Girdwood, previous and concurrent plans were reviewed for relevant information related to this planning process. Below is a table outlining relevant plans that were considered during the development of this plan.

Figure 1

PLAN/STUDY	PLAN DESCRIPTION	CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN
Girdwood Area Plan, 1995	The GAP was adopted in 1995 and is currently being updated. The GAP gives overall policy direction for trails in the Girdwood Valley. The 1995 GAP outlines 7 policies/guidelines to serve as interim measures until a revised Anchorage Trails Plan is adopted. The policies/guidelines cover trail buffers, easements, pedestrian facilities along connector streets, multi-use trails, primitive trails, and a management plan for the Recreation Reserve.	The GTP and the GAP are being developed concurrently. It is extremely important that the updated Vision, Goals, & Policies for the GAP continue to be the overarching guidance for the GTP. The GTP shall be consistent with the GAP and continued coordination is required.
Anchorage Park, Greenbelt and Recreation Facility Plan: Volume 3: Turnagain Arm, 1987	The Turnagain Arm Park and Open Space plan is a planning document that was a tool used to assist communities in shaping their neighborhoods. The document was used to identify specific areas for trails and neighborhood and community use parks and open spaces.	This plan is outdated; however it is still referenced in current Title 21 regarding use-specific standards in Turnagain Arm for Parks and Open Areas (21.05.040 G2c). The GTP will replace the 1987 plan for trail projects in the use-specific standards identified in 21.05.040 G2c.

PLAN/STUDY	PLAN DESCRIPTION	CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN
Girdwood Valley Trails Management Plan, 2020	The Girdwood Valley Trails Management Plan (GVTMP) provides guidance for trail development, management, and maintenance. The plan offers a thorough inventory of existing trails and guidance for sustainable trail maintenance and construction. While the GVTMP touches on everything from physical features to signage and accessibility, the primary focus is trail management including design guidelines and parameters.	Although there will be some overlap between the GVTMP and the GTP, the GTP should remain consistent with the GVTMP regarding trail classifications. The GTP will define the future trail network including access, connections, and new trail development.
Chugach State Park Management Plan, 2016	The Chugach State Park Management Plan is the basis for the management and development of the state-owned land and water within the legislatively designated boundary of the park as well as for areas managed by the park under special agreement.	There are several existing Management Agreements cataloged within the Chugach State Park Management Plan that have some bearing on Girdwood trails with shared management. A table of Facility Improvements proposes a trailhead and small parking lot at the south end of the Bird to Gird trail. California Creek Trailhead is listed as a proposed project.
Chugach State Park Access Plan, 2010	This plan is a coordinated effort between the State of AK and the MOA aimed at securing and improving public access to Chugach State Park. This plan guides both agencies as they work to maintain and provide for future access to the park. The access plan was adopted by the MOA as an element of the Comprehensive Plan.	A table of access-specific recommendations suggests the following actions on the Bird to Gird Milepost 0 Trailhead, California Creek Trailhead and California Creek Trail: 1. Bird to Gird Milepost 0: Work with ADOT&PF, DNR DMLW, ARRC, and the GTC and GBOS to establish and manage a small vehicular lot in this area for trail access. 2. California Creek Trailhead: Continue to maintain management right between the DNR DMLW and DPOR. Work with the GBOS and GTC to construct and manage a small vehicular lot, trailhead and trail in this area. Work with HLB to establish a trail easement to ensure access across their lands is preserved. 3. California Creek Trail: Work with HLB to establish a trail easement to ensure secure access across their lands is preserved. Work with the GBOS and GTC to maintain and manage the trail.
Chugach National Forest: Land Management Plan, 2020	The Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan sets desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines for the management, protection, and use of the forest.	This plan describes the desired trail conditions for the Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) and the Winner Creek Trail. The INHT is listed as Trail Maintenance Priority Area #15 (in the nation).

PLAN/STUDY	PLAN DESCRIPTION	CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN
Girdwood South Townsite Master Plan, 2014	This area master plan establishes the general arrangement of land uses, circulation and infrastructure systems for the Girdwood South Townsite including proposed vehicular and pedestrian circulation and the types of acceptable proposed development.	1. Encourage transportation modes other than automobiles 2. Locate trails and activity areas with particular care for solar access, views, protection from weather, and continuity of connections. 3. Need recreational facilities, including expanded ski terrain, and more hiking or Nordic trails. 4. Partnerships for Development: The details of the process to implement projects created by a public-private partnership (such as the partnership between HLB and potential developers) will be worked out on a case-by-case basis. For example, in a case where the Heritage Land Bank was to sell a large parcel, without subdividing, a new developer would be required to develop roads, trails, stormwater management, and other infrastructure, as well as doing the necessary surveying and project permitting.
Girdwood Commercial Areas & Transportation Master Plan, 2001	The Girdwood Commercial Areas and Transportation Master Plan addresses two vitally important areas of concern for Girdwood - a long-range, multi-modal transportation plan and a long-range strategy for improving the commercial areas in the Girdwood Valley.	1. Sidewalk connectivity to nearby trail system. 2. The trail system should provide for recreation, recreation-based tourism and at the same time trails should support a growing volume of utilitarian travel, commuting to and from school/work or shopping by bike, skiing or walking. 3. Trail connections between pods of development, between different trails, and between areas of the valley must be implemented.
Heritage Land Bank Annual Work Program & 5-year Management Plan, 2021	The HLB Work Program is an annually approved guide for allocating and managing HLB land and resources. The program functions and activities must be consistent with Municipal Code, HLB policies, and pertinent comprehensive or area plans.	As HLB is the largest landowner in the Girdwood Valley, continual coordination between the community and HLB to implement both HLB's and the community's goals is required.
Crow Creek Neighborhood Land Use Plan, 2006	The Crow Creek Neighborhood Land Use Plan guides decisions by HLB on land to be sold and developed for housing, and land to be retained for public open space and recreation use.	The land use plan makes recommendations for the study area including open space, establishing a neighborhood trail system, and preserving existing trails.
Winner Creek Trails Feasibility Study, 2007	This study determines the feasibility of building Nordic ski trails in the Winner Creek/Glacier Creek valleys that balance community sensitivities to increased public use, the environment, and other related developments.	Proposed projects in the GTP that overlap this study area will use the extensive analysis in suggesting the appropriate route.
Girdwood-Iditarod Trail Route Study, 1997	This study determined a feasible route for the commemorative Iditarod Trail linking Turnagain Arm and Girdwood to the Crow Pass Iditarod Trailhead. The Girdwood Trails Committee realized that if the historic trail was restored, pedestrian opportunities could be enhanced valley wide.	Provides detailed route descriptions, design parameters, and general mapping of the Iditarod Trail through Girdwood.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Existing Community Conditions

Characteristics of the Study Area

Girdwood consists of a diverse population of outdoor enthusiasts, local business owners, teleworkers, and commuters with jobs in Anchorage. Other outdoor enthusiasts throughout Alaska come to use Girdwood's trails for back country and Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, biking, etc. The town's historic roots as a mining community and as an access route for the original Iditarod Trail provide many unique routes and trails. Alyeska Resort's offerings continue to evolve and expand (downhill biking and Nordic Spa) offering year-round activities and visitor numbers increase every year. This plan will analyze the Girdwood Valley systematically to fully realize the community's year-round trails and natural spaces.

Population

The original people of the Girdwood Valley were the Dena'ina Athabascan who used the land to trap, hunt, and fish. In the 1950's the population of the Girdwood Valley was low and mostly supportive of rail and highway construction efforts after gold mining ended during WW2. As Alaska began to develop its resources throughout the state, the population began to increase. After the Alyeska Hotel was completed in the mid-1990's population growth slowed as development became constricted by lack of land and available local jobs. During peak times, population in the town can reach 4000 people – double

Figure 2

YEAR	POPULATION	CHANGE (%)
2015	2,658	3.4
2010	2,570	22.9
2000	2,091	71.3
1990	1,221	111.6
1980	577	300.7
1970	144	128.6
1960	63	-20.3
1950	79	

Source: American Fact Finder, 2017, US Census

Economy

Girdwood's economy relies largely on the visitor industry and the related natural assets and outdoor recreation infrastructure that visitors seek. As such, Alyeska Resort and Girdwood's surrounding trails and natural spaces are a large part of the town's economic sustainability.

The largest industry sector providing just under half of the jobs in Girdwood is arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodations, and food service, which reflects Girdwood's primary employer, Alyeska Resort.

Governance

As part of the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA), the Girdwood Valley Service Area (GVSA) provides public services within its boundary. The Girdwood Board of Supervisors is an elected body made up of residents to advise the Municipality on services for which Girdwood taxes itself: road maintenance, fire, police, cemetery, and parks & recreation.

The Girdwood Trails Committee, as a committee of the Girdwood Board of Supervisors, makes recommendations for all trails in the valley, regardless of land ownership. However, the authority to improve or authorize trails resides with the underlying landowner. Public landowners whose lands provide authorized trails, include Girdwood Parks and Recreation, MOA Heritage Land Bank, Chugach National Forest, Chugach State Park, and Anchorage School District. Alyeska Resort, a private landowner and lessee of State of Alaska DNR, hosts popular summer trails that are accessible to the public during the summer months.

Although the planning analysis of trails in the valley includes trails on all lands, the GTP only has the authority to make recommendations for trails, natural spaces, and related trail development on Municipal land.

Girdwood Trail Managers: Recreation-Based Organizations & Volunteers

In Girdwood, Trail Managers are defined as non-profit organizations or businesses that have obtained an easement from the MOA Heritage Land Bank to build and manage trails for public use in the Girdwood Valley. Current trail managers include the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club, Chugach Powder Guides, Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance, and the Girdwood Trails Committee.

Existing Trail Planning, Design & Construction Approval Process

Planning, design, and construction of a new trail in the Girdwood Valley requires a process with multiple steps and a variety of public input. The following graphic describes the current process required to get approval to build trails on Municipal land including HLB and other Municipal authorizations.

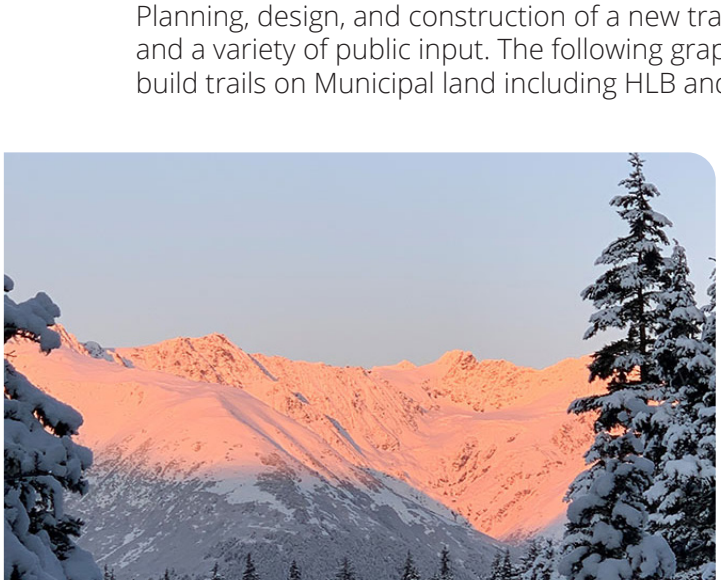
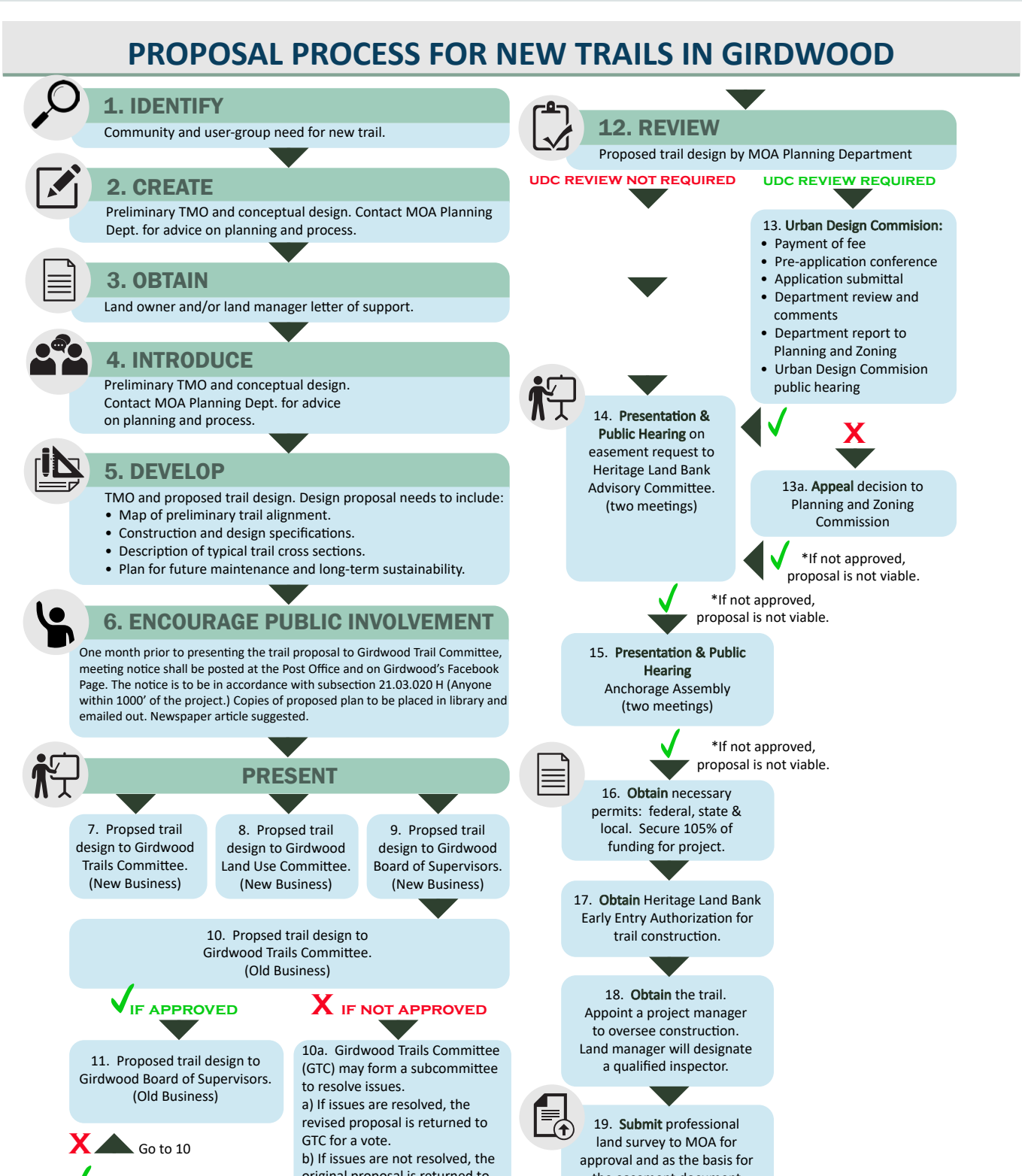


Figure 3

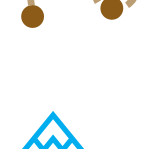

PROPOSAL PROCESS FOR NEW TRAILS IN GIRDWOOD
1. IDENTIFY
Community and user-group need for new trail.
2. CREATE
Preliminary TMO and conceptual design. Contact MOA Planning Dept. for advice on planning and process.
3. OBTAIN
Land owner and/or land manager letter of support.
4. INTRODUCE
Preliminary TMO and conceptual design. Contact MOA Planning Dept. for advice on planning and process.
5. DEVELOP
TMO and proposed trail design. Design proposal needs to include:
• Map of preliminary trail alignment.
• Construction and design specifications.
• Description of typical trail cross sections.
• Plan for future maintenance and long-term sustainability.
6. ENCOURAGE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT
One month prior to presenting the trail proposal to Girdwood Trail Committee, meeting notice shall be posted at the Post Office and on Girdwood's Facebook Page. The notice is to be in accordance with subsection 21.03.020 H (Anyone within 1000' of the project.) Copies of proposed plan to be placed in library and emailed out. Newspaper article suggested.
PRESENT
7. Propsed trail design to Girdwood Trails Committee. (New Business)
8. Propsed trail design to Girdwood Land Use Committee. (New Business)
9. Propsed trail design to Girdwood Board of Supervisors. (New Business)
10. Propsed trail design to Girdwood Trails Committee. (Old Business)
IF APPROVED
IF NOT APPROVED
11. Proposed trail design to Girdwood Board of Supervisors. (Old Business)
10a. Girdwood Trails Committee (GTC) may form a subcommittee to resolve issues.
a) If issues are resolved, the revised proposal is returned to GTC for a vote.
b) If issues are not resolved, the original proposal is returned to GTC for a revote.
Go to 10
And trail conforms to the Trails Master Plan, go to 14
But trail doesn't conform to the Trails Master Plan, go to 12
12. REVIEW
Proposed trail design by MOA Planning Department
UDC REVIEW NOT REQUIRED
UDC REVIEW REQUIRED
13. Urban Design Commision:
• Payment of fee
• Pre-application conference
• Application submittal
• Department review and comments
• Department report to Planning and Zoning
• Urban Design Commision public hearing
14. Presentation & Public Hearing on easement request to Heritage Land Bank Advisory Committee. (two meetings)
13a. Appeal decision to Planning and Zoning Commission
*If not approved, proposal is not viable.
*If not approved, proposal is not viable.
15. Presentation & Public Hearing
Anchorage Assembly
(two meetings)
*If not approved, proposal is not viable.
16. Obtain necessary permits: federal, state & local. Secure 105% of funding for project.
17. Obtain Heritage Land Bank Early Entry Authorization for trail construction.
18. Obtain the trail. Appoint a project manager to oversee construction. Land manager will designate a qualified inspector.
19. Submit professional land survey to MOA for approval and as the basis for the easement document recorded w/ State of Alaska.
20. Submit copies of all paperwork to GTC via Girdwood Parks & Recreation.

Demand for Expanded Trail and Natural Space Network

The 2019 Girdwood Area Plan Survey results indicate that access to trails and outdoor recreation experiences are one of the primary aspects of Girdwood that residents love. Additionally, when asked what changes residents want to see in the next 10-20 years, recreation was a top choice. The survey results indicate that Girdwood residents want more of what they love. To dig a little deeper into this topic, the Imagine! Girdwood public meeting in April 2019 asked meeting participants what outdoor recreation opportunities they would prioritize for Girdwood's future. More than 61% of respondents indicated that new 4' wide trails for hiking/running, mountain biking, and classic Nordic skiing should be prioritized. This data suggests a desire for more trails and natural spaces within the Girdwood Valley.

Natural Spaces – While the community planning process has historically focused on the development of new trails, there is a demand for areas within walking distance of town for primitive trail experiences including non-mechanized experiences, habitat protection, spaces for quiet and solitude, orienteering, wildlife viewing, and ungroomed skiing. Trails in these areas would be limited to class 2 standards unless use of trails within these areas warrants improved trail tread to protect the surrounding area.

Multi-Use Trails – There is increasing demand to expand the class 3 and 4 range, year-round, multi-use trails that create more connecting and looping opportunities that are easy-moderate in difficulty. This type of trail would provide more outdoor recreation experiences for visitors and more accessible opportunities for new trail users and families.



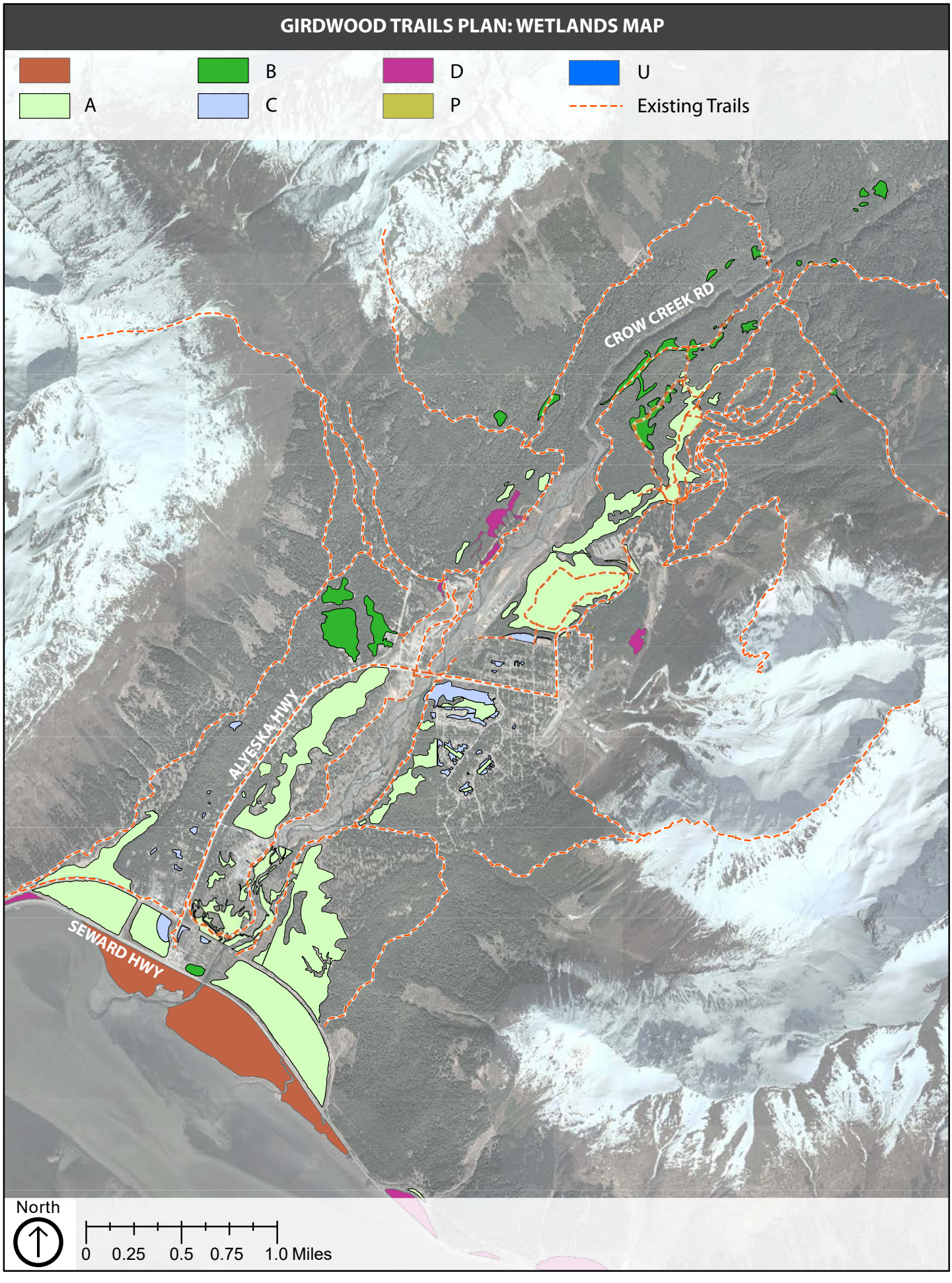
Single-Use Purpose-Built Mountain Biking - Use of mountain bikes and demand for mountain bike specific trails has been on the rise in Girdwood. Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance has developed a Master Plan for creating bike-only trails. There is currently user conflict between the growing mountain bike community and other trail users.

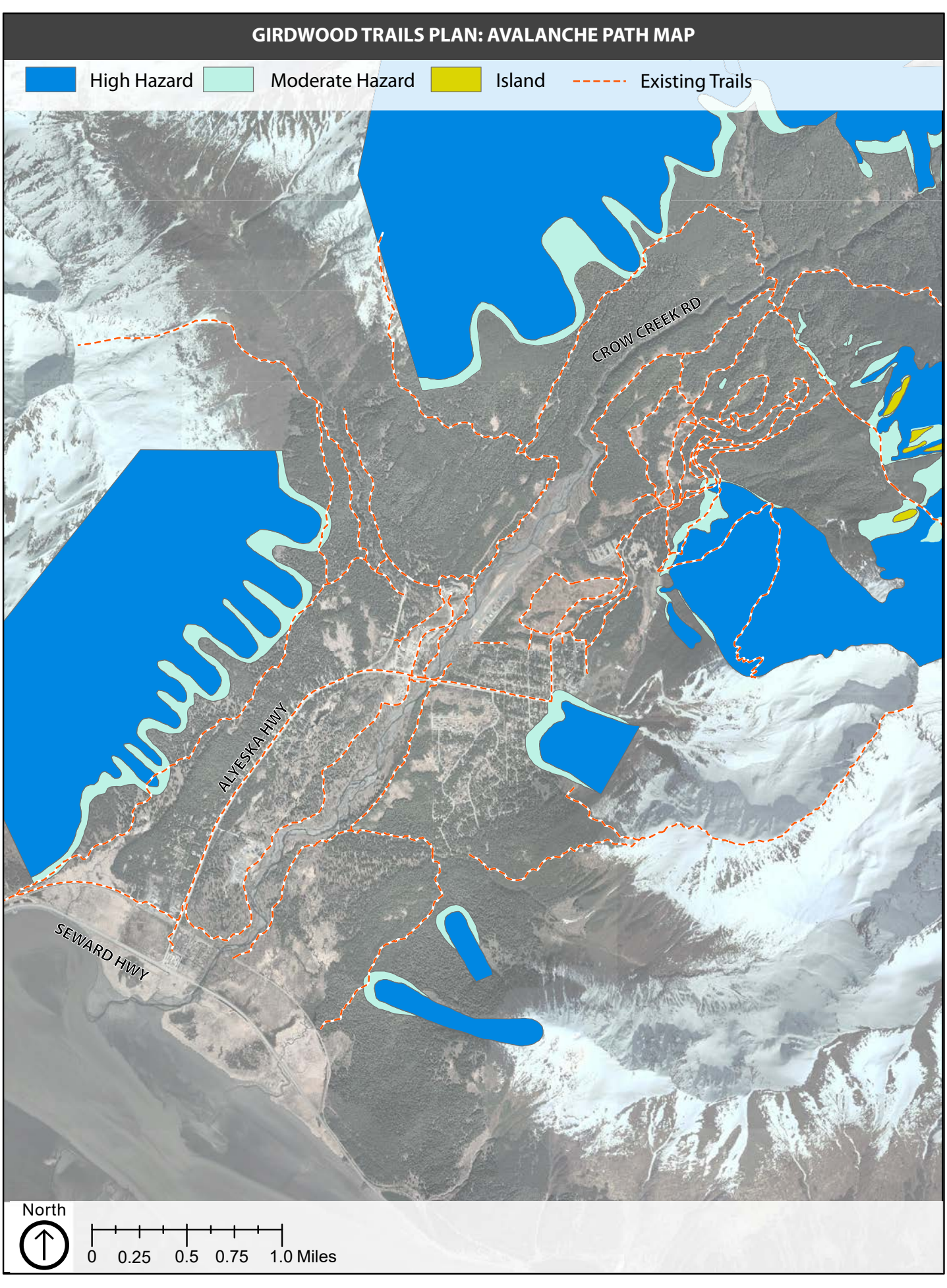
Existing Physical Conditions

The Girdwood Valley is surrounded by public land on three sides and Turnagain Arm of Cook Inlet on the fourth. The narrow valley is bisected by Glacier Creek, Virgin Creek, California Creek, and their tributaries. The base of the valley is splattered with various wetlands that have traditionally been too wet to develop or use, however, climate change is altering precipitation and vegetation patterns quickly and the long-term implications are unknown. Finally, human-built infrastructure, including the Alyeska Highway, Alaska Railroad, the Airport, and the Hand Tram impact trail routes. In brief summary, the existing trail system in the Girdwood Valley has developed as a result of its natural and constructed characteristics. Girdwood has a variety of out-and-back trails that essentially "dead-end", instead of creating loops or traverses.

Environmental Conditions

While natural beauty and opportunity for recreation are abundant in Girdwood, there are some physical constraints to consider for trails and natural spaces. The organic soils, wetlands, avalanche zones, and topography create challenging conditions for sustainable and maintainable trail development in the Valley. Trail alignment, development and management must consider these environmental factors when planning for new and existing trails. A very detailed narrative on the geology, topography, hydrology, soils, vegetation, fish, wildlife, and climate of the Girdwood Valley can be found in the GVTMP (2020).


GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: WETLANDS MAP
A
B
C
D
P
U
Existing Trails
CROW CREEK RD
ALYESKA HWY
SEWARD HWY
North
0
0.25
0.5
0.75
1.0 Miles


GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: AVALANCHE PATH MAP
High Hazard
Moderate Hazard
Island
Existing Trails
CROW CREEK RD
ALYESKA HWY
SEWARD HWY
North
0
0.25
0.5
0.75
1.0 Miles

Existing Trails

The GVTMP identifies more than 30 individual trails within the Girdwood Valley. The trails make up more than 75 miles winding through the Girdwood Valley and up surrounding ridges (See existing trails map on page 21). Existing trails offer recreation opportunities for a variety of different uses. The existing trail system predominantly offers recreation and access to scenic and natural destinations.

The GVTMP classifies and manages trails using the USDA Trail Classification System described below. For a complete description of Girdwood's trail classification system, see the GVTMP.

Figure 4

For planning purposes, it is important to understand the current distribution of trail classifications so that the community can plan for future trail and natural space projects that achieve the demand not currently being met by the current trail system.

Figure 5

KEY	TRAIL	TRAIL LENGTH (MI)	TRAIL CLASSIFICATION
1	Girdwood to Indian Bike Trail	10	5
2	Beaver Pond	3.25	3
3	Alyeska Highway Trail	3	5
4	Abe's Trail	1.5	2
5	California Creek Trail	1	1
6	Ragged Top Trail	2	1
7	Iditarod - Upper Trail	6	3
7	Iditarod - Lower Trail	3	4
8	Joe Danich Trail	2.5	1
9	Wagon Trail	1.5	1
10	Virgin Creek Falls Lower Trail	0.6	1
10	Virgin Creek Falls Upper Trail	0.25	3
11	Max's Mountain Trail	2	1
12	Shortcut from Bike Path to Davos	0.125	3
13	Hightower Multi-Use Trail	0.3	5
14	Tiny Creek Trail	1	3
15	Athabascan Environmental Physics Trail	0.25	3
16	Deb's Way	0.5	3
17	Moose Meadow Trails	1	4
18	Verbier Way Bike Path	0.3	5
19	Egloff Multi-Use Trail	0.2	5
20	Winner Creek Trail Extension	0.4	3
21	Winner Creek Trail Upper	9.12	2
21	Winner Creek Trail	3.5	4 & 3
22	North Face Trail	2.25	2
23	Nordic 5K Loop	3.1	4
24	Mt Alyeska: Center Ridge to Max's	1.3	1
25	Snow Cat Summer Trail	4	1
25	Snow Cat Winter Trail	4	4
26	Stumpy's Summer Trail	2	1
27	Stumpy's Winter Trail	2.5	2
28	Arlberg Bike Path	1.5	5
29	Two Cents	0.3	3
29	Small House	0.5	3
29	Earnagain	0.3	3
n/a	Eagle Glacier Access	3.85	1
n/a	Crow Pass Trail	3.73	2
	Total	78.625	

SUMMARY: TRAIL CLASSIFICATION TOTALS (MI)		
Class 1	20.75	26.39%
Class 2	19.1	24.29%
Class 3	15.375	19.55
Class 4	8.1	10.30%
Class 5	15.3	19.46%
	78.625 miles	100%

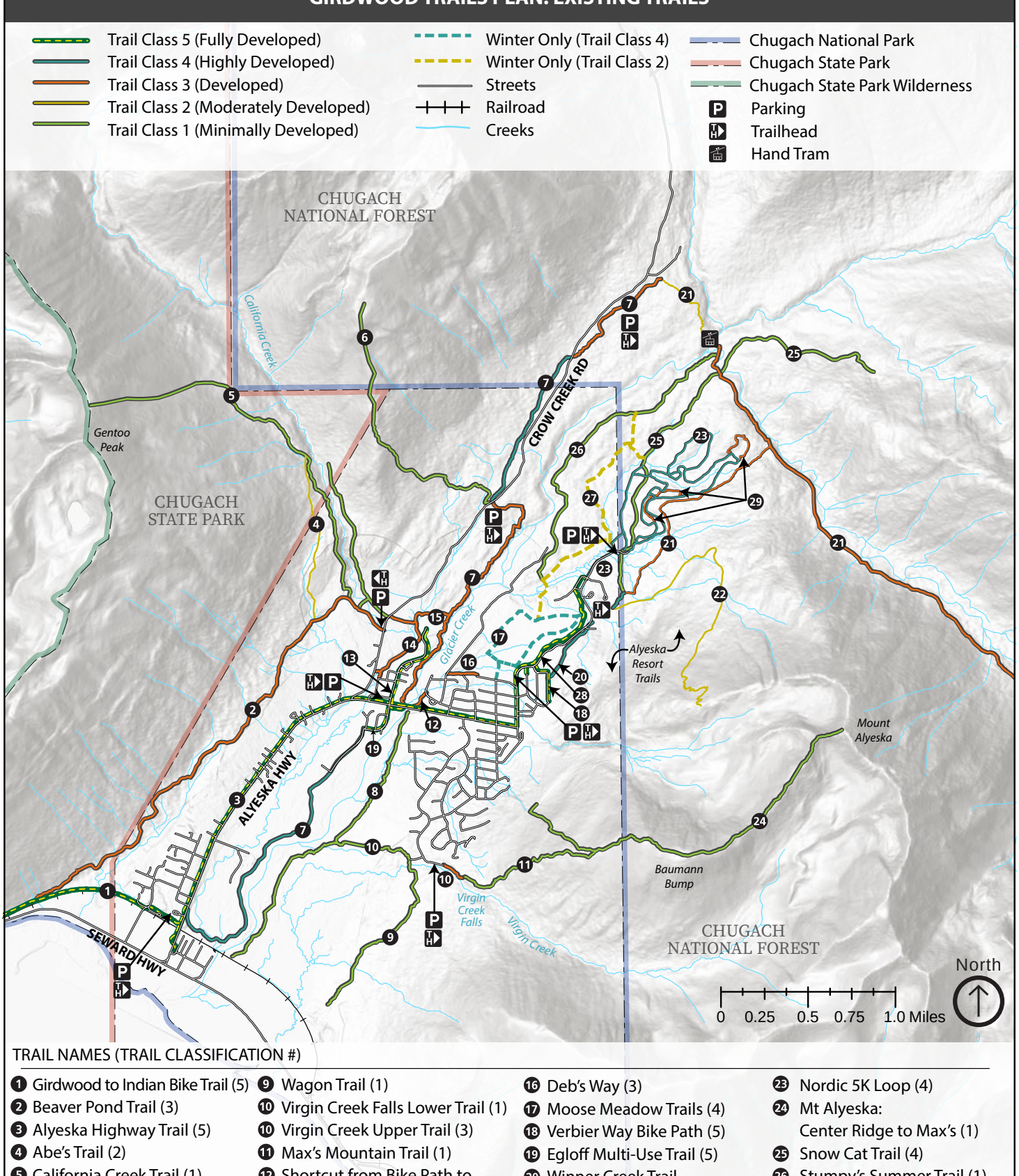
Seasonal Trails

The Girdwood trail system offers four seasons of opportunities. Given the unique climate and abundant snowfall in Girdwood, winter recreation and trail opportunities allow residents and visitors alike to enjoy Girdwood year-round. Alyeska Resort offers 1,400 acres of skiable area and the Nordic Ski area managed by the Girdwood Nordic Ski Club is nearby. However, due to soils and climate, there are remarkable winter-only trails through wetlands and meadows, providing trail experiences on frozen surfaces. However, these routes are not sustainable or accessible during the summer months. In addition, other routes that utilize elevation and topography to access more remote areas of the Valley are not accessible in the winter due to avalanche hazards. Finally, there are trails that are managed for a single use during the winter (ski only, for example) that are utilized as multi-use during the summer months. The takeaway is that the Girdwood trail system varies greatly in seasonal routes and uses. Trail design and management practices should consider seasonal and environmental conditions for the safety of trail users and to protect the environment the trail traverses.

Trail planning and development should achieve sustainable, four-season management of trails through collaborative planning and partnership, intended use, classification, construction, and shared use agreements.

See the existing trail map on page 21 to identify seasonal trails.

GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: EXISTING TRAILS



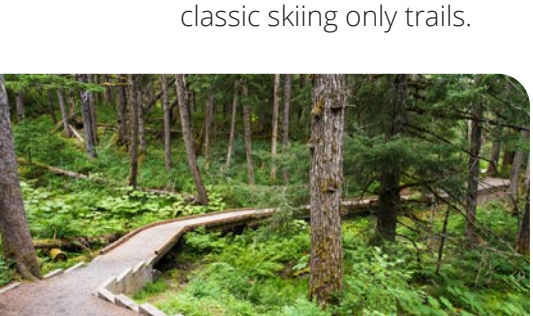
TRAIL NAMES (TRAIL CLASSIFICATION #)

1. Girdwood to Indian Bike Trail (5)
2. Beaver Pond Trail (3)
3. Alyeska Highway Trail (5)
4. Abe's Trail (2)
5. California Creek Trail (1)
6. Ragged Top Trail (1)
7. Iditarod - Lower Trail (4)
7. Iditarod - Middle Trail (3)
7. Iditarod - Upper Trail (3)
8. Joe Danich Trail (1)
9. Wagon Trail (1)
10. Virgin Creek Falls Lower Trail (1)
10. Virgin Creek Upper Trail (3)
11. Max's Mountain Trail (1)
12. Shortcut from Bike Path to Davos (3)
13. Hightower Multi-Use Trail (5)
14. Tiny Creek Trail (3)
15. Athabascan Environmental Physics Trail (3)
16. Deb's Way (3)
17. Moose Meadow Trails (4)
18. Verbier Way Bike Path (5)
19. Egloff Multi-Use Trail (5)
20. Winner Creek Trail Extension (3)
21. Winner Creek Trail Upper (2)
21. Winner Creek Trail (4 & 3)
22. North Face Trail (2)
23. Nordic 5K Loop (4)
24. Mt Alyeska: Center Ridge to Max's (1)
25. Snow Cat Trail (4)
26. Stumpy's Summer Trail (1)
27. Stumpy's Winter Trail (2)
28. Arlberg Bike Path (5)
29. Two Cents (3)
29. Small House (3)
29. Earnagain (3)

For management purposes, the Girdwood Valley is divided into five areas. (See map on page 23)

Upper Valley Trails

The Upper Valley trails have the most concentrated use of any trails in the valley with the highest diversity of user groups. Hikers, mountain bikers, Nordic skiers, snowshoers, visitors, and residents use these trails. Some of the winter trails are on wet ground unsuitable for summer use. Trails range from class 1 to class 5. The popular Hand Tram that previously connected the two portions of the Winner Creek Trail is no longer functioning. All the groomed Nordic trails are in this management area, as are many ungroomed multi-use and classic skiing only trails.



Resort-Managed Trails

Alyeska Resort manages and maintains trails that are on the Resort's private property. Summer trails include the North Face Trail and Winner Creek Extension Trail. Alyeska Resort also manages and maintains downhill mountain bike trails, which are accessed via chairlifts. A trailhead for the Winner Creek Trail is located adjacent to Hotel Alyeska. These trails are open to the public; fees apply for lift access.

Alyeska Basin & South Valley Trails (ABS)

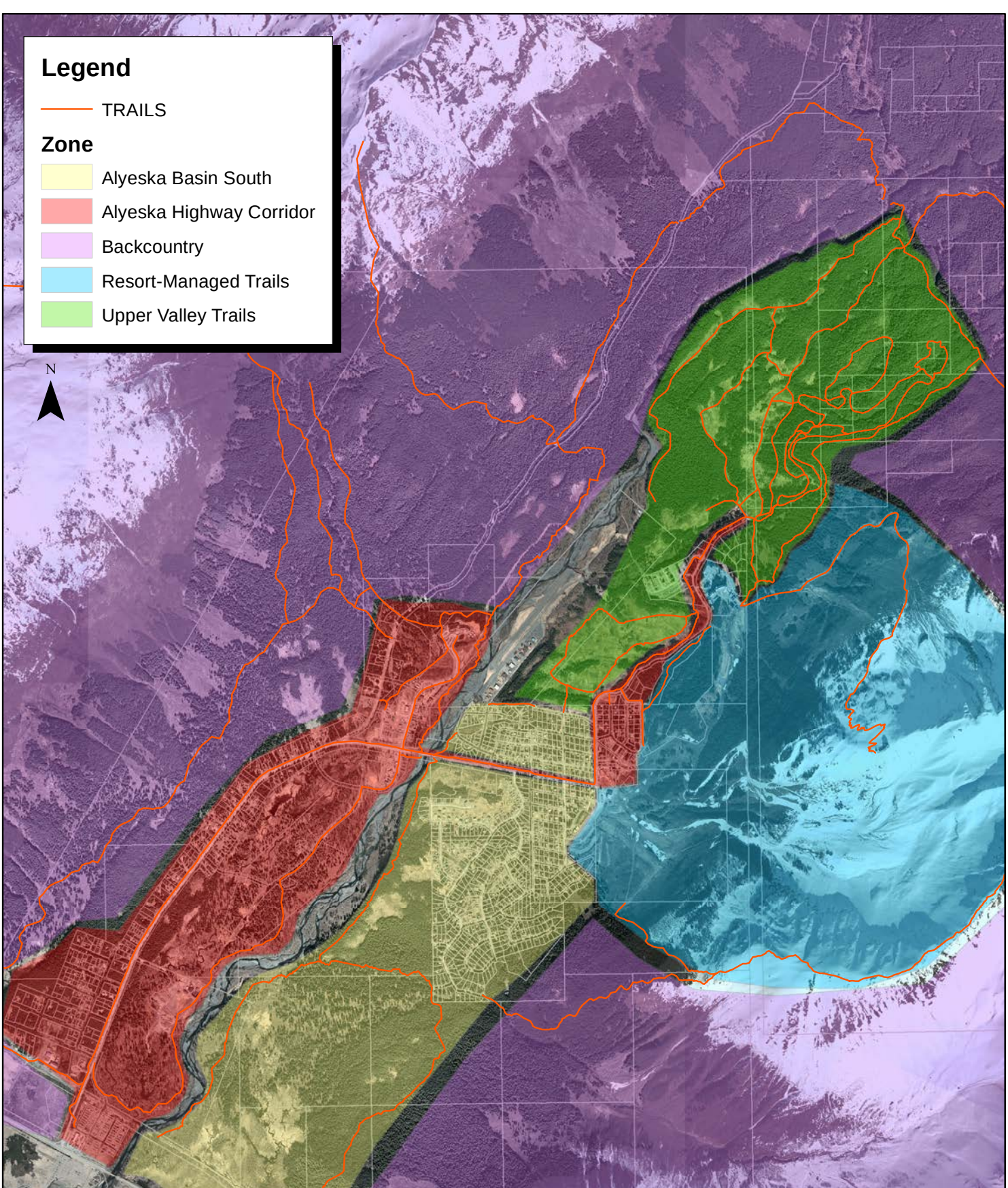
The ABS trails are routes that have evolved through community use into class 1 and 2 trails. This management area includes social trails that are important community links. The ABS trails are high value trails to the community with significant maintenance requirements, especially regarding snow storage issues each winter. Their alignments are generally across flat ground with numerous streams, wetlands, and flood plains.

Alyeska Highway Corridor (AHC)

The AHC contains all the paved multi-use trails in the valley, from the Hotel Alyeska to the intersection of the Alyeska Highway and the Seward Highway, as well as the trails found in Girdwood's Town Center and Forest Fair Park. The core trail is the Alyeska Highway Bike Path. There are four other paved bike path trails that radiate from it: the Hightower Pathway to the school, the Moose Meadow Pathway to Hotel Alyeska, The Egloff Pathway to the Library and the Bird-to-Gird Pathway. The Lower Iditarod Trail and Tiny Creek Trail are also located in this corridor.

Backcountry (BC)

The BC management area surrounds all the other trail management areas and contains the more remote, primitive trails. This area stretches form Turnagain Arm to the top of the ridges surrounding the valley. The BC area encompasses all lands west of the Alyeska Highway Corridor and extends east to Berry Pass with trails mostly along historic transportation routes. Trails in this corridor face significant pressure from potential development of the new south town site and the proposed Crow Creek neighborhood developments, including the Holtan Hills subdivision. Most INHT segments are within this area (Girdwood Iditarod, Crow Pass, and both upper & most of lower Winner Creek Trails). The Athabaskan Environmental Physics (AEP) Trail, Beaver Pond Trail, California Creek Trail, Abe's Trail, and the Ragged Top route are all located in this area. The area contains several trailheads along Crow Creek Road, and the Hand Tram at Four Corners is within this area.


Legend
TRAILS
Zone
Alyeska Basin South
Alyeska Highway Corridor
Backcountry
Resort-Managed Trails
Upper Valley Trails
N

Existing Trail Use

Hiking/Pedestrian – The Girdwood trail system currently sees a broad spectrum of hiker and pedestrian, from young children and first-time hikers on guided tours, to seasoned backpackers heading out for multi-day overnight journeys.

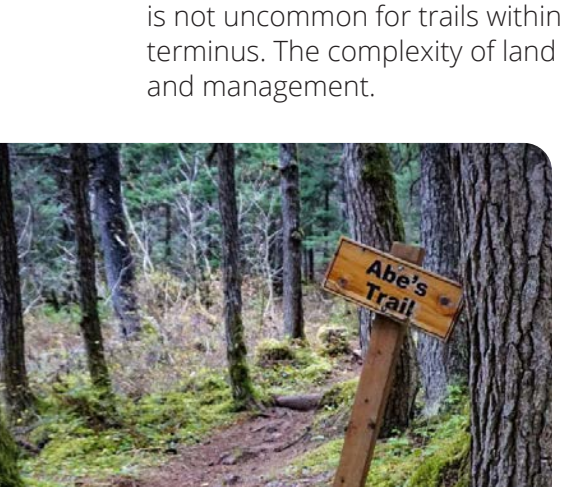
Skiing – Within the Girdwood trail system, there are opportunities for groomed and ungroomed classic and skate Nordic Skiing as well as resort and backcountry downhill skiing. The existing opportunities cater to a more advanced skier and there is a desire for more beginner runs and routes in both Nordic and downhill areas. A range of difficulty will better serve a broad range of trail users (new and experienced) and families with younger children.

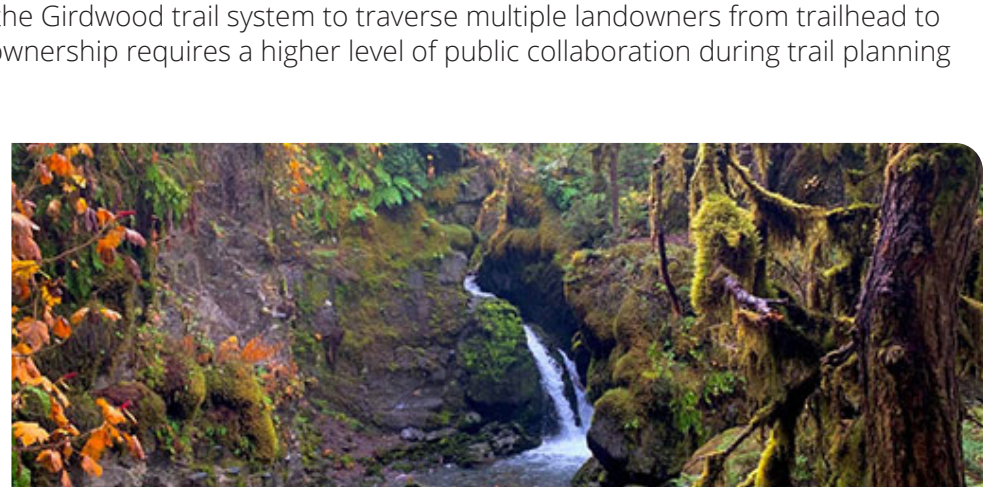
Biking – The Girdwood to Indian Trail brings bicyclists into Girdwood along the Turnagain Arm and offers 13.2 miles of paved trail. There are additional paved multi-use trails that connect cyclists through Girdwood along the Alyeska Highway Corridor. There are limited amenities for bicyclists which can discourage multi-modal transportation for those who live in or visit Girdwood.

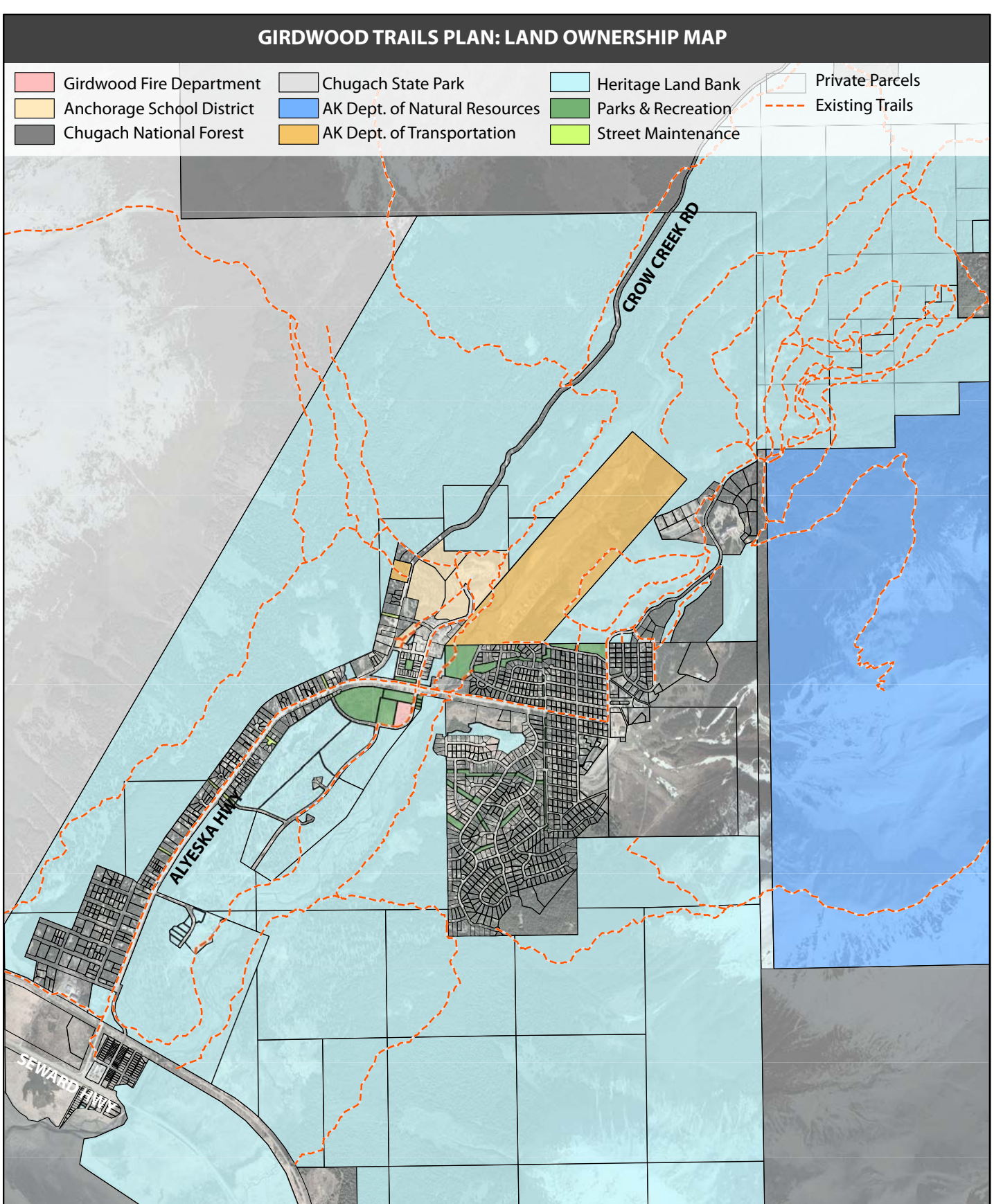
Primitive Trail Experiences – Many of Girdwood's existing trails were once far more primitive experiences. Due to increased use and popularity, some of those once primitive trails have been developed to a higher standard. Primitive experiences are desired by many users and a balance between Trail classes should be maintained.

Land Ownership

Land Ownership presents unique opportunities and challenges for the Girdwood trail system. Girdwood trail system lands are predominantly owned and managed by public agencies like the Municipality of Anchorage – Heritage Land Bank, State of Alaska - Chugach State Park and the Department of Natural Resources, and United States Forest Service - Chugach National Forest. The Girdwood trail system is a complicated network that traverses multiple landowners. Agency decision-making and project authorization processes vary by agency. It is not uncommon for trails within the Girdwood trail system to traverse multiple landowners from trailhead to terminus. The complexity of land ownership requires a higher level of public collaboration during trail planning and management.






GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: LAND OWNERSHIP MAP
Girdwood Fire Department
Anchorage School District
Chugach National Forest
Chugach State Park
AK Dept. of Natural Resources
AK Dept. of Transportation
Heritage Land Bank
Parks & Recreation
Street Maintenance
Private Parcels
Existing Trails
CROW CREEK RD
ALYESKA HWY
SEWARD HWY
North
0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1.0 Miles

Trail Easements & Legal Access

All publicly managed trails should be legally accessible, protecting the trail from encroachments, protecting the public's access to the trail, but also respecting the property rights of private landowners. All managed trails in the Girdwood Valley should have one of the following authorizations:

1. Easement managed by the underlying land management authority
2. Intra-governmental agreement or permit
3. Entirely within a dedicated Municipal park

There are unauthorized trails on State of Alaska DOT&PF (aviation & highway) lands, utility easements, Alaska Railroad right-of-way.

Connectivity

Glacier Creek bisects the Girdwood Valley and the Hand Tram provides one of the only crossings within the trail system itself. The pedestrian bridge adjacent to the vehicular bridge on the Alyeska Highway provides another crossing. No other formal cross-valley connections exist, including at the mouth of the valley where several trails terminate at the Railroad but do not interconnect. Reliable multi-use connections are needed at the lower and upper valley to provide interconnectivity of trails.

The Hand Tram can carry only a few people at one time and can operate only in summer months. Although very scenic and a unique experience, the Hand Tram cannot accommodate the current volume of traffic on Winner Creek Trail which has increased since improvements to the trail have been completed. The hand tram mechanical operation has not failed, however there have been accidents near the Hand Tram, including a fatality, and the MOA is exposed to liability. A year-round crossing to connect the two sides of the Winner Creek Trail is needed.

Access: Trailheads and Parking

The Girdwood Trails Management Plan states that identifiable trailheads with adjacent sufficient parking should be provided for each trail. Parking and trailhead access within Girdwood have become more difficult with an increase in visitors who arrive by car. Winter snow storage further complicates providing adequate trailhead parking and amenities that are accessible year-round.

Parking for trail access is available at the USFS Ranger District Office, Beaver Pond Trail and Moose Meadows Ski Trails. The following parking options are only accessible during summer: Crow Pass, Upper Iditarod Trail, Upper Virgin Creek Trail.

Virgin Creek Falls is a popular scenic stop and photo opportunity for visitors that lacks adequate parking for current demand. The site has some constraints to expanding parking and lacks amenities to accommodate higher levels of use. The 5k Nordic Ski Loop parking was constructed in 2016 and has outgrown its capacity on popular days. Alyeska Resort allows trail users to utilize hotel parking near the church. While having this overflow lot is helpful, it may not always be allowed, and longer-term sustainable options may be needed.

There are several trails within the Girdwood trail system that do not have trailheads. Wagon Trail is a commonly cited example that is not accessible by a public trailhead. The trail has historic value but cannot easily be shared with visitors. Deb's Way/Airport Conflict is commonly mentioned by Girdwood residents. The airport road was a popular access point for upper valley exploration as it provides connection to upper valley trails and locations such as the Hotel Alyeska. DOT has recently been enforcing trespassing on DOT land as pedestrian traffic conflicts with airport operations. A mutually agreeable compromise to this would be beneficial, as connectivity to the trails is needed and would be used by general aviation, commercial aviation, and other trail users.

Most of Girdwood's trails provide parking along wide road shoulders and trail access is via informal trailheads. Even at trailheads where parking has been recently updated, current use has already outgrown the existing capacity.

Chugach State Park has developed a management policy for trail access and trailheads. This will begin solution-driven conversations around trails that begin in Girdwood and enter Chugach State Park land.

Figure 6

EXISTING PARKING AND TRAILHEADS

P1: AK Railroad Depot
20-30 spaces

P2: USFS Chugach Glacier District Ranger Station
16 spaces + 2 accessible

P3: Virgin Creek Falls
9-12 spaces in roadway

P4: Girdwood Town Center
30-40 spaces + 2 accessible

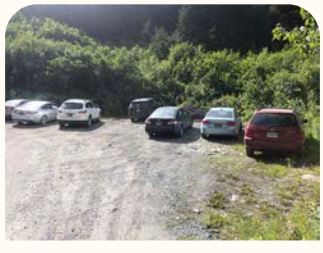
P5: Beaver Pond
16 unmarked spaces in roadway

P6: Moose Meadows
10-12 spaces

P7: Arlberg Road
20 spaces + 1 accessible

P8: Middle Iditarod
4-6 spaces

P9: Winner Creek Gorge
20 spaces + 1 accessible


Middle Iditarod Trailhead

Arlberg Road Trailhead

Virgin Creek Falls Trailhead

Beaver Pond Trailhead

Amenities, Signage, & Wayfinding

Signage & Wayfinding – A lack of clear signage and wayfinding in tandem with informal parking and unmarked trail heads, makes navigation of the Girdwood trail system difficult. Most junctions are unmarked, which makes navigation challenging, especially where social trails intersect the established trail system.

Land ownership is complex throughout the Girdwood Trail System and there are inherent risks and hazards in outdoor recreation. A lack of wayfinding and emergency information on the trails presents challenges for emergency and rescue situations and reporting trail issues.

With multiple landowners and management at trailheads throughout the system, the wayfinding is not consistent in appearance or information provided. This creates confusion for trail users and first responders.

As the Girdwood trail system expands, clear signage and wayfinding will be crucial to indicate difficulty, allowed uses, ownership, safety, interpretation, rules & regulations, and wayfinding. Snow storage and berms should be considered in the implementation of wayfinding to ensure wayfinding and trailhead markers are visible year-round. A cohesive and uniform wayfinding system should be developed and implemented.

Toilets – There are no restrooms provided at trailheads throughout the Girdwood trail system. Due to the high level of visiting trail users and the economic activity that is trail-based, providing permanent or portable toilets during peak season would reduce environmental impact, litter, and improve the user experience.

Dog Waste Stations & Signage – Conflict between humans and dogs on the trail is not exclusive to Girdwood. Clear signage to indicate when dogs are allowed and if they must be leashed reduces conflict. Dog waste has become an issue on trails within Girdwood. Highly trafficked trailheads lack dog waste stations, trash receptacles, and educational signage. As many visiting trail users are not familiar with 'Leave No Trace' principles, this issue may be expected to grow.

Trash Receptacles – There are few trash cans located throughout the trail system in Girdwood. Many trailheads have trash receptacles, but there are long stretches of trail without them. While most weekend backpackers and residents are willing and prepared to 'pack it out' or wait until they find a trash can, providing bear proof trash cans at highly trafficked visitor-favorite trailheads like Upper Virgin Creek Falls and Beaver Pond will help keep the trail system clean.

Bike Racks – The Indian to Girdwood National Recreation Trail brings cyclists into Girdwood from Anchorage along the Turnagain Arm. A growing Mountain Bike community and trail opportunities draw additional cyclists into town for recreation. Bike racks are present at few trailheads including Alyeska Resort. Installation of bike racks throughout town would encourage trail users to move around town to local businesses and other recreation spots while visiting.

Trail Maintenance

The Girdwood Trails Management Plan describes the current level of maintenance for each of the trails within the system. The Girdwood trail system requires brushing, grooming, and general trail maintenance throughout different areas based on the trail class, designation, and allowed use.

Multiple landowners along trails results in various levels of capacity for maintenance and management throughout the trail system and along specific trails. Different types of trail users would like to see varying levels of maintenance based on their preferences and activity.

Trail maintenance relies heavily on a small, seasonal MOA Parks and Recreation Staff, partner organizations, and community volunteers. As trail use increases and more trails are constructed, it will be crucial to provide adequate funding and resources to support trail maintenance and management.

COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Girdwood Trails Plan project launched in late February 2020 just as the world was entering lockdown due to COVID-19. Community and stakeholder participation occurred entirely in a virtual setting. The process was not ideal; community members would have much preferred to be in rooms together gathered around maps with markers and sticky notes or out on the trails in groups investigating site conditions, but everyone adapted, and the project moved forward.

Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee

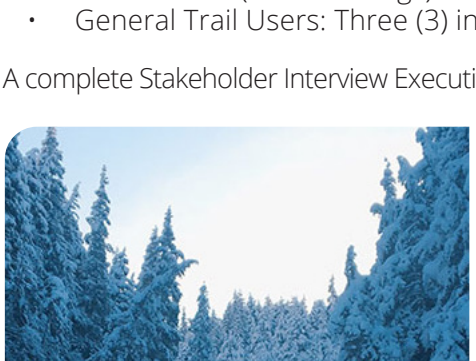
The Girdwood Trails Committee selected eleven (11) individuals to sit on the Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee. The subcommittee met on a monthly basis via Zoom to participate in and make recommendations to the trail planning process. During the process, the subcommittee held eleven (11) regular meetings, four (4) workshops and one (1) special meeting. A compete record of meeting agendas, summaries, and meeting materials can be found by visiting the following website: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1gPuYrLKRM9ovsAf4x7Th-Dh2CziVkZ4sl?usp=sharing

Stakeholder Interviews

A series of ten (10) stakeholder interviews were conducted to establish a baseline of qualitative project information and to better understand the current conditions of the trail system, as well as the diversity of community goals and visions for the future of the Girdwood Trails. The following groups and individuals were interviewed:

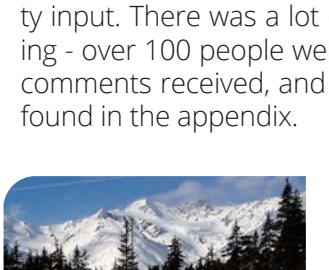
- GirdWild
- Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance
- Alyeska Resort
- Girdwood Nordic Ski Club
- Ascending Path
- Landowners (Two meetings): Chugach State Park, Heritage Land Bank, Chugach National Forest
- General Trail Users: Three (3) individuals not associated with a group or organization.

A complete Stakeholder Interview Executive Summary and each individual meeting summary can be found in the appendix.



Public Meetings

Two virtual public meetings were held during the development of the Girdwood Trail Plan. The first public meeting introduced the project to the broader community, shared draft values, vision, and goals, and launched an interactive online mapping application (described below) to gather community input. There was a lot of community interest in this meeting - over 100 people were in attendance! A summary of the comments received, and presentation polling results can be found in the appendix.

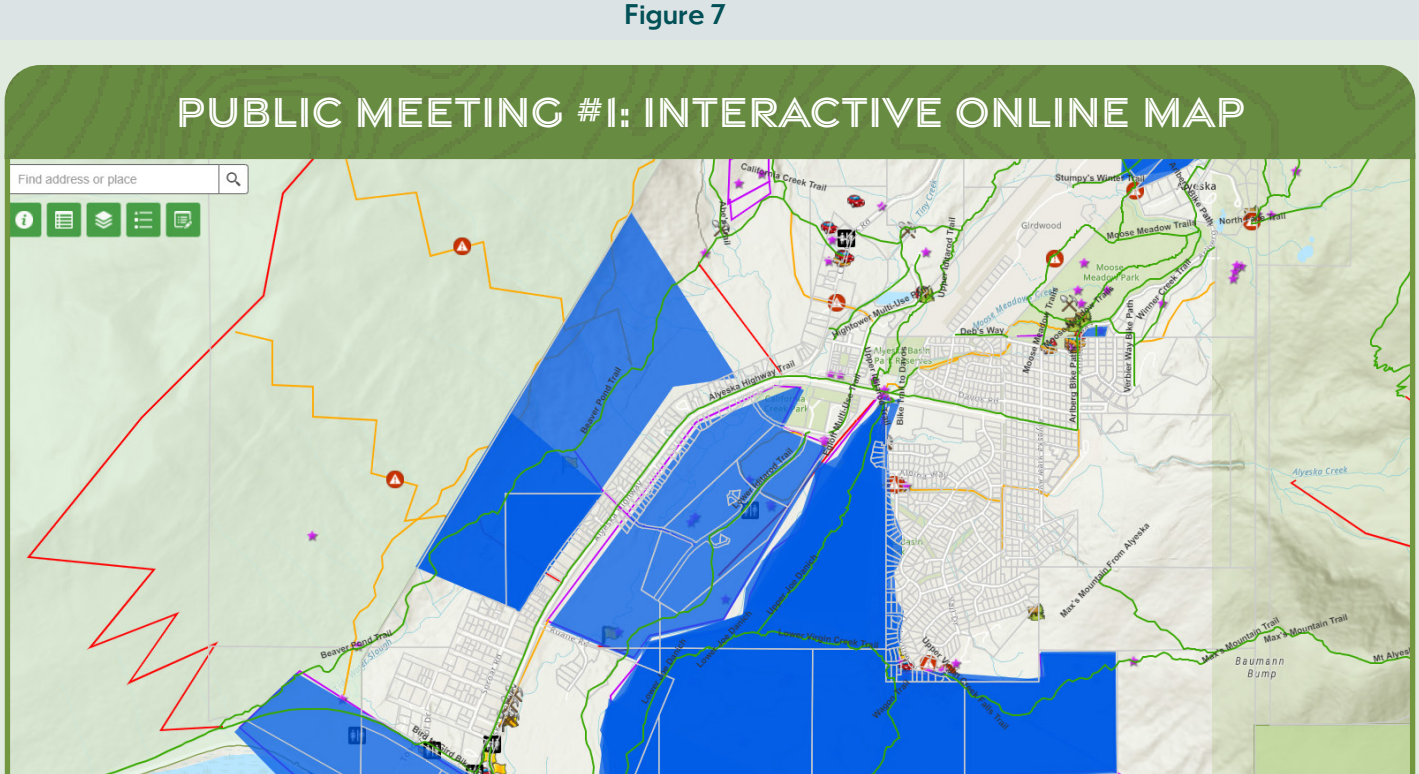


A second virtual public meeting will be held in May or June of 2021 to share the Draft Girdwood Trails Master Plan with the public for review and comment.

Interactive Online Map

An interactive online mapping application was developed to gather comments and feedback from the public. It was not possible to implement in-person community mapping workshop activities due to COVID-19. The goal of the application was to collect information about existing conditions, but to also gather input and ideas about the future of the trail and natural space system. The application was launched and advertised to the community on Thursday, November 19th and was open for participation through Monday, December 21st. Almost 500 individual comments and ideas were received via this online tool. A summary and complete list of comments can be found in the appendix. The application is closed for participation but can still be viewed. Girdwood Trails Interactive Web Application: https://arcg.is/1PyHKf

Figure 7



Girdwood Trail Plan Themes

The results of the existing condition analysis and community and stakeholder engagement revealed the following key findings and themes:

Girdwood Residents Value Access to Trails and Natural Spaces
Many Girdwood residents were drawn to the town due to the nature of the small community and its access to trail-based recreation and natural spaces. Given Girdwood's proximity to Anchorage, residents value having access to trails and natural spaces directly from their front door. Continuing to provide direct and easy access to trails and natural spaces for everyone is a shared goal.

Girdwood residents and trail system users value the variety of activities that are possible within the trail and natural space system (i.e. hiking, biking, skijoring, downhill skiing, cross country skiing, wildlife viewing, 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 highly values.

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 in Girdwood still seem to skew toward 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 visitors engaging in recreation is on the rise.

Managing Allowed Uses

Due to the growing popularity of trail and nature-based activities such as biking, the balance as well as clear indication of allowed uses on trails 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 purpose-built, single-use, bike specific trails and areas are needed to reduce this conflict system-wide. Trails that are not designed and built for bikers result in increased user conflict, maintenance requirements, and costs.

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. With proper planning, the Girdwood trail system can provide a range of experiences for users of all ages and abilities. There are opportunities for viewing scenery with very little walking, biking on paved trails, pushing a stroller on a trail through the forest, mountain biking, and backcountry hiking experiences. Each trail cannot cater to everyone, but the planning process will help determine which opportunities are already provided and what updates or additions can be made 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 each trail user wishes to have when using the Girdwood trail system. To best meet this diversity in demand, the trail system should be comprised of a balance 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 and nature-based recreation. Trail users 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 valued. A trail system with a balance of trail classifications will lend itself well to providing opportunities for the novice as well as advanced trail user and creating a broad range of outdoor and recreation experiences.

Preserved Natural Areas for Primitive Trail Development

While it is vital to provide a variety of trails when it comes to difficulty, use, and trail classification, it is also necessary to identify areas that prioritize limited or primitive trails (Class 1 and 2). Many residents and user groups value having access to wild lands areas that are minimally developed. The area should be accessible, within short walking distance of the community, and provide primitive, non-mechanized trail experiences. The natural area with primitive trails should prioritize habitat protection, spaces for quiet and solitude, orienteering, wildlife viewing, and ungroomed skiing.

Improving and Managing Trail Access

There are many wonderful trails within the Girdwood trail system that are missing formal or improved access, wayfinding, or amenities. The thought of the Girdwood trail system inundated by out-of-town guests is difficult for many long-time residents, however, with proper planning and thoughtful access planning, use can be managed.

Girdwood may consider upgrading certain trails to support higher levels of traffic and promoting them accordingly. Trails that are not yet to a standard that can sustainably accommodate higher levels of use or do not have easy access should be managed as such. Trails that are managed for use by Girdwood visitors should be clearly marked with wayfinding, 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 improved 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.

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.

Brushing out trails, grooming, and general trail maintenance (removing fallen trees, tread, bridges, etc.) should all be considered. Trails that become overgrown (such as Beaver Pond and Upper Iditarod) should be brushed out with some regularity. Although some seem to be content with the level of grooming, others think that additional grooming would make the winter multi-use trail system more accessible to more trail users.
The level of trail maintenance required, anticipated funding, and volunteer commitment should be discussed in the initial planning stages of all new trail development.

Connectivity

There is generally consensus 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 that have evolved over time.

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 eventually addressed to create the desired valley-wide connectivity. There is interest to fill in gaps in the system and to create more trail loops.

Creating connectivity within the trail system will create a more cohesive experience and additional opportunities to travel through Girdwood. Girdwood residents value the ability to travel without a car and a connected trail system utilizing the town'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 community frustration about the current process and consensus that a streamlined approval process would benefit everyone. The trail plan will provide 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.

PART 2 – RECOMMENDATIONS + IMPLEMENTATION

PURPOSE

The purpose of Part 2 of this plan is to identify both broad aspirations and specific implementation actions to guide trail and natural space projects over the next 10 – 15 years that will achieve the trail and natural space system that Girdwood envisions. This section of the GTP contains:

- A simple, long-range vision statement that describes Girdwood's aspirations for the trail and natural space system.
- A list of community-developed values that support the vision and articulate core principles that guide and direct work. Values guide decision-making and establish a standard against which actions can be assessed.
- Five goals Girdwood can aim to achieve over the next 10-15 years.
- Implementation actions that identify specific projects that Girdwood should invest in and accomplish.

VISION, VALUES, & GOALS

Girdwood residents developed values, a vision statement, and plan goals that guided the development of the trail plan and will serve as the basis for future action and decision-making for Girdwood's trails and natural spaces.

The vision, values, and goals provide organizing principles for the plan and serve as a "compass" for future decisions – providing statements of intent that can guide Girdwood, its citizens and partners when responding to change, growth and new opportunities. The vision, values, and goals ensure that future decisions are consistent with the original intent of the plan. The vision, values, and goals were derived from public input provided through the GTP Subcommittee, public meeting #1, and general public comments.

Girdwood Trail Plan: Vision

Girdwood aspires to be a world-class outdoor recreation destination offering residents and visitors a balance of trails and natural spaces that are interconnected, diverse, and sustainable. Girdwood's trails and natural spaces are vital to our community well-being, identity, and economy.

Girdwood Trail Plan: Values

Values are core principles that guide and direct work. Values guide decision-making and establish a standard against which actions can be assessed.

Access: Trails and natural spaces are easily accessible, provide safe access to outdoor recreation, everyday community destinations, and the alpine.

Health & Well-Being: Trails contribute to improved physical and emotional health by promoting outdoor activity and social connection.

Experience: Girdwood Trails provide a variety of outdoor experiences.

Community Identity: Trails are an essential part of Girdwood's community identity and cultural history.

Explore & Learn: Trails provide places for exploration, discovery, and education.

Natural World: Trails provide access to the natural world to experience wildlife, wilderness, natural spaces, and functioning ecosystems.

Stewardship: Trails and natural spaces are sustainable, well-planned, designed, constructed, and maintained now and for future generations.

Diversity & Inclusivity: There are a variety of diverse trail experiences for everyone.

Recreation: Trails and natural spaces provide safe, low-cost opportunities to get outdoors and recreate.

Figure 8

GIRDWOOD TRAIL PLAN: GOALS

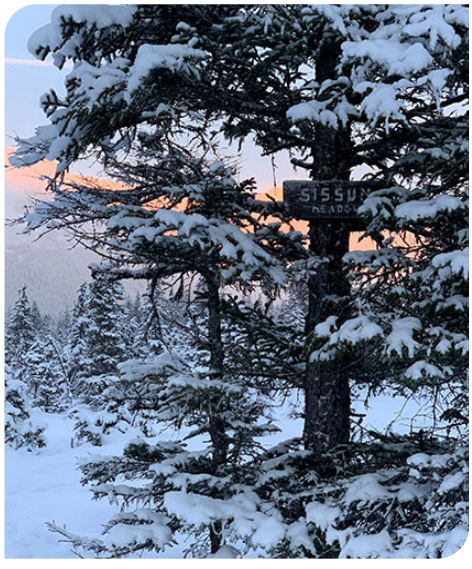
GOAL 1: PLAN
Provide a balance and diversity of trail and natural area experiences that minimize user conflicts and are consistent with the Girdwood Area Plan and the Girdwood Valley Trail Management Plan.

GOAL 2: CONSERVE
Identify, designate uses, and protect trails and natural spaces through proper processes.

GOAL 3: DEVELOP
Build trails and establish natural spaces using sustainable design principles with a clear project approval process among landowners.

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN
Trails and natural spaces are managed as needed for safety, the desired user experience, and to conserve natural resources.

GOAL 5: SUSTAIN
Provide adequate funding, planning, support, and stewardship for trails and natural spaces.



PROPOSED TRAIL AND NATURAL SPACE NETWORK

The Proposed Trail and Natural Space Network map along with the list of proposed projects work to achieve the vision and goals of the GTP and specifically address major themes identified through stakeholder engagement and the existing condition assessment.

- Improve Connectivity and Access
- Improve Balance & Diversity of Trail & Natural Space System

Proposed projects are grouped into the following categories; New Trails (T), Bridge Projects (B), Trailhead Projects (TH), Proposed Natural Spaces (NS), Proposed Mountain Bike Areas (MB), and Special Projects (SP).

How this Plan Improves the Balance and Diversity of the Trail and Natural Space System

Natural Spaces

One way in which this plan improves the balance and diversity of Girdwood's Trail and Natural Space system is by identifying natural areas that should remain entirely or predominantly in their natural state. Natural spaces serve a variety of purposes, including both conservation and recreation. Natural spaces are not solely for conservation and ecosystem services (such as providing wildlife corridors and habitat), but also can be used for primitive, non-mechanized recreation activities like trail walking, running, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, foraging, wildlife viewing, education, solitude, and meditation. Natural spaces are not areas that are 'locked up' or 'off limits,' but rather are places available and open to those who value a more primitive recreation experience.

Mountain Biking Areas

Another way this plan improves the diversity of trail experiences in Girdwood is by identifying areas that are suitable for purpose-built, single-track mountain biking flow trails. There is an increased demand for this type of recreation experience in the valley. Providing a specific area for mountain bikes will provide users with an exceptional trail experience tailored to mountain biking while reducing user-conflicts on multi-use trails elsewhere that are primarily built for hiking or skiing.

New Trails

The GTP proposes a variety of new trails that will improve the balance of trail classifications within the Girdwood Trail System. Trail users will have a greater range of experiences and options for outdoor recreation, and more trails from which to choose.

How This Plan Improves Connectivity and Access

Bridges

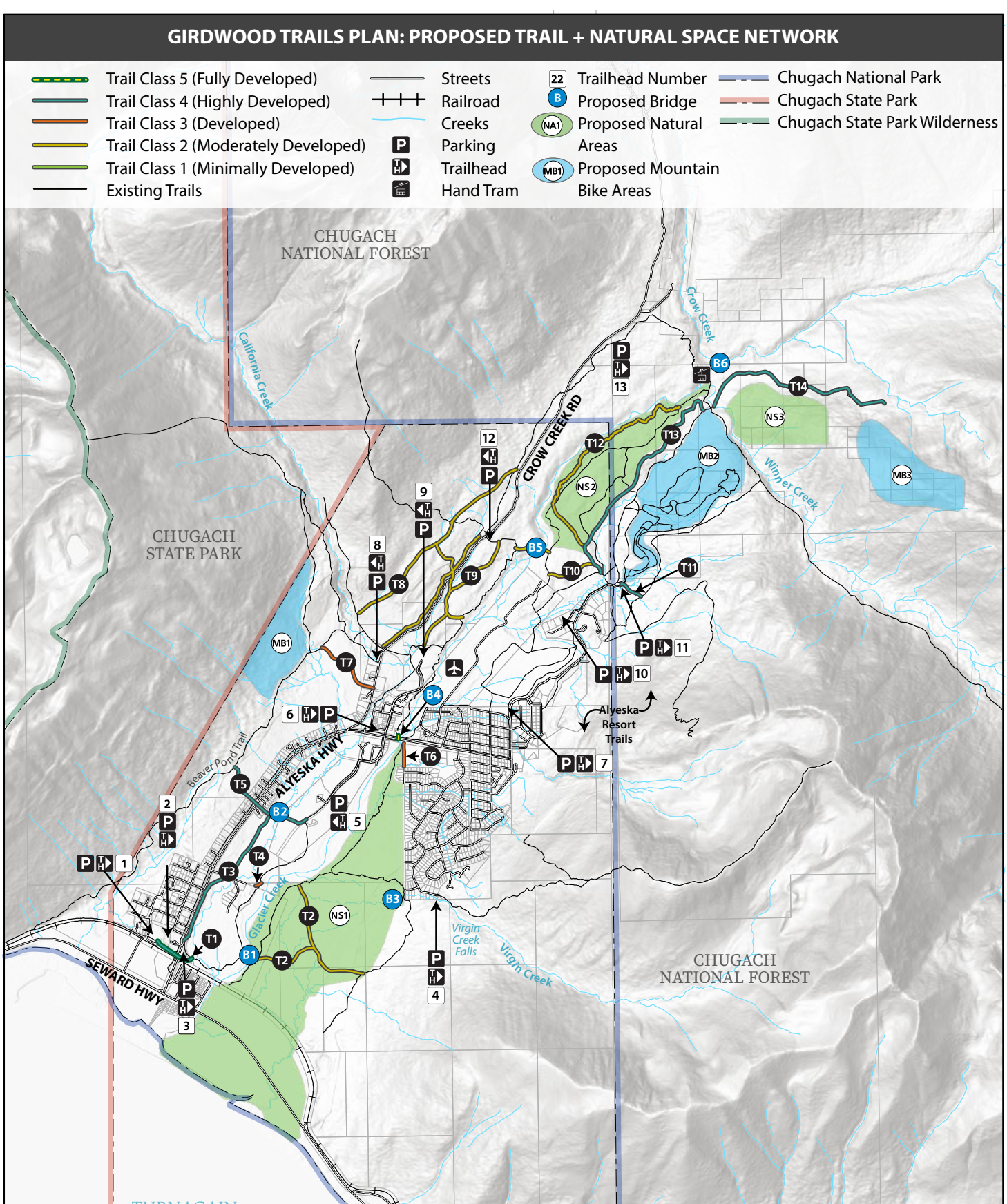
Glacier Creek is a barrier to trail connectivity in the Girdwood Valley. This plan proposes three (3) multi-use trail bridges equitably dispersed throughout the valley to better connect residents and visitors to trails without having to drive to access trailheads.

Trailheads

There are a multitude of existing trailheads in Girdwood with a range of amenities, however, to improve access to trails and natural areas, this plan proposes a range of trailhead upgrades, expansions, cooperative agreements, and new trailheads to meet increasing access demands and to ensure existing parking areas are being efficiently utilized.

New Trails

In addition to the proposed new trails that will improve the balance and diversity of the trail system, other new trails are proposed to improve access to the trail system and connectivity within the system. Proposed new trails improve the functionality of the system by completing smaller and larger loops, connecting to neighborhoods and community facilities, and providing safe and authorized routes to avoid trespass.


GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: PROPOSED TRAIL + NATURAL SPACE NETWORK
Trail Class 5 (Fully Developed)
Trail Class 4 (Highly Developed)
Trail Class 3 (Developed)
Trail Class 2 (Moderately Developed)
Trail Class 1 (Minimally Developed)
Existing Trails
Streets
Railroad
Creeks
Parking
Trailhead
Hand Tram
Trailhead Number
Proposed Bridge
Proposed Natural Areas
Proposed Mountain Bike Areas
Chugach National Park
Chugach State Park
Chugach State Park Wilderness
CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST
CHUGACH STATE PARK
CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST
TURNAGAIN ARM
California Creek
Crow Creek
CROW CREEK RD
Winner Creek
ALYESKA HWY
SEWARD HWY
Beaver Pond Trail
Glacier Creek
Virgin Creek Falls
Virgin Creek
Alyeska Resort Trails
North
0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1.0 Miles

GIRDWOOD TRAILS PLAN: PROPOSED TRAIL + NATURAL SPACE NETWORK

NEW TRAILS

- T1 Separated Grade Crossing: Railroad Bridge at Alyeska Hwy (4)
- T2 Wagon Trail - Lower Danich Connection (2)
- T3 Lower Valley Trail Loop Connection (3)
- T4 Ruane Road Trail Connection to Lower Iditarod (3)
- T5 Beaver Pond to Lower Iditarod (3)
- T6 Barren Avenue to Alyeska Hwy (3)
- T7 Crow Creek Road to Beaver Pond Trail (3)
- T8 Toe Slope Trail-California Creek to Iditarod (2)
- T9 Crow Creek Neighborhood Trails (2-3)
- T10 Cross Valley Trail (2)
- T11 Arlberg Connection to Winner Creek Trail (4)
- T12 Glacier Canyon Rim Trail (2)
- T13 Upper Valley Multi-Use Trail (4)
- T14 Snowcat Trail Improvements(4)

TRAILHEADS

- TH 1 Girdwood Depot Trailhead Upgrades – with restroom
- TH 2 Glacier Ranger District
- TH 3 Lower Valley Trailhead
- TH 4 Virgin Creek Falls Access Study
- TH 5 Karolius Trailhead
- TH 6 Girdwood Town Center Trailhead Improvements – with restroom
- TH 7 Moose Meadows Trailhead Improvements
- TH 8 Beaver Pond Trailhead
- TH 9 Girdwood PreK-8 School – Parking Agreement
- TH 10 Alyeska Resort Parking Agreement
- TH 11 Arlberg Trailhead Expansion – with restroom
- TH 12 Middle Iditarod
- TH 13 Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead Expansion

BRIDGE PROJECTS

- B1 Glacier Creek Trail Bridge - Lower Valley
- B2 California Creek Bridge
- B3 Virgin Creek Bridge
- B4 Improve Connectivity at Glacier Creek Bridge at Alyeska Hwy
- B5 Glacier Creek Trail Bridge – Middle Valley – (north of airstrip)
- B6 Glacier Creek Trails Bridge - Upper Valley Hand Tram

PROPOSED NATURAL SPACES (NS)

- NS1 Virgin Creek Natural Space
- NS2 Stumpy's Natural Space
- NS3 Winner Creek Natural Space

PROPOSED MOUNTAIN BIKE AREAS (MB)

- MB1 Beaver Pond
- MB2 Near the Nordic 5K
- MB3 End of the Snowcat Trail

SPECIAL PROJECTS

SP1: Areawide Wayfinding (Not on Map)

SP2: Girdwood Valley Circum-Valley Loop

(See map on page XX)

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS: PROPOSED TRAIL AND NATURAL SPACE NETWORK

New Trails (T)

T1 Separated Grade Crossing: RR Bridge @ Alyeska Highway
Develop a trail connection built to Class 4 Biking Design Parameters that would complete a missing link between the Lower Iditarod on the east side of Alyeska Highway and the Girdwood to Indian Trail. This trail may also provide an important link if the Girdwood to Indian Trail ever gets extended south.

T2 Wagon Trail – Lower Joe Danich Connection
Develop sustainable trails that connects the Wagon Trail with the Lower Danich Trail. The trails will provide a primitive loop in the lower valley. The trails should be constructed to Class 2 Hiking design parameters in the uplands as much as possible. Boardwalk structures and bridges can be used to cross wetland and creeks as necessary.

T3 Lower Valley Trail Loop Connection
Build a trail connection in the uplands, where possible, between California Creek and the Alyeska Highway. This new lower valley trail would provide a loop in the lower valley east of the Alyeska Highway, improving connectivity and providing an alternate, unpaved looped route for lower valley residents. The trail should be constructed to Class 3 Bicycle design parameters. For the most ideal trail experience, the utility easement should be avoided. Structures are permitted to traverse wetlands. The trail should be located on HLB lands zoned GOS.

T4 Ruane Road Trail Connection to Lower Iditarod
Build a trail connection from Ruane Road to the Lower Iditarod Trail to provide more connecting loops in the lower valley. The trail should be constructed to Class 3 Bicycle design parameters.

T5 Beaver Pond to Lower Iditarod
Construct an east/west trail connection in the lower valley, creating a more connected network of trails across the lower valley. There is currently no east/west connection serving the lower valley west of the Alyeska Highway. This trail would serve as a critical link in the valley's trail system, serving both the lower valley neighborhoods as well as visitors to the valley. The trail would be constructed to Class 3 Biking design parameters. Boardwalk structures can be used to cross wetlands where necessary.* The trail alignment should use the existing Juniper Drive easement. The proposed trail crosses HLB land zoned gR-3. If the trail is constructed before parcels 6-010 and/or 6-040 are developed the trail and associated easement will be relocated when the HLB parcels are subdivided and developed. *A bridge is required to cross California Creek (See B2).

T6 Barren Avenue to Alyeska Highway
Provide a trail connection from the neighborhoods of the middle valley to town center. This proposed trail connection would provide a more direct trail connection to town center from the Alyeska Basin Subdivision by shortening the amount of time pedestrians and trail users would have to travel on roads. Avoid wetlands when possible. Boardwalk structures can be used where staying out of wetlands is not feasible. This trail should be kept outside of natural area 1 (NA1) using HLB land zoned GOS and/or GCR-1. Designed to Class 3 bicycle design parameters. Trail would tie into existing trails before crossing the highway.

T7 Crow Creek Road to Beaver Pond Trail
This proposed trail is a Class 3 trail using bicycle design parameters. The purpose of this trail is to provide a separated "down-route" for bikers using mountain bike area 34. Beaver Pond Trail would be the up route. The intention is not to promote this trail with a trailhead at Crow Creek Road, but rather to direct bike traffic leaving mountain bike area 3 (MB3), separating user groups and mitigating user conflict by removing downhill bike traffic moving at a higher speed from other trail users on Beaver Pond Trail. There is an existing ROW easement in the neighborhood that should be utilized in the construction of the southernmost portion of this trail. The trail may cross the very southern tip of the Girdwood cemetery parcel. If the trail is constructed before parcel 6-010, zoned gR-3 is developed, the trail and associated easement will be relocated when/if the HLB parcel is subdivided and developed. This trail is identified as the Village Intertie in the Crow Creek Neighborhood Land Use Study.

T8 Toe Slope Trail - California Creek to Iditarod
This trail is shown on many trail plans and forms a natural connection between the Beaver Pond Trail on the south, and the Iditarod on the north crossing Ragged Top Trail on the way. The route traverses area of old growth rainforest, open marshes, small stream courses and waterfalls. This trail connection would provide an important link in the Circum-Valley Loop. Trail would be constructed to Class 2 Hiking design parameters. The proposed route

traverses HLB lands zoned both GOS and gR-3. If the trail is constructed before parcel 6-010, zoned gR-3 is developed, the trail and associated easement will be relocated when/if the HLB parcel is subdivided and developed. This trail is identified in the Crow Creek Neighborhood Land Use Study.

T9 Crow Creek Neighborhood Trails
This area on either side of Crow Creek Road between Beaver Pond Trailhead and Middle Iditarod Trailhead contains several trails that are referenced in the Crow Creek Neighborhood Land Use Plan: https://www.muni.org/Departments/hlb/Documents/CC_Land_Use_Plan_May_06_WEB.pdf
The trails referenced in the plan and included in this planning document are as follows:

- Crow Creek Byway – parallels the Crow Creek Road, provides pedestrian access along this corridor that will be diminished if the road becomes a higher speed, higher volume route. Ideally this route would be separated from the roadway, and built as part of the Crow Creek upgrade.
- Inter-meadow Trail – this route, also shown on several planning maps, connects through the Matrix unit to the Iditarod Trail to the north and the school to the south. This is a very picturesque area of timbered ridge tops, bedrock outcrops and open marshes, all with spectacular views of the upper Glacier Creek Valley. These same features create challenges for development in this area, so the trail may be limited to short trail connectors between residential streets.
- Tiny Creek and Hemlock Interties – these two interties would provide connections between the existing and proposed up-down valley routes. The Tiny Creek intertie takes advantage of a small stream corridor through big timber; the Hemlock intertie follows a low inter-marsh ridge with view sheds both up and down valley.
- The proposed trails are located on lands zoned GOS, gR-3, and gR-5. If the trails are constructed before HLB parcels 6-011, 6-016, and 6-017 are developed, the trails and associated easements will be relocated when/if the HLB parcels are subdivided and developed.

T10 Cross Valley Trail
Build a primitive trail connection to ensure the connectivity of Stumpy's Summer Trail and avoid AK DOT&PF airport land. The trail should be constructed to Class 2 Hiking design parameters in the uplands.

T11 Arlberg Connection to Winner Creek Trail
As the Arlberg Trailhead becomes a more central access point to the trail system it is necessary to build an official connection between this trailhead and the Winner Creek Trail. There is a trailhead to Winner Creek on Alyeska Resort property, but access to Winner Creek should be provided from public land.

T12 Glacier Canyon Rim Trail
Proposed upland route between Stumpy's Summer Trail and the Glacier Canyon Rim between the southern portion and northern portion of Stumpy's Summer Trail. The proposed trail is a primitive, non-mechanized trail constructed to Class 2 Hiking design parameters. The trail would be unhardened as much as possible, however it could hardening is minimally allowed to avoid braiding of trails, resource damage, and to achieve trail sustainability if desired.

T13 Upper Valley Multi-Use Trail
This trail would provide an upland multi-use loop for the Upper Valley. It would border the east side of natural area 2 and provide a trail link connecting skiing, biking, and hiking routes with the Arlberg parking lot. Designed to Class 4 Skate Skiing Design Parameters for 2-way travel.

T14 Snowcat Trail Improvements
The snowcat trail was originally located and constructed not for sustainable trail use, but as a cut in vegetation for the snowcat to reach higher elevations in winter. Over time, the route has been used by trail users, not because the route is great, but because it is there. This project proposes identifying a sustainable route (both the tread surface and the grades) either within the snowcat cut or adjacent to it and hardening the tread. Improvements should be considered on both sides of Winner Creek Trail and built to Class 4 Bicycle Design Parameters. On the north side of Winner Creek a separate, down route for bikes should be constructed separate from the multi-use T13 and connecting MB3 to the bottom of the hill. This connection will separate faster and slower traffic minimizing user conflict.

Figure 9

The Girdwood Valley Trails Management Plan (GVTMP) provides management guidance for the classification, designed uses, and managed uses of existing trails in Girdwood. This plan (GTP) defines the class and uses for the proposed trails recommended in this plan.

NEW TRAILS:
PROPOSED TRAIL CLASSIFICATIONS, DESIGN PARAMETERS, DESIGNED USES, & MANAGED USES

PROJECT	TRAIL	TRAIL CLASS	TRAIL LENGTH (MI)	DESIGNATED USE	MANAGED USE	PROHIBITED USE
T1	Separated Grade Crossing: Railroad Bridge at Alyeska Hwy	4	0.25	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T2	Wagon Trail - Lower Danish Connection	2	1.1	Hiking	Hiking	Dogsled, Biking, Pack & Saddle
T3	Lower Valley Trail Loop Connection	3	0.9	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T4	Ruane Road Trail to Lower Iditarod	3	0.04	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T5	Beaver Pond to Lower Iditarod	3	0.6	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T6	Barren Avenue to Alyeska Hwy	3	0.14	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T7	Crow Creek Road to Beaver Pond Trail	3	0.42	Mountain Biking	Mountain Biking (down-route)	Dogsled, Pack & Saddle, Skijor
T8	Toe Slope Trail - California Creek to Iditarod	2	1.3	Hiking	Hiking	Dogsled, Biking, Pack & Saddle
T9	Crow Creek Neighborhood Trails	2-3	2.15	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T10	Cross Valley Trail	3	0.27	Hiking	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T11	Arlberg Connection to Winner Creek Trail	4	0.15	Hiking	Biking, Hiking	Dogsled, Pack & Saddle
T12	Glacier Canyon Rim Trail	2	1.52	Hiking	Hiking, Skiing	Dogsled, Biking, Pack & Saddle
T13	Upper Valley Multi-Use Trail	4	1.41	Skate Ski	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Pack & Saddle
T14	Snowcat Trail Improvements	4	1.21	Bicycle	Multi-use: Hiking, Biking, Cross Country Skiing	Skijor, Pack & Saddle
MB1, MB2, MB3	Single-Use, Purpose-Built Mountain Biking Trails	3	TBD	Mountain Biking	Mountain Biking	Dogsled, Pack & Saddle, Skijor

Trail Class: There are five Trail Classes, ranging from the least developed (Trail Class 1) to the most developed (Trail Class 5).

Design Parameters: Technical guidelines for the survey, design, construction, maintenance, and assessment of a trail based on its Designed Use and Trail Class. These parameters help trail developers by setting the design criteria to meet the trail's intended use.

Managed Use: Modes of travel that are actively managed and appropriate on a trail, based on its design and management. Additional uses may also be allowed, but the trail would not be specifically designed to accommodate that use.

Designed Use: Only one Designed Use is identified as the design driver for a trail— that use which has the most limiting design requirements. The seven designed uses found on Girdwood trails are:

a. Hiker/Pedestrian
b. Mountain Bike
c. Bicycle
d. XC Ski (Skate)
e. XC Ski (Classic/Diagonal)
f. Skijoring
g. Dog Sledding

SUMMARY:
TRAIL CLASSIFICATION & LENGTH TOTALS (MI) OF EXISTING & PROPOSED TRAILS

Class 1	20.75	23.09%
Class 2	25.17	28.01%
Class 3	17.75	19.75%
Class 4	10.87	12.09%
Class 5	15.3	17.03%
	89.84 miles	100%

This summary represents the total length of exisiting and proposed trails.

Bridge Projects (B)

B1 Glacier Creek Trail Bridge - Lower Valley
There is no safe and authorized crossing of Glacier Creek in the lower valley. A trail bridge at this location would create the opportunity for more loops in the lower valley. The bridge would also provide options for those who use the Depot Trailhead or Glacier Ranger District Parking Lot to connect to the Virgin Creek Natural Area and primitive trails on the east side of Glacier Creek. Bridge should be wide enough to accommodate adjacent trails. If the Alaska Railroad pursues a bridge repair or replacement project where the railroad crosses Glacier and California Creeks at the northeast corner of Oldtown, consider a coordinated effort in partnership with the Railroad to include a pedestrian element. ***Additional UDC review required.***

B2 California Creek
Construct a pedestrian trail bridge across California Creek as part of the T5 trail project connecting Beaver Pond Trail to the Lower Iditarod Trail. The trail bridge will need to accommodate Class 3 Biking Design parameters.

B3 Virgin Creek Bridge
Identify a location for a trail bridge to cross Virgin Creek. A bridge would provide a safe, legal, and sustainable connection between lower Virgin Creek and the Wagon Trail and complete a loop in the lower Valley. This project must be pursued in concert with the Virgin Creek Access Study (TH4).

B4 Improve Connectivity at Glacier Creek Bridge at Alyeska Highway
This project will likely not result in the construction of a bridge; however a pedestrian circulation analysis should be completed to make recommendations on how to improve accessibility, connectivity, safety, and circulation across and underneath the Alyeska Highway connecting neighborhoods with the Town Center, school, and other community facilities, the Upper and Lower Iditarod. ***Additional UDC review required.***

B5 Glacier Greek Trail Bridge – Middle Valley – (north of airstrip)
A pedestrian bridge at this location to cross Glacier Creek would improve connectivity of the entire trail system, creating opportunities for more looping trail experiences. A bridge here would connect future neighborhoods to Upper Valley Trails. In coordination with this project, trails should be constructed on either side of the proposed bridge connecting the Iditarod Trail to Stumpy's Summer Trail. These trails should be built to the trail classification of the connecting trails. Finally, a bridge in this location provides legal access to trails by avoiding AK DOT&PF Airport property. ***Additional UDC review required.***

B6 Glacier Creek Trail Bridge – Upper Valley Hand Tram
The Hand Tram provides the opportunity for trail users to cross Glacier Creek in the upper valley, however on many summer days, the demand for use highly exceeds capacity creating a long wait. A pedestrian bridge in this location would remove the connectivity barrier creating a more accessible, multi-use trail experience. Bridge should be wide enough to accommodate adjacent trails. ***Additional UDC review required.***

Trailheads (TH)

TH 1 Girdwood Depot Trailhead Upgrades
Pursue an official parking agreement with the Alaska Railroad to provide authorized trail parking in this location. Install trailhead, wayfinding, and informational signage as authorized. Provide a vaulted restroom. This trailhead can successfully accommodate Girdwood visitors who want access to lower valley trails and can be a great future trailhead for the Virgin Creek Natural Area when an authorized crossing of Glacier Creek is constructed.

TH 2 Glacier Ranger District Trailhead
Pursue an official parking agreement with the USFS to provide authorized trail parking in this location. Install trailhead, wayfinding, and informational signage as authorized. This is a great opportunity to highlight coordination and collaboration for a community-based trail system.

TH 3 Lower Valley Trailhead
Build a new trailhead on HLB land east of the Alyeska Highway to access lower valley trails via the Lower Iditarod Trail. The trailhead should have the capacity for 8-10 vehicles, include a kiosk, sanitation, and other trailhead amenities. *Additional UDC review may be required.

TH 4 Virgin Creek Falls Access Study
A combination of trailhead and circulation improvements are needed in this location to achieve the following:

- Reduce traffic impacts to the neighborhood streets.
- Improve connectivity between Lower Virgin Creek and Upper Virgin Creek Trails
- A separate Virgin Creek Trailhead and trail circulation study is needed to recommend a range of alternatives for resolving trail, traffic, parking, and trailhead conflicts in the neighborhood. ***Additional UDC review required.***

TH 5 Karolius Trailhead
Build a new trailhead on HLB land zoned GCR-1 to service the east side of Glacier Creek. The trailhead should have capacity for 24 vehicles and include a kiosk, sanitation, and other trailhead amenities. This parking area will provide access to the trail and natural space system via the Lower Iditarod Trail and will also be under consideration for other uses in the future and are likely to require parking.

TH 6 Girdwood Town Center Trailhead Improvements – with restroom
This trailhead exists but is underutilized. Provide signage, wayfinding, trailhead amenities, and a restroom to improve the use and functionality of this trailhead adding useful capacity and relieving pressure from other trailheads.

TH 7 Moose Meadows Trailhead Improvements
Expand the Moose Meadows Trailhead to accommodate forty (40) vehicles. Reorganize and define parking to efficiently use the space. Add other trailhead amenities including informational and wayfinding signage.

TH 8 Beaver Pond Trailhead
Implementing other simple trailhead improvements (Town Square, Anchorage School District, Girdwood PreK-8 School Parking Agreement, improved signage and wayfinding), may reduce the demand for on-street parking in this location. As required, coordinate with AK DOT&PF to investigate the feasibility of an official trailhead in this location.

TH 9 Girdwood PreK-8 School Parking – Parking Agreement
Pursue an official parking agreement with Girdwood PreK-8 School to provide authorized trail parking in this location. Install trailhead, wayfinding, and informational signage as authorized.

TH 10 Alyeska Resort Parking Agreement
Pursue an official parking agreement with Alyeska to provide authorized trail parking in this location. Install trailhead, wayfinding, and informational signage as authorized.

TH 11 Arlberg Trailhead Expansion
Coordinate with neighboring landowners to expand the Arlberg Trailhead parking area to the east. Include a vaulted restroom. Any resulting trailhead construction will likely need additional UDC approval separate from this plan approval. ***Additional UDC review required.***

TH 12 Middle Iditarod
Develop official trailhead parking in this location to accommodate 10-15 vehicles including signage, wayfinding, and other trailhead amenities. ***Additional UDC review may be required.***

TH 13 Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead
Expand the existing Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead to accommodate another 20+ vehicles. After a trail bridge (B5) is constructed across Glacier Creek there will be an alternate access route for trail users to access the Upper Valley east of Glacier Creek more easily. Expansion of the Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead will disperse trailhead access to the Upper Valley and relieve some pressure from the Arlberg Trailhead. *Additional UDC review may be required.

Proposed Natural Spaces (NS)

NS1 Virgin Creek Natural Space
Create a natural space in the Virgin Creek area that is kept in its primitive natural state. Allowed uses include primitive, non-mechanized recreation activities like trail walking, running, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, foraging, wildlife viewing, education, solitude, and meditation. Trails in the area should be kept to Class 1 and Class 2 Design Parameters. Mechanized trail use is not authorized. Trail boardwalk or bridge structures are authorized to avoid wetlands and streams. Signage should be kept to a minimum. Parking for this level of development would be required either via TH9, TH10, or TH2.

Stumpy's Natural Space

Create a natural space in the Stumpy's trail system meadows and forest area that is kept in its primitive natural state. Allowed uses include primitive, non-mechanized recreation activities like trail walking, running, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, foraging, wildlife viewing, education, solitude, and meditation. Trails in the area should be built to Class 1 and Class 2 Design Parameters. Mechanized trail use is not authorized. Trail boardwalk or bridge structures are authorized to avoid wetlands and streams. Signage should be kept to a minimum.

Winner Creek Natural Space

Create a natural space in the Winner Creek area that is kept in its primitive natural state. Allowed uses include primitive, non-mechanized recreation activities like trail walking, running, hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, orienteering, foraging, wildlife viewing, education, solitude, and meditation. Trails in the area should be built to Class 1 and Class 2 Design Parameters. Mechanized trail use is not authorized. Trail boardwalk or bridge structures are authorized to avoid wetlands and streams. Signage should be kept to a minimum.

Proposed Mountain Bike Areas (MB)

Beaver Pond

Provide purpose-built mountain biking flow trails (Class 2-3 bicycle design parameters) to the west of Abe's trail in the area between the California Creek drainages. This mountain bike area would alleviate user conflicts around the Abe's Trail/Beaver Pond/California Creek area. Beaver Pond Trail (out of trailhead 20) and a new built uptrack would be up routes for bicycle traffic and the proposed Crow Creek Road to Beaver Pond Trail would be the down route. Design intent is to mitigate user conflict in this area to the greatest extent possible by providing purpose-built mountain biking trails and removing faster-speed bicycle traffic from multi-use trails built for hiking. Trailhead access for this area would be located at Town Center, the improved Beaver Pond Trailhead, or Four Valleys Community School.

Near the Nordic 5K

Provide purpose-built mountain biking flow trails (Class 2-3 bicycle design parameters) within and around the 5K Nordic Ski Loop. Trailhead access to the area is from the Arlberg Trailhead, Alyeska Resort for resort guests, Alyeska Resort for the general public if a parking agreement is in place, and the Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead once the bridge over Glacier Creek at the Hand Tram is in place. Additional trails in MB1 will not be authorized until a parking agreement is in place, Arlberg is expanded, or another parking solution is identified.

End of the Snowcat Trail

Provide purpose-built mountain biking flow trails (Class 2-3 bicycle design parameters). This area will likely need to be coordinated and authorized by multiple landowners (HLB and DNR). As mentioned in Project T14, designate a down route for biking to parallel the Snowcat Trail and separate walkers and hikers from faster downhill biking traffic. The down route should be located between NA3 and T14. Trailhead access to the area is from the Arlberg Trailhead, Alyeska Resort for resort guests, Alyeska Resort for the general public if a parking agreement is in place, and the Winner Creek Gorge Trailhead once the bridge over Glacier Creek at the Hand Tram is in place.

Special Projects (SP)

SP1: Areawide Wayfinding

Develop a comprehensive and standardized wayfinding and informational system that improves the understanding of and access to trails and natural spaces in Girdwood. The system should be simple, flexible, sustainable, fundable, represent community identity, and be implementable across multiple land ownerships.

SP 2: Girdwood Valley Circum-Valley Loop

The existing and proposed trails that make up the route of the Girdwood Valley Circum-Valley Loop are described elsewhere; however it is important to highlight the larger context of this idea. This loop trail is a key connector to the entire Valley connecting parks, roads, neighborhoods, and other community facilities. Everyone has access and everyone can navigate around the Valley by trail. Trail users can complete one segment or they can go big and complete the whole thing. This concept presents an exciting opportunity as a destination trail experience.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The Girdwood Trail Plan presents a proposed trail and natural space network along with a list of projects that are endorsed by the Girdwood Community. The plan will be implemented over the next 15-20 years by a variety of landowners and trail/natural space managers including, but not limited to, the Municipality of Anchorage, Chugach State Park, US Forest Service, Girdwood Trails Committee, Girdwood Nordic Ski Club, Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance, GirdWild, Chugach Powder Guides, and Alyeska Resort.

The size and complexity of every project in this plan is different, however, all projects are required to complete the following steps:

For a detailed list of the project approval process, see page 15 of this plan or the GVTMP.

However, many of the projects identified in this plan will not require additional review and approval by the Urban Design Commission or the Planning and Zoning Commission. The review and approval process for trails in Title 21 (Sec. 21.03.190 C 2.b.) combined with the community process of developing and adopting a trail master plan provided the necessary review for many projects. Please reference the Proposed Trail and Natural Space Network project descriptions on pages 36 – 41 to identify the projects requiring additional Urban Design Commission or Planning and Zoning Commission approvals.

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