

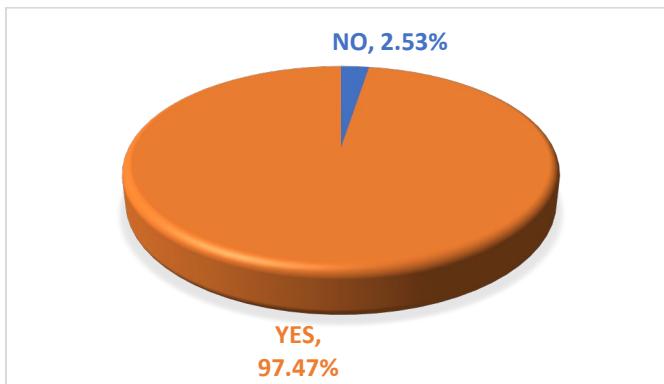
Girdwood Trails Master Plan Public Meeting Activities Summary

November 19, 2020

VALUES

Access, Health & Well-Being, Experience, Community Identity, Explore & Learn, Natural World, Stewardship, Diversity & Inclusivity

QUESTION: Do these values align with your values for Girdwood trails and natural spaces?



Row Labels	Percentage	Responses
NO	2.53%	2
YES	97.47%	77
Grand Total	100.00%	79

QUESTION: If you selected NO, what values do not align with your values for Girdwood trails and natural spaces?

ANSWER:

ACCESS (2)
EXPERIENCE (2)
NATURAL WOLD (3)
COMMUNITY IDENTITY (2)
HEALTH & WELL BEING (1)
EXPLORE & LEARN (1)
DIVERSITY & INCLUSIVITY (1)

QUESTION: What values do you think are missing?

ANSWERS:

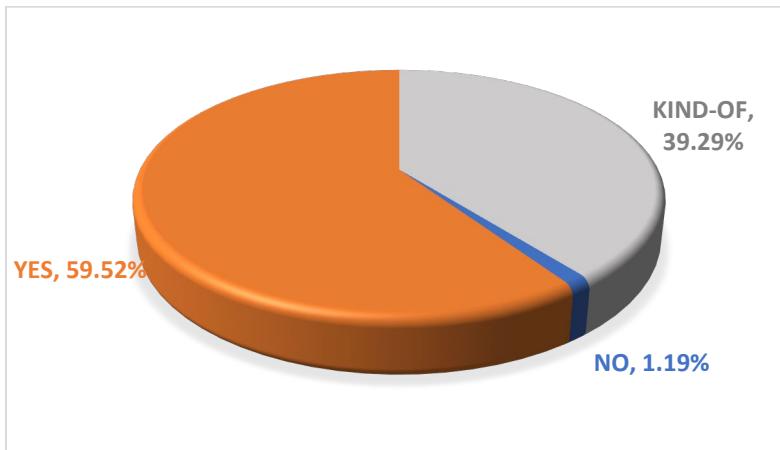
Recreation
Economic Development
Eco-Tourism
Social Connections
Fun
Forward-Looking
Transportation

Competitive Sport
Community Involvement
Connectivity
Cultural & Indigenous Heritage
Adventure

VISION

Girdwood aspires to create an interconnected, diverse, beautiful system of trails and natural spaces that well-serve the community.

QUESTION: Does this vision statement align with your vision for Girdwood trails and natural spaces?



Row Labels	Responses	Percentage
KIND-OF	33	39.29%
NO	1	1.19%
YES	50	59.52%
Grand Total	84	100.00%

QUESTION: Is there anything in the draft vision statement that you would like to change or add? What do you feel is missing?

ANSWERS:

ADD/MISSING
Abundance
Multi use
Wildlife & Visitors
ADD “and its guests”
ADD “community and visitors”
add abundance of trail opportunities
Economic Development is missing
Needs to be more about fun, recreation, and economic development
To be a premier outdoor recreation location in south-central Alaska

Economic component is missing.

Sustainable

Balance among our natural values and our outdoor recreation economy.

Multiple comments about balancing trail development with the natural setting.

Designate natural spaces

Desire for growth of the trail system

Maintainable

Multiple comments about thinking big and bold.

CHANGE

The word beautiful it is too subjective and not measurable

"something for everyone" could be more explicit

'Aspires' needs to go.

I like 'Aspires'

More action-oriented and forward looking.

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: DEVELOP

Build sustainable trails using a common set of design principles with a clear project approval process.

GOAL 3: CONSERVE

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

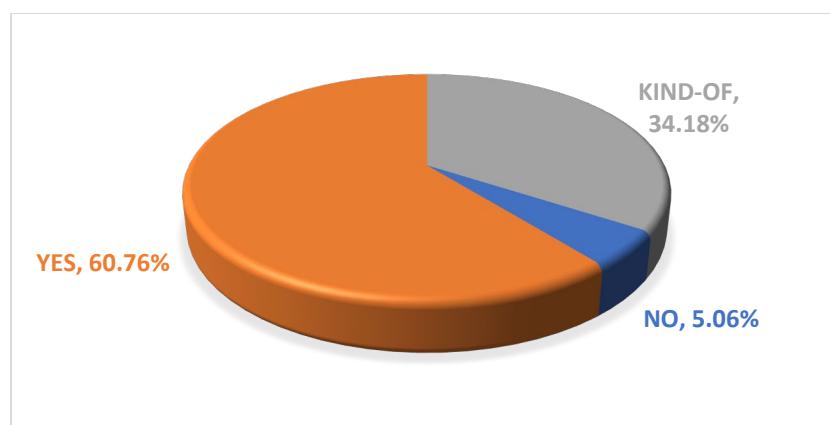
GOAL 4: MAINTAIN

Trails and natural spaces are maintained 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.

QUESTION: Do these goals align with your goals for Girdwood trails and natural spaces?



Row Labels	Percentage	Responses
KIND-OF	34.18%	27

NO	5.06%	4
YES	60.76%	52
Grand Total	100.00%	83

QUESTION: Is there anything in the draft goals that you would like to change or add? What do you feel is missing?

ANSWERS:

Change develop to build – many agree with this, some disagree and like “develop”.

Promote economic development

These are tactics to bigger visionary goals

Plans and processes are important, but each of those words appear 3 times in multiple goals. I think one goal should be good planning and clear processes, and the others should focus more clearly on our desired objectives. more good trails

2/develop: should include designating natural spaces. they aren't just for conservation. Also for recreation - see many examples around the world.

“Common set of design principles” was confusing to many.

Goal 3: wary of "designating" as being restrictive to future maintenance or improvement

Goal 6: Attract

Goal 6: Shred

Goal: Girdwood should have the best trail system in Alaska.

Maintain: Regular maintenance for safety.

Would like to see trails that help youth progress their skills.

Add protect ecosystem.

Girdwood Trails Plan Interactive Map General Trends

December 29, 2020

The Girdwood Trail Plan interactive map was live for stakeholders to be able to add comments from November 19, 2020 through December 21, 2020. Over the course of the participation period there were almost 500 comments from a range of stakeholders. That's a lot of participation! With over 24 pages of comments, a summary of trends is below. As you review, please refer to the online map – you can no longer add features/comments to the map, but you can refer to it as a resource. Link: [interactive map](#)

Designate Natural Spaces

The following areas were identified by participants as areas to designate as a natural area:

- Wagon Trail/Lower Iditarod/Virgin Creek, East of Glacier Creek
- HLB Land west of Glacier Creek: Lower Iditarod Area between Ruane and California Creek Park
- The flats along Turnagain Arm at the mouth of Glacier Creek – boardwalks/viewing platforms
- HLB Land surrounding portions Beaver Pond Trail
- Stumpy's between the Cat Trail over to Crow Creek Road
- North of Winner Creek Trail, east of Glacier Creek

Purpose-Built Mountain Biking Areas

There were multiple areas identified on the map specific to mountain biking trails.

- Single-track flow route above Beaver Pond Trail
- Single-track trails between Abe's Trail and California Creek Trail
- Find a way to provide groomed winter biking opportunities without impacting the 5K
- Continue to develop mountain biking trails in the vicinity of the Nordic 5K
- Create a bike trail system to the north of and at the end of the Snowcat Trail (north of Winner Creek Trail spanning both sides of Glacier Creek)
- Pump Track/Bouldering Area near frisbee golf course

Improve/Add Trailheads

Overall, participants identified parking to be increased in some areas, more formalized in others.

- Improve Middle Iditarod Trailhead (not for camping)
- Improve/Expand parking at Moose Meadows
- Beaver Pond Trailhead Improvements
- Expand parking at Arlberg parking lot, including restrooms
- Shared parking agreement with Four Valleys Community School
- Add Trailhead at the end of Karolius
- Promote Girdwood Town Center as an access point to the trail system/major trailhead
- Improve Trailhead at the Train Depot
- New Trailhead at Seward Highway to access Wagon Trail/Natural Area
- Collaborate with the Glacier Ranger District for trailhead where Bird to Gird meets Alyeska Highway.

New Trails

- Connect California Creek and Ragged Top
- Connect from Arlberg Lot to Winner Creek Trail
- Multi-Use, all season trail suitable for families connecting Arlberg Lot with Winner Creek Trail.
- Glacier Creek Rim Trail
- Use existing ROW to connect Alyeska Highway to Beaver Pond and Lower Iditarod
- Circum-valley long trail
- Connect Lower Joe Danish and Wagon Trail
- Girdwood Upper Valley Trail (north of Winner Creek Trail)
- Multiple connections proposed to improve neighborhood access throughout town.
- Connect Barren Ave. to the Alyeska bike path

Trail Projects

- Install a bridge at the Hand Tram location
- Improve Ragged Top to be a sustainable trail
- Improve California Creek Trail
- Improved signage to protect natural resources and manage trail use
- Improve Winner Creek Trail viewshed where it is close to the Nordic 5K
- Better Connectivity: Connect Upper and Lower Iditarod under the Glacier Creek Bridge on the Alyeska Highway
- Biker/Hiker Conflict near Abe's Trail and California Creek Trail. Consider solutions to mitigate conflict.
- Improve Max's Trail

Conflict Point

Area of conflicting opinions near Virgin Creek Rd, Wagon Trail, Lower Virgin Creek Trail, and Timberline Dr concerning parking/access to the trails in this area.

DRAFT Existing Conditions Report
Girdwood Trails Plan
December 29, 2020

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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 to town.

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.

The Girdwood Trails Plan (GTP) is a concerted effort to bring the community together for a holistic conversation about the future of the trail and natural space system.

Purpose of the Existing Conditions Report

The Existing Conditions Report provides a summary of the current conditions, resources, and processes that prescribe trail use, management, and planning in Girdwood. Portions of this report will eventually be elements of the draft and final Girdwood Trail Plan. The information in this report should be used by staff and plan stakeholders to develop the recommendations and implementation actions in the Girdwood Trail Plan.

Planning Context

Policy & Code

Regulations for trail design and trail approval are established in MOA Code Title 21.

Trail Approvals

Under 21.03.190C, Trail Review, "trails are a basic part of the infrastructure of the municipality. They are used for transportation, for recreation and leisure, and also provide aesthetic and psychological benefits. Significant additions or revisions to the municipality's trail network benefit by oversight and concurrence in design decisions by the Urban Design Commission." Generally, trails that are major multi-use trails, trails more than one-half mile in length along streams or through community or special use areas, or trails that are likely to create significant public interest, will require review by the Urban Design Commission.

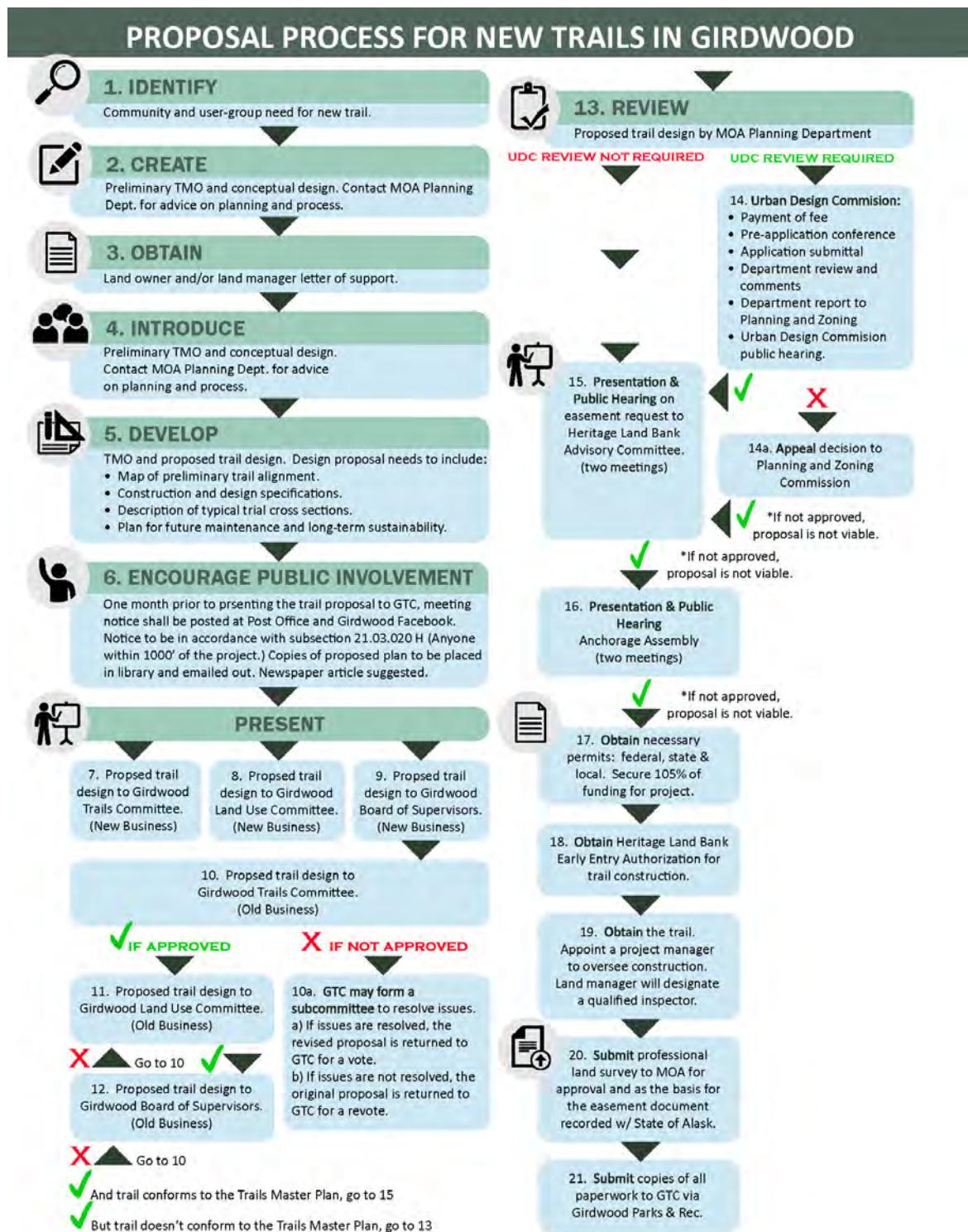
Trail Design, Sustainability, & Maintenance Policies

In order to ensure that trails are sustainable, maintainable, and used as intended, new trails and trail rehabilitation projects are required to:

1. Develop one or more Trail Management Objectives (TMO)
2. As defined in the Girdwood Valley Trail Management Plan (GVTMP), trails shall be consistent with the GVTMP Design Parameters; design criteria that specify technical guidelines for the survey, design, construction, maintenance, and assessment of a trail

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.



Previous and Concurrent Plans and Studies

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 should be considered as the Girdwood Trails Plan moves forward.

Plan/Study	Plan Description	Considerations for the Girdwood Trails Plan
Girdwood Area Plan	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.
Girdwood Valley Trails Management Plan	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	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	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	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).

Girdwood South Townsite Master Plan	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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	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.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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	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 land-owner in the Girdwood Valley, continual coordination between the community and HLB to implement both HLB's and the community's goals is required.

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 the 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 trail and natural space resources.

Population

Early on the populations of the Girdwood Valley were 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 the resident population.

Historical Population of Girdwood 1950 - 2015

Year	Population	Change (%)
2015	2,658	3.4
2010	2,570	22.9
2000	2,091	71.3
1990	1221	111.6
1980	577	300.7
1970	144	128.6
1960	63	-20.3
1950	79	

Source: American FactFinder

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 local 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 Chugach State Park land, hosts popular summer trails that are accessible to the public during the summer months.

Although the planning analysis of trails in the valley will include trails on all lands, the resulting Girdwood Trails Plan will only have 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.

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 an expanded trail and natural space network 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. Trail development 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 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.

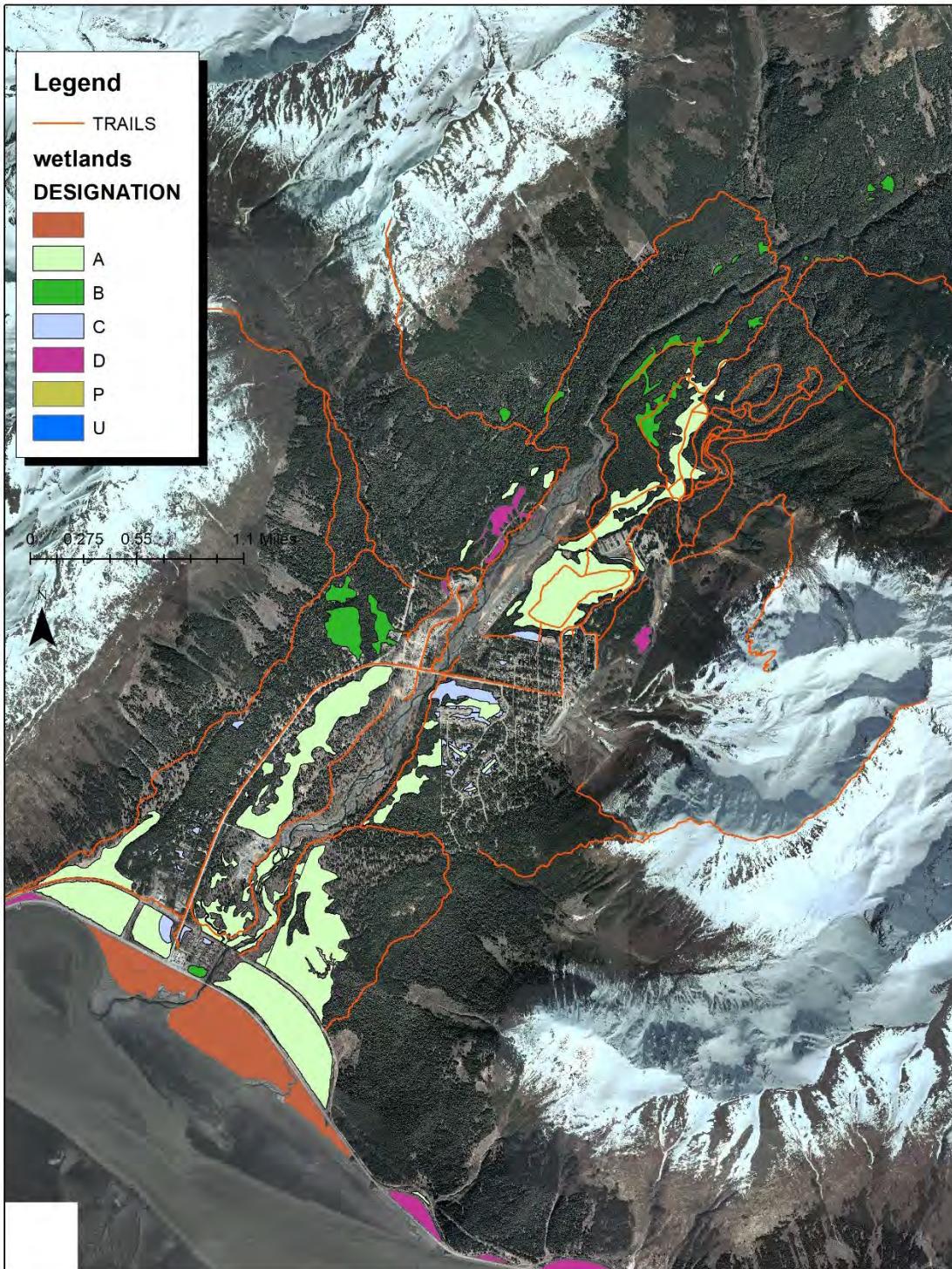
[Existing Physical Conditions](#)

The Girdwood Valley is surrounded by public land on three sides and Turnagain Arm of Cook Inlet on the other. 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

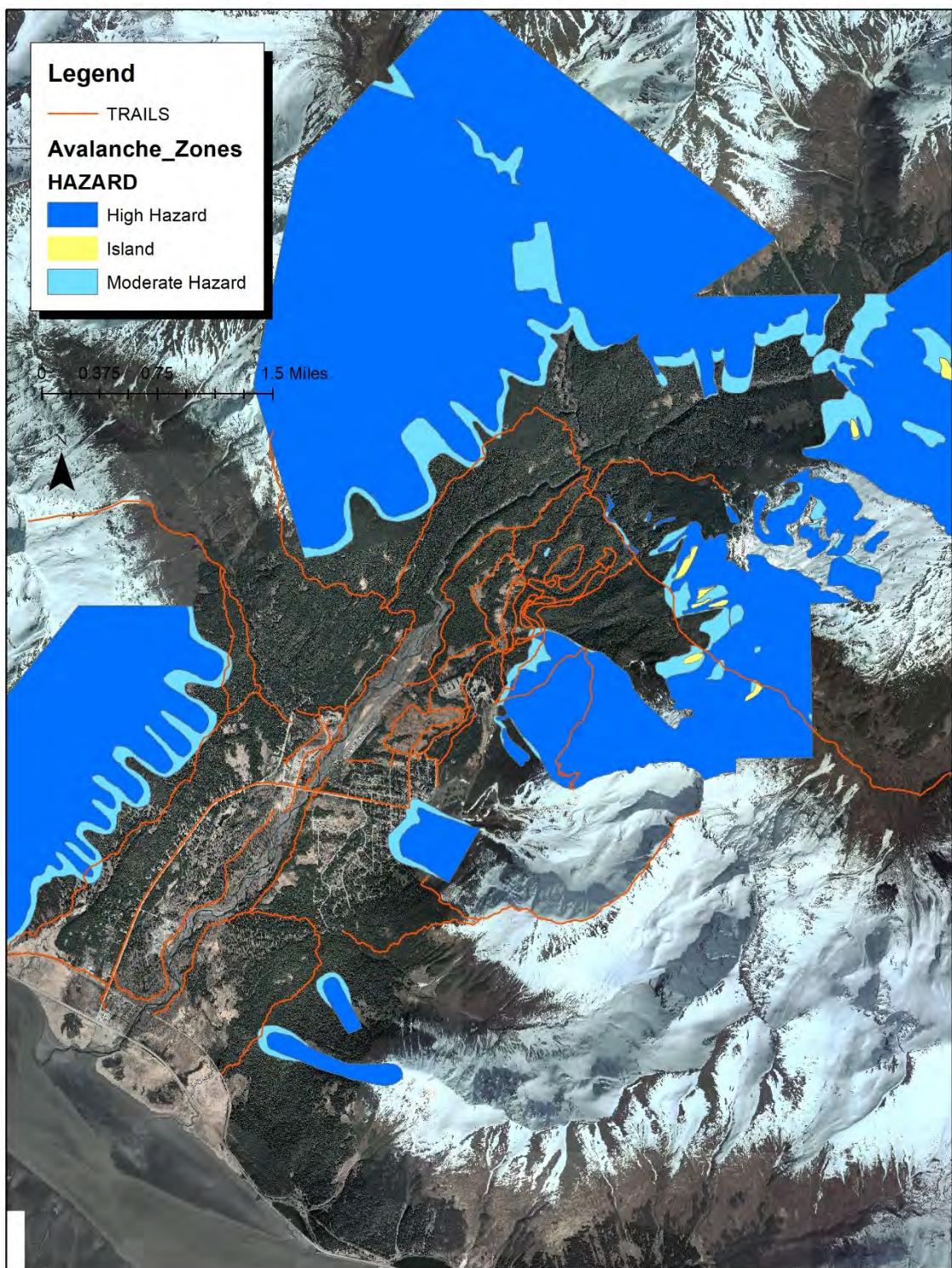
While natural beauty and opportunity for recreation are abundant in Girdwood, there are some physical constraints to consider for trails and natural spaces. The organic soils, wetlands, avalanche zones, and

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).



Wetland Designations in the Girdwood Valley

Source, MOA GIS



Girdwood Valley Avalanche Hazards
Source, MOA GIS

Existing Trails

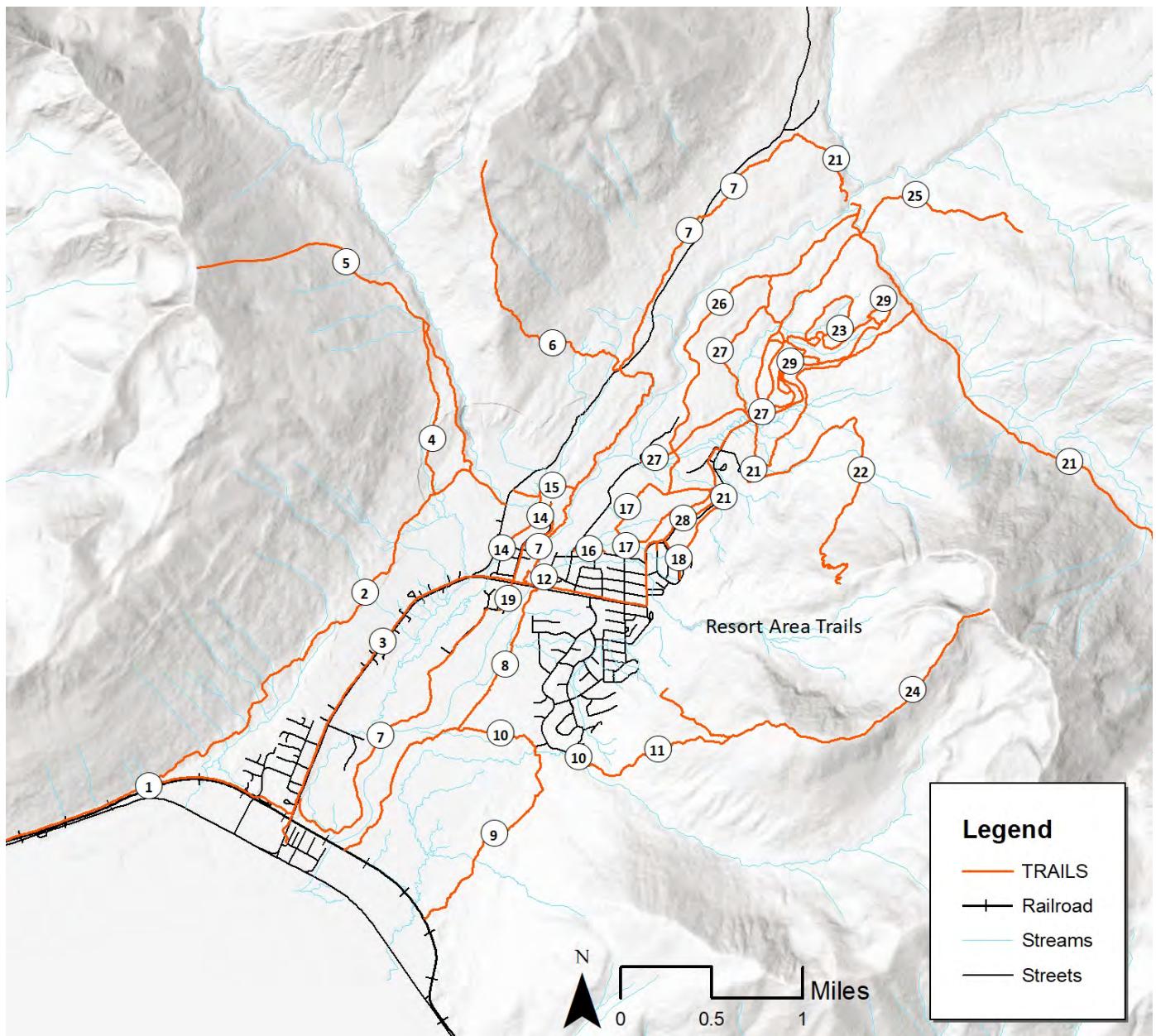
The GVTMP identifies more than 30 individual trails within the Girdwood Valley. The trails make up more than 75 miles winding through the Girdwood Valley and up surrounding ridges (See existing trails map on page 11). Existing trails offer recreation opportunities for a variety of different uses. The 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.

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.

Trail Class 1 Minimally Developed	Trail Class 2 Moderately Developed	Trail Class 3 Developed	Trail Class 4 Highly Developed	Trail Class 5 Fully Developed
				

Existing Trails
(See Key on Page 11 for Trail Names)



KEY	TRAIL	Trail Length	Trail Classification
1	Bird to Gird Bike Trail	10	5
2	Beaver Pond Trail	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 Trail	4	1
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

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	100.00%

Girdwood Valley Trail Management Areas

For management purposes, the Girdwood Valley is divided into five areas. (See map on page 14)

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 connects the two portions of the Winner Creek Trail. All the groomed Nordic trails are in this management area as are many ungroomed multi-use 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.

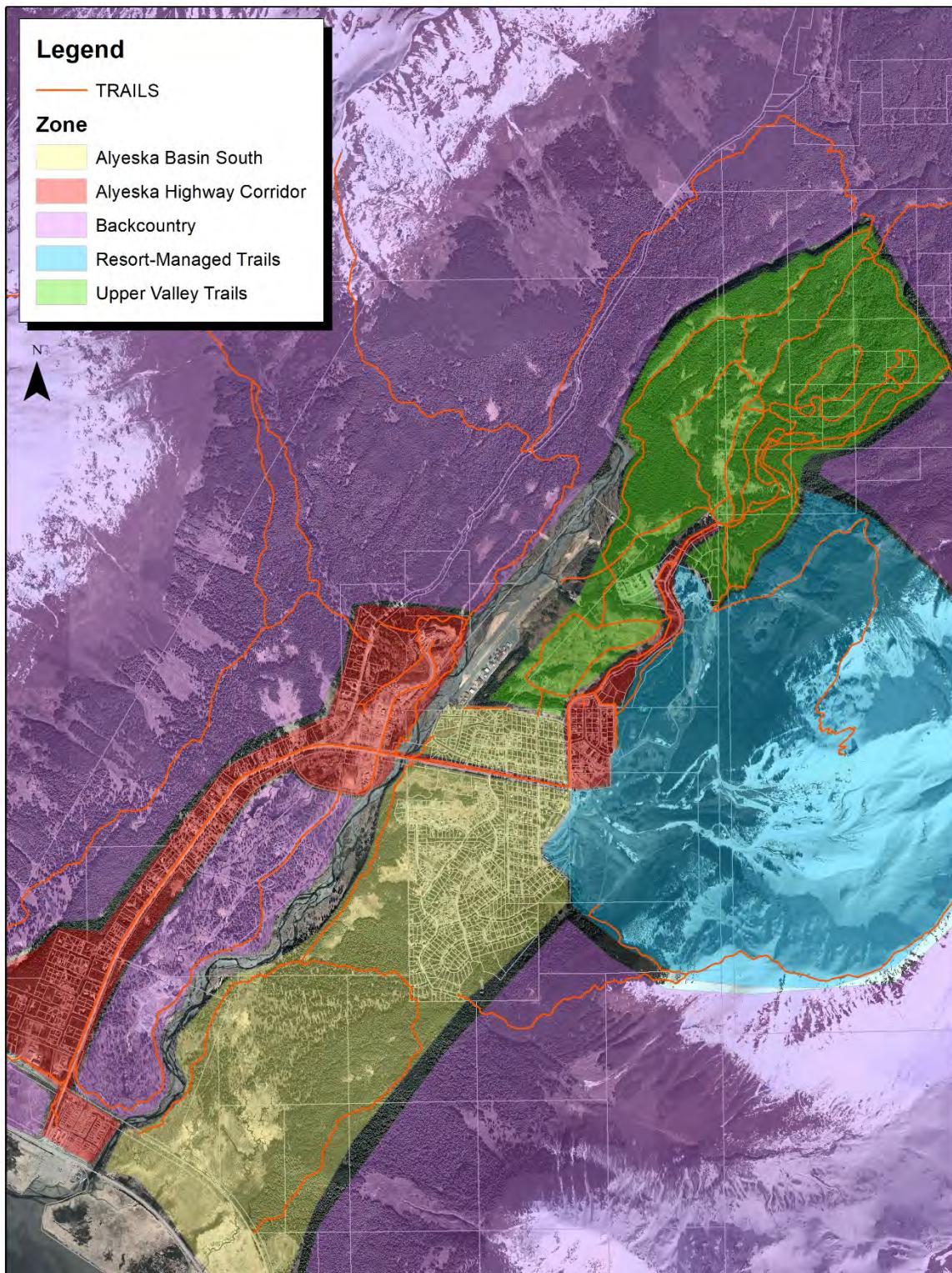
Alyeska Highway Corridor (AHC)

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 three 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. Tiny Creek trail is also located in this corridor.

Backcountry (BC)

The BC management area surrounds all the other trail management areas and contains the more remote rustic trails. This area stretches from 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. All 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.

Girdwood Valley Trail Management Areas



Seasonal Trail Management

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 hazard. 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.

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.

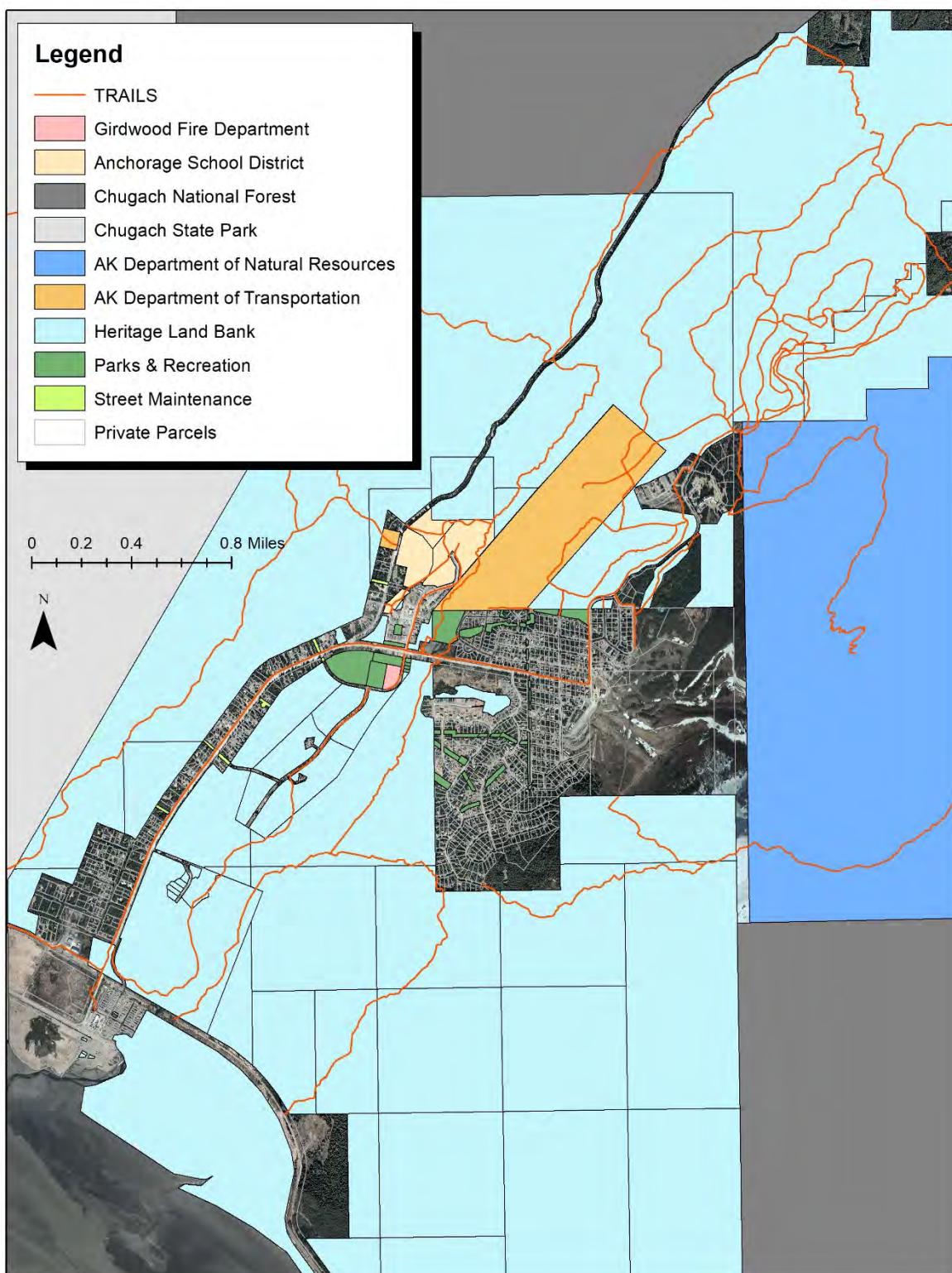
Biking – The Indian to Girdwood National Recreation Trail brings bicyclists into Girdwood along the Turnagain Arm and offers 13.2 miles of paved trail. There are additional paved multi-use trails that connect cyclists through Girdwood along the Alyeska Highway Corridor. There are limited amenities for bicyclists to encourage 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, 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 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.



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 unique and scenic, the Hand Tram cannot accommodate the current volume of traffic on Winner Creek Trail. The hand tram mechanical operation has not failed, however the increase in number of hikers on the improved Winner Creek Trail has resulted in accidents, including a fatality, involving the Hand Tram and has exposed the MOA 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 and Commercial aviation users as well as other trail users.

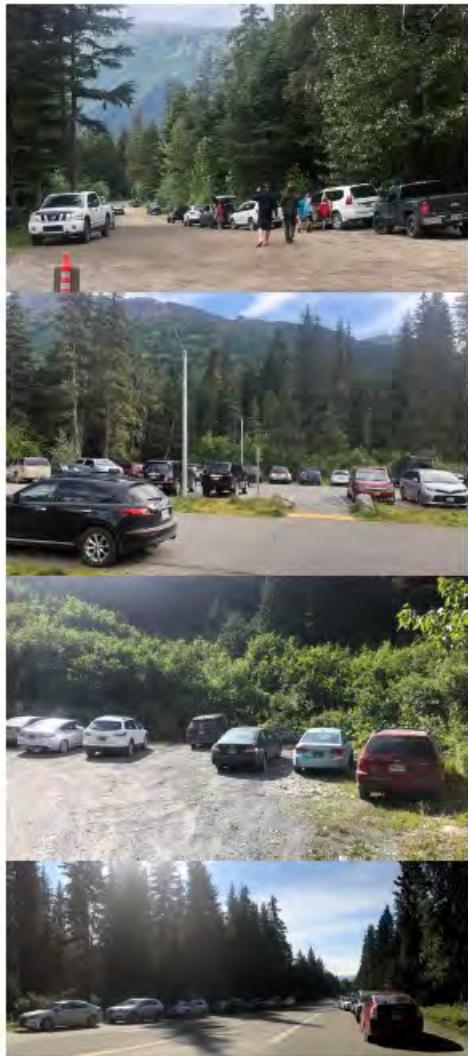
Most of Girdwood's trails provide parking along wide road shoulders and trail access is via informal trailheads. Even at trailheads where parking has been recently updated, current use has already outgrown the existing capacity.

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.

Existing Parking Lot & Trailhead Locations

(See photos and descriptions on next page)





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 Hand Tram
20 spaces + 1 accessible

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 issues for emergency and rescue situations as well as 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

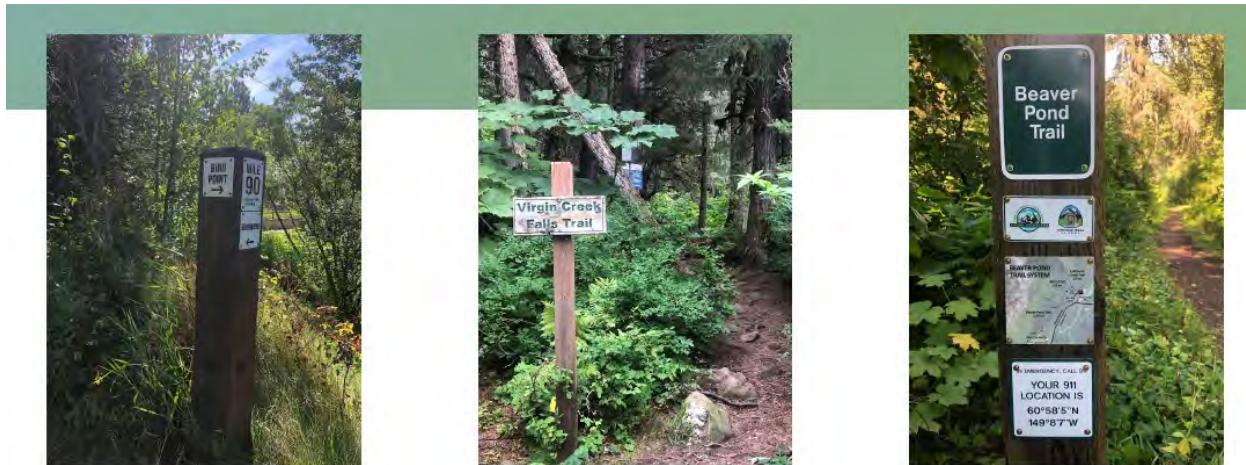
berms should be considered in the implementation of wayfinding to ensure wayfinding and trailhead markers are visible year-round. A cohesive and uniform wayfinding system should be developed and implemented.

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 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 small seasonal MOA Parks and Rec Staff, partner organizations and community volunteers. As the use of certain trails is changed or formalized, associated maintenance and available funding and capacity should be considered.

Community & Stakeholder Engagement

Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee

The Girdwood Trails Committee selected ten (10) individuals to sit on this Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee. The subcommittee generally meets on a monthly basis (first Tuesday of the month) to participate in and make recommendations to the trail planning process. As a subcommittee of Girdwood Board of Supervisors, the meetings fall under the Open Meetings Act. Since March 2020 the subcommittee has held seven (7) regular meetings and three (3) workshops. A compete record of meeting agendas, summaries, and meeting materials can be found by visiting the following website: <http://www.muni.org/departments/operations/streets/service/pages/girdwoodboardofsupervisors.aspx>

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 as well as each individual meeting summary can be found in the appendix.

Public Meeting

Public Meeting #1 was held on Thursday, November 19, 2020. The goal of this public meeting was to introduce the project to the broader community, share the draft values, vision, and goals, and launch an interactive online mapping application (described below). 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 public meeting will be held in March or April 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 in order 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 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>

Values, Vision, & Goals

Draft plan values, a vision statement, and plan goals were developed as a result of all the public, community, and stakeholder engagement activities described above.

Girdwood Trail Master 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:

Girdwood Trail Master Plan: Vision

PRESENTED AT PUBLIC MEETING:

Girdwood aspires to create an interconnected, diverse, beautiful system of trails and natural spaces that well-serve the community.

EDIT AFTER PUBLIC MEETING INPUT:

Girdwood's interconnected, diverse, sustainable system of multi-use trails and natural spaces well-serve the community and visitors. Girdwood balances the natural characteristics of the wild places in the Valley with the fun and adventurous trail-based recreation opportunities available to everyone.

Girdwood is a world-class outdoor recreation destination.

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: DEVELOP

Build sustainable trails using a common set of design principles with a clear project approval process.

GOAL 3: CONSERVE

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

GOAL 4: MAINTAIN

Trails and natural spaces are maintained 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.

Key Themes, Issues, & Emerging Concepts

The following key themes and issues are a summary of the existing condition analysis and community and stakeholder input to date.

Key Themes & Issues

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 the Girdwood trail system still seem to skew towards a more experienced outdoor recreator. There is a desire for trails that are accessible and safe for hikers, bikers, and skiers of all levels. Creating opportunities at all levels of difficulty is especially important as the number of youth and visitors engaging in recreation is on the rise.

Managing Allowed Uses

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

Balance of Trail Classifications throughout the System

There is significant diversity in the experience that each trail user wishes to have when using the Girdwood trail system. In order 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 pristine wilderness 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

While many are excited about the prospect of new trails and expansion of allowed uses, there is 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 addressed eventually to create the desired valley-wide connectivity. There is interest in filling in gaps to create out and back loops.

Creating connectivity among the trail system would create a more cohesive experience and additional opportunities to travel through Girdwood. With so many residents valuing the ability to travel without a car, a connected trail system utilizing the 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.

Emerging Trail Planning Concepts & Projects

Circum-Valley Long Trail
Virgin Creek Primitive Area
Stumpy's Primitive Area

Upper Valley Multi-Use Loop (below Winner Creek Trail)
Glacier Creek Canyon Rim Trail
Single-Use, Purpose Built Mountain Bike Park
Hand Tram Replacement – Trail Bridge
Virgin Creek Trailhead Improvements
Wagon Trail Access – Trailhead
Moose Meadow Parking Expansion
Arlberg Parking Area Expansion
Bird to Gird @ Alyeska Highway Trail: Trailhead Improvements & Amenities
Areawide Signage & Wayfinding Plan
Beaver Pond Trailhead Upgrades
Glacier Creek – Another Crossing?
Timberline Drive Pedestrian Improvements
Ongoing Maintenance, Tread, and Drainage Improvements: Beaver Pond, Winner Creek, Max's Mountain, Iditarod Trail
Lower Iditarod Trailhead parking area Expansion on Karolius

FIRST DRAFT Girdwood Trail Plan Map – 12.30.2020

New Trails

1. Wagon Trail – Lower Danish Connection
2. Lower Danish Extension out to Seward Highway
3. East side of Alyeska Highway connecting Glacier Ranger District to Lower Iditarod
4. Beaver Pond to Lower Iditarod
5. Crow Creek Road to California Creek Trail
6. Barren to Alyeska Highway
7. Lower Virgin Creek to Upper Virgin Creek
8. Glacier Canyon Rim Trail
9. California Creek to Ragged Top
10. Upper Valley Multi-Use Trail
11. Trail Connection from Water Treatment Plan to Lower Iditarod
12. Separated Grade Crossing: RR Bridge @ Alyeska Highway
13. Improve the Snowcat Trail for Summer Access above Winner Creek

Other Trail Projects

14. Glacier Creek Trail Bridge - Lower Valley ? (not on map)
15. Glacier Creek Trail Bridge - Hand Tram
16. Improve Connectivity at Glacier Creek Bridge at Alyeska Highway

New Trailheads

17. Virgin Creek Natural Area Trailhead along Seward Highway (2 Ideas)

Expanded/Upgraded Trailheads

18. Karolius Trailhead
19. Girdwood Town Center Trailhead – with restroom
20. Beaver Pond Trailhead
21. Virgin Creek Falls
22. Moose Meadows Trailhead
23. Arlberg Trailhead – with restroom
24. Middle Iditarod

Parking/Trailhead Upgrades and/or Agreements

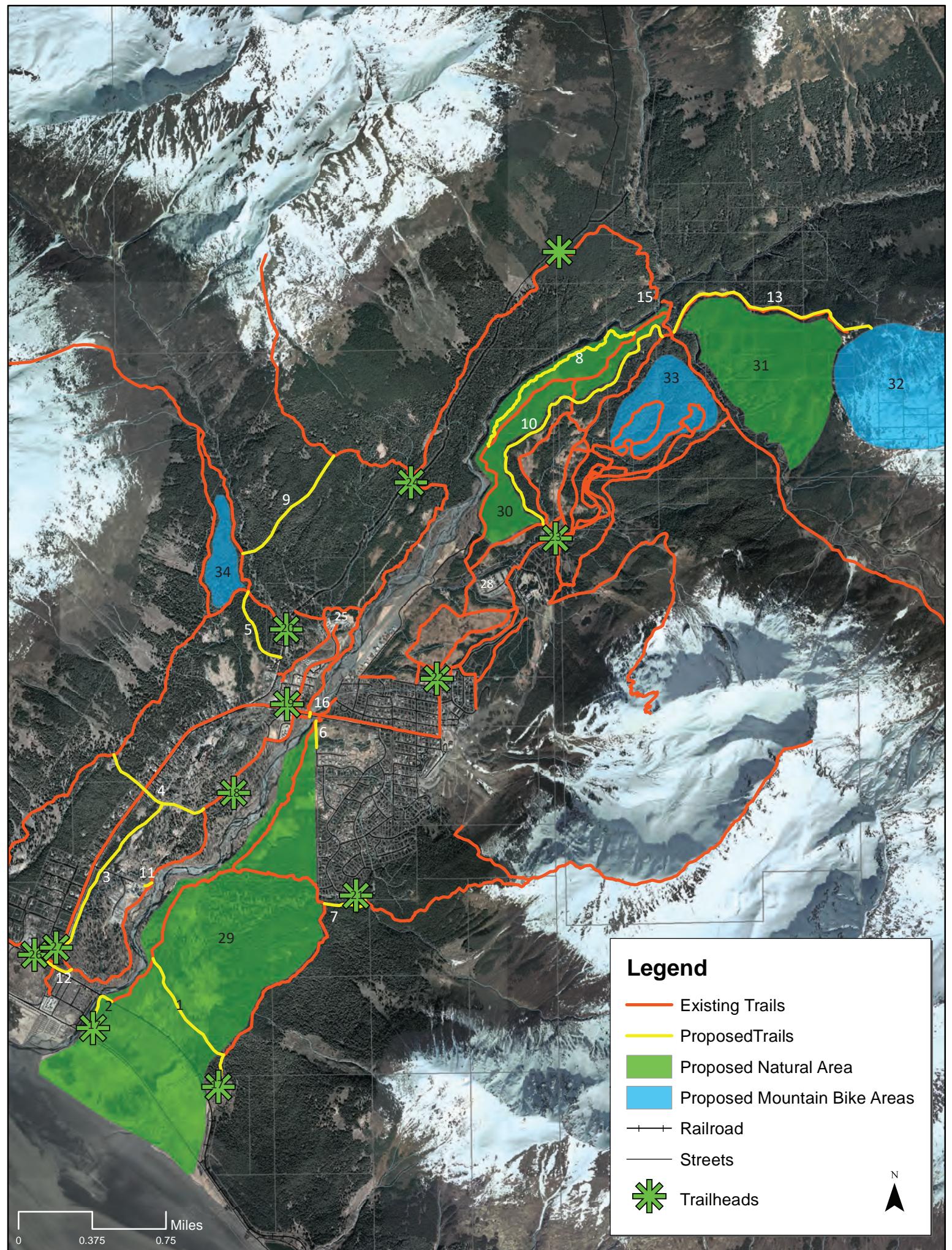
25. Four Valleys Community School Parking
26. Girdwood Depot Trailhead Upgrades – with restroom
27. Glacier Ranger District
28. Alyeska Resort

Proposed Natural Areas

29. Virgin Creek Natural Area
30. Stumpy's Natural Area
31. Winner Creek Natural Area

Proposed Mountain Bike Areas

32. End of the Snowcat Trail
33. Near the Nordic 5K
34. Abe's/California Creek



Girdwood Trails Plan

Plan Outline

December 29, 2020

- 1) Executive Summary
- 2) Introduction
 - a) Plan Purpose
 - b) Study Area
 - c) Values, Vision, & Goals
 - d) Planning Context
 - i) Regulation and Code
 - ii) Existing Trail Planning & Development Process
 - iii) Previous and Concurrent Plans and Studies
- 3) Existing Conditions
 - a) Existing Community Conditions
 - i) Characteristics of the Study Area
 - ii) Population
 - iii) Economy
 - iv) Governance
 - v) Girdwood Trail Managers: Recreation-Based Organizations & Volunteers
 - vi) Demand for Expanded Trail and Natural Space Network
 - b) Existing Physical Conditions
 - i) Environmental Conditions
 - ii) Existing Trails
 - iii) Existing Trail Use
 - iv) Land Ownership
 - v) Trail Easements
 - vi) Connectivity
 - vii) Access: Trailheads & Parking
 - viii) Amenities, Signage, & Wayfinding
 - ix) Trail Maintenance
 - c) Existing Conditions Summary: Key Findings & Themes
- 4) Community & Stakeholder Engagement
 - a) Community Engagement Summary
- 5) Plan Recommendations
 - a) Proposed Trail and Natural Space Network
 - b) Proposed Trail and Natural Space Projects
 - c) Implementation Strategy

Kelley, Kyle T.

From: brenden jbr-y.net <brenden@jbr-y.net>
Sent: Sunday, December 20, 2020 7:21 PM
To: Kelley, Kyle T.; Holly@HuddleAK.com
Subject: Comments for Girdwood Trails Plan

Hello,

I am submitting these comments for the work that the Girdwood Trails Plan Subcommittee and Facilitators are doing on that Plan. These comments can be registered as my own personal comments, or as a member of the Subcommittee contributing ideas to his fellow Subcommittee members, however they can be accepted at this juncture.

I have been one of the strongest advocates for this Plan. I'm very disappointed in significant aspects of how things have progressed, especially but not exclusively lately, and hope there can be a course-correction. I want to ask some of my fellow Subcommittee members who seem to have been trying to undermine the natural spaces part of our scope through various means (elimination, de-prioritization, redefinition, etc.) to please stop and be more community-minded; your values, preferences, and visions are not the only ones in our community. Natural space advocates are helping work on behalf of built-trails on this body, and it's reasonable to expect the reverse.

Regarding this Plan's progress moving forward, including some spatial recommendations, I want to highlight the following issues.

For those looking for a very 'high points' summary version, I believe that if we did JUST THREE KEY SIMPLE THINGS, almost all the problems related to trails conflict in this community would be avoided:

1. Designate/manage a couple areas in the community (i.e. within short walking distance) as wild/primitive natural spaces. I.e. for primitive trail experiences, non-mechanized experiences, habitat protection, spaces for quiet and solitude, orienteering, wildlife viewing, ungroomed skiing, etc. (The forests and meadows of the Virgin Creek and Stumpy's areas seem good and obvious choices to me.)
2. Adopt as a principle: You can't see one trail from another.
3. Adopt as a principle: All new trails in Girdwood will be built as low impact as possible. (This cannot be adopted in vague wishy-washy fashion, though - it needs hardline specifics, e.g. max trailbed/clearing width of 6/12 feet, little to no tree cutting, strict build oversight, etc.)

For a more detailed elaboration of my recommendations, I offer the following:

- **Share your community.** The idea that all our major user groups should get served within the community should be unobjectionable. This includes natural space advocates, who are simply asking for a couple cherished places to stay protected as they are, not for the whole valley to be re-wilded or something. Healthy communities strive to serve everyone, respect everyone's values, and meet everyone's well-being needs.

- **Have vision.** Can you imagine a Virgin Creek Natural Space like the Eagle River Nature Center and its surrounding lands, but done in a more Girdwood-style (i.e. wild and primitive), with well-kept class 2 trails and a yurt overlooking the meadows for nature education and viewing? Can you imagine a Stumpy's area for near-community backcountry ungroomed skiing and orienteering?
- **The trails spectrum is broader than class 3 to 5 trails. Additionally, natural spaces (including wild/primitive ones) include recreation.** Class 1 and 2 trails, and the experiences on them, are part of the trails spectrum, and fit within the idea of wild/primitive natural spaces. Trying to cut out such natural spaces from this plan also cuts out nearly half the trails spectrum. They are a vital part of having a diverse and inclusive trails experience within our community.
- **We are all united as trails advocates - we should be working from that base, not division.** That is our bigger consensus which underlies any other divisions. People who are wild/primitive natural space advocates are strident primitive trails advocates. Those who seem to only favor built-trails and only see class 3-5 built trails as legitimate or part of the scope of planning are dividing us, where a common thread could make us all work together so much more powerfully.
- **We can all work together.** I was one of only two people who stood up and spoke as a member of the public at GBOS to push this plan forward over its final local hurdle. I believe our community would be best served by a beautiful, diverse, interconnected system of trails and natural spaces. Every word of that phrase is key. We could all actually work together on this, and our community would benefit hugely.
- **A little less is a lot more.** If people could relent on their opposition to designating wild/primitive natural spaces in the community, and instead support them, it would open up everyone being able to move forward together. If we don't designate such natural spaces, there will always be acrimony over trails because many people in our community want such spaces protected, and because it's part of our community's lands identity, heritage, and well-being. If we do designate such spaces, however, built-trails advocates may get less of what they want (instead of 100%), but you've broadened the base to serving everyone and appealing to a broader base of visitors, and you reduce the acrimony over trails building. If for no other reason, built-trail advocates should think practically - isn't it better to get less than 100% without acrimony then completely fail in a hopeless attempt to get 100% of what you want?
- **We need high-level principles for trail-building.** If we adopted some high-level principles, we could avoid a huge amount of whatever remains in terms of trail acrimony once designating wild/primitive natural spaces is taken care of. I suggest 2 key ideas: 1) you shouldn't be able to see one trail from another; and 2) trails should be built as low-impact as possible, with little to no tree cutting, with a maximum tread/clearing width of something like 6ft/12ft., trails should not degrade the quality of the area they are being built through, etc.
- **We must acknowledge and learn from the mistakes of the Nordic 5K.** If that trail had not been built as poorly as it was, I reckon this entire plan and most of the trails acrimony in Girdwood would not exist. That the 5K problems are still not fixed makes things even worse. People who don't understand natural space concerns need to understand this issue. We are running out of natural spaces to make whoopsie-daisies in. That the Forest Loop proposal wasted the community's time for over three years simply reinforces the fears over the dangers of incompetence in trail building.
- **We do not know the future of Girdwood, but we know where we are now.** Bold estimates of drastically increased populations in Girdwood (thus justifying a massive trails complex everywhere) proved false before, and with climate change are probably just as likely as not to prove false in the future. We also do not know what future residents will want. But we do know that many residents now cherish natural spaces and live here because of them - and past behavior is a good indicator of the future, so it's a good guess that future residents will want that as well.
- **We must be climate-responsible.** There is no reason to believe that changes happening in the wetlands will not also happen in the forests with climate change; using climate change as an excuse to

build trails in the now-dryer areas isn't great logic. What is clear is that cutting down trees to build trails will contribute to climate change and does not show leadership in a community such as ours which is currently so dependent on climate stability.

- **Girdwood is not simply a ‘resort community.’** We are a resort community to many people, but also not that to many others. For many others, this is a community with a resort (which is different than a resort community). It is also a nature community, an arts community, and a festivals community, among other things. People need to stop telling others what their values are or should be. (I also personally find it a little creepy to promote what comes off to me at least as a ‘company town’ vibe and define a community in terms of what its richest person does.)
- **The Subcommittee must stop trying to push out natural spaces and come to grips with key facts.** It is a fact that natural spaces - even wild/primitive ones - accommodate recreation, and that conservation is a form of development. It is a fact that many people in our community want these, as the Area Plan work (among other things) shows, and with which we should be in harmony. It is a fact that wild/primitive natural spaces have always been a part of this Plan’s scope. It is a fact that HLB wants to see such natural space planning as part of this Plan. Natural spaces - as their advocates define them - must be a part of this plan. Cutting them out is simply out of order, and we have to stop wasting time and money and start working together. There are currently zero designated wild/primitive natural spaces in our community, which is what people have been calling for, and this must change.
- **We live in Girdwood, not Anchorage.** If people wanted a trails apocalypse (or bonanza, depending on your view), then they wouldn’t bother to drive down from Anchorage to Girdwood, because it’s all there. People come to live and visit Girdwood for many reasons, but key among them is that it is beautiful here. Dissecting the valley with trails, some of which will also likely be built poorly as past evidence indicates, will seriously degrade this quality of our community, and I am convinced that Girdwood’s natural character is really what lies at the base of our economy, identity, and well-being, and it should be item #1 we are always defending and stewarding.
- **I have four key spatial recommendations:**
 - We should identify in the Plan at least 2 distinct wild/primitive natural spaces within the community to remain as such for the future. I.e. areas which only have existing class 1 and 2 trails, are only for non-mechanized uses, perhaps a yurt for nature education and events, etc. as I’ve described before. The obvious first choice is the Virgin Creek area. For the Virgin Creek area not to be identified as one of them would be nonsensical to my mind. This area historically has huge community backing behind protecting it, it would be inappropriate environmentally-speaking to have significant trails or other development there, and the area already has nice primitive trails. It could also be made a large area while not decreasing other user-group opportunities significantly. The second sensible choice to my mind is the Stumpy’s area, though this is obviously more contentious. If the Subcommittee can’t agree on designating the Stumpy’s area as a wild/primitive natural space, at the most that area should simply have a suite of ideas laid out for it, including significant density and trail design restrictions for the area (i.e. designate in future as wild/primitive area, or build a trail in the area but no more than one which is class 2-3 max with a natural base, no tree cutting, non-mechanized, ungroomed, etc.). Other additional potential areas include the forest across the canyon opposite the Stumpy’s Trail ridge, the forest and canyon areas on the opposite side of the creek once you go over the Cat bridge, and the Beaver Pond Trail area (the latter being the least useful candidate for the Plan’s immediate needs as it already has significant trails development in it, but it could be a good candidate for a non-primitive natural space area to also add in addition).
 - Remediation of trail problems must occur. The 5K, for example, should be brought into compliance in terms of trail width (e.g. through revegetation with the largest commercially-

available native trees available) and gravel extraction areas (only one was permitted, and it along with all others should get revegetated). Additionally, the impacts on the Winner Creek Trail viewshed should be mitigated. Smart revegetation can help with this, but this may even involve other more substantial efforts e.g. partial relocation of parts of the 5K to an area further away from the WCT. For all remediation, there should be a clearly identified plan, strict oversight, and a timeline for completion which is on the order of years not decades. Other trail remediation in the valley should also occur, including the mountain bike trail building that has impacted Abe's Trail, and fixing the trail sprawl seen at the Virgin Creek Falls Trail. These could all be done as community-based projects and draw people together rather than in some cases continue to pull them apart.

- Looking to other areas as development in the community possibly expands outwards, the Plan should note that if other development expands, we should also start designing more natural spaces as well to accompany that.
- Planning to build a circum-valley long trail that is about halfway up the mountains, and wraps around the valley from Penguin (where it bends into the valley) to Orca, would provide an awesome experience in its own right as well as being a backbone for future trails and natural spaces efforts.

Thank you,

Brenden Raymond-Yakoubian

Brenden Raymond-Yakoubian

Natural Spaces 1-pager: What are they?

The following discussion was written from the perspective of an avid natural space user and advocate in Girdwood. While I do not speak for others, I feel these ideas well-represent how many in Girdwood talk and feel about such spaces.

A working definition

The term ‘natural spaces’ is used to describe lands that are and remain entirely or predominantly in their ‘natural’ state.

The ‘purpose’ of natural spaces

Natural spaces serve a variety of purposes, including conservation and recreation. They are not solely for conservation and ecosystem services (such as providing wildlife corridors and habitat), but also can be used for certain forms of recreation and other uses. Natural spaces, like trails, run along a spectrum from the more wild and primitive kinds to those with more heavily impactful human ‘development.’ However, even primitive natural spaces include opportunities for non-mechanized recreation like primitive trail walking, running, hiking, skiing, and snowshoeing; orienteering; foraging; wildlife viewing; education; solitude and meditation; etc. Natural spaces are not areas that are ‘locked up’ or ‘off limits,’ but rather are positive places available and open to those who use and value them. Such spaces are currently found in a variety of the Girdwood valley’s lands, including - but by no means exclusively - those currently zoned by the Municipality as GOS (Girdwood Open Spaces).

Why this term?

This term (‘natural spaces’) encompasses other terms such as ‘open spaces’ and ‘wild spaces.’ The term used for this type of space is not as important as the idea behind it. Many other terms have been used for this and similar ideas: for example, wildlands, primitive areas, open spaces, etc. Natural space advocates working in Girdwood planning have been using the term ‘natural spaces’ for a number of reasons. As noted above, such spaces are found in a variety of Girdwood’s zoning districts, not just GOS; also, zoning terminology can change; so, it was desired to use a term which did not replicate existing zoning terminology. Also, people are often confused by the term “open spaces,” because for some it implies areas without trees or other concepts more appropriate for urban areas, which is not the intent.

FAQ

- **What kind of natural spaces are there?** There can be many kinds, with various levels of ‘development.’ The gap in Girdwood’s system of natural spaces in and near the community - and the one many have been advocating to protect - are those on the primitive side of the spectrum. Girdwood is lucky that our community still has and deeply values such spaces in and near the community. Some special areas like this include the Virgin Creek waterbody, forest and meadows area, and the forest and meadows around the Stumpy’s Trail system.
- **Can there be trails in natural spaces?** Yes. Even wild and primitive natural spaces can include class 1 and 2 trails - that is, primitive trails. Natural spaces of other kinds, i.e. that aren’t wild or primitive, can contain even more-highly-developed, built trails.
- **Are wild/primitive natural spaces part of the Girdwood Trails Plan?** Yes. The architect of the plan explicitly designed it this way. This can be seen in discussion in the plan’s scope (for example: the necessity to include all relevant recreation disciplines) and has been confirmed multiple times directly. GirdWild was a stakeholder consulted in the development of the plan. This plan is supposed to serve the entire community, and consider a trails system in Girdwood spanning the entire gamut of trails and trails experiences. That trails spectrum runs from areas with no and ephemeral trails, to class 1 and 2 primitive trails, to various kinds of built trails (class 3-5). Wild and primitive natural spaces alone constitute areas which embody half of this trails spectrum, i.e. all the way up through class 2 trails.

- **Does Girdwood want natural spaces protected in and near the community?** Yes. This has been shown through a variety of formal and informal ways in Girdwood planning and public processes. For example: The 1995 Area Plan called for the development of a system of open spaces in Girdwood. Two such spaces - Moose Meadows and the Four Corners area - have been protected since then. The current Area Plan's work discovered in its data gathering that designating natural spaces - even in their most 'restrictive' version focused on conservation - was of significant interest in the community. The Girdwood Trails Committee also has a long-standing history of consistent citizen support for protecting class 1 and 2 trail areas.
- **Are natural spaces about conservation only?** No. Conservation (e.g. to protect bird and wildlife habitat and corridors, ecosystem services, existence value, etc.) can be a goal, including in combination with other goals, for natural spaces. While some natural spaces may be focused solely on conservation, this is not what is currently being proposed in Girdwood. Natural spaces are not contrary to recreation, nor are they contrary to all development. Natural space advocates in Girdwood are proposing designation of primitive natural spaces in and near the community that are amenable to a variety of non-mechanized recreation experiences, including primitive trail hiking, orienteering, wildlife viewing, meditation, and so on. This includes, for example, the Virgin Creek area, Stumpy's Trails area, Winner Creek area above Four Corners, and other areas if the community expands outwards. In addition, they also support protection of non-primitive natural spaces. Some natural spaces allow more highly developed uses - like the Four Corners area, which has the hand tram, or the Beaver Pond Trail area. Others (such as primitive natural spaces) are for lower impact uses, such as non-mechanized primitive trail uses. But all are amenable to recreation. Additionally, it is important to understand how conservation can be a form of development when it is done intentionally, protecting areas the way they are now for current and future generations to enjoy. For example, GirdWild has proposed that a Virgin Creek Natural Space be designated and maintained in such a way, as a primitive natural space with class 1 and well-kept class 2 trails, minimal but useful signage and trail marking, and a management plan which includes the possibility of expanded primitive trail development in the future and even the development of a raised platform/boardwalk area at the edge of the meadows for scenic viewing with a small yurt or other structure for nature education and gatherings.
- **Do natural space advocates want to lock areas up? Are they opposed to trails development?** No. Girdwood's natural space advocates, such as GirdWild, are not opposed to trails and other kinds of development. We want to see the development of a diverse, beautiful system of trails and natural spaces that serves the entire community and visitors for years to come. We advocate 'something-for-everyone.' This includes the many people in Girdwood who love and value primitive natural spaces in the community, and who depend on them for their well-being. It is Girdwood's natural character which drives so many people to live and visit here, and it is that which lies at the root of our collective well-being and economy. We want to see a handful of cherished natural spaces - such as the Virgin Creek and Stumpy's areas - stay as they are now for generations to come - and this includes the primitive class 1 and 2 trails experiences in them, as well as the possibility for other forms of recreation such as orienteering, meditation, wildlife viewing, etc. Nothing is being locked up. We also support additional, appropriate, sustainable trails development in other areas of Girdwood.
- **Don't you need trails to protect natural spaces?** Not necessarily. In some cases, trails may be used as tools of conservation. They can also help protect areas when trail users sprawl throughout an area e.g. in an attempt to get around wet areas. However, trails can also damage natural spaces, which has happened in Girdwood. They can also make areas impossible for a variety of multiple uses, such as single-use mechanized trails, which may be unsafe or off-limits for runners, walkers, children and pets. Wild and primitive natural spaces throughout the Girdwood valley have remained in their natural state for many years with primitive trails or no trails, despite people walking throughout them. Even where trails may be needed to curtail the impacts of human users of an area, primitive trails can be sufficient in many cases for this purpose.

VISION – Comments from Paul Crews

Girdwood aspires will create an interconnected diverse-system of diverse well planned and constructed sustainable multiuse trails and natural spaces that well serve the community provide opportunities for fun, recreation, non-motorized transportation and economic opportunity for our community and its visitors.

We only scored 60% on this one. I tried to add most of what the respondents wanted. We can not include everything.

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 Develop BUILD

Build sustainable trails using a common set of sustainable design principles with a clear project approval process.

Goal 3 CONSERVE

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

Goal 4 MAINTAIN

Trails and natural spaces are regularly maintained 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.

Trail notes

My thoughts and concerns. Not certain where they might fit in or be viewed. I just wanted to have a voice.

Stewardship; Gratitude and Respect for the Land

We have been allowed to enjoy the earth/land in Girdwood for her beauty, her bounty, and our belonging. In my opinion the stewardship of this land should benefit and respect the place we love as much as we use earth for our own needs and enjoyment. We are provided with her berries, mushrooms, plant medicines. Our forests and plants are an important and necessary source of oxygen and moisture, they clean our air and our waters. There are also other beings we share the land with, from the smallest fungi, to the largest moose or bear, and all those in between such as porcupine or fish. Our stewardship should definitely take all of our forests and forest beings into consideration.

Permanent scars can so easily be left in our fragile wetlands, random trails will take us through essential habitats and can easily make a negative impact on our wildlife.

To use trails for economic reasons should be balanced with a care for all nature.

I have always claimed that what makes me love Girdwood and the trails is because of the quality of life I enjoy. But it is deeper than that. Our land provides our place of belonging, a spiritual connection to nature, and of course exciting rides, skis, hikes and forage-ings.

Trails are a part of Girdwood, people will come, care must be taken to protect what we have and stewardship should also be attentive to what visitors will need such as bathrooms, parking, dog excrement containers and information.

Stewardship should also take into account what the future might bring in the way of climate and population of humans and other beings. And to what we want to protect for the future.

There is history in the land, the formation, the uses, the animals, the species of trees and plants, and the natural phenomena. We can imagine this place in the future and how we want it to serve us, and how we serve our space.

Alison Vail Perea

Holly Spoth-Torres

From: Kelley, Kyle T. <kyle.kelley@anchorageak.gov>
Sent: Monday, January 4, 2021 11:09 AM
To: Holly Spoth-Torres
Subject: FW: map methods + a couple comments

From: julie jbr-y.net
Sent: Wednesday, December 30, 2020 4:37 PM
To: holly@huddleak.com; Kelley, Kyle T. <kyle.kelley@anchorageak.gov>
Cc: Ron Tenny (ron10e@gmail.com) <ron10e@gmail.com>; Carolyn Brodin <carolyn_brodin@hotmail.com>
Subject: map methods + a couple comments

[EXTERNAL EMAIL]

Hi Holly,

Quiana for your team's work on the draft existing conditions report that was shared today. Will you be adding a section to your report about how you determined what to put on the draft trails and natural spaces map? It's really unclear to me and I would like to understand it better (and I think it should be available to people who only review the doc, but don't attend at GTMP subcommittee meeting to hear a verbal explanation).

Hopefully I can attend the next meeting and if so will probably provide comments. I know it's a draft, but maps become like cement in peoples' brains and since it's on paper now, I would bet these will be very difficult to modify (not add to, but remove/reduce). Here's a few initial comments.

- I'm really disappointed to see new trails being proposed within proposed natural spaces. That's just new trails. While natural spaces can have trails, and can accommodate new class 1/2 trails, I am opposed to proposing a new natural space at the same time as proposing new trails inside those natural spaces.
- Trail number 8 already exists and is walkable, skiable and snowshoeable. This should be on the map as an existing trail.
- Trail 10: not clear if this is proposed trail is within the proposed natural space. Even if it is the boundary of it, it's too close to what is proposed as a narrow natural space and would add to the multiple 'parallel' trails going to the same general location (and a multiuse trail is never going to be a class 1 or 2 trail, which adds to the impact on a natural space, even if adjacent). Trails going to the same general location include: Stumpy's winter/summer, cat track, portion of the 5k, winner creek, plus this proposed one.
- Natural space 31: should extend at least over to the cat track so that whole system of meadows, wetlands, and associated uplands can be intact for ecosystem values, wildlife, and other reasons (like solitude, exploration, etc etc).
- Trail 1: there is already a connector trail between lower VC and lower Danish. it does not formally cross VC to Wagon Road.
- 'conflicting opinions': again, to be clear, the majority of comments at Virgin Creek Road about parking/access/amenities were not legitimate comments for the reasons previously stated. That should

be removed from the report, or clarified. Over the course of years I can count on 1 hand the number of days that have had more than 3 non-VC Road resident cars parked on Virgin Creek Road for the purpose of accessing that land/trails. There has never been a single day on VCRoad that looks anything like a typical day at the Falls trailhead, in terms of parking.

- Vision: I am not in favor of some of the edits to the Vision, specifically; "*Girdwood balances the natural characteristics of the wild places in the Valley with the fun and adventurous trail-based recreation opportunities available to everyone. Girdwood is a world-class outdoor recreation destination.*" I don't like how it seems to juxtapose wild/natural places and trail based recreation as inherently different - experience wise. trails are fun and adventurous, wild/natural places are ??? not clear, but the juxtaposition seems to imply 'not fun and adventurous'. And I'm not sure what world-class means. Typically built-trail advocates use it to argue we need more trails like the 5k - big, wide, gravel, groomed. I hope there is another way to say world-class that gets at 'really nice trails and natural spaces that rival those elsewhere in the world and gee you're going to want to come here and use them'. But it seems like that sentence could be removed from the vision and just be discussed in a more narrative way elsewhere in the report (and/or marketing materials, etc.)

Chin'an,
Julie

17 Sept 2020
Julie Raymond-Yakoubian

Values: in relation to Girdwood trails and open spaces

Needs to be consensus on what we mean by “values”.

For me, values are fundamental, non-negotiable beliefs or principals about things that are important and that guide actions. Values are things we identify that we want to achieve and want to maintain. Values determine our community’s character and guide our vision for action.

Discussion and consensus on values needs to come first. This is important because values can be used to prop up and reinforce existing power dynamics, rather than being reflective of a consensus process. It may or may not be possible to come to full consensus on a set of values – but values discussions are an important way to identify points of disagreement and conflict – as well as agreement.

How can we determine and discuss what kinds of things should/shouldn’t go where, and what we want/don’t want, when we don’t know or haven’t clearly articulated why we value those ‘things’ or those areas? Clarifying values is what moves us on to action. Maps are the ‘solutions’ that help implement our agreed-upon values.

~~~~~  
This is how I would attempt to figure out community values:

#### WHAT DO YOU VALUE ABOUT zzz?

- I VALUE xxx ABOUT zzz.
  - WHAT DOES xxx LOOK LIKE?
    - xxx COULD LOOK LIKE THIS, AND THAT, AND THIS.
    - HOW DO WE GET TO xxxx?
      - EVERYONE discusses this, similar values that have been raised; are their values that can be ‘combined’?; that everyone agrees on? Restate them as community values. OUR COMMUNITY VALUES xxx.
      - TO GET TO xxx, WE SHOULD (designate this natural space, do maintenance on these trails, build this trail, establish this parking area, etc.)
        - NOW VISUALIZE THESE ON A MAP FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND DECISION-MAKING

Values discussion:

What are we doing?

We are identifying values related to X (categories the subcommittee comes up with, for example):

- Girdwood’s natural environment
- recreation in the Girdwood valley
- trails in the Girdwood valley
- natural spaces in the Girdwood valley

a couple made-up examples:

Example 1:

**What do you value about recreation in the Girdwood valley?**

- I VALUE a diversity of recreational experiences in the Girdwood valley.
  - WHAT does this look like?
    - Different kinds of recreational opportunities (e.g. primitive trail hiking, narrow track XC skiing, downhill mountain biking, skate skiing, Frisbee golf, croquet)
    - Opportunities for different skill levels (e.g. ‘easy’ to more challenging Nordic trails)
    - Different levels of development (e.g. natural spaces with no trails to ‘hardened’ gravel trails like the lower Iditarod)

Then there is a discussion of all the values identified in this category. Then they are (potentially) narrowed down to an agreed upon number and the exact wording is tweaked. Each likely gets transformed into something more like “Our community values the Girdwood valley having outdoor recreational opportunities for many different activities.” Or something... Whatever then gets agreed upon, is a value of our community in relation to this specific ‘topic’ we are all addressing.

Once the values in a particular category are agreed upon. Then we need to ask:

- HOW will we get there/what is required to actualize this value?
  - We have numerous formal ‘developed’ trails that have easements mapped, etc.; and we have few ‘formal’ primitive trails, and not all of them are mapped or have easements. So, we should designate, get easements for, map our primitive trails.

Then you move to the ‘mapping’ part of this. Ok, where are our primitive trails without easements – let’s mark those. Etc etc

Example 2:

**What do you value about natural spaces in the Girdwood valley?**

- I VALUE the existence of natural spaces and the opportunities they provide for solitude, reflection, and observation of the natural world near my home.
  - WHAT does this look like?
    - Having spaces actually designated as ‘natural spaces’ which at most have a low density of primitive trails, and where I can do these things regularly and without having to get in my car to visit them.

Then there is a discussion of all the values identified in this category. Then they are (potentially) narrowed down to an agreed upon number and the exact wording is tweaked. Each likely gets transformed into something more like “Our community values having designated natural spaces in/near the community.” Or something... Whatever then gets agreed upon, is a value of our community in relation to this specific ‘topic’ we are all addressing.

Once the values in a particular category are agreed upon. Then we need to ask:

- HOW will we get there/what is required to actualize this value?

- We currently have no designated natural spaces, so we need to identify areas that could be designated.

Then you move to the ‘mapping’ part of this. Ok, what areas could be designated natural spaces? Etc etc.

Some of the things I value are:

- a gender, race and ability inclusive natural environment
- The ability to find solitude, quiet, and contemplative spaces in natural areas
- The existing forested-nature and feel of our community
- The challenge of primitive trails
- The challenge of wayfinding in trail-free spaces
- Learning about, accessing, and preserving historic and cultural resources in our environment
- The discovery associated with exploring trail-free (or few trail) spaces
- Being able to encounter wildlife and diverse plant life in our forests
- Being able to do all of the above things/find all of the above things in the natural environment, in close physical and time proximity to my home, without using a car
- Knowing that younger people and future generations will be able to experience an undisturbed natural environment in parts of the Girdwood valley in the future
- my fellow community members respecting my values as much as their own (and vice versa).
- fair processes that are consistently followed

I would like/request that this document be called the Girdwood Trails and Natural Spaces Plan.

## Executive Summary – Girdwood Trails Plan Stakeholder Interviews

### OBJECTIVES

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

### METHODOLOGY

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

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

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

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

### PARTICIPANTS

Girdwild    GirdWild

Alyeska Resort

Girdwood Nordic Ski Club

MTB Alliance

## Ascending Path

### Landowners and Managers

General Trail Users: Jonathan Lee, Carolyn Brodin, Paul Crews

KEY THEMES What is meant by "Trail Town"? A formal designation, or 'we call our town a trail town'? We do not have a formal designation. I didn't see anyone actually say this in the interviews.

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

Many Girdwood residents were drawn to the town due to the nature of the small community and its access to trail-based recreation. Given Girdwood's proximity to Anchorage, residents value having trail access from their front door on-foot and providing recreation opportunities within the community is important to all. I don't think this is accurate. I read and hear people say they came here/were drawn to here because of the 'natural environment' - or something like that.

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

**\*\*throughout: wherever it says 'trail system' it should read 'trails and natural spaces system'.**

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

### The Girdwood Trail System Should be Equitable and Balanced

#### *Level of Difficulty*

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

#### *Allowed Uses*

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

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

this is not accurate. they have ~3.4mi of trails and for about ~1mi of that the WC viewshed, and trail user experience, is negatively impacted.

GirdWild's efforts are missing  
from the discussion below.

why is the below in here? isn't it assumed that all groups will go through proper process/channels?

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

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

*Range of Opportunities for All People* I agree we are trying to provide opportunities for a very diverse set of people, but ALL possible people seems impossible?

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

#### *Balance of Trail Classifications throughout the System*

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

#### *Designated Natural Spaces Areas for No Trail Development*

...where no new trail development will occur, but which may have primitive or ephemeral trails.

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

not just trail experiences - but also natural spaces experiences - that area was used for snowshoeing, plant gathering, etc etc

or small? When people want lots of trails, they say valley is huge...

minimally developed. The Girdwood valley is vast and with proper planning and public involvement, spaces and experiences for all user groups are possible. Areas for no trail development must still follow the proper process and channels that new trail development is subject to. It should be clear why the area has been selected, how it will be accessed, and what (if any) level of enforcement, maintenance, or involvement will be needed. Similar language about 'proper process' needs to be included for trail development (e.g. removed from discussion of GMBA specifically, but noted in relation to trails generally).

## Trail Access

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

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

This, to me, is an odd way of talking about use of trails. Need people on the trails for safety?? Trails and spaces with less people aren't inherently less safe. I

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

recommend removing the first 2 sentences.

## Priority Projects

- Hand Tram
- Virgin Creek Trailhead
- Max's Mountain
- Iditarod Trail
- Winner Creek Improvements lower? upper? upgrades by which entity?
- Girdwood Mountain Bike Alliance Development
- ~~Dedicated Areas for No New Trail Development~~ Dedicated natural spaces
- Increased Connectivity between existing trails (Abe's Trail and California Creek)
- Wagon Trail Access and Tread
- Beaver Pond Maintenance and Improvements
- 

## 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

this section does not have a discussion of remediation, but it should be added; it was discussed in the interviews. Specifically of 5K remediation and Abe's remediation.

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

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

I think this statement is true.  
Not sure abt 2nd clause.

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

## Connectivity

What expansion of allowed uses??

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

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

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

town/village?

## Project Approval Processes

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

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

- Viewshed
  - Land Ownership
- soudscape density of trails  
environmental impacts balance of uses  
cumulative impacts buidling/design standards

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

#### APPENDIX – Detailed Interview Summaries

##### Other JRY comments:

\*I would like this document to be called the Girdwood Trails and Natural Spaces Plan

\*\* I hope that no one would disagree that we are discussing natural spaces - and that they are part of the system that we are collectively trying to envision? If so, that should be discussed asap as it was one of the motivating factors for this document.

##### Under key themes -

I've seen and heard "Trail Town" used multiple times - and it seems to be more than in a colloquial sense. I definitely wouldn't identify 'trails town' as one of the top things that people discussed in the interviews, especially if it is being used in the more formal sense. What is meant by a Trails Town?

I think that very first sentence, which I'm guessing will be important to how this all proceeds, needs to be modified. I read in the interviews, and have heard it discussed and noted many times, that many people moved to Girdwood, or were drawn to the community - because of the natural environment. Now that may include "trail-based recreation" - but that is not a phrase or sentiment I have heard or seen expressed the way I have seen and heard "natural environment".

The issue of numbers, or implied numbers, needs to be contained. People are implying things all over the place - a rise in this, and increase in that. Fine - except if the SubC starts using these implied numbers as justification for doing or not doing certain things. And if that is the case, I'd like to see something more concrete. If that isn't possible, it should be noted.

Wherever 'trail system' is written, it should say 'trails and natural spaces system'

Wherever it says 'trail-based activities', it should say 'trail and natural space-based activities'

\*\*\*I want to encourage a robust discussion of values in this Trails and Natural Spaces Plan. This has been missing in a lot of GTC documents and discussions and I really want to see that. I think it is a big gap.

I'd really like to see the summary, and any future documents, stop calling natural spaces 'areas for no trail development'. They should be called natural spaces, or discussed as 'dedicated NS', or 'areas dedicated as NS'. All the discussions I've been part of over the past few years have never discussed natural spaces this way - i.e. as banning trails, or as being locked up land, or untouchable, or off limits to people or certain uses. It is not accurate to call them 'areas for no trail development' - only people not in favor of them try to describe them that way. Here's a list of things I do in our existing natural spaces - I'm sure others could add to the list with things they do: hike, snowshoe, ski, view wildlife, seek solitude, write, paint, berry and plant gather, photography, yoga, meditation, cloud watching, climbing over things, climbing under things, mushroom hunting..... So as you can see these are not unused or locked up areas. In fact, they are probably way more multiuse than some dedicated trail areas.

\*\*\*Question for the SubC: What is a trail?

It may seem silly at first, but I think this is an important question for subC members to consider. Is it the 4 foot wide line of packed earth (or 60 foot wide gravel swath, if you are the 5k)? or does it include what's around it, what it goes through? I think it does include those things. And if you agree that it isn't just a line on the ground or a map - then things like density, design, cumulative impacts, view sheds, soundscapes, and many other factors that need to be taken into consideration when planning and designing trails (or natural spaces).