

Government Peak Recreation Area – Southern Sub-Unit Development Plan

PLAN OVERVIEW: PURPOSE, SETTING, ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES

PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

The Government Peak Recreation Area (GPRA) is an increasingly popular four-season outdoor recreation destination. This Plan addresses the “southern sub-unit” of the larger Hatcher Pass recreation area: 1420 acres of attractive, accessible Matanuska Susitna Borough (Borough) and located south of Government Peak, just west of the Palmer-Fishhook Road.

The plans listed below set the framework for managing these lands, including dedicating the Borough parcel and an adjoining 390-acre state parcel to public recreational use.

- Hatcher Pass Plans, State of Alaska; 1986, 2010, 2012 amendments
- Government Peak Asset Management Plan, Borough; 2012
- Southern Sub-unit Recreation Master Plan – Borough. Not adopted, but includes future “development nodes” that were one reference for this current plan

This Plan will guide and help coordinate user and Borough driven recreation projects, including the general locations of near term improvements and reservation of space for future expansion. An attachment to this plan sets quantified standards for improvements to ensure projects serve public needs and are fiscally and environmentally sustainable. This Plan and the associated standards will be used to clarify the process for Borough review and approval of proposed future projects, and ongoing management.

How Has the Area Developed? How Is It Used Today?

The combination of major Borough investments and the work by energetic, generous volunteers and user groups has created a very successful, non-motorized public recreation destination. Current facilities in the area include:

- Borough built access road and a 4000 square foot chalet and parking area. The chalet is heavily used year-round for everything from ski and bike races to public meetings and weddings.
- Thirteen kilometers of professionally designed and built cross country ski trails. This includes three groomed winter loops; two are ski only, one loop is a multiuse trail.
- Growing system of summer and winter bike and hiking trails, including a recently built single track bike trail, a project done by the Valley Mountain Bikers & Hikers
- Backcountry equestrian trail

Opportunities and Challenges

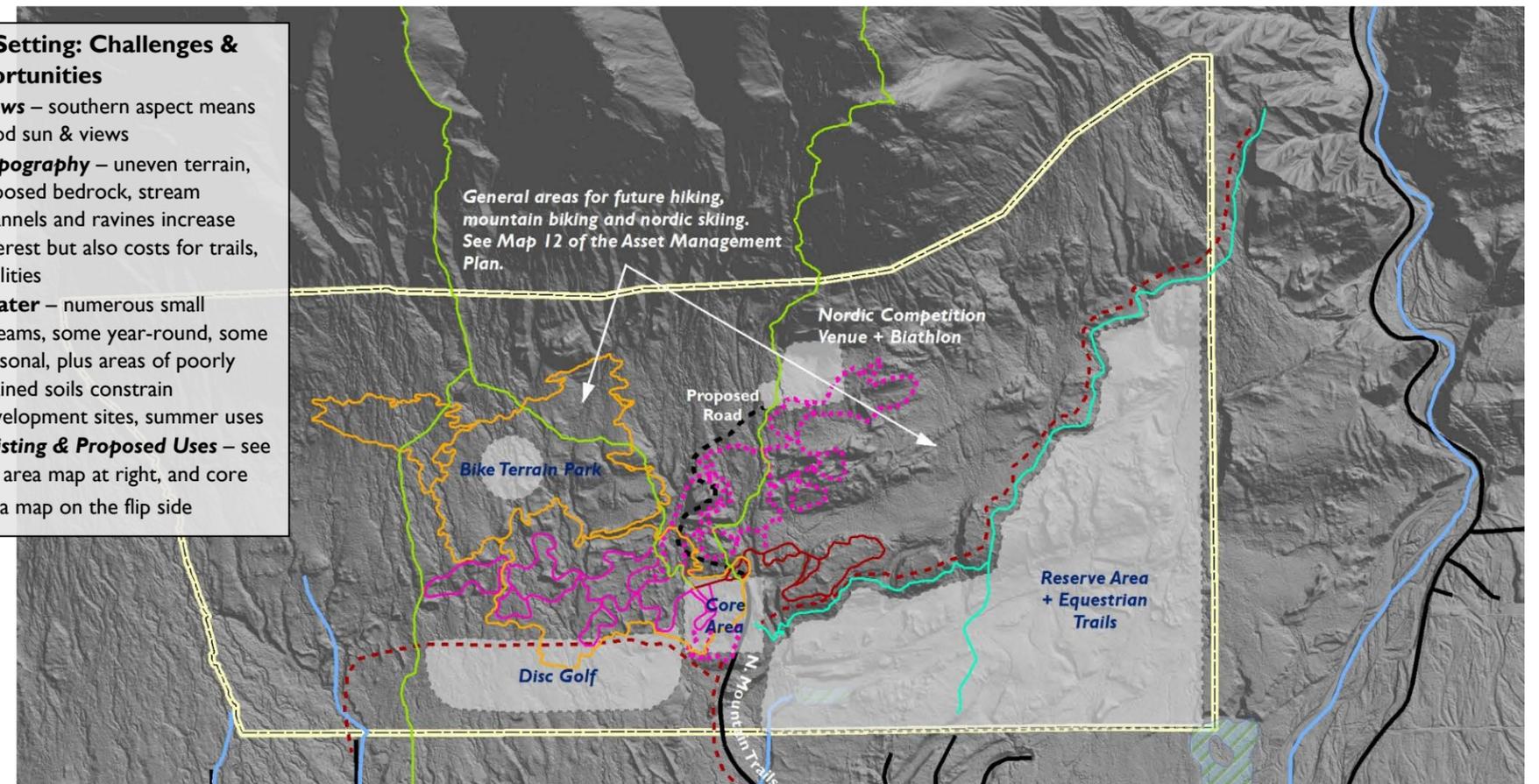
The GPRA offers something hard to match and highly valued in the Mat-Su Borough: the combination of good snow, great views and accessibility, all in a public area designated for non-motorized recreation. Building from this foundation, user groups, individuals, the State, the Borough, and non-profits have invested substantial resources and hundreds of hours to create an excellent, still growing system of trails and other facilities.



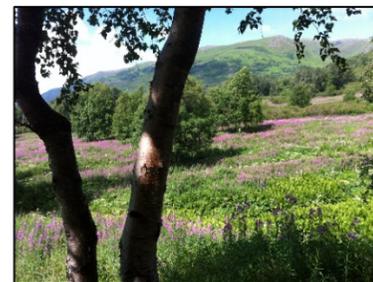
The challenge going forward is meeting the recreation demand that is already pushing the capacity of the current facilities. New facilities and new strategies are needed to guide and accommodate growth for 10, 20 and 30 years in the future, including providing resources for capital improvements and ongoing maintenance and management.

The Setting: Challenges & Opportunities

- **Views** – southern aspect means good sun & views
- **Topography** – uneven terrain, exposed bedrock, stream channels and ravines increase interest but also costs for trails, facilities
- **Water** – numerous small streams, some year-round, some seasonal, plus areas of poorly drained soils constrain development sites, summer uses
- **Existing & Proposed Uses** – see full area map at right, and core area map on the flip side



An Increasingly Popular Destination – Where Pressures for Use are Starting to Exceed Capacity



- **Striking, four-season destination** – beautiful views, a sweet place for a hike, bike, ski, or sit in the sun, with good access from centers of Borough population. Indoor and associated outdoor spaces are increasingly popular for weddings and other private and community events; nearly all summer 2017 chalet weekends already booked.
- **Diverse and growing recreation use, summer and winter** – groomed ski trails, bike and hiking trails bring out experts and novices, people who are fit and striving to be fit. One example: participation in the recently established, GPRA-based, Junior Nordic ski program has grown from 20 to 350 people.
- **Demand starting to exceed capacity** – events overflow parking; restrooms and septic system are not designed for 300,000 annual users; local groups are having increasing trouble reserving space for meetings.
- **Pending proposals for new facilities & uses** – including disc golf; better hiking, biking and ski trails; improved sled hill and amphitheater; improved equestrian facilities; upgraded septic system; new parking & “outbuildings.”

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GOALS, DEVELOPMENT CONCEPT PLAN, STANDARDS

GOALS AND FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Goals for the Place and the Recreational Experience

- Comply with adopted plans (see list previous page).
- Strive to meet the evolving recreational interests of a growing region, providing a diverse range of healthy, non-motorized outdoor recreation activities, including skiing, biking, walking, horseback riding, disc golf, biathlon, and associated support buildings and related facilities.
- Maintain a strong sense of the site’s natural setting, but on balance lean towards the goal of giving more people the chance for healthy active outdoor activity.
- Invest in sustainable trails, buildings and other facilities; minimize future maintenance and management costs through high quality, up-front design and construction.
- Continue to improve facilities through active partnerships with user groups and other volunteers. Link approval of user group projects to responsibilities for ongoing maintenance.
- Maintain identified, prime future residential development areas to the extent feasible in the “reserve area”. Extend GPRA trails into the reserve area after more specific residential development plans are completed and approved.

Projects and the Project Development Process

For each proposed project, proponents shall submit an application including a map and briefly describe: proposed project and sponsor; importance as a recreation resource in the borough; development challenges, costs & timeframe; access; compatibility with adjacent activities and planned projects; required supporting infrastructure such as water, parking, sewer/septic; compliance with Borough plans and this plan’s development standards; and specific responsibilities for ongoing maintenance. Pending/proposed projects addressed here include

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| • stadium improvements, | • improved trails: trails within/through the core area, |
| • improved amphitheater with service, vehicle access, seating, “stage”, power | • improved trails outside the core: nordic skiing, hiking, biking, multipurpose; bike skill area (general locations per Asset Mgt. Plan), |
| • upgraded chalet/chalet infrastructure, | • future parking area, |
| • group day use facilities – deck, gazebo | • biathlon (per Asset Mgt. Plan), and |
| • relocated winter sled hill, | • improved signage, e.g. “Scoop the Poop.” |
| • secondary buildings, e.g., ski waxing and ski grooming equipment storage, | |

Improved Standards for Project Review and Approval

The Borough must require high standards for recreation improvements, with an eye towards both near and long term use, management, and maintenance. It is also important to allow flexibility for creative proposals by project proponents. This Plan meets these objectives by establishing a flexible framework for “what and where” and at the same time establishing a set of reference standards, for example, standards for design and construction for trails or bridges. The attachment provides these standards. Project proponents shall explain how their proposed project conforms with these standards, along with the information listed above.

Improved Systems for Ongoing Funding – Capital and Management

The Borough is a strong supporter of a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities. At the same time, funding to build, maintain and operate such facilities is limited. Solutions to funding challenges include partnerships with user groups and non-profits, both to construct and maintain recreation facilities. In the future, depending on public and Assembly preferences, other options to support recreation uses may include: a recreation service area, user fees, recreation capital improvement bonds, and/or more extensive service commitments from user groups.

Updates and More information?



Core Area Development Concept Plan Map

The map above shows existing and future conceptual locations for planned improvements in the Core Area, including trails, buildings and other new or improved facilities. Locations shown represent generalized intentions. Final siting and design of planned improvements will require more detailed on-site and user group review and more refined site planning.