



Municipality of Anchorage
Eagle River/Chugiak Parks & Recreation
Board of Supervisors
12001 Business Blvd., Ste. 123
Eagle River, AK 99577
Tel 907-343-1500
URL www.muni.org/ERCparks



MEMORANDUM

Date: April 18, 2023

To: Eagle River/Chugiak Parks & Recreation Board of Supervisors

Cc: Michael Braniff, Director, MOA Parks and Recreation
Tanya Lieberman, Deputy Director, Eagle River/Chugiak Parks and Recreation

Thru: Jeffrey Urbanus, Landscape Architect, Eagle River/Chugiak Parks and Recreation

From: West Beach Lake Park Multiuse Trail – Staff

Project: Recommendation

INTRODUCTION

Beach Lake Park is an important Anchorage regional park located north of Eagle River, in the Chugiak area, off Birchwood Loop Road. While year-round recreation opportunities are found within the park, the majority of use occurs in the winter on the extensive network of dog mushing and Nordic ski trails. The Beach Lake Master Plan (BLMP), completed in 2011, serves as the guiding document for future recreational development of Beach Lake Park. The key elements of the BLMP are summarized in a Beach Lake Park Conceptual Development Plan map. A copy of that map is included with this memo as Attachment A.

One element of the conceptual plan is a new multiuse trail along the west side of Beach Lake, extending southwards along the west side of Beach Lake Road, all the way to Birchwood Loop, and then extending to southwest, and ending at Section 25. While the construction of this trail would represent an important, new amenity in the community, care must also be taken to ensure that existing uses are not disrupted. To that end, the BLMP directly states (pg. 27), that measures must be taken to protect existing uses as any new trails are added.

While the BLMP provides general guidance about new uses not conflicting with existing uses, in the case of a west multiuse trail, a specific recommendation is presented on how to move forward, the completion of preliminary feasibility analysis. This extra step in the implementation process is intended to help mitigate specific safety concerns with new trails crossing existing mushing trails. The feasibility study is intended as a “go/no”

analysis to determine whether it is feasible to move forward with a project concept. As outlined in the BLMP, this feasibility step should include a site visit, public involvement, site data acquisition, consultation with the relevant experts, and outlining the project needs and goals. *It is important to note that this feasibility analysis does NOT supplant or otherwise take the place of the normal public process for the design and construction of new trails outlined in Title 21.*

Eagle River/Chugiak Parks and Recreation (P&R) believes that following the completion of the initial feasibility analysis there is enough information to meet this condition and move forward with a more formal, public trail design and construction process. The steps that were part of that preliminary feasibility analysis are outlined separately in this memo.

The proposed West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail both implements an element in BLMP and addresses a deficiency in the Chugiak/Eagle River trail system, wintertime dedicated multiuse trails. While there an extensive trail system that serves dog mushing and Nordic skiing, there are very few areas available for dog walking, skijoring, and wintertime biking. Within Beach Lake Park, these activities are primarily limited to the loop trail on Beach Lake itself. The West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail would also serve as a component of the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail, part of the Chugiak Eagle River Long Range Transportation Plan. The construction of this proposed trail allows more people within the community to enjoy one of the Municipality of Anchorage's important regional parks during wintertime months.

WORK PERFORMED AS PART OF FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS

In 2022, Chugach Mountain Bike Riders (CMBR) received a federal ARPA grant to improve Chugiak/Eagle River Trails, with a specific emphasis on starting on elements of the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail. Prior to receipt of the funding, CMBR began discussions with local stakeholders, including P&R, the Chugiak Dog Musers Association (CDMA), and Eklutna, Inc. to discuss potential projects that could contribute to the effort to move the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail forward. The West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail was quickly identified as a possible project, in part because of it being a component of the BLMP.

Even at the most basic conceptual level, the ability to mitigate the potential trail crossing safety concerns, as identified in the BLMP, is an obvious potential barrier to implementation for this project. A grade separated crossing is one option that is presented in the BLMP. Stakeholder meetings with CDMA very quickly identified that this was the option favored by the mushing community. The feasibility analysis outlined in the BLMP was initiated to determine whether it was possible to address the potential safety concerns arising from a new multiuse trail, whether a not a grade-separated trail was the only option for mitigating concerns, and the cost of trail crossing alternatives. In

terms of the guidance of the BLMP, these were the clear “go/no-go” items that required further examination.

Summary of Feasibility Analysis Actions

<u>Stakeholder Meetings/Expert Consultations</u>	
September 2022	CMBR/CMDA Meeting
October 2022	CMBR consultation with Alaska Sled Dog Racing Association
December 2022	Beach Lake Trails and Crossing Concept Analysis by The Boutet Company
February 2023	CMBR/CDMA Meeting
March 2023	CMBR/CDMA Meeting
March 2023	P&R Staff Consultation with MOA Planning on BLMP Interpretation
<u>Site Visits</u>	
October 2022	Beach Lake Site Visit with CMBR and P&R Staff
November 2022	ERC P&R Board of Supervisors Beach Lake Site Visit with CMBR and CDMA representatives
November 2022	ERC P&R Board of Supervisors Beach Lake Site Visit with Assembly Member Kevin Cross
March 2023	Beach Lake Site Visit with CDMA and P&R Staff
April 2023	Beach Lake Site Visit with CMBR and P&R Staff
<u>Public Meetings</u>	
September 2022	CMBR Presentation to Birchwood Community Council
November 2022	West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail Concept Presented at Birchwood Community Council
November 2022	West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail Concept Presented to ERC P&R Board of Supervisors
<u>Letters of Support for Moving Forward to Project Design Phase</u>	
March 2023	South Fork Community Council
March 2023	CDMA
April 2023	Chugiak Community Council
April 2023	Eagle River Valley Community Council
April 2023	Eagle River Community Council

Through the process summarized above, P&R believes that enough information has been gathered as part of a pre-planning effort to warrant the West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail Project moving forward through the formal planning and design process. Key outcome of the analysis included:

- A determination that a grade-separated crossing of mushing trails was not a mandated element of the BLMP and that other mitigating measures were permissible.

- A \$1,000,000 estimate for the cost of constructing a bridge to facilitate a grade-separated crossing
- A letter of support from CDMA for moving forward using an at-grade trail crossing that incorporates mitigating safety measures.

The results of the analysis were used to develop an updated draft conceptual plan. Based on the process and results summarized above, P&R believes that go/no-go threshold has been met for moving forward with a conceptual plan that does not incorporate a grade-separated crossing of the mushing trail north of Beach Lake. The cost of constructing a grade-separated is not feasible given the acceptable, lower cost alternatives. The draft conceptual plan incorporates chicane gates, fencing, and signage at the trail crossing. These measures will control access to the mushing trail at the trail crossing, force bikers to dismount at the crossing point, and make all users aware of the need to watch for dog teams.



PROJECT SUMMARY

The working concept for new multiuse trail includes a clearing width of 12 feet and a hardened, gravel surface 8 feet wide. This is consistent with other area multiuse trails, including those recently constructed at Mirror Lake. This type of design will help preserve the natural character of Beach Lake Park, a goal of the BLMP.

The new multiuse trail will connect to the existing trail at the “Fisherman’s Bench” on the west side of Beach Lake. The trail will provide connections from the north shore of Beach Lake to an inlet overlook point and the existing beach access area. Development of the inlet overlook point will include fencing, as required, for safety. There is already an existing social trail running from the north shore of Beach Lake to Knik Arm. The planned trail improvements will help address existing safety concerns from this unmanaged crossing of the mushing trail that is already occurring, as evidenced during the site visits.

Within the conceptual scope and budget, it is anticipated that other safety improvements will be possible to the existing mushing trails in the vicinity of the new crossing. These include trail straightening to improve sight distances, providing new turnaround loops, and minor trail routing to avoid lakeside wetlands and maintain 100-foot separation from the new multiuse trail.

FUNDING

- **PROJECT TOTAL COST:** Total build estimate of \$500,000.00
- **FUNDS RAISED:**
 - Chugach Mountain Bike Riders (\$250,000)
- **PENDING FUNDING:**
 - Eagle River/Chugiak Parks and Recreation Department (\$250,000)

TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

It is intended that construction of the new trail would take place during the summer of 2024. In order for this to occur, the final approved design would need to be completed by May 2024.

A tentative schedule, outlining major project milestones would be as follows:

- Site data inventory, in the field route analysis: Summer 2023
- Preliminary project design: Fall 2023
- 65% project design, project design study report, application submitted to the Planning Department: Fall/early winter 2023
- Public outreach, public comment period, Planning administrative/Urban Design Commission review: Winter 2024
- Response and revisions to comments, final design: Spring 2024

- Construction: 2024

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

P&R recommends that the Eagle River/Chugiak Parks & Recreation Board of Supervisors pass the proposed resolution to support the West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail.

**ATTACHMENT A: BEACH LAKE MASTER PLAN CONCEPTUAL PLAN
MAP**

Beach Lake Park Uses

DOG MUSHING



Mushing trails are formally dedicated and protected as the major trail use north of the railroad tracks. Exclusive mushing trail use is August 1st - April 15th to be adjusted at the discretion of the department. Mushing trails are open for multi-use May - July, with improvements and/or blockages to limit trail damage in sensitive wet areas. Measures are needed to keep other users and loose dogs off of trails during the mushing season. Water/extreme wet conditions/poor soils limit some trails to winter use.

- Existing Trail
- - - Proposed Future Trail
- Trail Relocation
- Winter Trail Only
- Grade-Separated Trail
Safety and spectator viewing separation

Mushing Facilities

Seasonal use, with public rental options

- Existing Facility
- Existing Parking
- Expansion Reserve Area
(as needed facility and/or parking expansion)
- * Unauthorized, unsecured trails crossing private land
(relocate or gain easements)

NORDIC SKI



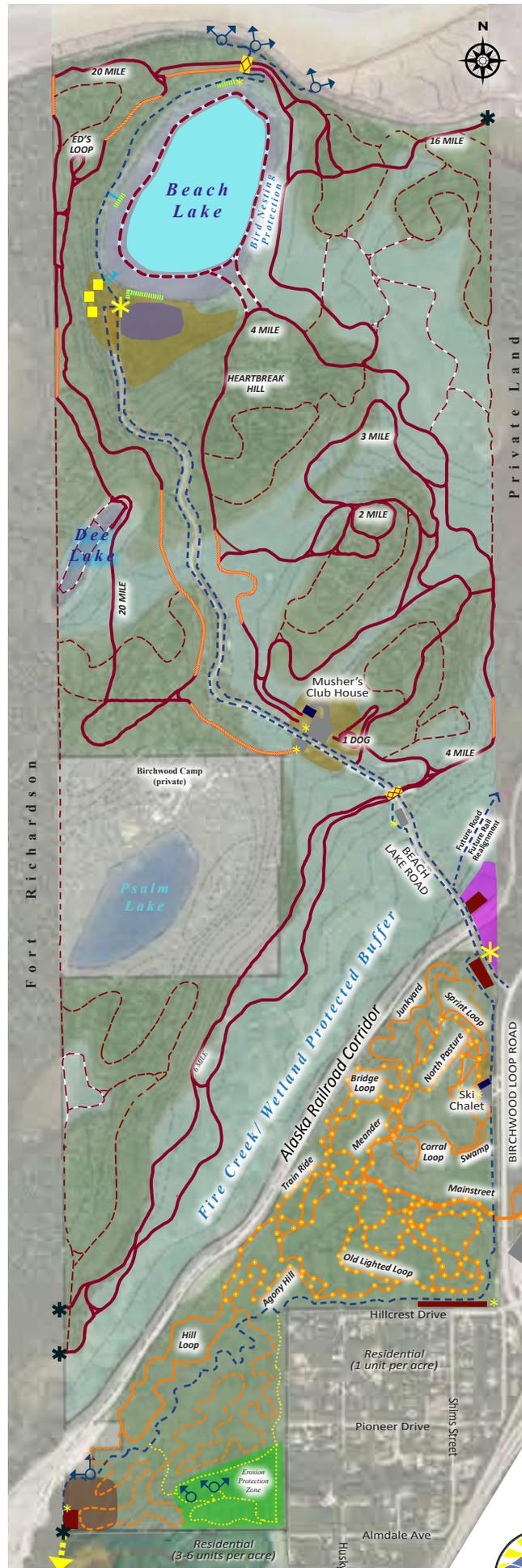
Nordic Ski trails are formally dedicated and protected as the major trail use south of the railroad tracks, up to the designated multi-use trail crossing. Skiers have exclusive use of these trails during the winter maintenance season. Ski trail expansions south of the multi use trail are unlit and unmaintained, and are not exclusive use for Nordic ski. The rest of the year, trails are open for multi-use with improvements and/or blockages to limit trail damage in sensitive wet areas.

- Existing Ski Trails
- Existing Ski Trail Lightpoles
- - - Unlit/Unmaintained Ski Trail Expansion

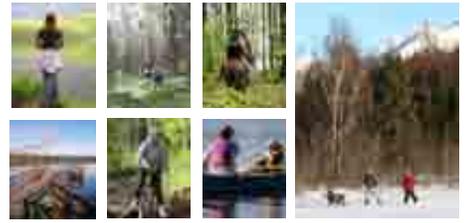
Nordic Ski Facilities

Seasonal use, with public rental options

- Existing Facility
- Existing Parking
- Expansion Reserve Area
(as needed facility and/or parking expansion)



MULTI USE



Non-motorized multi-use corridors and public areas are phased into the park as the population grows to focus and direct public use, with the intent of maintaining the natural character. No multi-use facility is to be installed until: 1) there is demonstrated demand; 2) maintenance resources and responsibilities are clearly set out; and 3) measures are in place to separate incompatible uses, including signage.

Multi-Use Trails:

Beach Lake Road: Non-paved, one side of the road. Construct second side only if/when conflicts demonstrate clear need for additional capacity.

Beach Lake Vicinity: Emphasize ADA accessibility, and protection of lake edge habitat.

NW1/4 Section: Initially along powerline until re-designed as a winding forest setting trail with width capacity for 2-way horses & bikes to safely pass.

NW1/4 Section Footpath:

Minimal clearing, except in select scenic view areas. Revegetate disturbed areas, protect slope from erosion.

Public Use Area

- Winter - Multi-use ice fish, cross-country ski, skijor, ice skate, etc. Closure or trail priority for mushing events.
- Summer - Small craft boating, fishing, swimming, etc

- Beach Lake Day Use Area w/ Restrooms
- + Existing Dock (fishing, canoe launch)
- Future Dock (exact siting/size may vary)
- ▲ Interpretive Station/Gateway elements with maps & user education/safety rules
- Day Use Area Expansion Reserve
- ADA Public Use Lodge/Cabins, or other "Gateway Lakeside Facility"
- ↻ Scenic View Areas

"Gem" Forest Preserve
Maintain natural forest condition with retention of vegetation.

Future Park Reserve
Potential community play-park area, to be installed during build-out of Powder Reserve Development.

Fenced Off-Leash Dog Park
Phased implementation into existing cleared area north of the railroad, with expansion/shift after ARRC realignment.

Potential Parking Site
Potential area for phased development of parking, if and when existing lots become saturated. Construct only as needed where needed. Impacted roads must be upgraded to handle park traffic, and park oversight be expanded to deter illegal activities.

Legend

- Uplands
- Class A Wetlands
- 10 foot Elevation Contours
- Park Boundary

Figure 7. Beach Lake Park Conceptual Development Plan



ATTACHMENT B: PROJECT LETTERS OF SUPPORT



March 15, 2023

Chugiak Dog Musher's Association (CDMA) Letter of Support for West Beach Lake Multiuse Trail

CDMA supports the development of a year-round West Lake Multiuse Trail with an at-grade crossing of the mushing trails. This at-grade crossing will use signage and fencing/chicanes to minimize user conflict. CDMA withdraws its request for a grade-separated crossing at this location.

Deanna Partow, CDMA President



Chugiak Community Council

Post Office Box 671350
Chugiak, Alaska 99567

<i>Board Officers</i>	•	<i>Board Members</i>
Jake Horazdovsky, President		Darryl Parks
Blake Merrifield, Vice President		Will Taygan
Vacant, Secretary		Matt Hickey
Burke Wonnell, Treasurer		Rashae Johnson

<i>Alternate Board Member</i>	•	<i>Alternate Board Member</i>
Tom Looney		Harold Parker

Fire Lake

Chugiak

Peter's Creek

Mirror Lake

Thunderbird Heights

Eklutna

Chugiak Community Council Resolution

From Council Meeting

April 7, 2023

Letter of Support for the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail through Beach Lake Park.

The Chugiak Community Council meet on March 16th 2023 and had further discussion on the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail. We passed the following resolution.

1. Chugiak Community Council fully supports the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail, connecting Eagle River to Eklutna through Beach Lake and Mirror Lake Parks.
2. Specifically, Chugiak Community Council supports Chugiak-Eagle River Parks and Recreation matching a \$250,000.00 grant from Chugiak Mountain Bike Riders for the immediate development of the West Lake Trail around Beach Lake.
3. Chugiak Community Council supports constructing a year-round West Lake Multi Use Trail with an at-grade (not separated-grade) crossing.

Jake Horazdovsky, President

Chugiak Community Council
chugiakcouncil@gmail.com,
Jacob.Horazdovsky@RESPEC.com

Join CCC conversations on Facebook:

Facebook: chugiak community council

Visit CCC web page / sign up to receive emails:

Web: communitycouncils.org

Contact the CCC by email:

Email: chugiakcouncil@gmail.com

South Fork Community Council

10 March 2023

Eagle River & Chugiak Parks and Rec Board of Supervisors
Eagle River Town Center
12001 Business Blvd
Eagle River, Alaska 99577

Dear Board of Supervisors

The South Fork Community Council fully supports the Northern Extension of the Coastal Trail. Connecting Eagle River to Eklutna through Beach Lake and Mirror Lake Parks.

Specifically the South Fork Community Council Supports t Chugiak – Eagle River Parks and Rec matching a \$250,000.00 grant from Chugiak Mountain Bike Riders, for the immediate development of the West Lake Trail and Beach Lake.

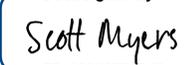
South Fork Community Council supports constructing the West Lake Multi Use Trail with no separated grade crossing.

This was brought up at the March 2nd, 2023 South Fork Community Council Meeting. The motion was made to support this project. The Motion was seconded and voted on unanimously.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact using the information below.

Sincerely Yours,

DocuSigned by:


Scott Myers

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President,
South Fork Community Council
(907) 280. 8010
scott@scottak.com