

Eklutna Valley Community Council
May 12, 2022
Meeting minutes

The meeting was chaired by council president Rick Sinnott and began at 6:37 p.m. The council met at the Chugach State Park campground fire ring, near the pavilion. Twenty-six council members were present: Dan Thompson, Margan Grover, Buff and Deb Rix, Keith and Vicki Darby, Glen and Mary Keller, Erlinda Downing, Tena and Skip Cheely, Lisa and Rick Sinnott, Gwyn and Mike Wiedmer, Josiah Trout, Randy and Charity Bangerter, Tom and Helen Bohn, Teal Heller and Russ Carpenter, Kirk Alkire, Kevin and Jessie Menkens, and Barry Rogers. Two guests – Tim Stallard and Jen Schmidt – were also present.

We were blessed with decent weather. After the meeting the valley was dusted with snow.

The meeting agenda was approved unanimously. The minutes of the January 12, 2022, meeting were approved unanimously with no changes.

Dan Thompson reported that the council still has \$578.38 in its account.

OLD BUSINESS

Local crime report. Nothing significant to report, except Russ and Teal reported that their Sasquatch had been shot.

Ice cream shop and proposed recreational lodge and cabins. The ice cream shop is open. To the best of our knowledge, no permits, including a conditional use permit, have been issued for constructing the proposed lodge and cabins. Deb Rix said her daughter had heard an advertisement for e-bike rentals and opportunities in Chugach State Park on FM 903.1 “The Mix” radio. Rick remarked that e-bikes are not allowed on the community trail or in Chugach State Park and he planned to ask a few questions. **May 15 update: Rick was wrong. The state park’s new e-bike regulation went into effect on May 5.**

NEW BUSINESS

Invasive plant control in Eklutna Valley. Tim Stallard, with Alien Species Control, presented information on local invasive plant species and told us about his plans to reduce white sweet clover and bird vetch infestations along Eklutna Lake Road. Invasive plants are not simply weeds, which are plants that grow where they aren’t wanted. To be considered invasive a plant species must be capable of causing significant economic or physical damage to people, their properties, or natural resources. Eklutna Lake Road is the only road leading into the community (and one of the few roads that access northern Chugach State Park). Therefore, it is a likely route for invasive plants that often prefer disturbed areas like road shoulders and ditches.

Tim passed out copies of a handbook to help identify invasive plants. It can also be found at https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5320150.pdf. His company has a permit from the Alaska Department of Transportation to spray individual plants along the road. He is working with Chugach State Park as well and asks that anyone who finds an outbreak of invasive plants contact him at 907-347-2214. Tim’s PowerPoint presentation couldn’t be shared without electricity, but Rick sent community council members a copy of his presentation by email.

Wildfire hazard mapping. Jen Schmidt, a professor with the University of Alaska-Anchorage's Institute for Social and Economic Research, showed us maps she has compiled that assess wildfire risks in the Municipality of Anchorage and Eklutna Valley. Jen has incorporated information on plant coverage (e.g., conifers, hardwoods, brush, grass, rock, water) overlain with its flammability, likelihood of producing burning embers that are carried by winds, and other related factors. An area between Cheely's Lane and Cranberry Ridge Road has a high risk of wildfire, as do areas just south of Eklutna Lake Road as far west as Milepost 4 or 5. With only one road in and out of the valley, these areas present a significant hazard. The wildfire hazard map for the entire municipality is at <https://sites.google.com/alaska.edu/jenschmidt/wildfire/aura/wildfire-exposure>. You can zoom in to Eklutna Valley, but you might have to click on the "layers" button in the bottom right corner of the MOA map and turn off the community council layer to get a better view.

Jen told us that conifers are the most likely to burn, while deciduous trees are generally much less likely. She recommended creating a defensible space of up to 30 feet around homes and other structures by removing spruce trees, spare tires and firewood; pruning spruce limbs up to 6-8 feet above the ground; and cleaning up gutters and piles of leaves. Flying embers, often from burning spruce cones, cause most of the damage to structures from wildfires. Several people mentioned that they've asked Chugach State Park to allow them to clear beetle-killed and other spruce trees from the strip of parkland between Raymond Drive and Eklutna Lake Road, with no success. Rick said he'd share Jen's wildlife hazard maps with the ranger and see if that might be persuasive.

Moose calves and bears. It wasn't on the agenda, but after hearing about local hazards like invasive species and wildfires, Rick added that moose calves will be born any day now, so be careful and keep dogs out of the woods. Also, bears are active and Eklutna Valley is a part of the municipality where bear-resistant trash cans are required by ordinance. If you don't have a bear-resistant container, ask the trash pickup service for one as soon as possible.

Erosion on Eklutna Lake Road near the guardrail. About two weeks ago Erlinda told Rick about a badly eroded area near the guardrail. He sent an email to Scott Thomas, the Alaska Department of Transportation's traffic and safety engineer for the southcentral region. Scott promised to look into it. **May 15 update: It looks as though several cubic yards of soil were dumped on the spot; however, there now appears to be a much larger problem with the jeep road slumping below the guardrail that might eventually affect Eklutna Lake Road.**

Road cleanup. Community council members plan to meet at the ice cream shop parking lot on Saturday, May 14, to conduct the annual road cleanup. Kirk Alkire told us he has organized a large group of volunteers who will be picking up trash along the highway between Mirror Lake and Eklutna overpasses. He offered to coordinate with us to take Eklutna Lake Road trash to the landfill.

The meeting adjourned at about 7:30 p.m. Newly elected assembly member Kevin Cross had expressed his intent to attend this meeting. He had another community council meeting to attend in Eagle River; however, he hoped to come to Eklutna after that meeting. Most members stuck around and visited with one another until 8:10, but Kevin wasn't able to make it.

By the way, both speakers commented favorably on the turnout at the meeting compared with other community councils they have visited. So pat yourselves on the back.