

South Fork Eagle River Trail Design Summary

Overview of Original Trail

The original South Fork Eagle River Trail was an inherited alignment. Originally a social trail, the route traveled through wetlands, up the fall line, and roughly followed a glacial moraine bench for a mile and a half before descending to a bridge over the South Fork. Much of the trail, while scenic, was suffering from the kind of degradation typical of un-planned, non-designed trails in Alaska. There were abundant muddy sections, over-steep and fall-line sections, many areas of trail-braiding, and highly rocky and rutted tread throughout. Very little of the trail was in sustainable condition. With upwardly trending visitor use and little maintenance, the trail would continue to degrade and the areas of impact would widen.

New Trail Design

The design for the new trail tries to retain the positive qualities of the former trail (views, destinations, features) while improving the alignment to a sustainable one, with full-bench cut whenever possible and tread-hardening structures intermittently. The trail begins and ends at the same points. In between those points, the new design dovetails with the old alignment in places and moves the trail to better terrain and soils whenever possible.

Trailhead to Hunter Pass Junction: (.4 miles) The new trail leaves the trailhead using a causeway for several hundred feet and quickly finds sloping ground to begin a bench cut. It climbs through three sweep turns and traverses open tundra toward the existing Hunter Pass Trail Junction. The planned trail width is 48 inches to accommodate side-by-side hiking and easy two way traffic and passing. This makes it more convenient for the larger numbers of people who typically use the first portion of hiking trails. The planned surface is compacted gravel to protect these wetter and softer soils from foot traffic as well as from the hooves of pack animals that have traditionally used this trail to access hunting within the Ship Creek Valley.

Hunter Pass Junction to SFER Bridge: (1.8 miles) The new trail leaves the junction and traverses as a full bench cut to the high point on the trail midway to the bridge. It crosses two major drainages in better soils, avoiding many of the wettest sections of the old trail. It makes use of much of the highly impacted corridor along the top of the moraine, moving the trail onto sloping ground instead of the ridge. From the high point, the trail traverses at consistent grades to the bridge, utilizing one topo-turn to approach the bridge. The trail narrows slightly from the junction of Hunter Pass, reducing to a measurement of 36 to 42 inches depending upon the terrain and adjacent obstructions.

Final Summary

Chugach State Park is confident in the new alignment, which conforms to the following sustainable principles:

- Planned and Designed
- Controlled Grades (none over 15%)
- “The Half-Rule”

- Durable Tread Surfaces in flat ground
- Full-Bench cut with adequate out-slope
- Curvilinear Contour Alignment
- Integrated Grade Reversals for drainage control