



Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation Ten-Year Strategic Plan 2007-2017



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November 31, 2006

Dear Friends,

Alaska offers a great variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and cultural experiences. From fishing on the many beautiful streams to traveling on our thousands of miles of trails, the experiences are as diverse as the people of this great state and are embodied in the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation's various parks and programs.

In recent years the Division has faced many challenges trying to fulfill our mission to provide the high quality facilities and services people have come to expect. As a result, we initiated this strategic planning process to improve the effectiveness of the Division and better provide for the needs of state residents and visitors.

I am confident that this document represents the priorities outlined by the public. The seven goals and various objectives, along with the strategies to achieve them, will serve as a blueprint for the management of state park areas and division programs and will help the Division tackle the challenges of the future.

I am particularly proud of the fact that, as part of this planning process, many Alaskans took the time to attend meetings, submit comments and respond to our questionnaire. Alaskans clearly care deeply about our state parks and division programs and the many public benefits they provide. With my utmost gratitude and appreciation, I want to thank the staff, partners and hundreds of Alaskans who contributed toward making this plan a shared vision for our division's future.

Sincerely,

Jerry Lewanski, Director
Alaska State Parks





November 31, 2006

Dear Alaskans:

I am pleased to present this Ten-Year Strategic Plan for the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. This plan represents a collective process designed to reflect the views of the public and their vision for how the Division can best meet their needs today and in the future.

The strategic plan is about the future: the future of outdoor recreation opportunities in Alaska and its natural landscapes, environments, cultural resources, and most importantly, the future of the diverse people who reside in and visit the state.

The planning process was purposefully designed to be inclusive and I hope that many of you took every opportunity to participate in the process to develop a plan that presents a shared vision for the future. The challenge now is to ensure that the many strategies incorporated into the plan are aggressively pursued and the plan is used as a roadmap to improve the Division's existing operations and pursue new initiatives. I encourage all of you to support our staff, Citizens Advisory Boards, and partners as they implement these strategies over the next ten years.

The success of the planning process will be ultimately be measured by the success of its implementation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Michael Menge", is written over a light blue circular stamp. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Michael Menge, Commissioner
Department of Natural Resources



Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Ten-Year Strategic Plan, 2007-2017

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Photos courtesy of: Robert C. Angell, Tom Bol/Mat-Su CVB, Eagle River Nature Center and State Park Employees.



Introduction

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation provides outdoor recreation opportunities, protects and interprets areas of natural and cultural significance, and supports the state's tourism industry. The 121 park units range in size and character from the half-acre Potter Section House State Historic Site to the 1.6 million acre Wood-Tikchik State Park. In addition, there are several programs administered by the division including the Office of History and Archaeology, State Historical Preservation Office, Office of Boating Safety, Office of Design and Construction, and the Alaska Trails Program.

The division employs 129 full-time, part-time and Alaska Conservation Corps employees. Of these, only 43 full-time employees work in the park units. The division also sponsors a very large and active volunteer program including over 800 dedicated volunteers who donate over 80,000 hours of labor annually.

The state park system in Alaska enables everyone, regardless of age, background, economic or social circumstances to enjoy the state's natural beauty and experience a wide range of recreational activities. Containing 3.2 million acres, the Alaska State Park System is the newest and largest in the United States. Units in the system are diverse and include parks, historic parks and sites, marine parks, wilderness

parks, recreation areas and sites, trails, preserves, and special management areas. The system provides over 2,500 campsites, 128 trailheads, 37 boat launches, 43 scenic overlooks, and over 340 toilets. Alaska State Parks receive over 4 million visits per year, almost twice the visitation seen in Alaska's National Parks. Of the approximately 4.4 million visits, 80 percent of the visitors are Alaska residents.

Park visitors help fuel the state's economy. More than 630 commercial use permits are issued annually to small businesses operating inside state parks. Many community economies depend on and thrive from state park users. With continued growth projections in the tourism industry, state parks are a key component of Alaska's economic future.

After 40 years of providing outdoor recreation to the public, the division faces unprecedented challenges. Despite the increase in funding from both the legislature and user fees over the last 15 years, the division's budget has not kept up with inflation. To compound this, park visitation has risen 29 percent in the last decade. As a result, the division has found it evermore difficult to satisfy the outdoor recreation needs of residents and visitors. Increased use threatens to damage park resources and challenges the agency's ability to sustain facilities and programs at acceptable levels.



Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation's Spring Conference 2005



Matanuska Glacier; Tom Bol/Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau

This backdrop of social, economic, and environmental influences requires continual, innovative approaches and dedication by division personnel to provide the outdoor settings and programs people desire while effectively meeting resource management goals. The division has long been familiar with these challenges; they are embodied in the agency's multi-faceted legislative mission mandated in Alaska state law. Those holding the fate of this division have an awesome responsibility. Division leaders, together with Alaska residents, must decide what kind of parks we want to leave our children, and pursue that vision with unswerving determination. In Alaska, these responsibilities also include the management of statewide outdoor recreation, education and cultural resource programs.

Mindful of these responsibilities and realizing that the division could not meet the public's future expectations without a significant change in direction, the department's leadership initiated this strategic planning process. The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation's Ten-Year Strategic Plan, 2007-2017, is the product of this comprehensive planning process.

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan

Why the Plan?

This strategic plan is a tool to improve policy analysis and priority setting for the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation over the coming years. The plan is designed to be flexible, allowing the agency to adjust to unexpected challenges that will inevitably appear during the ten-year planning timeframe. The strategic plan provides overall direction to the division, as well as guidance and stated purpose for its leaders, employees and stakeholders.

How was the plan developed?

The planning process began in late May 2006. Planners first reviewed themes identified in the 2004 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and strategic plans from many other states. A process timeline and draft plan format were then developed. In June, planners distributed a news releases and developed a website and questionnaire. Through the course of the summer, a series of 42 focus group meetings were held across the state.



Focus groups included park staff, park advisory boards, municipalities, non-profits, contractors, concessionaires, visitor bureaus, volunteers and many others. By early August, over 300 questionnaires had been returned. The responses on the questionnaires and information generated by focus groups included hundreds of valuable suggestions and insights. These were compiled and formatted into draft goals, objectives and over 250 strategies. In late August, 35 members of the division's staff met for a two-day facilitated workshop to review and consolidate all the public's suggested strategies and to refine the draft goals and objectives. These were included in the draft plan which was distributed for public review in September. In October, a series of 11 public meetings were held throughout the state. One hundred and twenty four people attended and almost 100 written comments were received. These comments were used to further refine the plan and prioritize strategies. The final plan was adopted by the Department of Natural Resources Commissioner and Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation Director in early December 2006.

What is the Plan?

Three essential elements comprise this new strategic planning model for the division:

1. **Strategic Plan** - To succeed, an organization must have a clear view of its purpose and reason for existence. With this in mind, Mission and Vision statements were created for the agency. The mission and vision reflect the core values which evolved from public input during the process and were further articulated by division employees in August 2006. Core values include:

- Providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities;
- Committing to natural resource stewardship and interpretation;
- Protecting and fostering understanding of our cultural heritage;
- Lending support to outdoor recreation and safety programs statewide;
- Providing customer service;
- Basing management and decision-making on sound data;
- Developing an informed and involved public based upon an open and motivated staff that exude professionalism;
- Creating a staff that are valued, diverse and dedicated, and
- Developing a means of sustainable funding.

The ***Mission Statement*** was developed to clarify the agency's reason for existence. The new ***Vision Statement*** explains the agency's future. Seven planning ***Goals*** frame the steps over the next ten years that will move the division closer to this vision. ***Objectives*** and specific ***Action Strategies*** during that timeframe will help the agency reach desired goals.

2. **Annual Implementation Plan** – An Annual Implementation Plan will be developed. This planning effort will closely link prioritized planning action strategies with division budget initiatives and other resource allocations. The plan specifically identifies actions to pursue

in the upcoming fiscal year, as well as budget initiatives that will be reflected in the budget process. Envisioned to be dynamic and to assist in developing benchmarks and performance planning, the plan will be developed each year by the Leadership Team. The team is made up of area superintendents, division program managers and members of the Director's Office. Prioritized action strategies from the Ten-Year Strategic Plan will be identified, quantified and considered in the annual budget process. As part of this process, the division must realistically balance its ability to fund new initiatives in the plan with the need to continue providing adequate resources for core duties and responsibilities.

- 3. Annual Report** – An Annual Report will be published near the end of each calendar year. The Annual Report will cover the prior fiscal year's (July through June) accomplishments and agency priorities for the coming fiscal year.

With these three integrated planning pieces, the division will be prepared to respond to legislative and executive branch initiatives, social and economic

trends or themes, and immediate threats to important natural and cultural resources.

How will the plan affect division's priorities?

The action strategies listed under each objective are in priority order. Most strategies in this plan are initiatives new to the division or recommendations for improving operations. This approach was intended to focus attention on ways to improve the ways the division conducts its business. Although many on-going activities and programs are not identified in the plan as specific strategies, they are still essential for fulfilling the division's mission.

The Strategic Plan's priorities along with the existing demands of operating the park units and other programs will help direct budget requests and allocations. High priority strategies were determined to be those that are absolutely essential and cannot be postponed without serious detrimental consequences to the division's mission. Those strategies with higher priorities are given specific initiation and/or completion dates in the plan. Those strategies with lower priorities were not assigned dates because of the unpredictability of future funds. Shortly after the



Anthracite Ridge, photo taken from Long Lake SRS

plan was adopted, cost estimates for funding some of the high priority strategies were prepared. Funding requests for these will be pursued first as opportunities arise.

Current fiscal resources are insufficient to implement all the strategies in the plan. However, many of the strategies do not require additional budget or staff. The division will strive to achieve these strategies regardless of the availability of additional funds. In other cases existing resources can be shifted to strategies that better meet the division's mission.

What the Plan is Not

The Ten-Year Strategic Plan is not intended to list all activities undertaken by the division over the next ten years; it focuses primarily on new initiatives and ways to improve park operations and programs. If

an activity or product is not identified in the plan, particularly day-to-day activities required to operate state parks and programs; it should not be assumed that these too aren't important.

In addition, plan strategies are not intended to apply equally to each of the 121 park units. The park system includes a wide variety of units ranging from large, relatively undeveloped parks to small historic sites. While it is the intent of the division to provide for a diversity of uses, this does not imply that every park unit is capable of, or suitable for, all uses.

This document, as well as integrated agency plans, is not intended to replace other critical planning processes conducted regularly by the division. Each of these plans and processes will consistently include division priorities, mission and vision. Other



Lost Lake at Quartz Lake Recreation Area



important division planning processes include the:

- Annual division budget and plan, submitted to the Commissioner's Office;
- Ten-year Development Plan, updated annually by the Leadership Team, which reflects intended capital budget investments from all funding sources over a rolling ten-year planning horizon, and the
- Division grant programs developed each year to reflect the intended use of these funds over the coming year.

Trends, Influences and Public Preferences

Over the past several months, department planners gathered and analyzed trends, influences and public preferences related to the agency's mission. We have listened to Alaskans and as a result, the goals, objectives and action strategies contained within this Ten-Year Strategic Plan reflect this input and public interests.

For more information about the Ten-Year Strategic Plan and the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, see www.alaskastateparks.org

Mission Statement

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation provides outdoor recreation opportunities and conserves and interprets natural, cultural, and historic resources for the use, enjoyment, and welfare of the people.

Vision Statement

The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation envisions an affordable and accessible system of parks that provide diverse, safe, year-round, high-quality, family-oriented, outdoor recreation experiences; statewide programs that enhance the enjoyment and stewardship of the state's outdoor recreation, natural, historic and cultural resources; and a dedicated, professional staff that fully meets the needs of the public.



Recreation

Goal: Provide and promote high-quality, sustainable, safe and affordable recreational opportunities to keep pace with the rising demands, needs and diversity of Alaskans and visitors.

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation has accumulated a sizeable portfolio of park facilities and infrastructure. To ensure park visitors continue to enjoy quality outdoor recreation experiences, and interaction with Alaska’s natural and cultural world, these invaluable state assets must be properly maintained. Park visitors and other Alaskans have agreed that taking care of existing resources should be one of the division’s highest priorities.

The deferred maintenance backlog for park facilities is now over \$49 million.¹ In some years, as little as \$50,000 was appropriated to address this statewide backlog. At this rate, the deferred maintenance needs will continue to grow rapidly and significantly shorten the useful life of park facilities. Ongoing routine maintenance is one way of extending the useful life of facilities, but adequate funding for this has not been available for some time. A concerted multi-year effort will be necessary to rebuild and maintain Alaska’s state park facilities to acceptable standards. If we are to have a state park system we can be proud of, this investment is necessary. Help from the federal government through grant funds is part, but not all of the answer. Federal funds must be matched with state dollars and some repairs are not eligible under grant programs. For the continued enjoyment of accessible outdoor recreation and for the continued economic benefits that visitors provide to local communities, the state must provide sufficient funds dedicated to eradicating the maintenance backlog. To that end, the division will develop and fund sustainable

maintenance schedules and seek opportunities and funds that will help sustain these facilities in an acceptable condition.

Design of new park facilities, operative guidelines and efficient energy use and conservation all have tremendous impacts on the environment and on the division’s economic bottom line. Applying sustainable development principles in state parks will lower long-term maintenance and operating costs and improve the state park experience for visitors.

As Alaska faces burgeoning growth and development at the parks’ borders, the division must protect current and future access points and trails connecting to the park units. The division will strive to keep more facilities open and staffed year-round, will consider future recreation needs of the public over the long term, and will seriously consider proposals for additions to the park system while staying mindful of the potential long-term costs of managing these additions.

Most of the strategies in this chapter address the immediate needs of the frontcountry and associated facilities. These areas experience the highest level of use and associated impacts, and require the most management attention. Backcountry areas managed by the division are also important and they will continue to be managed for primitive forms of recreation and their high ecological values.



Moon Lake, Northern Region

¹ “Deferred maintenance costs” apply to infrastructure such as campgrounds, visitor centers and boat launches. They also include deferred maintenance needs incurred by such things as trails, signs, equipment, roads and bringing existing facilities into compliance with the Americans with the Disabilities Act.

Objective I.

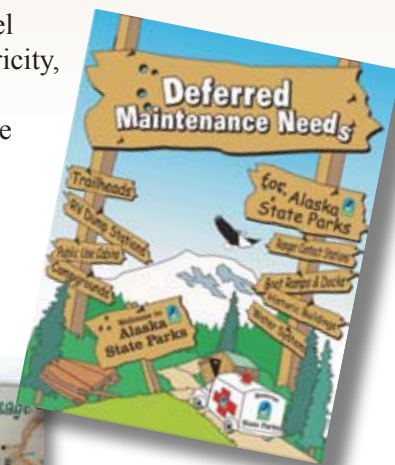
Ensure that all park grounds, equipment and facilities are well maintained at a standardized level that enhance safety, maximize equipment and facility lifespans, and meet public expectations.

Action Strategies:

1. In order to address the deferred maintenance needs of the division, consider the following strategies and begin implementing by 2007:
 - Develop a 5 or 10 year plan that prioritizes by yearly increments deferred maintenance needs designed to eliminate the backlog.
 - Develop a revolving maintenance fund for repairs of new facilities based on a depreciation formula.
 - Provide each district legislator and Citizens Advisory Board with an itemized list of specific local deferred maintenance needs. This updated list will also be posted on the division's website.
 - Utilize funding from grant programs which could be allocated to deferred maintenance projects as program restrictions allow.
 - Establish a measurement for the useful life of facilities and equipment and maintain them to the extent of their useful life.
 - Promote a statewide park bond issue specifically directed at reducing the backlog of state park facility deferred maintenance needs.
2. As part of addressing the current deferred maintenance backlog, develop a Preventive Maintenance and Management Plan by June 2007 to provide data and strategies needed to bring park facilities and infrastructure up-to-date. Criteria should be developed to prioritize repairs based on such factors as safety, public health, historic values, levels of use, and consequences of significant additional costs if repairs are not completed. Regularly revise this plan along with the "Deferred Maintenance Needs" document. Use the plan to identify and prioritize major renovation, maintenance and staffing needs and fund associated budgets.
3. Conduct trails inventories and condition assessments on all high-use trails in the park system which will allow the division to prioritize maintenance needs, assign work crews, develop cost estimates, and assist in obtaining funding.
4. Improve facilities to assure they comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act standards and provide a quality experience for visitors of all capabilities.
5. Provide adequate working spaces and maintenance yards (either inside or outside park units) that meet the needs of the district offices. At a minimum every field office should provide staff with an office that meets the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and state standards including adequate space, ventilation, bathroom facilities and running water with enough additional space to contact visitors and provide information.
6. To improve camp host retention, improve host sites by providing hardened, level sites. When economically feasible, provide hookups with drinking water, electricity, telephone and septic systems.
7. Revamp the system for placing and maintaining mooring buoys in all the marine parks.
8. Assure that historic properties maintain historic integrity and character as described in the U.S. Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.



Deferred maintenance needs



Objective II.

Provide sustainable park facilities and infrastructure that accommodate diverse user groups, meet visitors' present and future needs, and enrich the state park experience.

Action Strategies:

1. To meet the ever-growing public demand for trails and increasing concerns about health as related to physical exercise, acquire funds to maintain and upgrade existing trails to sustainable standards and design and construct additional sustainable trails to and within state parks for a diversity of users. As part of this effort, by December of 2007 begin developing statewide trail standards which incorporate sustainable design concepts.
2. Develop additional group campsites and pavilions that fulfill community group needs for gatherings and assured camping by reservation for larger groups. Add one new site every other year for the next 6 years.
3. Develop an online campground reservation system and integrate it with the public use cabin reservation system by 2007.
4. Begin securing funding to initiate the design and construction of the South Denali Visitor Center Complex in partnership with the National Park Service in 2007.
5. Explore renewable and/or alternative energy options that would meet park needs and reduce long-term energy costs. Seek funding to implement these options in one pilot park by 2010 and, if successful, apply this program to other park units.
6. Expand the public use cabin system and, where appropriate, consider developing a backcountry hut-to-hut system.
7. In cooperation with other partners, develop at least one challenge course (such as ropes and obstacle courses) in a state park unit.
8. Consider proposals by concessionaires, contractors and others to operate and/or develop commercial facilities and services in units of the state park system. Priority consideration should be placed on facilities and services most valued by the public, or where the division lacks the expertise or resources to provide essential services or facilities. A portion of profits would be used to support the park system.



Objective III.

Pursue new state park lands and access needs to meet current and future demand.

Action Strategies:

1. Provide for present and anticipated future access to state parks when reviewing proposed subdivisions, plats and easements adjacent to park units. Ensure that public parking is platted at, or in close proximity to, these access points. Trailheads and parking facilities should be designed to be compatible with the character of the local area. Provisions for neighborhood access should also be provided. As part of this effort, by 2008 begin to develop a park access plan for Chugach State Park.
2. Improve and expand parking in areas where parking is limited or congests traffic on adjacent roadways in order to support increased use and access. Also consider development of additional smaller parking areas to disperse use and reduce congestion at existing parking areas. Take into consideration the ability of the park unit to accommodate increased use and the impacts on the character of the local area.
3. To provide for winter access: keep additional parks open in winter by plowing more (and bigger) parking lots; extend the use in shoulder season by keeping gates open and facilities in place longer; and continue to collect day-use parking fees in winter. As part of this effort, by August 2007 create a prioritized list of park areas that will receive increased shoulder season and winter management attention and work with partners to ensure year round access.
4. Produce a prioritized list of land acquisition, land trade, and management agreement needs by region and review and update it every four years. Develop criteria for adding new park units that includes whether funding is likely to be available to cover the additional cost of operations. Business plans should be developed for proposed additions if there is a question whether or not funding is available to operate the area and the area has potential to be financially self sustaining.
5. Develop realty services expertise within the division to provide technical assistance on complex land issues such as easements, land exchanges, management agreements and other realty-related issues. Until this expertise can be developed, work with the Division of Mining, Land and Water to establish an agreement between the divisions for assistance with this type of work.
6. To meet the recreation demands of an increasing population, complete acquisitions and park additions for Afognak Island, Shuyak State Park tidelands, Sitka Causeway, Petroglyph Beach State Historic Site parking area, Fort Abercrombie State Historic Park, Bradley Lake, and land exchanges at Independence Mine State Historic Park and Point Bridget State Park.
7. Consider linear parks (greenbelts) that provide recreation opportunities and connectivity to other recreation areas and destinations in local communities.



Objective IV.

Provide for a diversity of recreation opportunities to experience and explore our natural and cultural environments and provide sustainable outdoor recreation settings in park units.

Action Strategies:

1. To encourage dispersed recreational use and decrease pressure on heavily used facilities, direct users to lesser-used facilities and during non-peak times. This goal could be met through methods such as enhanced marketing, improved facilities, making more spots available for advance reservations, or reduced fees for the lesser used facility or periods.
2. Investigate innovative ways to expand diverse recreational opportunities both within existing parks and by establishing new types of parks such as underwater and water trails, maritime heritage, scientific, educational, ecological and motorized recreation parks.
3. Establish additional historic parks and sites to preserve and interpret our cultural heritage.



Financial Management

Goal: Stabilize and strengthen the division's financial condition.

Alaska's state park system is the largest in the nation and attracts over four million visitors each year, 80 percent of which are Alaska residents. Over 3.2 million acres and 121 park units are within the system. Compared to other states, the system is ranked one of the lowest for both the number of employees and the amount it spends per visitor (\$ 1.50). Because of its small staff and budget, the division faces serious challenges in meeting the needs and expectations of its visitors. The division, despite these challenges, remains committed to providing the best possible park system and programs by using a variety of innovative and creative means. Efficient financial strategies must be in place in the future to achieve this division goal and ensure more effective financial decisions.

Alaska State Parks has an ongoing program of "contract management." There are now 44 facilities within 25 park units managed by private contractors. The types of facilities that are contracted out include historic buildings and sites, nature centers, public use cabins, campgrounds, and parking areas. Contracted facilities are generally located near population centers and on the road system. These are the facilities that generate an income stream that is more than adequate to cover the cost of daily operations and therefore are of interest to contractors and non-profits. Many of the 121 facilities and units of the state park system are not as heavily used, and as a result, past attempts to interest contractors in operating these lesser-used facilities have been largely unsuccessful.

Contracting out facility operations still does not entirely relieve the division of its management responsibilities and the costs associated with them. The division still retains the obligation and liability of larger maintenance needs, law enforcement and

contract oversight. For example, a contractor can fix a latch on an outhouse door and, if revenues are adequate, build more picnic tables with the maintenance account set aside from the proceeds. The maintenance account does not provide enough for the contractor to repair roads, rehabilitate campsites, maintain the remainder of the park unit or address the estimated \$49 million deferred maintenance backlog.¹

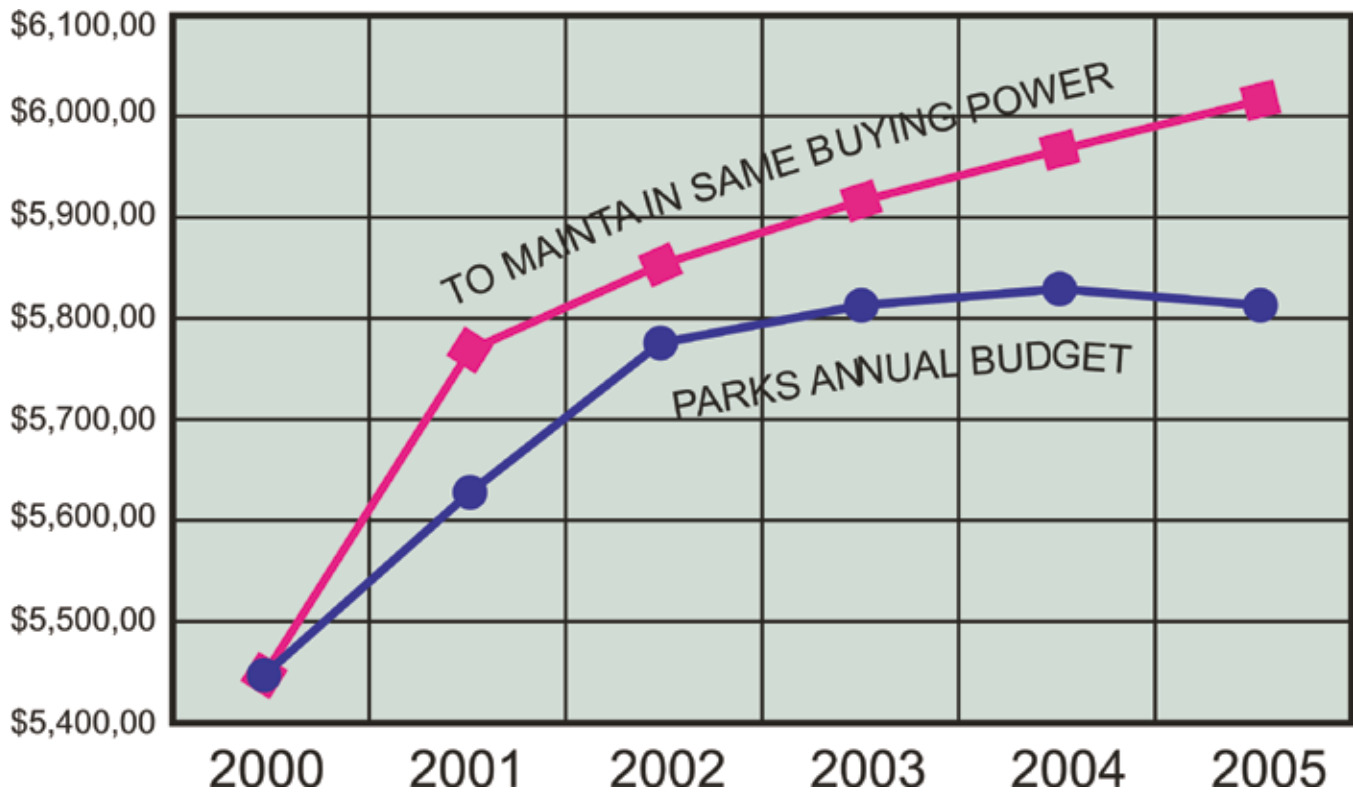
While contracting provides an opportunity to stretch the operating budget, it alone will not allow for a sustainable park system. The inherent functions of government still remain. Such functions include law enforcement; public safety; resource management; contract administration; permit management; authorizing and monitoring uses on park land; and staffing the State Historic Preservation Office. In addition to campgrounds, trailheads and boat launches, the division has defined responsibilities for resource and recreation management identified in state statute.

For the past ten years, legislative directives and funding have emphasized increased collection of user fees. The division's response was to increase and expand user fees. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1992, user fees funded just 14 percent of the division's budget. In 2005 these fees funded 32 percent of the budget.² At the same time, state general fund support for the division has decreased considerably from 84 percent in 1992 to just 57 percent in 2005. As a result, the division's budget has remained relatively flat the last few years and actually decreased in relation to inflation (Figure 1). This is further exacerbated by the fact that health care and energy costs, which constitute a significant portion of the division's budget, have increased faster than the rate of inflation over this timeframe.

¹ Deferred maintenance is under the Recreation goals and objectives section.

² The remainder of the budgets in 1992 and 2005 were made up of other sources, such as federal grants, and payments from other agencies requesting our assistance in management of resources

Figure 1. Division's Budget in Relation to Inflation, 2000-2006



The ability to generate additional revenues through fees is approaching its limit. Market resistance to further fee increases is evidenced by park users' opposition to these increases and the fact that the facilities that are most likely to generate revenues already have fees. The resistance to pay from both park users and commercial operators has increased to the point that visitation is at risk of dropping significantly if fees are increased further. A 2004 survey³ of state residents found that a significant majority were willing to pay user fees, but the amount they were willing to pay was well below what the division was charging at that time. While there remain some opportunities to collect additional fees in new areas and raise fees in other areas, this funding source cannot be depended on to provide significant new revenues that support the division's operations and deferred maintenance needs.

Strong public sentiments expressed at focus group meetings in the summer of 2006 and through the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan survey in 2004 indicate that the State Park System cannot be expected to pay for itself entirely through user fees. In addition, many felt that beneficiaries of the division's facilities, recreation opportunities and statewide programs should not be limited to just those who can afford to pay park fees. The personal, social, health and economic benefits of the division's programs, including the opportunity to experience physical and spiritual renewal in the park units, should remain available to all citizens, regardless of their economic status.

The stability of the division's budget is also a concern. Revenues from fees fluctuate dramatically from year-to-year depending on weather,

³ From the user survey conducted as part of developing Alaska's Outdoor Legacy, Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2004-2009.

Financial Management

visitation, fish runs, the economy and other factors. Approximately 25 percent of the user fees are collected in the last five weeks of each fiscal year, which ends June 30th. Fees collected must be used in the same fiscal year. As a result, park managers have difficulty predicting how much funding is available to operate during the busy summer season. To remain financially viable in the future, the division must seek additional general funds or other financial support to assure fiscal stability over the course of the year and from year-to-year.

Other than Louisiana, Alaska State Parks has the least diverse array of funding resources in the United States. Fifty-six percent of the annual budget comes from the General Fund, 32 percent from user fees, and 11 percent from other sources such as federal grants. One factor common to those state park systems that are particularly successful is their reliance on a diverse array of funding sources. The Alaska State

Park System relies on only a few funding sources and is therefore more susceptible to budget fluctuations from year-to-year. In order to create a successful and sustainable park system, it is essential that the division broaden its funding sources and utilize those sources in creative ways.

The division recognizes its historic and legal responsibility to keep parks accessible, affordable and open to all visitors. In the coming years, the division will make a reasonable, understandable and equitable system of user fees a priority and will also commit to working with the Legislature to retain a reasonable percentage of its total budget from the state's general fund dollars. In addition, the division will continue to seek state and federal funds for grants and the funds required to administer these programs. The grant programs the division administers have received wide public support and the objectives and strategies below are designed to improve and enhance these programs.



Objective I.

Deliver a financially stable park system and other division programs.

Action Strategies:

1. To ensure a financially viable park system, work closely with the Alaska Legislature, the Commissioner's and Governor's offices, constituents and others to provide full funding for division programs and park operations.
2. By 2009, sponsor economic studies of some of the larger park units in the system such as the Kenai River Special Management Area, Chugach State Park, Kachemak Bay State Park, Chena River State Recreation Area, and Wood-Tikchik State Park. The purpose of the studies will be to document their contribution to local and statewide economies. In addition to looking at the direct economic impacts, this effort should also assess and attempt to quantify the benefits that parks provide through storm water management, soil conservation, clean air and healthy recreation opportunities.
3. Encourage municipalities to direct a portion of their bed tax receipts to trail enhancements, interpretive signs, historic sites and other visitor facilities and programs.
4. Request that a portion of tax revenues received from the cruise ship industry be directed toward park facilities and services that benefit cruise ship passengers.
5. Encourage increases to the percentage of non-restricted federal-aid highway apportionments from their current level of two percent to their 2002 level of approximately eight percent. These funds are used to support the design and construction of recreation facilities within the units of the state park system along state and local roadways.
6. Increase the legislative appropriations to state park operations from the registration fees that the Division of Motor Vehicles already collects for off-road vehicles and RV's. These funds would be used for trail enhancements, RV campsites, trail ethics education and other programs and facilities. In addition, a portion of current boat registration fees should be directed toward building and maintaining boat launches and launch-associated parking.
7. Work with the Alaska State Parks friends groups to set up accounts with the Alaska Community Foundation or another foundation to encourage personal philanthropy toward the state park system.
8. Cooperate with supporters of the state park system to create a State Parks Foundation. The foundation would provide a means for benefactors to donate funds, goods and services to support the division's programs and park units.



Sheep Mountain, pullout at milepost 113, Glenn Hwy.

Objective II.

Continue and expand grant programs that provide for and enhance recreation, education, cultural resources and public safety.

Action Strategies:

1. Maximize federal funding through matching funds to ensure that the division receives 100 percent of its entitlements for federal outdoor recreation grant programs. This would include ensuring qualification for federal funding under 46 U.S.C., managing the Alaska Boating Safety Program to take full advantage of benefits available to the state under 46 U.S.C. 13101-13110, providing state funds to match the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and providing funding to the Historic Preservation Office to achieve annual certification and eligibility for the Historic Preservation Fund grant.
2. Recommend legislation to remove the sunset clause from the Alaska's Boating Safety Act (AS 05.25). If the Act sunsets, Alaska would no longer receive the state's share of federal funds for the state boating safety program.
3. Propose legislation by 2008 to increase snowmobile registration fees comparable to those in other snow-belt states in order to enhance and expand Alaska's trail grooming efforts.
4. Seek funding for the Alaska Outdoor Recreational, Open Space, and Historic Properties Development Fund Grant Program (11 AAC 17.010 – 11 AAC 17.900) to assist with the preservation of historic properties and seek capital funding for the Alaska Historic Preservation Plan.
5. Propose legislation and funding for new state-supported trail grant programs that are less restrictive than the current federal grant programs and are easier for applicants to apply for and comply with.
6. Propose changes in grant programs that are adequate to cover the cost of administering them.





Objective III.

Incorporate long-term financial planning and analysis into management decision making.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop a five-year, agency-wide business plan by 2009 to provide a blueprint for the division's business decisions, to guide efforts to efficiently generate revenue, and to be used in the annual budget implementation plan process. Update this plan annually. Based on available surveys, trend analyses and other information, the plan should project expenditures and revenues, identify fee changes and other initiatives to increase revenues.
2. By 2010, conduct a professional, comprehensive, asset-investment analysis at one pilot park to identify and recommend specific actions to improve efficiency, including increased investment and/or potential divestment of park assets. Complete similar analyses in other parks as funding/workload allow. The analyses should be completed in conjunction with the time and motion study described in the Human Resources section.
3. Initiate a study that assists in helping determine which park areas should be added to the system and which areas, if any, should be surplus. As part of this study:
 - a) Develop a list of areas that are currently managed by the division and those proposed to be added to the state park system by DNR plans, pending legislation and other proposals.
 - b) Audit all current and proposed lands managed by the division. The audit would include factors such as visitation rates, costs of operations and maintenance, how they were created (legislative designation, management agreement, purchase, donation etc.), deed restrictions and economic contribution to the local economy.
 - c) Using specific criteria, identify park units that should be added, deleted, or transferred to other agencies, passively managed, or have facilities removed.
 - d) Explore means for implementing the study's findings.
4. Create a consistent process that can be used for analyzing proposed projects, initiatives and park additions. This process will include an effective cost-benefit analysis methodology which fully accounts for administrative, fiscal and workforce expenditures.

Objective IV.

Provide effective administration and accountability for all programs.

Action Strategies:

1. As part of project-specific planning and budgeting processes, build projected maintenance and operating costs into funding plans for every capital project starting in 2008.
2. Identify and implement technologies that provide a more efficient and user friendly fee collection system at park entrances and other fee collection stations.
3. Improve communications with other departments when their projects are adjacent to or affect park land, resources or activities. In particular, this includes developing better communications with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to help clarify prior to each season which state park roads need to be serviced and when.
4. Secure funding to fully develop GIS capacity within the division. An integrated GIS database will result in more efficient operations and improved information for the public. Benefits include facilitating search and rescue, incident tracking, monitoring of natural resources, determining use patterns, project planning, and providing information to the public.
5. Continue to develop an integrated database for historic preservation programs which both saves staff time and funds while ensuring that these programs are in compliance with federal requirements.



Objective V.

Maintain the affordability of state parks while collecting fees to support parks and programs.

Action Strategies:

1. Beginning in 2007, evaluate every two years 11 AAC 05.010 regulations that allow collection of fees for facilities and areas. This evaluation will ensure that fees are commensurate with services and other considerations.
2. In 2007, propose capital improvement project funding that contributes to the design, construction and operation of the South Denali Visitor Complex.
3. Analyze the current fee structure and park fee elasticity (the degree to which visitors respond to changes in fees) and develop a more comprehensive, simple and understandable system of fees and passes for the public.
4. Encourage appropriate private sector enterprises through park concession agreements that provide services for park visitors outside of the division's expertise or mission.
5. Broaden the range of goods and services concessions are allowed to offer in state parks, while taking into consideration excessive commercialization of state parks.
6. Develop new facilities within, or complimentary to, state parks that are likely to produce at least enough revenue to pay for their maintenance and operations.

Natural and Cultural Resources

Goal: Sustain Alaska’s cultural, ecological, scenic and scientific assets through proactive stewardship pursuant to the division’s parks and programs.

Many of Alaska’s State Park units include lands that are of regional, statewide and national significance. With responsibility for over 3.2 million acres and 121 park units, the division manages large and small areas possessing outstanding and distinct natural, cultural, scenic and scientific values. These values should be conserved and protected for all time. With increased threats to natural and cultural resources, caring for existing resources and meeting the division’s resource stewardship mandate will require increased focus and attention.

As intact natural systems are reduced throughout Alaska, the division should, wherever appropriate and possible, serve as models of healthy, natural and sustainable ecosystems. To succeed in such efforts, existing resources must be understood. This understanding begins with an inventory of all flora, fauna and other resources within each park. The division must continue to increase collaboration with other agencies and higher-education institutions, taking advantage of outside expertise to expand agency knowledge and foster help with resource

management. To ensure that resource management remains a high priority, these values and priorities must be integrated into division plans, parks must be adequately staffed, and the staff must be properly trained to effectively manage these resources.

As development pressures increase, and with the passage of time and the effects of the elements, historic and archeological artifacts deteriorate and are lost. The division must strengthen efforts to identify study, designate, interpret, and protect or treat significant archaeological and historic resources. To accomplish this, the Office of History and Archeology needs to conduct surveys to identify and evaluate sites, buildings and structures. The office also needs to encourage communities to conduct surveys, and document, interpret, and protect or treat historic and archaeological properties. To promote recognition of cultural resources, the division must document properties to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Finally, the statewide inventory of cultural resources sites should continue to be expanded.

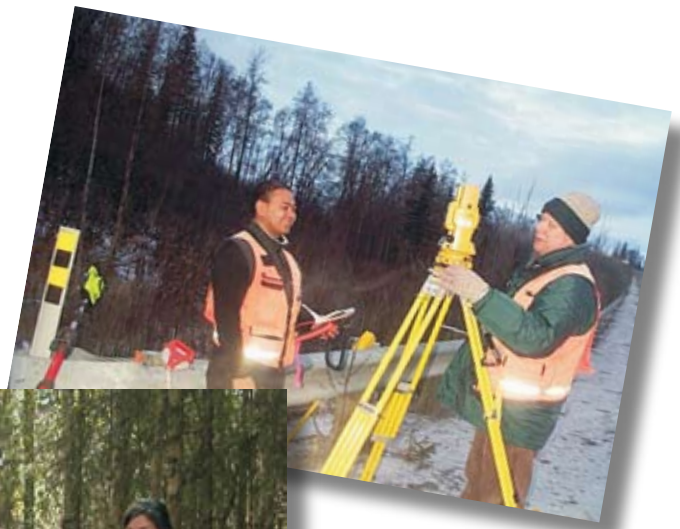


Objective I.

Inventory state parks' natural and cultural resources to determine their nature, location and overall condition.

Action Strategies:

1. Complete a set of baseline natural and cultural resource inventories by 2015 and develop a matrix of additional inventories desired at all parks by 2016.
2. Develop and implement a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) plan that identifies the most cost-effective way to meet the natural and cultural resource inventory and mapping needs of the park system. This may be accomplished by partnering and sharing information with other agencies and universities.
3. Utilize and integrate with the rest of the department a GIS to map features such as cultural resources, park boundaries, trails, facilities, roads and inholdings in at least five percent of the larger park units per year starting in 2008. Integrate data into a GIS database and provide training and infrastructure to assist in better managing resources.
4. Continue to develop an integrated business system within the Office of History and Archeology for the tracking and management of cultural resources.



Objective II.

Manage and monitor state parks' natural and cultural resources to limit user impacts and ensure that the condition of the resources, natural viewshed and ecological communities remain intact and fully functioning for future generations.

Action Strategies:

1. To help enhance the division's natural and cultural resource decisions and expertise, form an interdisciplinary team of division staff and external cultural and natural resource scientists and experts for one large park or region by 2008. Define the team's purpose and responsibilities through the development of a charter and standard protocols. Use the team to review park management plans and best management practices. If successful, form teams for other areas.
2. By 2009, create and implement a cultural and natural resource monitoring schedule for one model park that addresses monitoring needs by resource categories and identifies appropriate monitoring frequency and responsibilities along with associated funding requests. If successful, apply to other areas.
3. Ensure on-the-ground actions to meet stewardship objectives are carried out at each park unit by creating annual work plans listing targeted resource actions for the coming year, along with associated funding requests.
4. Provide adequate and timely staff assistance to parks for natural and cultural resource issues (e.g., noxious weeds, native revegetation, and historic building rehabilitation).



Castle Hill, Sitka



Fort Abercrombie, Kodiak



Totem Bight, Ketchikan



Rika's Roadhouse, Big Delta

Objective III.

Coordinate resource management with other agencies, organizations and stakeholders to collect, share and disseminate natural and cultural resource information.

Action Strategies:

1. Improve the understanding and visibility of state park units within Alaska's conservation and historic preservation community and with the public by creating and implementing a communications plan to share and disseminate information.
2. Ensure division personnel identify opportunities for resource management collaboration within their park units by working closely with universities and government agencies to coordinate collection and evaluation of natural and cultural resource information within state parks. Provide a matrix of resource study needs to these entities by December 2008; secure at least 3 agreements with these entities by 2009.
3. Review permits and proposed authorizations to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to protect recreational, environmental and cultural resources.
4. Managers will actively engage in regional planning efforts that affect recreational and cultural resources or may impact units of the state park system and will promote incorporation of recreation and cultural preservation issues in plans.

Objective IV.

Strengthen efforts to identify study, designate, interpret and protect or treat significant archaeological and historic resources.

Action Strategies:

1. Conduct archaeological and historic surveys to identify and evaluate sites, buildings and structures.
2. Encourage communities to conduct surveys and document, interpret, and protect or treat historic and archaeological properties. Document properties for the National Register of Historic Places to promote recognition of resources.
3. Improve the statewide inventory of cultural resources sites.
4. Support and strengthen the professional historic preservation community.
5. Continue to enforce the Alaska Historic Preservation Act.



Independence Mine at Hatcher Pass

Outreach, Education & Interpretation

Goal: Build a strong identity and broad public support with high-quality education and interpretive programs and innovative communication strategies.

The tourism industry in Alaska is robust and growing. The industry is successful by marketing to its customers Alaska's heritage, natural beauty and wildlife, much of which is found within the state park system. However, to many visitors and even residents, Alaska's state parks remain a relatively undiscovered resource. By encouraging responsible, public participation in the enjoyment and protection of natural resources through improved outreach, the division will increase public awareness of Alaska's outdoor recreation opportunities.

As reflected by the public input on the 2004 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and during the scoping period of this strategic planning process, there is strong support for the division to devote more resources toward increasing visitor's knowledge of the unique attributes of Alaska's state parks. Visitors gain appreciation through education. The division should play a leading role in providing outstanding education and interpretive programs such as nature walks and campfire programs for children, the future stewards of Alaska's outdoor recreation, natural and cultural resources, and also for adults.

Objectives and actions will be tailored to establish long-term connections with visitors. Information will be developed and targeted to those who currently do not use the parks and are not aware of division programs and resources. Existing visitors will be encouraged to support the division and become lifelong advocates for its programs and services. The division will convey the message in terms of programs, deliverables, and what they mean in terms of jobs, economic stability, and management of cultural, natural and other resources.

The division also plays a key role in providing education programs that extend beyond the state park system's borders. Federal grant money has allowed the division to provide statewide education programs such as those that promote boating safety and historic preservation. These programs have been successful by increasing public awareness. The division should continue to pursue opportunities to participate in education programs of this nature, particularly those that encourage fun, safe, courteous and responsible outdoor recreation experiences throughout Alaska.



Interpretive guided walks and educational program



Objective I:

Broaden the division's visibility including the unique attributes of state parks and the contributions they make.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop and implement a marketing policy that prescribes a consistent theme, image and message for the division and its programs by May 2007. As part of this policy, display the appropriate division logos on all park vehicles, equipment and agency internal and external communications. Post on each of the fee collection sites signs that read, "All fees collected at this site are used to operate and maintain Alaska State Parks."
2. Work cooperatively with convention and visitor bureaus, chambers of commerce, Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development, and tourism trade organizations to market Alaska's state parks, particularly those areas and facilities that are underutilized. The division should join local convention and visitor bureaus that provide information about the parks and include links to the division on their websites.
3. Develop, maintain and increase the distribution of effective websites and brochures describing the opportunities available in each of the park units and system-wide.
4. Complete the sign inventory project and update the system-wide park sign standards to effectively meet the need for consistent, simple signage for park visitors. Park entrance signs and other signs with the Alaska State Parks' eagle logo will be funded and installed at the entrance of all parks.
5. Help policymakers understand specific programs and gain on-the-ground perspective by being prompt and responsive to inquiries. Each year, citizen's advisory boards will offer legislative briefings for their local representatives.
6. Develop and distribute activity reports to the legislature, park supporters and other interested parties highlighting the division's accomplishments, recent park improvements, current challenges and issues, etc. The reports would include highlights of a few park areas in each issue and describe current challenges, opportunities, and key features of the park unit.
7. Identify, cosponsor and participate in high profile community events annually to promote Alaska's state park areas, healthy living, family-oriented recreation, cultural resource stewardship, outdoor safety, and outdoor recreation opportunities.
8. For those events taking place in units of the state park system that are consistent with the division's mission and vision, require that the division be listed as a co-sponsor as a condition for permitting the event.
9. Initiate an "I support Alaska State Parks" campaign by distributing free stickers with this phrase along with annual parking passes.

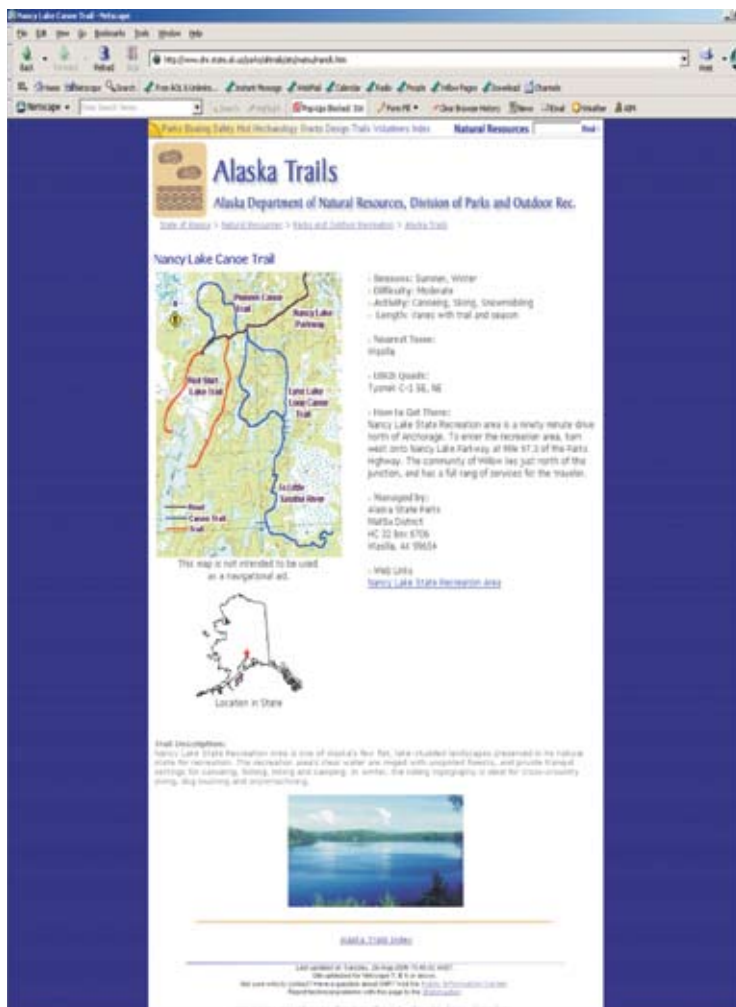


Objective II.

Create connections to the outdoors, Alaska's history and opportunities for discovery that will inspire existing and potential park visitors to experience Alaska State Parks.

Action Strategies:

1. By 2009, create an interactive trails web site accessible to the general public, user groups and all government entities. The web site would have a statewide inventory map of all maintained trails in the state park system, general trail information, and information on trail planning, management and monitoring. The web site would provide a way that trail users and division staff could post updated information about trail conditions, scheduled events, work parties and other information for the benefit of users and managers. As part of this effort, explore providing wireless internet options at park areas.
2. By 2009, produce and/or update trail brochures for each park unit showing trails within and connecting to the units. In some areas, produce brochures in conjunction with other agencies that include descriptions and maps of trails in the vicinity of the park unit. Such brochures should be offered for free or for a nominal fee.
3. In addition to the existing visitor centers, develop new centers in parks with high visitation such as Denali State Park, Kachemak Bay State Park, Chugach State Park and the Chena River State Recreation Area.
4. Develop and conduct an ongoing marketing campaign that targets infrequent state park users and promotes the wide range of activities and health benefits available in state parks.
5. To attract first-time users, encourage the larger state park units and division program areas to host at least one public event annually.

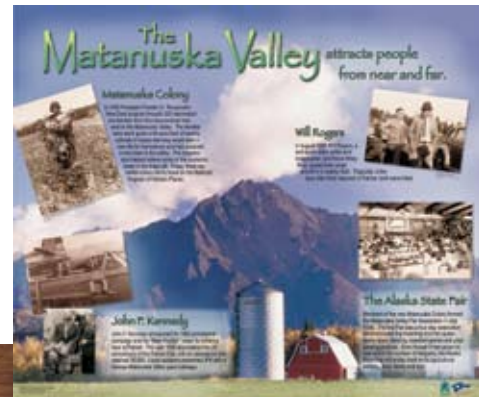


Objective III.

Increase public awareness of the value and importance of Alaska's natural, archaeological and historic resources and promote the health benefits of recreation.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop and implement by 2010 a statewide, five-year Interpretation and Environmental Education plan to identify interpretive and educational opportunities and techniques. The program should provide organized educational programs, interpretative facilities and materials. Start with a pilot program in three park areas and after an evaluation, implement the program in the remaining areas.
2. Identify and use public events such as Alaska Archaeology Week/Month, Historic Preservation Week, 50 year statehood anniversary, and Earth Day to increase the visibility of our environmental and cultural resources. Seek opportunities for celebrations, ribbon cutting and ground breaking ceremonies, to either commemorate important events, or to give thanks to those who participated in making projects happen.
3. Encourage interpretation of archaeological, historic and natural features to educate the public by supporting the development of elementary, secondary and post-secondary programs about Alaska's environmental, archaeological and historic resources. As part of this effort, encourage and continue to provide opportunities to school, educational and youth groups to use the state park system for educational purposes and provide interpretative programs for hotels, tour boats etc. as appropriate.
4. Encourage accuracy of information about state park units, local historic places and archaeological sites.
5. Commemorate important themes, periods, and people in Alaska's history by designating state and National Heritage Areas (similar to the proposed designation for the Kenai Mountains).
6. Improve and standardize management of interpretive and educational materials and programs to ensure quality programs and materials are developed and delivered to the public.



Objective IV.

Serve as a resource for technical expertise on outdoor recreational and cultural projects and programs.

Action Strategies:

1. Make available technical information and assistance on caring for historic and archaeological properties.
2. Promote the division's technical expertise and oversight on recreation-related facility design, engineering, construction, management, and design of outdoor safety and education programs.
3. Become a statewide resource for all types of trail design and use. As part of this effort, build a strong comprehensive trails section within the division by 2009 to provide technical expertise that will help the division become a model agency for sustainable trail management.



Educational programs, Independence Mine, Hatcher Pass



Boating Safety staff with school group

Objective V.

Encourage safe, courteous and environmentally and culturally aware outdoor recreation behaviors throughout Alaska.

Action Strategies:

1. Continue to promote the safety of persons and property connected with the use, operation, and equipping of non-commercial boats by increasing public awareness of boating risks and improving boater behaviors to reduce the incidence of boating deaths, injuries and property damage, and to maximize public enjoyment of the waterways through the Boating Safety Program.
2. Develop outdoor recreation education and interpretive programs, modeled after the Alaska Boating Safety Program to address other outdoor activities with a high incidence of injuries/ fatalities such as backcountry skiing, snowboarding, ATV riding and snowmachining. This program would begin by compiling available research and conducting studies to measure areas of high risk, and then designing and delivering programs that increase public awareness and encourage behaviors to reduce risks. The program would also provide information on how to maximize personal enjoyment of outdoor activities, while maintaining the quality of Alaska's outdoor recreation resources.
3. Encourage protection of historic and archaeological resources by distributing information about disturbing and damaging sites, collecting, transporting, selling, trading, and purchasing artifacts.
4. Utilize interpretive and education management techniques to avoid regulatory and enforcement techniques when possible.



Partnerships

Goal: Strengthen partnerships and engage new partners to achieve common goals and mission.

Many successful partnerships have been established and nurtured to improve the division's programs and promote outdoor recreation statewide. For the division to survive, it must transition further toward seeking assistance from other agencies, volunteers, local constituency groups, the private sector and individuals through partnerships. Key among partnerships are the 800 volunteers who outnumber paid staff six to one and are crucial to the division's operations. They donate over 80,000 hours of service each year. Also essential to the division's grant programs is federal funding which provides over five million dollars to the division each year to distribute as grants to other agencies, municipalities and non-profits.

The division offers superb opportunities to attract and retain volunteers. Volunteerism provides camaraderie, serves as a connection to "place" and provides opportunities for Alaska residents of all ages to give something back to their state and community. Over the next ten years, the division will expand volunteerism, enabling seniors to pursue learning opportunities, youth to develop skills and knowledge, and others to serve within their local communities.

The division pledges to improve and increase its recruitment, retention and recognition of talented volunteers.

Additionally, personnel will concentrate on strengthening the division by cultivating advocates for the division's mission and vision. Partnerships have been a cornerstone in effectively leveraging the division's financial resources. Staff must investigate ways that private philanthropy can become part of the mix. The division must seek ways to increase opportunities to engage the public in special projects and educational opportunities. By strengthening relationships with "Friends" groups, individuals can make a significant difference through donation and support of individual park operations and other public services.

The division will also continue to fulfill its outdoor recreation and cultural resources leadership roles by managing statewide outdoor recreation and cultural grant programs and advocating for the benefits that these efforts provide.



Potter Marsh - partners include Conoco Phillips, Municipality of Anchorage, DOT&PF and ADF&G

Objective I.

Establish and cultivate champions and advocates of the division, including individuals, organizations, government entities and user groups.

Action Strategies:

1. In order to better support the State Park's Citizens Advisory Boards and to help the division better serve the needs of the public in their local communities, the Director will meet with the chairs of all the Citizens Advisory Boards at least twice a year through a statewide teleconference and will meet with each of the boards at least once a year.
2. Ensure each park area manager communicates at least once a year with local city and borough councils and assemblies, municipal officials, chambers of commerce, convention and visitor bureaus and/or other local officials to review upcoming local activities and seek ways to partner to complete them.
3. Create and maintain a contact list of individuals and organizations in the agency's stakeholder database, to keep them informed about important events and issues.



Objective II.

Expand and promote meaningful opportunities for volunteers.

Action Strategies:

1. Create and implement a volunteer program plan by 2008, which includes the strategic deployment of program resources to foster existing volunteer partnerships and increase the division's volunteer numbers and functions.
2. Expand opportunities for Alaska's youth to develop an awareness of natural and cultural resource stewardship and outdoor recreation by increasing learning, volunteer and work opportunities in parks.
3. Enhance the volunteer program by establishing regional or areawide volunteer services coordinators.
4. Create and implement a comprehensive, on-going volunteer marketing strategy that addresses recruitment and retention including a suggested list of awards and formal recognition options.
5. Continue to collaborate with current "Friends" groups. Foster the creation of new groups. Recommend charters and agreements that ensure the financial viability and sustainability of these groups.
6. Continue to provide critical support to the various boards, commissions and councils that are under the authority of the division.

Objective III.

Emphasize partnerships to leverage and enhance on-the-ground park and program resources.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop partnerships and enhance relationships with the tourism industry to increase efficiency in providing visitor services such as interpretive tours and talks, transportation & access to park areas.
2. Through strong support from the state's Congressional delegation and federal agencies, secure federal funds on an annual basis that are needed to complete the recreation facility renovations at several state park areas.
3. Pursue and secure cooperative marketing agreements, corporate sponsorships or similar fundraising partnerships.
4. Develop a cost share agreement with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) to develop and renovate recreation facilities along the state's highways. Work with DOT&PF to improve recreational and heritage tourism enhancements including waysides, pullouts, day-use areas and interpretive panels and planning.
5. Work more closely with other agencies including the Division of Mining, Land & Water, DOT&PF and ADF&G on issues, especially those affecting general state land.
6. Provide expertise to other entities in the design, contracting and construction oversight of recreational facilities. Offer expertise on managing recreational trails, parks, open spaces and marine parks to other agencies, organizations and local trail coalitions.
7. Cooperate with other agencies, organizations and individuals to provide a statewide boating safety education program. Cooperate with other state agencies in providing for boating accident and casualty reporting, boat registration, boating safety patrols, and marine law enforcement training.
8. Work cooperatively with the federal government, boroughs, municipalities, and nonprofits to form regional trail rehabilitation and construction teams. Model programs currently in existence including the Sitka Trailworks, Juneau Trailmix and the Southeast Alaska Guidance Association. The division should explore opportunities to form similar groups in other areas, particularly along the Railbelt and on the Kenai Peninsula.
9. Work with other agencies and organizations to develop uniform standards for trail classification, maintenance, marking, design and construction.
10. Create additional adopt-a-trail and adopt-a-park programs in state parks starting in one or two model parks. Modify and improve the program, then implement it in additional park units statewide.
11. Work closely with universities, state governments and federal agencies to coordinate the collection and evaluation of natural and cultural resource information within state parks. Provide a matrix of resource study needs to these entities.
12. Cooperate with other agencies and organizations to provide expertise in documenting and protecting marine heritage sites.
13. Become a co-sponsoring agency of the National Association of Interpretation, the national body that certifies interpretive planners, guides, managers etc., and/or universities. Seek opportunities to recruit from their ranks of certified interpreters.
14. Assist in training staff and volunteers in search and rescue, law enforcement, emergency medical treatment, interpretation, and public information services in collaboration with other agencies.



Arctic Valley - partner is Anchorage Ski Club

Objective IV.

Provide for the enhancement of recreational and heritage tourism opportunities for Alaskans through the partnership and administration of federal and state grant programs.

Action Strategies:

1. Provide outstanding service to grant applicants.
2. Annually offer grant writing workshops in key communities to public and private entities in order to increase the awareness of on-the-ground funding for trails, recreation facilities and historic preservation and to help future grantees become more competitive in the grant application process.
3. Grant programs should be focused on quality based outcomes such as grants to applicants who use best management practices for planning, design, and construction and who can assure long-term maintenance.



Independence Mine at Hatcher Pass - partners are Friends of State Parks/Mat-Su

Objective V.

Form new partnerships to encourage historic preservation and to expand and strengthen the historic preservation community.

Action Strategies:

1. Promote local preservation program efforts as a successful economic development tool to maintain, enhance, and revitalize communities and to promote tourism by supporting efforts to establish tax incentives at local and national levels for the preservation of archaeological and historic properties; encouraging establishment of incentive programs in the private and non-profit communities; and endorsing special initiatives of agencies at local, state and national levels for historic resources.
2. Encourage Alaska Natives to identify concerns and develop strategies to protect their cultural resources. Encourage nonprofit statewide organizations, to promote historic preservation. Organizations include: the Alaska Anthropological Association, Alaska Association for Historic Preservation, Alaska Historical Society, Keepers of the Treasures - Alaska, and Museums Alaska.
3. Foster stewardship of cultural resources by land owners, private individuals and groups, and public agencies. Use emerging technologies to improve communication among organizations and individuals interested in historic preservation.
4. Work with the Alaska Statehood Commission to sponsor events that commemorate Alaska's 50 years of statehood.
5. Provide cultural resource survey and research services to all state agencies through reimbursable service agreements, cooperative agreements and grants.

Human Resources

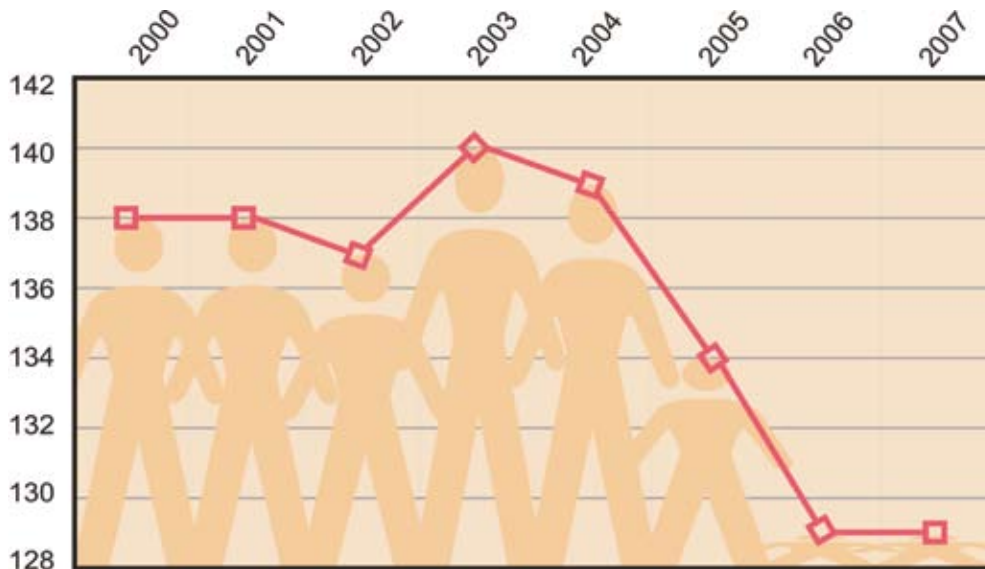
Goal: Recruit, develop and support a professional, diverse, dedicated, motivated and effective workforce.

The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is known for its ability to accomplish much with few staff. For years the division has ranked as one of the leanest park systems in the nation, with one of the lowest ratios of employees to both visitors and resources managed. The division has historically attracted people who are passionate about what they do, are capable of accomplishing a lot with few resources, have a wide variety of skills, and possess a deep-seated commitment to public service. In recent years however, the division has had trouble recruiting qualified candidates to fill vacant positions because of the inability to provide competitive wages and the few opportunities for advancement within the agency. In 2003 for example, the division had 140 employees. That number has dwindled to 129 employees today due in part to increased employee costs and flat funding.

The division is committed to increasing human resource investments to help staff retain and develop the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their duties at a high level and to enable the division to build and retain a creative and competent workforce.

To ensure the ability to support high quality recreation opportunities and meet increasing public demand for those opportunities, it may be necessary to complete an in-depth analysis of current staff numbers, duties and overall management structure to provide the highest level of service Alaskans have come to expect from their state park and outdoor recreation programs. The division will also strive for a workforce that exemplifies a diversity of skills, gender, ethnic backgrounds, ages, and viewpoints. As a part of this effort, the division is committed to developing a succession plan ensuring that as senior employees move toward retirement, junior employees are prepared to fill their shoes. The division must also identify the human resources needed for the future. The division must commit to creating a culture that actively encourages open internal communication, creative thinking and problem solving, to take full advantage of the collective knowledge and experience of our professional staff. Further, the outstanding work by employees will be sufficiently recognized and encouraged through a meaningful employee incentive and recognition effort.

Figure 2. Number of Park Operations Staff, 2000-2007¹



¹ Includes all permanent, seasonal and temporary staff.

Objective I.

Assure there are a sufficient number of highly-qualified employees, and the necessary resources for them to be able to efficiently serve the public.

Action Strategies:

1. Work with the Division of Administration to ensure that a career ladder exists within the division for all job classes and that wages are competitive.
2. By 2008, the division will begin to increase maintenance staffing to levels that will help the division reduce the deferred maintenance backlog and meet public needs for safe, clean and well-maintained facilities. The division will continue to add maintenance staff as necessary to achieve this end including creating a maintenance supervisor position for the entire division.
3. Evaluate current staff roles, and management strategies (such as use of seasonal employees, volunteers and contractors). As part of this effort, initiate and dedicate staff by 2008 to a time-and-motion study to understand how much time it takes to perform a job. Complete this study by 2009. The study needs to be done at every level of the division and will serve as a valuable tool to properly allocate resources to projects. Implement recommendations based on the study's findings.
4. Identify and acquire, as necessary, additional technical assistance on, realty services, planning, contracting, appeals and geographic information systems. Other staff positions may be needed to coordinate volunteers, trails management and interpretation. These positions should be identified by management by 2007 and established by 2010.
5. Develop a strategy to advertise and recruit highly qualified and motivated applicants to fill vacant division positions.
6. Establish an allocation plan, equipment standards and replacement schedules for non-DOT leased vehicles and equipment. This plan would address equipment such as snowmobiles, groomers, boats, and ATVs.
7. The parks with significant trail systems (Chena, Chugach, Kachemak and Denali) need dedicated and adequately trained trail crews. Other park areas should identify and partner with existing non-profit trail organizations (examples include the Sitka and Juneau areas), or foster the development of new trail nonprofits where none currently exist. Also see the action strategies under the Partnerships goal. The division will establish these trails crews by 2012.
8. Train to a high level at least one permanent staff member in sustainable trail management, layout and design to lend technical assistance to the entire division.
9. Work with the Division of Administration to determine how law enforcement rangers can qualify for twenty-year retirement similar to other law enforcement agencies.



Objective II.

Facilitate clear and effective internal communication.

Action Strategies:

1. Develop and evaluate communication tools to better inform staff of division issues, projects, activities, and personnel actions outside and within their immediate work environment.
2. Survey all division employees to determine ways to improve and encourage internal communications, staff creativity and innovative thinking. Conduct a confidential employee survey every two years to evaluate staff perceptions on the work environment and to measure the efficacy of strategies. Implement appropriate recommendations.
3. Identify and implement ways for staff to voice concerns and make suggestions for improvements to management.



Objective III.

Provide staff with opportunities for professional development to enable them to improve performance in their current position and to prepare employees to be qualified and competitive candidates for more advanced positions.

Action Strategies:

1. Establish and support a training committee consisting of representatives from management, administrative, ranger, technician and maintenance job classes by April 2007 to assess, prioritize and implement division-wide training needs. This committee will identify the specific skills needed for each job class and ways to receive training. The training committee will help develop and institute an annually updated succession plan, which includes an employee-mentoring program to develop existing staff for career advancement. A training officer(s) will be assigned to coordinate training and funds will be dedicated for training personnel.
2. To enhance natural and cultural resource management skills, the resource interdisciplinary team will identify baseline training needs and standards for all division employees and provide them to the training committee.
3. Promote and provide opportunities for cross-training staff statewide.
4. Implement a formal employee awards program that includes a nomination process and selection criteria. Establish procedures for encouraging and recognizing specific achievements by staff.



Objective V.

Recruit a diverse workforce for the division.

Action Strategies:

1. Provide information on the availability of job class and career opportunities within the division, targeting schools, universities, youth organizations, and state and federal youth and young adult conservation employment programs, in both rural and urban communities.
2. Participate in local job fairs and career days.
3. Develop a plan to better provide career opportunity information and investigate ways to reach diverse audiences including working with other agencies.

Planning

Goal: Apply effective, accurate and reliable information for the analysis, planning and implementation of all decisions.

Effective organizations establish ways to ensure accuracy in important decisions at all levels. It is essential that the division creates and maintains reliable processes to disseminate accurate and timely information. Although the division will pursue a variety of strategies, technology is viewed as a primary tool to accomplish this vision. Therefore, the agency is committed to establishing and implementing electronic administrative applications to enhance reporting.

So that the best interests of the division and the people of Alaska are met, integrated planning will occur at all levels of the organization. Managers and staff will be involved with and responsible for successful planning. The Ten-Year Strategic Plan will be the blueprint for the allocation of the division's budget and other resources for new and improved initiatives. This will also largely determine the content of other planning efforts including the annual implementation plan and the division's annual missions and measures report. Because park units and programs vary so widely, elements of some, but not all, strategies will be incorporated in plans for individual park units and programs.

To ensure that the division continues to provide for the needs of park visitors and responsible stewardship of natural and cultural resources, managers will initiate efforts to gather baseline data including levels of use and the condition of park units. This will include better assessment of yearly visitation levels, trail conditions and inventories. Staff will periodically survey park visitors to better understand conditions sought by the various users and identify management actions that can be effective in providing facilities that are safe, sanitary and well maintained. The division will also initiate cultural resource surveys both inside and outside park units designed to provide better information of these resources that will assist in their preservation, protection, and interpretation.

The division's policies, procedures, regulations and manuals that direct the division operations and programs should also be reviewed and revised on an as-needed basis and made more accessible to park staff through electronic formats.



Glenn Highway overlook at milepost 118

Objective I.

Improve the collection, interpretation and distribution of current, reliable information to ensure consistent and information-based decision-making.

Action Strategies

1. Develop an automated record keeping system by 2010 that is continuously updated which includes data and information on all aspects of division operations and planning and is accessible to all employees and volunteers throughout the state.
2. Develop and implement a plan to generate accurate visitation estimates and reliable visitation reports for each park.
3. Create and deploy an automated law enforcement records and citations management system to establish a centralized database. Train division law enforcement staff so the system is fully utilized.
4. Update the 1994 Catalog of the Alaska State Park System which includes maps of all units in the state park system and their acreages, designation dates, and realty information. Once updated, make the catalog available on the division website.
5. Gather baseline data on patterns and intensities of uses that will assist in documenting trends and activities to establish specific management objectives. To achieve this, the division will work with recreation survey professionals to design data collection strategies. The data should be standardized and collected over time so trends and changes can be identified and effective management strategies can be formulated.
6. Develop Cultural Resource Plans and Historic Building Preservation Plans in regions likely to undergo intensive development in the near term where high-value cultural resources are likely to be present. An example of such a planning effort was the Denali Highway Cultural Resource Plan.
7. Perform cultural surveys along transportation corridors, particularly along existing and proposed state highway right-of-way alignments. Funding for these surveys should be included in the Department of Transportation and Public Safety's project budgets for highway planning.
8. Develop and apply comprehensive evaluation criteria for adding new park units and/or deleting existing units from the state park system.
9. The division will gather information in those park areas with key public concerns that documents social and/or ecological conditions that can be used to establish standards that identify acceptable levels of impacts on both resource conditions and the experience of park users.



Matanuska Glacier, Tom Bol/Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau

Objective II.

Create, implement and annually update the agency-wide, Ten-Year Strategic Plan to better allocate agency resources.

Action Strategies

1. Complete an annual implementation plan that integrates the strategic plan with the division's budgeting process. Superintendents will provide annual "work plans" sometime prior to this each year that outline priority park-specific stewardship practices and funding requests for the upcoming budget cycle. Other division program managers will also provide their prioritized funding requests and work plans prior to the implementation plan each year.
2. Develop a procedure and timeline for producing a State Parks Annual Report to assess the agency's strategic plan and other accomplishments from the prior fiscal year. By the time the first annual report is completed, also establish a process to review and update the Ten-Year Strategic Plan action strategies and other related components each year that will be evaluated when considering the annual Implementation Plan.
3. Prepare and finalize a Strategic Plan every ten years, to be reviewed annually and updated as needed.



View of Flat Top and Anchorage bowl taken from "The Ramp" Chugach State Park

Objective III.

Produce a Management and Trails Plan for each park.

Action Strategies

1. Update the 1982 Alaska State Park System: Statewide Framework. This document, with its 20-year planning window, provided a framework within which more detailed planning efforts and management actions were to be taken. The document also defined the purposes of the types of state park units; their general characteristics; types of developments and activities allowed in each; and defined the four types of “land use zones” that could be applied to units of the park system.
2. Begin preparing at least one state park management plan or other related planning project each year.
3. Periodically review individual park management plans and update as necessary.
4. Parks (or regions/districts) with developed trails will develop trail plans within five years, and these should be reviewed every five years as recreational patterns change. A typical trails plan document or “template” will be developed by 2009.
5. Develop a state park policy that provides sustainable trail classifications, standards and general trail management objectives. Partner in the development of statewide trail guidelines that help provide direction for all trail users groups in the maintenance, design and development of trails in Alaska.



Objective IV.

Update and maintain policies and procedures to provide direction for all agency planning and decision-making.

Action Strategies:

1. Review and revise as needed board bylaws, division administrative directives, procedures and manuals.
2. Develop a list of specific sections and/or full documents that need to be updated or repealed and create a schedule for future maintenance of this information. This will include concession data, public safety procedures and volunteer manuals.
3. Ensure all staff have access to and comprehension of the process for creating agency rules, policies and procedures. Then begin to regularly update electronic versions of division rules, regulations, policies and procedures, as well as the Director’s Policy Files.

Plan Implementation

The division Director and the Leadership Team are responsible for the successful implementation of the Strategic Plan. This plan will provide important guidance in the development of annual budget requests and work programs. On a yearly basis, the Leadership Team will develop an Implementation Plan that recommends more detailed methods that will effectively move the division toward implementing the plan's strategies and achieving its goals and objectives. Each year, the team will also identify the high priority strategies to be implemented in the coming year and outline how they will be achieved. Through this process, at least one performance measure for each strategy will be identified. The performance measure(s) will provide a tool by which the division can evaluate its progress toward achieving each strategy. In the development of the Implementation Plan, the division will make every effort to seek input from its various boards, commissions and councils.

Although all of the strategies are important to the division, only a certain number can be pursued during any given year over the 10-year planning window. Those that are addressed initially will be ones that have the highest priority under each objective (the strategies are listed in order of priority under each

objective). In the process of developing the Strategic Plan, it was assumed that additional resources would be needed to implement many of the strategies, including many that are identified as high priority. If resources do not become available to implement the high priority strategies, then those requiring little or no additional resources may rise in priority for the coming year.

Budget decisions of the agency will focus heavily on items that will lead to the achievement of Strategic Plan goals. The Director will ask all Leadership Team members to review the performance measures and include items in each individual's workplan that will support one or more of them. Throughout the year the agency will take every opportunity to keep the goals and performance measures in front of the division's employees through emails, conferences and other measures.

As the yearly Implementation Plan is being developed, an Annual Report will also be prepared. The report will assess the success of implementing the Strategic Plan and other accomplishments from the prior fiscal year.

Conclusion

Our natural and cultural resources are invaluable and our responsibilities to the public are clear. The proper care of these resources and providing improved outdoor recreation opportunities will take time and require a coordinated effort between the division, its partners and the public. Over the coming months and years, the Strategic Plan will help establish a foundation for our state park system that is second to none. In addition, the plan provides a clearer vision for the division's programs which help ensure safe outdoor recreation opportunities and protect our natural and cultural resources. The citizens of Alaska can be proud that they participated in this planning process knowing that their efforts today will help protect this legacy for future generations. Thank you for your participation. We invite you to join us in making this vision a reality.



Glossary

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act.

ADF&G – Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

ATV – All terrain vehicle.

Director- Director of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Department of Natural Resources, or the Director’s agent.

Division – Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

DNR – Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

DOT&PF – Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

DPOR – Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

Facility – Something that is built, installed or established to serve a particular purpose. Facilities include structures such as boat launches, campgrounds and ranger stations, but also smaller “facilities” like trails, signs and primitive campsites.

GIS – Geographical Information System.

Goals - Set the desired future for the division in stating what the agency needs to do to accomplish its mission and vision.



Implementation Plan - An annual planning process that specifically describes action strategies from the Ten-Year Strategic Plan to be funded in the next fiscal year and/or budgeting cycle. The plan is developed internally, approved by the Leadership Team and identifies specific funds and staff resources responsible for accomplishing the action strategies and the timeline for completion.

Interpretation – An informational and inspirational process designed to enhance understanding and appreciation of natural and cultural resources.

Leadership Team - Consists of the division director, park superintendents and program managers.

Mission - The division's reason for existence: basic purpose, what it does, why it does it and for whom.

Objectives - Statements that reflect the desired expectations and requirements to be achieved by the division under each goal statement.

ORV – Off road vehicle.

SCORP – Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Strategies - Overall accomplishments the agency should achieve and the methods to achieve the accomplishments.

Sustainable - Capable of being continued with minimal long-term effect on the environment and meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Vision - An expression of the division's ideal future, highlighting what the agency wants to strive to become and what it wants to be known for.



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