

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

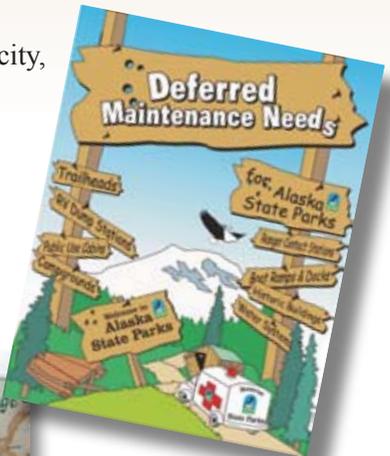
¹ “Deferred maintenance costs” apply to infrastructure such as campgrounds, visitor centers and boat launches. They also include deferred maintenance needs incurred by such things as trails, signs, equipment, roads and bringing existing facilities into compliance with the Americans with the Disabilities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

