



Homer Soil and Water Conservation District

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**Notes from a public meeting concerning the Caribou Lake boardwalk trail
and its parking lot, hosted by the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District,
November 27, 2007, City of Homer Council Chamber**

Background to the following notes:

The road discussed at this meeting is the unfinished section of road to the new parking lot for the Caribou Lake trail (the trailhead parking lot). The road from Basargin Road to the blue shed parking lot has been upgraded and graveled by Bob Chew, the owner of the land on which the blue shed parking lot is located.

The consensus of those at the meeting was that it's a high priority to gravel the road to the trailhead parking lot. No one at the meeting expressed opposition to graveling the proposed section of road.

The other high priority action identified at the meeting was getting as-built surveys of both the new road and the Caribou Lake trail (the newly aligned route, 1/3 of which is now boardwalked) in order to get formal road and trail easements from DNR. Once state easements have been granted, raising funds for maintenance and improvements will be easier.

Follow-up actions

- A committee of the following individuals will work to (1) raise funds to get the needed as-built surveys and (2) develop a process for soliciting and organizing volunteers who can offer time and equipment for road work: Dave Mastolier, Micky Todd, Phil Needham, Jennifer McLay, Larry Boone, and Ray Bellamy. The Homer Soil and Water Conservation District will provide logistical and organizational support. The first meeting will be held Thursday, November 29, at noon in the District conference room (4014 Lake Street).
- Borough Assemblywoman Milli Martin will check on getting gravel from the borough.
- Mike Arno will begin compiling a list of volunteers who could haul gravel or run excavators or dozers. Any volunteer work has to be scheduled well in advance so as not to conflict with work commitments.

Comments by the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD or "District")

- Devony Lehner, Al Poindexter, and Shirley Schollenberg provided background on the HSWCD in general and the Caribou Lake trail and trailhead parking lot in particular. The District works in partnership to accomplish natural resource goals. Damage to wetlands along the Caribou Lake trail, and related concerns by agencies, Caribou Lake landowners, and trail users led to District involvement on these issues. Most of the Caribou Lake trail is now boardwalked, but some rutted areas still exist and

some boards need replacing. The current boardwalk does not represent a long-term solution, but it's a first step in that direction.

- The Homer District needs as-built surveys in order to get final easements from the state for the Caribou Lake trail and the road between Bob Chew's property and the new trailhead parking lot. Costs for the road survey are estimated to be about \$4,000 to \$6,000. The road to the new parking lot needs to be upgraded, and the graveled parking lot will need to be expanded in the future. The District has done as much as possible on the trail and parking lot with available funding and volunteer assistance.
- The Homer District could contribute roughly \$8,000 as a challenge grant to raise money towards improving the road and parking lot.
- **Comments by the Alaska Departments of Natural Resources (DNR)**
- Cliff Larson explained what the state considered adequate access when the Caribou Lake parcels were originally sold. He also noted that no "prescriptive" trail easements can be filed on state (or Native) land and that DNR loses control of state land when it's transferred to the Mental Health Trust or to the University by the state legislature.
- The easement for the new Caribou Lake trailhead parking lot will encompass 10 acres in order to allow for future expansion.
- Cynthia Zuelow-Osborne provided background on the state's land disposal process and the steps involved in obtaining an easement (Step 1, application; Step 2, decision by state; Step 3, land use permit; Step 4, easement—the Caribou Lake trail is between Steps 3 and 4, with just the as-built survey pending). With respect to access issues concerning remote subdivisions, she pointed out that the Matanuska-Susitna Borough prohibits the state from selling subdivisions on state land within borough boundaries unless subdivision access has actually been built to borough standards.
- The state is now planning another "remote" public land sale at the head of Kachemak Bay, east of Fox Creek. This sale is not expected to occur before 2010. No improved access exists to the area.
- Neil Shishida is the new statewide trails coordinator for DNR and will be the one issuing trail easements. Groups preparing grant applications for trails should contact Neil first. He'll make sure that proposed trails meet threshold requirements for TRAAK grants.
- DNR's Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation builds trails in legislatively mandated state parks, but the Division also has some "Recreational Trail Grants."

Comments related to the Kenai Peninsula Borough (KPB)

- Gary Davis explained that the KPB currently won't maintain winter roads not built to borough standards.
- The KPB still does not have trail powers and cannot, therefore, hold trail easements.
- The Borough Road Board could (theoretically) authorize winter maintenance on a non-standard road, but the road would have to have a legal easement and get a variance from borough standards.

- The KPB Mayor could waive fees for gravel from the borough pit near the needed road. Apparently there's no gravel available from any nearby parcels of state land.
- Borough Assemblywoman Milli Martin will look into obtaining gravel for the road to the new parking lot from the nearby borough gravel pit, and see if borough fees for this gravel can be waived. (The gravel from this pit did not meet state standards required during upgrading of East End Road, but it could be adequate for the road to the new parking lot if a variance were granted by the borough.)

Comments by Caribou Lake landowners and trail users

- How will new lot buyers pay their fair share of access costs after existing landowners and trail users have paid to create and improve access?
- Some trail users don't want to identify the locations of trails they use for fear that those trail routes may be closed off as a result.
- Should the Caribou Lake landowners form a homeowners' association in order to raise dues for road and trail maintenance?
- Bob Chew, who owns the parcel on which the blue shed parking lot is located, is willing to notify the public through the media that it will be OK to park at the blue shed lot this winter. This represents a short-term solution, and he wants to see a long-term solution where an organization of homeowners and trail users works to get grants to gravel the road to the new trailhead parking lot. The estimated cost of finishing the road to the new parking lot to "Chew standards" is \$75,000 to \$85,000 (this would not be to borough standards). Most of this cost represents gravel. Chew used 17 ft-wide tympar on the section of road he had graveled.
- Several landowners/parking lot users are willing to donate time and/or equipment (graders, excavators, dump trucks) to help get the section of road to the new parking lot graveled. Costs could be greatly reduced given volunteer time and equipment, particularly if the borough would waive fees to its gravel.