

Kenai River Special Management Area Advisory Board
***** Meeting Minutes*****

Thursday April 10, 2014
5:30 p.m.
Gilman River Center
Soldotna, AK

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Roll Call:** Joe Connors, Ricky Gease, Brenda Trefon, Carol Padgett, Monte Roberts, Andrew Szczesny, Keith Baxter, Brent Johnson, Jack Blackwell and Tim Stevens.
- B. Minutes Approval:** Approved as written.
- C. Agenda Changes and Approval:** Approved as written.

II. Public Comments/Presentations: None.

III. REPORTS

A. Agency and Government Reports:

a. State Parks –Jack Blackwell provided board members with the following report:

1. Jack introduced Tom Anthony who was recently hired as a Kenai River state park ranger. Tom has been with the state for three years and transferred here from Kodiak. This position was recently funded by the legislature during the last session.
2. The mild weather has allowed state parks to work on some maintenance projects. One project that has been completed is the Cooper Landing Boat Launch improvements. Five planks were added to the boat ramp and concrete matting placed along the side. We also added some concrete matting along the edge.
3. The contractor is also ready to begin work on the Bing's Landing Boat Launch. This project will remove the dock and walkways. The structure will be replaced with the new elevated light penetrating material.
4. The Eagle Rock Boat Launch is now owned and managed by the State of Alaska. It was purchased by the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council. A new vaulted toilet will be installed this fall.

b. DEC –Tim Stevens provided board members with the following report:

1. Tim Stevens recently met with the Kenai Watershed Forum to go over two projects that DEC recently awarded. One project is beach sampling at the mouth of the Kenai River. The second is to put together a five or six year report on the baseline water sampling. They did complete an initial report for the first six years and now they want to include the next six years and a trend analysis will be included. This report should help in understanding how well the water quality is doing on the river.

Joe asked for clarification on the water sampling at the mouth of the Kenai. The bacteria tested for is required by state and federal agencies. They both carry pathogens and are easier and least expensive to sample for. Most of the bacteria originate with the sea gulls and the rookery that is upstream of the sampling area. Sampling will begin in early July before the dip net fishery and extend to early August. Sampling will also be conducted on the Kasilof River Beach.

2. The 2014 Integrated report on whether to list the Kenai River as impaired for exceeding turbidity standards is still in deliberation and there is no decision at this time.

Keith Baxter asked what would happen if the report listed the Kenai as impaired for exceeding turbidity standards. DEC would put the river on the 303D list and they would work on a solution with all agencies involved.



- c. **ADF&G –No Report.**
- d. **USFS/Chugach**–Brenda Trefon provided board members with the following report:
 1. The Forest Service held an interagency meeting reviewing the Russian River Management Plan.
 2. They are currently working on updating the visitor brochure for the Russian River. Approximately 15,000 copies will be available.
 3. A draft fish waste management plan has been completed.
- e. **US F&WS-** Deputy Manager Steve Miller submitted an e-mail report as follow:
 1. The refuge is drafting regulations for camping along the upper and middle river that will likely come out in the Federal Register for public comment this fall. It is a long process for us but we hope to have these or similar regulations in effect next season (2015). As currently drafted we would restrict camping to areas greater than 100 yards from the Kenai River except for designated primitive camping areas (we will work with our staff and partners to select these designated areas). We propose to restrict the length of stay to 3 night's maximum at any designated primitive campsite. We will let the KRSMA board know when these are available for public comment.
 2. We are currently advertising to fill the Supervisory Park Ranger position that was vacated when Janet Schmitt retired in December. The USA Jobs announcement # is R7-14-1084726-JE and the announcement closes April 22.
 3. Refuge staff are currently scoring applications to fill two vacancies in our 1B Upper River Scenic Float Guide area. These permits are for scenic float trips at the 7 trips/week level within the upper river. The two guides selected could start as early as this coming season.
- f. **City of Kenai –No Report**
- g. **City of Soldotna** –Keith Baxter provided board members with the following report:
 1. The City of Soldotna has been working with Mark Glassmaker on spring clean up week. The Mayor of Soldotna, Nels Anderson, has proclaimed May 12 – 17 as spring clean up week.
- h. **Kenai Peninsula Borough-** No Report.

C. Committee Reports

- a. **President's Report-** Joe would like to have people involved in the process. We start with the committees and they work on various subjects, refine and gather information and then pass it on to the board. The board has a discussion and then recommendations are then passed up to management.
- b. **Guide Advisory-**Joe also reported that a Guide Advisory meeting was held. Eleven members were present and the committee had a full agenda. Member Mark Glassmaker gave an update about the clean up the river week. Mark has been working with many of organizations and the City of Soldotna for the clean the river week from May 11 through the 17. There will be a number of events including a weigh your trash event with prizes to be given away and a barbecue will also be held on Saturday at Soldotna Creek Park. The areas to be cleaned up are Izaak Walton, Bing's Backline, Swiftwater and Centennial Park. There are eight school classes participating with two hundred participants. The children will be escorted by a Kenai River Guide. State Parks is currently working with Mark to have an information sheet on what to pick and what not to pick up.

Joe would like to have the board support this event. Monte gave a motion to write a letter in support of the clean week. Andy second the motion. It passed unanimously.

The committee also discussed concerns about anchoring on the Kenai River in drift areas. Often time boats have to take action to move to not hit the boat that is anchored. Monte stated that there is not a clear definition in law. Drift fishing causes a hazard, because it is very hard to move a drift boat if it its heading towards an anchor boat. The committee discussed that in designated drift boat only areas anchors cannot be dropped. The current regulation states that a person may not anchor a boat in the Kenai River Management area in a manner obstructing a primary traffic channel or a drift channel in any section of the river. The sections of the river are not defined so this make it difficult when determining if someone is in violation of the regulation.

The last item the committee discussed was camping in the middle river. The committee would like to continue working with the agencies in developing a plan.

c. Habitat – No Report

- d. River Use-** Carol reported that the first item on the agenda was a cost estimate for baseline boats counts and web cameras at key boat launch locations along the river. The purpose of this is to provide real time data for river users. The committee also discussed the volunteer boating education course. The committee felt in order to move forward with some of these items there needs to be capital funding and the committee will bring to the board an action item in May to support some funding for the boaters education program, baseline boat counts and web cameras at key boat launch areas. The board would ask for support in additional capital funding for these projects. \

In order to try and start recording baseline boat counts Ranger Jacques Kosto is going to have a volunteer travel from Skilak Lake to the mouth of the Kenai once a week.

Robert Begich from Fish and Game is looking at key areas along the Kenai to determine who owns the land and if there is public access.

e. Legislative/Government Activities –No Report

f. Board Development/ Nomination – No Report

g. Agenda/Board Structure/Housekeeping - No Report

IV. OLD BUSINESS:

1. Discussion about revising the Kenai River Special Management Plan-Jack Blackwell explained that State Parks is currently revising the Kachemak Bay State Park/Wilderness Park plans. This plan will take approximately three years to complete. Planners typically work on one state park plan at a time. Rickey Gease talked with Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels and he also said that state is currently working on Kachemak Bay plan and that they do one at a time. It would likely be two to three years before the KRSMA plan would be considered. The board is going to send a letter to have the KRSMA plan next in line for revision after the Kachemak Bay plan is completed. It passed unanimously.

V. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Report on limiting guides in the Kenai River-Andy said that for the past month the board and committees have been discussing a guide moratorium. He said that basically we have conservation issue with the king salmon on the Kenai River and king salmon fishing is closed in May and June with restrictions in July. Five or six years ago the Kenai River working group spent a lot of time trying to tackle this issue. One item during that discussion that was not available then is the Doug Whitaker report. Andy said that now that we have the report available and the report recommends that now is the time to limit the guides on the Kenai River. Andy is going to bring a recommendation to the board in May to ask State parks to put a three year moratorium on guide registration. The moratorium would have a sunset clause attached. This would give the State Parks and the board time to see if a limit needs to be put in place for the number of guide. Andy made several phone calls to ask other people thought on the proposal and he said 99 percent of the people he called said it was time to limit the guides. The first step is a moratorium, then look at guide limits.

Steve McClure stated that just four years ago we had 400 guides on the river and now we are down to 280. When the fishery rebounds it is believed that we will see more than 400 guides registering. With the king salmon closure, many of the businesses are targeting sockeye, silvers and trout. Many are moving up to the middle and Upper River. So when the kings rebounds there are fear that everyone will be fishing all over the river and it will drive the numbers up. Steve believes we need to get in front of this now while the numbers are down and he thinks that most people support the concept.

Tim Stevens asked if three years enough time to address the issue.

Joe said that we are asking for a moratorium that State Parks can use before moving it to the legislature. This has been attempted in the past and the state was sued. But now we have this situation with the king salmon and low abundance and this may be the push to make this happen. Joe stated that if we started this in 2015 that would give the state four years to get everything in place to make the limiting process permanent.



Joe said there are other users to consider. Would we allow them to continue to allow the public to use the river without restrictions? The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge report believes there is over use in the middle river. The Whitaker report also states that the river is over used. But no-one is willing to make a change to limit the guides.

Monte Roberts said he is opposed to limiting guides because every time there is a question or concerns such as over use, they take something from the guides and leave the other user groups alone. Another five years from now and we take something from the guides and we leave the other use groups alone. The guides are declining in numbers which is a good thing, but we also need to look at the other user groups. Monte believes it is a waste of public money to go down this road.

Ricky Gease reported on SB77 and the possibility of a professional services guide board. A million dollar fiscal note was attached to it for electronic log book program. If you put a moratorium in place because of the king salmon issue, you may not be able to place limitations in August and September or later months when king salmon fishing is not occurring. The conservation reason may come and go, but the economic reason are more solid to say you want to limit something and not have unlimited entry.

Andy would like to get the guide moratorium just on the books. Just get this thing moving, weather it works or not.

Steve McClure stated we need something now. We are looking to the future.

Monte asked how many guides are registered for 2013? It was 285. Monte stated if we use that number of 285 as a moratorium it would be too high and he would like to see a lower number.

Brent stated the commercial fishery is an economic issue. If you want someone to come back every year a limit is recommended. Brent believes that PR wise it is the best thing.

Joe stated you're in the room with guides saying limit guides. The public does not want to have any restrictions.

Andy said that limiting the public is only something the agencies can accomplish. It is also totally different then the current subject. Let's deal with the guides first, then look at the next issue.

Dennis Randa said that Parks is the stumbling block. At one point it was proposed to limited only 75 guides on the Kenai. He recommended reading former Kenai River Ranger Water Ward's paper on limiting guides and review the comments and see if anything has changed. Andy asked Parks to pursue this.

Andy made a motion that they bring a resolution to the board in May to put a moratorium on guide on the Kenai River. Ricky second it.

Ricky asked a few questions. Is the moratorium on existing guides or new guide?

So the question was brought to the table that the board vote at the May 8 meeting asking the department to put a moratorium on guides.

A vote was taken; it passed unanimously.

2. River Ranch-Hansen Property-Jack Blackwell gave the history of this property. It is a 150 acres parcel at river mile 32 that was purchased with EVOS money. The property is co-managed by Parks and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This is one parcel that may be developed for recreation purposes. A map and handout from the KRSMA plan was provided to the board. The area is currently closed to bank fishing.

Recently, there has been discussion to build some structures along the river and a possible boat launch. Ray Price is the past president of the Funny River Chamber of Commerce. They have been trying for years to get the property developed for public use. Ray Price and the community are willing to approach the legislature for funding to develop the area. The first initial money would be used to develop a site plan. He suggested the money would be administered through the Funny River Chamber of Commerce and Parks would work in conjunction with the chamber. All of the Funny River community is in favor of this developed. Ray would like to have a letter from the KRSMA board for the concept of developing the property for recreation.

A motion was recommended to support a site plan for the River Ranch property. Keith would like to delay the vote until it is determined why there is a habitat restriction and what the property is across the river. It was determine that the property across the river is owned by the Borough and was designated as the site of the bridge that would connect Funny River to the Sterling highway. The habitat closure was put in place to protect the area until a site place could be developed.

The question was brought to the table. Ricky Gease made the motion that the board vote to have a site plan developed for the River Ranch property. Andy second the motion. The motion passed with the City of Soldotna voting against it.

VI. **CORRESPONDENCE:** None.

VII. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.

VIII. **ADJOURNMENT**

- A. **Board Comments**-Brent commented that the Kenai Peninsula Borough had a teleconference with the legislature. The legislature felt that there was not appreciation to the legislature in helping to acquire the funding for a new ranger for the Kachemak Bay area.

Brent asked what kind of shape in the Kenai River smolt in that goes out to the ocean. Fish and Game commented that this issue has not been looked at for 20 years. Brent would like to see funding to study the king salmon smolt in the Kenai River. Brent is going to bring a resolution to the board proposing that Fish and Game study the king salmon smolt out migration.

Tim Stevens would like to have Fish and Game a report to the board how the \$30 million is being spent.

- B. The board would like to have an end of the year pot luck. Pam will work with the board in working on a menu. Brenda also proposed that board members bring donations for prizes for the clean up week
- C. **Date/Agenda of Next Meeting: May 8, 2014 at 5:30 p.m.**

