

**Kenai River Special Management
Area Advisory Board**

Thursday, April 14, 2005
5:30 p.m.
Kenai River Center

I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Roll Call

Members Present: Joe Connors, Paul A. Shadura, Ken Lancaster, Richard Hahn, Jeff King, Rick Wood, Keith Kornelius, Robin West, Tom Vania, Jack Sinclair, Tim Stevens.

Members Absent: Ted Wellman, Ted Forsi, Dave Westerman, Floyd Heimbuch, Pete Sprague, Bill Shuster.

B. Approval of 3/10/05 minutes

Approved as written.

C. Agenda Changes and Approval

The agenda was approved with the following changes: DOT Update/Soldotna Bridge-Chuck Swernor under New Business was moved to A; Soldotna Chamber of Commerce one Day Fishing Derby with Paul Gray was canceled.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

I. NEW BUSINESS

A. DOT Update-Soldotna Bridge-Chuck Swernor

Chuck Swernor with DOT is the project engineer on the construction of the temporary and new bridge in Soldotna. Basically DOT is building two bridges and tearing two bridges down. Their major focus is the May 1st deadline for driving pile in the river to get the temporary bridge built. They are on schedule. Wilder, the contractor, was working seven days a week 24 hours a day, but is currently working 12 hour days. For updates on the bridge and the construction in progress there is a web site kenairiverbridge.com. A web cam will be set up in two weeks. The camera will be on a 30-foot pole by the Soldotna visitor center. You will be able to control the camera for approximately 30 seconds to view the construction of the bridge. The temporary bridge is slated to be ready for vehicle traffic on May 26.

Ken Lancaster asked about foot traffic on the temporary bridge. Chuck said on the original design there was no provision for foot traffic over the temporary bridge and there were no complaints at planning time. As of right now there will be foot traffic across the bridge. A design firm is working on the plan.

Paul said the pilings appear larger than originally planned. When driving the piling into the riverbed did they run into bedrock or any different strata changes that were not expected? Chuck said the pilings are larger because the temporary bridge is a different design than originally planned. The pilings are placed with a vibrating hammer and then a gravity hammer for the last part of the placement. The riverbed consisted of big boulders. Paul asked if the north bank and the contaminated area was being monitored for leaching and changes in soil structure. Chuck said DEC is monitoring the water wells at the site.

Dick Hahn asked about bridge closure. Chuck said announcements will be made next winter or early spring when there will be 6/6-hour closures occurring at night. Other closures may occur just for construction purposes.

Jeff asked how the pilings will be removed. Chuck said they just vibrate them and they come out. How far down in the riverbed do the pilings go? About 32 feet.

The bridge will be completed on October 16, 2006 with 5 lanes, two 12-foot bike and pedestrian paths on each side, viewing platforms on each side and lighted pathway.

Jack Sinclair commented that the opening of the temporary bridge is on Memorial Day weekend, which is one of the busiest weekends on the peninsula. He asked if it would be a fairly seamless transition from the old bridge to the temporary bridge. Chuck is hoping confusion would only occur for the first 10 minutes. But the opening is tentative and is subject to change.

B. Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Planning Update and EIS process- Robin West

Julie Laker from the Fish and Wildlife field office presented a Power Point explaining the project, Kenai River Public Use Surveys 2004, Upper and Middle Kenai River. These surveys were conducted by request from the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. They repeated some surveys in the upper river and conducted some new surveys of various types in the middle river. This will give a snapshot in time of what is occurring on the river for future planning. The survey was conducted on the upper and

middle Kenai River, which are two different surveys because these are two very different areas. The upper Kenai River is non-motorized use only and limited points of entry with one direction of travel. The middle Kenai River is motorized with a number of entry points and many directions of travel. The aim for the middle river survey was to get a snapshot to characterize the use.

The Upper River survey consisted of two methods. Interviews and video counts; the methods mirrored a survey that was conducted in 1994 and 1999 to build on some trends over the past 10 years. The interviews were conducted at Jim's landing on June 17 through September 30, 2004. They randomly picked one weekday and 1 weekend day for a total of 31 days. The time was from noon to 7 p.m. One person from each boat that were launching, landing or drifting was surveyed. The parameters were modeled from early surveys which consisted of time and place of launch, guided or unguided, angling or scenic, residence, fish species targeted, Kenai Canyon use and Guide number. The results concluded 6,500 visitors, 1,700 boats. 66% were anglers; 34% were scenic; 51% guided and 49% unguided.

The second part of the study was video counts. The aim was to get the total estimate of boat use on the upper river. Two cameras were set up at the Russian River ferry sight; each one was pointed across the river and set on motion detection, to record boats as they came down the river. They were recorded on a digital video recorder with a removable hard drive, so the data may be reviewed at a later time. The cameras were set up June 8 through September 30 and operated continuously. The camera revealed 6,963 boats and 24,941 visitors. For each boat they recorded was the type of boat, time, number in party, angling or scenic, guided or non guided, guide number if applicable and the quality of the video. The results concluded 25,000 visitors, 7,000 boats. 62% were anglers and 32% were scenic, 45% guided, 40% unguided and 15% unknown. Driftboats were most widely used with rafts, than catarafts, kayaks and canoes.

The Middle River Survey took two snapshot of the fishery, the peak sockeye fishery which happened the last two weeks in July (18-31) and the other of the trout fishery which occurred the first two weeks in October (3-17). For each of these fisheries they selected four weekdays and two weekend days, and during this time they conducted surveys every two hours. In July the survey occurred between 6 am until 10 pm and for the trout season 10 am until 6 pm. The area surveyed was the Kenai River below Skilak Lake, approximately ten river miles. They traveled by boat every two hours, counting boat or shore anglers. On each count they counted shoreline anglers, boat anglers, boat type, guided or non-guided, # of active rods, tents and boat trailers. For July results 117 shore anglers,

69 boat anglers and 30 tents with 75% being unguided. For Octobers results 11 shore anglers, 51 boat anglers and 2 tents with 78% unguided. The surveys will be repeated every 3 to 5 years. A final reported is expected in fall of 2005.

Paul asked how much the study cost. Doug Palmer estimated approximately \$25,000 for the study.

Robin West passed around the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge planning update newsletter and a 1997 copy of the upper Kenai River Cooperative plan. The planning process requirements state that every Refuge needs to do a comprehensive conservation plan and revise it every 15 years by law. The Kenai's last plan was done in 1985. They have been working on the new plan for about a year, and it is a lengthy process. While working on the plan the Refuge conducted public meetings in Soldotna, Homer, Seward, Copper Landing and Anchorage and sent out 3000 solicitations for comments and interest. The range of alternatives was based on what the public told the Refuge, not necessarily what the Refuge management felt was top priority. The number one comment that came out of the public meetings and mail in comments was Kenai River crowding. Some of the comments were very focused on the Refuge area and some were just the area in general. The Refuge is now in the process of developing a range of alternatives to look at all the issues that were raised by the public and then go out in the next 8 months with a draft comprehensive conservation plan. The alternatives of the plan are subject to change in the next few weeks and months as the process continues. Robin briefly reviewed the five major issues and the specific areas of interest and three alternative recommended plans.

These issues and specific areas of interest are:

1. How will the refuge address large-scale habitat changes and the use of fire? Areas of interest are Fire and Land Management.
2. How will the Refuge manage facilities for public use while ensuring natural resources protection? Areas of interest are Beaver Creek, Swanson River, Mystery Creek Road, Ski Hill Rd, Skilak Loop Rd., Sterling Highway and Trail Maintenance and Planning.
3. How will the Refuge enhance wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities? Areas of interest are Personal Collection of Natural Resource and Wildlife Viewing Opportunities.
4. How will the Refuge manage increasing public use to ensure resource and visitor experience protection? Areas of interest include General Public Use of boating and fishing on the Kenai River, Sport Fishing Guides, Scenic Float-Trip Guides and Dispersed Camping.
5. How will the refuge balance motorized and non-motorized use with the resource and visitor experience protection? Areas of interest are

Aircraft Access, Snowmachine Access, Game Cart Use and Canoe Carrier Use.

Issue 4 is the most controversial on how the refuge will manage increasing public use to ensure resources and visitor experience protection. These issues are very tough because it is something that KRSMA has been dealing with for a long time. Anything that anyone suggested as a potential solution has been placed in the plan.

Robin now referred to the Upper Kenai River Cooperative Plan of May 1997. Everyone that was involved and signed the plan other than Robin is no longer in their positions. Robin said he inherited the plan and really had nothing to do with its development, which had limited text change process and had few changes. This plan was being developed at the same time as the Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Suzanne said Deidra St. Louis of the USFS headed the process of the Upper Kenai River Cooperative plan. Public meetings were held and there was hope that the state process would mirror the federal and work on limits of successful change for the lower river. We now have two different scopes that we tried to link together at that time.

Robin said a lot of work went into the process, but what typically happens with limit of acceptable change process is that it generates a lot of public interest. Robin stated that the managers of State Parks, Forest Service, Fish and Game and the Refuge need to sit down and take apart the plan and see if everyone is satisfied with the revisions.

Once the draft is completed there will be public meetings for comments. Comments electronically are still being accepted for the next week or two at <http://alaska.fws.gov/nwr/planning/KenaiPMA.cfm>. Once the plan is completed it will be incorporated into the EIS. The plan will take up to a year to complete before the final is in place.

Joe Connors asked if the survey on the middle river checked to see if the guide boats that were documented on the river were compared to the database of guides that are permitted. Robin said this process was not done on the Middle River but was completed on the upper river.

Dick said it is definitely a daunting task just to implement an alternative. He also stated that if the alternatives cannot be enforced, by increasing enforcement on the river, then the process is for nothing.

Paul asked about the recommendations for bank restoration in the plan. Robin said most of the things they deal with every day do not wait until the planning process is completed to address. They have issued closure,

such as Moose Range Meadows and put out an environmental assessment and there is a Skilak Plan and Russian plan and other closures along the river that have been done.

C. Boat Wake study update-Robert Ruffner

The Kenaitze Indian Tribe (KIT) is the entity working in cooperation with the Corps of Engineers. The EPA grant has been approved and they have a signed document for the boat wake study, water quality monitoring and motor voucher program. The first priority this grant allows them to do is to get the Corps lined up so they could do the study this summer. They immediately sent a government-to-government agreement between the tribe and Corps so they could get this all set. The Corps is set to come up in May to start the study. The first part of the study is to look at low water condition and the second part will be to conduct some in-river work in July and August. Dr. Maynard conducted the first study and will be conducting the second study. The first study was conducted 4 years ago.

D. Kenai River Operations

Jack said the Bing's Landing development project was awarded to D&L Construction. This will enlarge the parking areas along the roadway and improve the boat launch with eight additional pads.

Kenai River Sportfishing Associations' board of directors did vote to confirm the \$18,000 grant for Kenai River enforcement in July 2005. Law enforcement presence and contacts will increase during peak times.

Ken said he spoke with Jack about writing a letter to the commissioner about getting a new facilitator for the Kenai River working group. The Parks division does have a temporary Acting Director Richard LeFebvre who will also be Acting Chair for the Kenai River Working Group.

A recommendation for a letter to the commissioner to continue support of the working group was proposed by Joe Connors and seconded by Dick Hahn.

II. OLD BUSINESS

A. Kenai River Center Update, Suzanne Fisler

Bridge activity and pictures are being taken by the different agencies of the KRC. Each agency will take two weeks worth of pictures looking at the banks, the ice, the construction and what is going on so we can have some kind of record of how the bridge was built. This is to help keep

track of what worked and what did not work so when we are facing another bridge we have something to refer back to.

The center has been doing a lot of sight visits and writing about 15 to 20 permits a week for restoration, vegetation, walkways and floating docks. Suzanne said they are working with the landowners to upgrade or replace old structures that were put in prior to the centers permitting criteria.

The guide permits and commercial use permits from Prince William Sound and Kachemak Bay are rolling in. The center is issuing ADF&G logbooks and handing out the sportfish stickers. The Cooper Landing Catholic Church received some land from the state to put the church on. In their second application to add a little additional land to the cemetery area back in 1984 the state took a 200 foot area out of both sides of Shackleford creek. The church was not aware that had happened and they thought that this was their property. They built a real nice station of the cross and an area where ashes are buried and they want to put in a grave yard for casket. The center is working with the church to obtain the 90 feet of land they need for their cemetery.

B. Kenai River Working Group

Joe Conners said the meeting on Monday, April 11 completed phase one which included the short term requirements that may be implemented by 2006. The implementation of the short-term requirements may involve amended or changing existing stipulations that the Department has the authority to do. John Baker from the Alaska Department of Law came back to the group with a draft of everything that the group had forwarded to him as recommendation the month before. The draft looks very good with a few changes. The next phase will begin in the fall. In phase two the group hopes to move to what may take 2, 5 or even 10 years limiting guides which will require a legislative/constitutional changes. Before this action can take place the group needs to make sure there is justification for this action. Joe was very pleased with the product of the group thus far.

Jack has the task this fall or late summer in bringing in some of the other people that have done similar studies nationwide in limiting the number of guides and crowd control. Jack is not only looking at the number to restrict, but the method to use to restrict the number or create different uses of the river.

C. Corr Property update

Jack Sinclair met with Pete Sprague to get a consensus among the legislative committee that they would pass on the letter the KRSMA board had written about purchasing the Corr property. There are certain

Assembly board members that are concerned about the Corr property and what the State intends to use the property for. Grace Merkes is concerned that it will not be open to the public. Jack said the land would be open to the public but would be used with protection of resources as the main responsibility of Parks. There was mostly a positive response from the Assembly, and a resolution would be rewritten and presented at the next meeting on April 19.

Joe asked if there was enough money to purchase the land. Jack said Chris Degernes stated that the Governors' Office is ready to go ahead with the rest of the money as long as there is local support.

V. PUBLIC COMMENT

Robert Ruffner talked about the water sampling that was taking place on May 25-26. Robert thanked DEC, City of Soldotna and Kenai, DNR, Fish and Game, Refuge, Forest Service and Cook Inlet Agriculture for investing in the water quality-sampling program.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

A. Board Comments

Jeff King apologized for not having a user fee committee meeting but will schedule a meeting before the next KRSMA board meeting.

Joe Connors stated that the group needs to do whatever it takes to obtain the Corr Property.

Tom Vania encourages anyone from the group that is interested in building the new hatchery facilities to support the sport fishing license increase. Contact your legislature. This is House bill 147.

Robin stated that the Unocal Recreation club site might be available for sale. This is a great piece of land along the river.

B. Date/Agenda of Next Meeting

May 12, 2005 at 5:30