

Chapter 4

Issues

Miller Point

Miller Point is a major attraction in the park because it offers scenic vistas, whale watching, hiking opportunities, and unique historic experiences including the Kodiak Military History Museum. The area receives over 65,000 visitors a year. As a result on nice summer days, parking at Miller Point is challenging: traffic becomes congested, visitors have to wait for parking spots, and pedestrian safety becomes a significant concern. This plan recommends a number of solutions for addressing these issues and improving the visitor experience. These include moving the existing campground (see section below), installing a bus turnaround, improving parking, adding a restroom for the museum, and constructing an interpretative trail and displays.

Camping in the Park

The origin of camping in the park began during pre-park days when the area was used for transient housing for temporary workers in the fishing industry. Due to the uneven nature of the terrain, the only suitable locations for campsites were on the flat foundations of the structures built during WWII. The Miller Point Campground was never designed for this purpose and therefore the sites are poor with little regard to their impact on the historic resources of the area. Vehicle parking has always been an issue. Half of the sites accommodate only standard-sized vehicles, and the other half were developed as “walk-in” sites for those traveling without vehicles. No accommodation was made for larger recreational vehicles (RVs). They are currently only permitted to park overnight in the lot below the Spotting and Plotting Room. Because today’s RVs are often 40 feet and longer, two vehicles fill the entire lot.

The question of whether or not to allow overnight camping in the park has been a longstanding issue. Although the 1973 master plan recommended the development of a new campground west of Miller Point, it also proposed that camping be de-emphasized in the park. This plan recommended that a new campground be developed outside of the park and suggested Pillar Creek as an appropriate location. During the preparation of the 1979 master site development plan, it was suggested that camping be eliminated as soon as either the state or borough could develop an alternative campground. Local residents were complaining that campers, particularly long-term campers, were preempting resident’s full use and enjoyment of the park. At that time, short-term camping limits were established and vigorously enforced.

In 1982 State Parks acquired, via a cooperative land management agreement, 168 acres from the U.S. Coast Guard along the Buskin River where it developed an 18 unit campground. The campground was designed to accommodate larger recreational vehicles.

This plan presents some alternatives in an effort to resolve camping-related issues. State Park's continues to recommend that only short-term, primitive, convenience-oriented camping be allowed in the park. That is, camping which is not oriented toward providing a camping experience but simply provides a place for an overnight stay for persons visiting the park. Should additional lands be acquired and added to the park (see Land Acquisition section below), camping facilities could be relocated to this area. If this land base is absent, parking for larger recreational vehicles would either be eliminated since there is usually adequate space at the Buskin River Campground or be accommodated on a limited basis by the current headquarters facility provided ownership of that area is resolved. Since Ft. Abercrombie is less than 2 miles from shopping centers, it is far easier for travelers without vehicles to stay in the park rather than at the Buskin River since the latter campground is over 4 miles to the nearest store. Tent camping will be provided by the development of new walk-in campsites to the north of the War Reserve Magazine. This proposed solution will still allow people to camp in the park but in a manner which neither conflicts with other day users nor with the primary mission of the park: the protection of the historic resources and the interpretation of World War II history.

Trails

Since the most used resource in the park is trails, this plan proposes a program for aggressive trail enhancements. This includes proposals for new trails, trail maintenance, and relocation of certain trails for safety or cultural resource preservation. Additionally, a separate Trails Plan for the park has been developed concurrent with this plan revision that provides more specific guidance for trail management and development. The Trails Plan is included as Appendix A. In brief, it includes new trail recommendations, existing trail upgrade priorities, trail classification designations, trail standards, and signage. This plan also addresses issues such as pets, trail accessibility (ADA compliance), and types of trail uses appropriate to the park.

Fees

Fees are a critical revenue source for Alaska State Parks and help support and maintain park facilities. User fees are collected for camping, cabin or recreation site use, and boat launching in many park units. Commercial operators pay permit fees that allow them to operate within a state park. Those fees are intended to compensate the public for the commercial use of a public resource. In an effort to generate more revenue, day use fees are proposed for Kodiak state park areas including Fort Abercrombie State Historic Park. These fees will be charged for vehicle parking and use of the facility for longer than 30 minutes and will be used to enhance funding for facility construction, management and maintenance.

Park Facility Needs

Aside from initial construction of the park headquarters in the 1980's, very little capital infrastructure has been added to the park. Many of the existing facilities are in a state of disrepair or inadequate to serve current visitor's needs. The WWII War Reserve Magazine is currently being used as a storage and maintenance structure but marginally serves this purpose since the building is generally cool, damp, dark and too small to serve the entire Kodiak District's needs. Although the structure provides some storage space, perpetual dampness promotes mold, mildew and rust, and heating the structure is too costly. A new maintenance and storage building is needed to fully comply with state worker safety standards and to meet the park's maintenance needs. Currently, a small partially screened area is being used to store park furniture, supplies and equipment, but it is too small and not secured. Theft of supplies is an ongoing problem.

Many of the restroom facilities in the park need to be replaced and/or upgraded especially those at Lake Gertrude and the Group Recreation Area. Kodiak's maritime climate is very harsh on wooden furniture such as picnic tables and bulletin boards. Park fireplaces are in very poor condition and at least half require replacement. Park tables are in poor condition; wooden boards require frequent replacement and longer-lasting products should be explored.

When first constructed, the district headquarters was built with two salvaged modular units stacked on top of each other and then remodeled. Inexpensive and adequate at the time, the building suffers from poor insulation and low quality construction. The lower unit contains the district offices and visitor center/meeting area, and the upper unit contains an apartment that is available for rent. Rental income pays for most building utilities and has been an essential asset for the district's limited budget. The headquarters contains the only heated dry space in the district, and therefore is the only place for storage of sensitive materials. Office space there is extremely confined creating a very congested workspace and visitor information area. A single office entrance creates challenges for both staff and public to share, and creates a safety hazard for egress purposes in the event of an emergency. No additional staff can be accommodated without eliminating further visitor services. Additionally, office parking is substandard and should be expanded to include secured parking for fleet vehicles.

Pets in the Park

Roughly half of the daily visitors to the park bring dogs. This is particularly true for local residents, many who visit the park one or more times per day. Dog walking is a very popular recreational activity and is often a compelling reason for many people to visit the park. Many people, especially those with small children or those with physical challenges, prefer that dogs be restrained on leashes. The public has the right to enjoy the park without encountering some of the problems, including safety concerns, loose dogs can create. Other problems observed to date in the park include: dogs chasing wildlife, pet waste in high-use public areas, and dog fights.

Part of the park's purpose is to "provide safe recreational opportunities for park visitors" through carefully crafted regulations and policies. Park regulations (11 AAC 12.130) require that pets be leashed and under control at all times in developed facilities that include buildings, campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads, parking areas, swim beaches, and similar areas. In undeveloped areas, pets are allowed to be unleashed, but the owner must be present and in constant control of their animal at minimum by voice command. Pets running loose in the park will not be permitted, and it will remain the policy of the park to vigorously enforce this regulation.

Because the park contains both developed and undeveloped areas, conflicts have arisen over what areas should be zoned as "leash-required" or "leash-free." As a compromise the park instituted leash zoning in 2000. The northwest side of Lake Gertrude and the trail around the lake was designated as a leash-required zone, and the rest of the park on the southeast side of the lake was designated a leash-free area (see Figure 5.2). This compromise has for the most part, been well received and gives those who prefer not to be harassed by loose dogs a place to feel comfortable and safe. This plan continues to provide areas for leashed and unleashed dogs and recommends further clarification of the regulation through establishment of a Director's Order. To insure that these efforts are successful to resolve this conflict, education efforts that address pet regulations should continue including those that apply to pet control or restraint, waste, and protection of the park's wildlife. Because voluntary compliance has been problematic, new strategies that encourage "self-policing" by pet owners of pet rules and etiquette should continue to be explored.

Land Acquisition

The previous plan recommended that the park acquire several vacant lots at the park entrance for infrastructure development and park access control. No action was taken and residences were subsequently built on the lots. Today, very few vacant lots adjacent to the park remain as residential development has rapidly consumed almost all privately owned vacant land in the greater Ft. Abercrombie area. There are two large parcels of public land remaining adjacent to the park. When planning the future uses of these lands, compatibility with the adjacent historic park and provisions for pedestrian access should be considered.

City of Kodiak "Cry of the Wild Ram Site"

A 77-acre parcel of city-owned land adjoins the park on the southwest side and extends across Monashka Bay Road. Most public use of this tract occurs on the approximately 50-acre portion between Monashka Bay Road and the park. This portion is mostly forested and situated in a small valley draining into Monashka Bay. Previously used as both a cemetery (one grave remains) and an outdoor theater, the "Ram Site" lands have now been cleared of most of the theater infrastructure and remain as open space. These lands are principally being used for recreational purposes including hiking, picnicking, tidepooling, birdwatching, and kayaking. Other uses include a boat drop-off/mooring

point for residents of Spruce Island, education and research of intertidal organisms, and subsistence food gathering on the beaches. The large parking area across the road from the park headquarters is partially owned by the city and the park, and used to access both properties. The site has a history of late night parties, litter, vandalism, and physical assaults.

The portion of the tract on the opposite side of Monashka Bay Road was formerly used as a Boy Scout camp. Currently, it is mostly forested open space with incidental use by hikers and ATV users. This plan recommends the Ram Site portion of the city property be acquired and added to the park through purchase or management agreement so that its future use is compatible with the park's mission.

Kodiak Island Borough

The approximately 60 acre tract (Tract B) is not contiguous to the park, but adjacent to the City's Ram Site property on the opposite side of Monashka Bay Road. The two properties form a large undeveloped tract of forested land with several small ponds that are adjacent to the rapidly developing subdivisions along Otmeloi and Lakeview drives. When planning for development of this land, reservation of greenways or trail corridors that provide access to the park should be considered.

Vegetation Management

Ft. Abercrombie hosts a variety of plant communities that are an important part of the character of the park. These include dense Sitka spruce forests, coastal meadows and a variety of beach dwelling plants adapted to salt water spray. This plan recommends the park be managed to protect, as much as possible, the park's natural ecosystems as a stronghold for natural processes and cycles. In keeping with the Statewide Framework however, development will be consistent with the historical period the park was established to represent. Some limited manipulation of vegetation can occur if compatible with park purposes, particularly in the cultural areas of the park where manipulation is permissible to maintain the historic setting of the fort.

Invasive or noxious weeds are a growing problem on Kodiak Island and throughout the state. Much attention in recent years has centered upon invasive plant control. The plan recommends preventing the introduction and spread of noxious weeds within the park. While many invasive plants can be found in the park, few noxious weeds have been noted to date.

Wildlife Management

The Kodiak brown bear is a well established species with a healthy population throughout the island. While bears generally frequent unpopulated areas, some inhabit areas close to the city. Ft. Abercrombie is not quality bear habitat and few have been seen, although they occasionally pass through. Wise food storage and garbage management practices in recent years have further reduced the number of bears seen within the park. All permanent garbage containers are designed to be bear-resistant and have not yet been

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compromised by any wildlife. Park regulations prohibit leaving food unattended in a place or manner reasonably accessible by bears. This regulation is strictly enforced. This plan continues to recommend the current management strategy for park habitat and handling of bear sightings: if there is a confirmed bear sighting, public and agency notification is required. Education and awareness are also important park management tools.

Birders are attracted to the park in summer because it affords the opportunity to closely observe horned puffins nesting on the bluffs at Miller Point. This is the only time of year that puffins stay close to shore and are readily observable from land. This plan recommends that activities that may disturb nesting puffins, such as rock climbing, be restricted while puffins are using their nests.