

A Strategic Interagency Response to Dynamic Challenges at the Kenai-Russian River Complex



2009-2014

“The Kenai-Russian River Complex is unique, combining great natural beauty, abundant and diverse fish and wildlife populations, and a rich historic and cultural legacy. We envision the Kenai-Russian River Complex where, through interagency and stakeholder cooperation, scenic beauty will forever be sustained, populations and habitat conserved and restored, and the cultural resources preserved. Our legacy will be to encourage responsible human uses while maintaining respect for the natural and cultural heritage of the Kenai-Russian River system”.

~Interagency Vision Statement



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List of Acronyms

ADF & G- Alaska Department of Fish and Game
ANCSA-Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act
ANILCA- Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act
CIRI- Cook Inlet Regional Incorporated
CNF- Chugach National Forest
DLP- Defense of Life or Property
DNR- Department of Natural Resources
EA- Environmental Assessment
EILT- Executive Interagency Leadership Team
IMC- Interagency Management Coordinator
ISIC- Interagency Steering and Implementation Committee
KENWR- Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
KRRC- Kenai-Russian River Complex
KRSMA- Kenai River Special Management Area
RRICG- Russian River Interagency Coordination Group
UKRCP- Upper Kenai River Cooperative Plan
USDA- US Department of Agriculture
USDOI- US Department of the Interior
USFWS- US Fish and Wildlife Service

I. Overview

The Kenai and Russian Rivers is an intensively used area that boasts a rich cultural heritage and one of the State of Alaska’s most popular sockeye salmon fisheries. As many as 150,000 anglers and other visitors flock to the area seeking highly-prized sockeye salmon and recreational opportunities between May and September each year. Over the years, the level of intensive human use coupled with the abundant natural and cultural resources in the area has generated management concerns related to adverse human-bear encounters, resource degradation, loss of wilderness character, and public safety hazards. These management concerns pose serious challenges for the responsible agencies. Other management challenges also exist due to the unique statutory authorities, and missions, and diverse interests of the state, federal, and tribal entities.

The intent of this strategic plan is to help guide interagency management of the area over a 5-7 year time-frame. To ensure effective implementation of this plan, additional interagency and intra-agency operating procedures may need to be developed in concert with this plan but through independent processes.

The scope of the planning area, referred to hereafter as the “Kenai-Russian River Complex” (KRRC), is a five-mile radius from the Kenai and Russian River’s confluence as shown in figure 1. The KRRC is broken down into two distinct areas. The 2-mile radius of the confluence represents the most intense use and management and an outer 3-mile radius which recognizes the potential for cumulative impacts of adjacent activities.

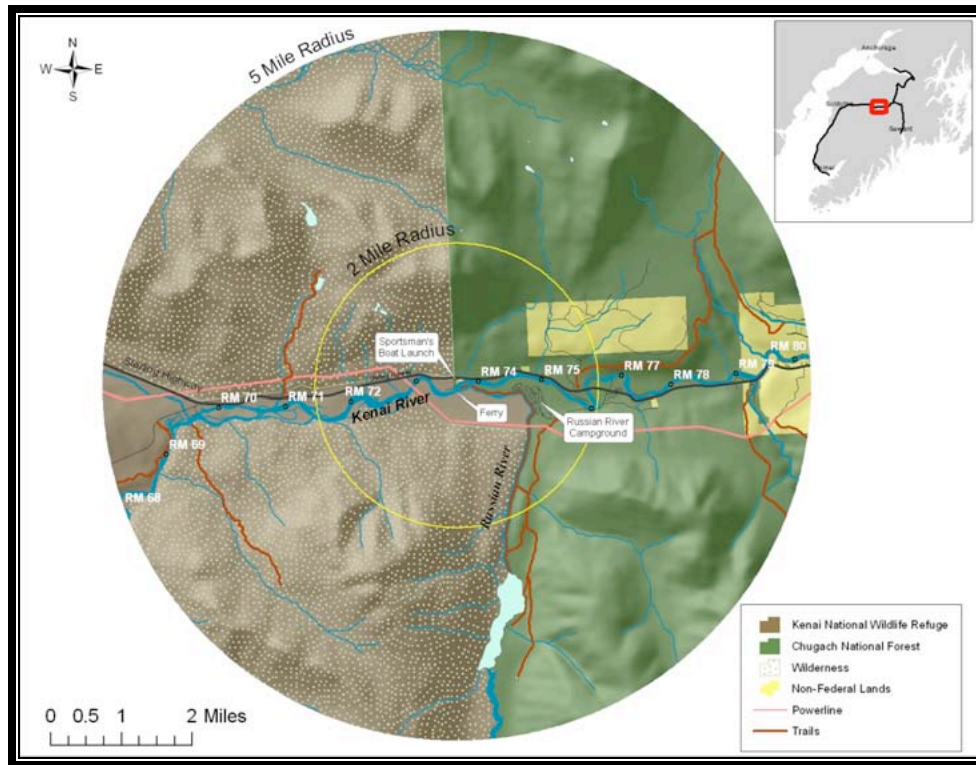


Figure 1: KRRC Planning Area

II. Guiding Principles

A.) Embracing Change

We embrace innovative and cooperative interagency management approaches to balance human use and resource conservation of this changing landscape.

B.) Leading Change

We are committed to a more cooperative management approach and will champion this strategic effort at all levels of our agencies.

C.) Working Together

We embrace a management culture where agencies actively cooperate to achieve our strategic priorities. We respect the differences that exist between the various interests and remain committed to finding solutions to the most complex issues.

D.) Instilling Ethics

We strive to instill in all stakeholders an ethic of individual responsibility. We demonstrate and encourage respect for the lands, resources, and cultural heritage of the KRRC.

E.) Staying the Course

We understand that accomplishing our strategic priorities will require persistence and follow-through. We are committed to sustaining our efforts which will require time, money, and human resources.



III. Introduction

Alaska's Kenai-Russian River Complex (KRRC), defined as a five-mile radius from the Kenai and Russian Rivers confluence, is managed as a highly utilized recreational area that boasts a rich cultural heritage and one of the State's most popular sockeye salmon sport fisheries. The Russian River is a tributary of the Kenai River and the surrounding lands are managed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service as part of the Chugach National Forest (CNF), and by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (KENWR). Within the KRRC, the congressionally designated Kenai Wilderness Area makes up 49% of the land base as shown in figure 2. The Wilderness Area, managed by the KENWR is also referred to as the Andrew Simons Research Natural Area and was established in 1980 as a provision of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) to protect salmon, brown bears, and their habitat while also precluding oil and gas exploration and leasing.

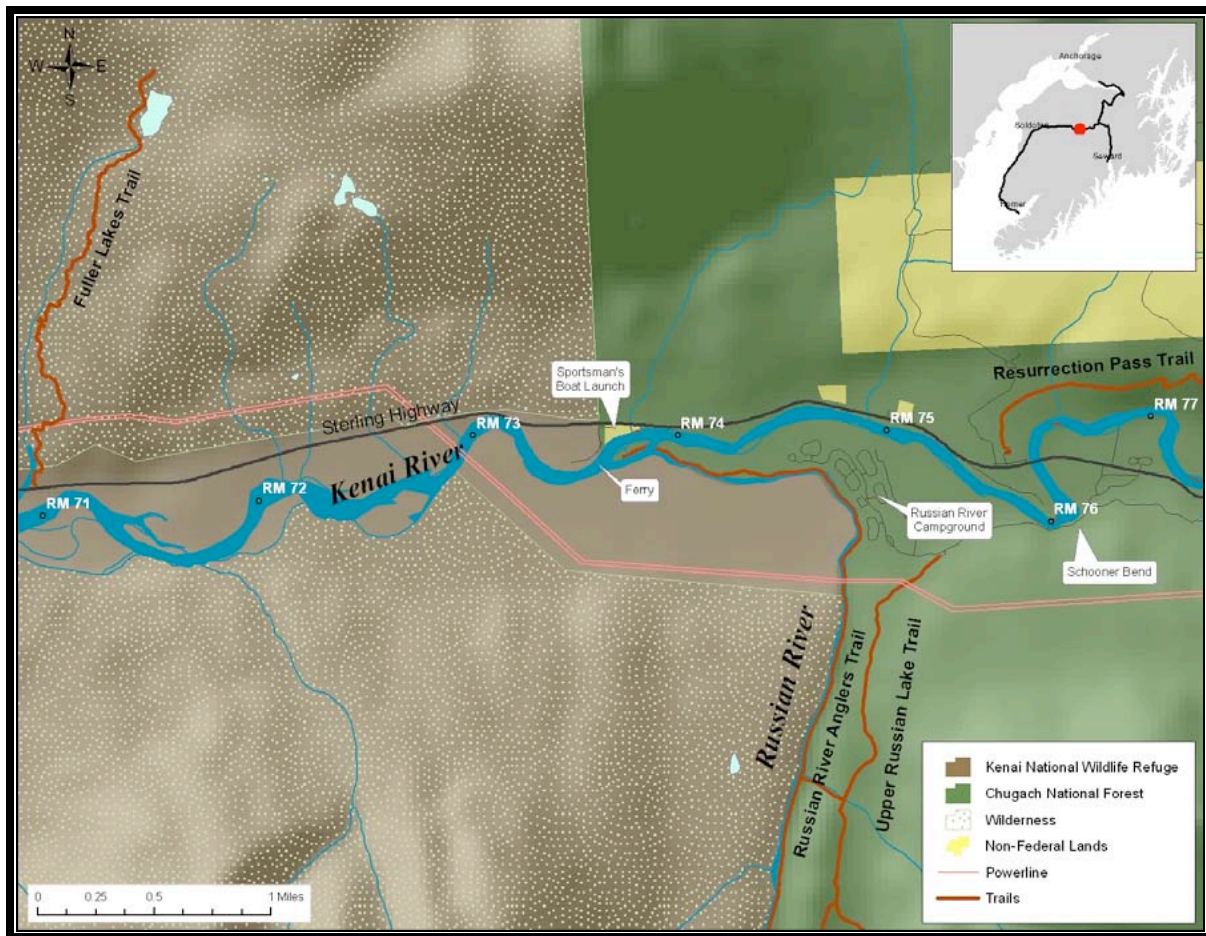


Figure 2. The Kenai-Russian River Area Map

The Kenai and Russian Rivers lie within driving distance of two main population centers, 110 miles south of Anchorage and 40 miles east of Soldotna in south-central Alaska. Due to the close proximity of the population centers, anglers and other visitors have easy access to the roadside fishery and recreation site annually between the months of May and September, as shown in

figure 3. Along with anglers, Russian River Falls and the Upper Russian Lakes Trail and cabin system draw diverse visitors, including anglers, hikers, bikers, and backpackers to the area. Visitors are also drawn to the area during the summer to camp in the Russian River Campground and nearby developed recreation sites. During the high-use months tens of thousands of anglers compete for space along the banks of these rivers.



Figure 3. Anglers line the banks at the confluence of the Kenai and Russian Rivers.

Archeological studies and oral history in the area show that native Alaskans and early settlers have used this location for gathering salmon for centuries. The complex of heritage sites in the Russian River area, also known as the Squilantnu Archeological District, is one of the largest and most important in Alaska. The sites encompass nine to eleven thousand years of human history and include at least four major cultural traditions; American Paleoarctic, Northern Archaic, Riverine Kachemak and Dena'ina.

One of the most unique aspects of the KRRC is that the Russian River forms the boundary between the Chugach National Forest (CNF) and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (KENWR). This unique geographic boundary makes coordination and cooperation challenging but absolutely crucial between the two federal agencies. In addition to the two federal land management agencies, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks and Recreation Division (DNR), the Kenaitze Indian Tribe (KIT), and Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated (CIRI) are also involved with various aspects of management of the KRRC.

Each agency and organization possesses unique missions, mandates, interests, priorities, and an established organizational model. The agencies and organizations each have an autonomous but interrelated responsibility and obligation to the area, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Agency responsibilities in the KRRC

Agency	Primary Responsibility in the KRRC
Alaska Department of Fish & Game's Division of Sport Fish and Division of Wildlife Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages for sustainable sport fishery and wildlife populations • Regulates fishing seasons, angler bag limits, methods, and means
USDA Forest Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages 23,400 acres of National Forest System lands in the KRRC • Manages the largest developed recreation site in the KRRC including an 83 site campground, a trail and cabin system, and additional angler access infrastructure
Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds title to two parcels of undeveloped land totaling 62 acres in the KRRC • Holds ownership of the cultural resources that exist in a majority of the area
Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Alaska State Parks and Recreation Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversees management of the Kenai River Special Management Area (KRSMA) which includes a portion of the KRRC
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages 27,000 acres of Refuge lands in the KRRC, most of which is Congressional Wilderness • Manages the Kenai-Russian River Ferry and angler access site • Oversees management of Sportsman's Boat Launch
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has long standing history and heritage in the area • Operates an interpretive cultural heritage site within the KRRC • Regional member of CIRI

Natural Landscape

The Russian River is nestled in the steep, glacially formed mountains of the Kenai Peninsula in south central Alaska. The Russian River forms a 63.5 square-mile tributary watershed to the Kenai River. The drainage contains two major lakes - Lower Russian Lake and Upper Russian Lake. The watershed is 17 miles long and 2 to 4 miles wide. From Upper Russian Lake down to its mouth at the Kenai River, the Russian River forms the boundary between the CNF and the KENWR. National Forest System lands comprise about 46 percent of the watershed, with the remainder of the lands under the management of the USFWS.

This drainage is important habitat for sockeye, coho and Chinook salmon, rainbow trout, Dolly Varden as well as moose and black and brown bear populations. Two distinct runs of sockeye salmon navigate the waters of the Russian River to spawn in the lakes higher in the drainage. A series of falls just below Lower Russian Lake provides a partial barrier to fish passage, particularly during high and low water flows. Prior to 1980, a fish passage tunnel was constructed on the west side of the river to facilitate sockeye salmon in reaching lake spawning habitat during high water when heavy rains and/or heavy snow melt make it difficult for fish to continue upstream.

According to geographic information system (GIS) data, within a 5-mile radius of the Kenai-Russian River confluence (78.5 square miles), 42% of the land is forested with predominantly white or Lutz spruce, mountain hemlock or mixed softwood-hardwood (aspen, black cottonwood, paper birch). More than 25% of this area is alpine tundra, exposed rock, or snow and ice; a similar amount of the remaining landscape is alder and, to a lesser extent, willow shrub.

In addition, less than 0.5% of the land has been developed. However, the human footprint is evident in the KRRC with over 33 miles of maintained trails and 31 miles of maintained and unmaintained roads. Over 2,000 acres within the 5-mile radius are non-Federal land.

Table 2. Features within the Kenai-Russian River Complex

	2 Mile Radius	5 Mile Radius
Trails	7.7 miles	33 miles
Roads	11.6 miles	30.9 miles
Streams	25.4 miles (8.9 miles anadromous)	103 miles (27 miles anadromous)
Lakes	11 acres	270 acres
KENWR	5,000 acres	27,000 acres
CNF	3,072 acres	23,4000 acres
Non-Federal	406 acres	2,140 acres

Current Human Footprint

Russian River Campground and Angler Trail

The Russian River Campground is managed by the USDA Forest Service. The campground contains 83 campsites and is considered a developed recreation site by the CNF. It also contains two day-use parking lots for angler access currently managed under special use permit by a private entity. Impacts to the riparian areas and associated habitat encouraged the CNF to engage stakeholders in the Angler Trail Environmental Assessment (EA). The assessment began in 1989 with a decision being signed in 1996. The final decision outlined in the EA proposed the development of a sequence of boardwalks and access points on the north side of the Russian River to protect key habitat areas. Today, the project is near completion, with 1.5 miles of light-penetrating boardwalks and gravel trails being installed upstream from the Kenai-Russian River confluence.

The Kenai-Russian River Ferry and Access Site

The Kenai-Russian River Ferry area is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and according to the Russian River Interim Management Plan, has seen intense use as far back as the 1930's. In the 1930's, a cabin, tent frames, a horse corral, and other facilities associated with a guide camp existed on the south bank. Sometime in the 1940's, the camp and cabin were moved to the north side of the river to the current location known as Sportsman's Landing. During that period, a narrow dirt road from local communities provided access to the ferry site. What was once a trail from the dirt road to the ferry evolved into a campground. A special use permit for the Kenai River ferry was issued as early as 1955 with the operation of the ferry being conducted by the private lodge on the north side of the river. Currently, the ferry is operated by a private entity under concessions contract with the USFWS and continues to provide 24 hour parking and angler access.

Adjacent Community: Cooper Landing

Adjacent to the KRRC is the roadside community of Cooper Landing. This community is home to approximately 400 residents and is located along Kenai Lake at the source of the Kenai River. Cooper Landing is a community that grew up around the river system and transportation corridor which eventually connected Anchorage to the Kenai Peninsula. Once the Sterling Highway was completed in 1951, settlers claimed land along the river for home and business sites. Since then, recreation, tourism, and fishing related activities have become the mainstay in the growing economy due to the proximity of the CNF and KENWR. These public lands provide a unique and distinct natural growth boundary for Cooper Landing. Today, the unincorporated community still relies heavily on a resource-based economy, namely sport fishing. Each summer the population doubles due to the influx of seasonal workers seeking sport fishing related and other tourism employment.

Future Proposed Development

The future human footprint may include the Sterling Highway by-pass project which has been discussed for over 30 years and may eventually be built in the Cooper Landing valley. This highway, if built, will provide easier access to the lower Kenai Peninsula but could further fragment critical wildlife habitat in the vicinity of the Russian River. The highway could also facilitate the development of a 1,080 acre subdivision in the adjacent Juneau Creek watershed. Development by Cook Inlet Regional Incorporated (CIRI) may also occur on lands acquired through the Russian River Lands Act, legislation that adjudicates rights to cultural resources and resolves land claims issues dating back to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). CIRI has the ability to develop a 42 acre parcel and 20 acre parcel within the KRRC for future cultural facilities.

IV. Current Interagency Coordination Effort

In 2007, as a response to increasing public safety concerns between humans and bears, upper level staff from the following agencies convened the Russian River Interagency Coordination Group as shown in table 3.

The Russian River Interagency Coordination Group charter, shown in appendix A, affirms the group's commitment to implement interagency strategies to address varying environmental and social issues ranging from habitat and riparian area degradation, cultural resource deterioration, human waste management, and human-bear conflicts. The group's main objectives are to:

- Facilitate coordination and communication between agencies and partners;
- Facilitate consistent education, regulation, and enforcement to allow for a safer and more enjoyable recreational experience for all users;
- Develop strategies and protocols to address human/bear interactions, and to protect natural and cultural resources;
- Develop a consistent public communication strategy;
- Actively engage in and steer Russian River Complex planning processes

Table 3. The Russian River Interagency Coordination Group Membership

Agency	Position
ADFG- Wildlife Division	Regional Supervisor
ADFG- Wildlife Division	Regional Management Biologist
ADFG- Sport Fish Division	Regional Supervisor
ADFG- Sport Fish Division	Regional Management Biologist
USDA Forest Service	District Ranger
Alaska State Parks	Park Superintendent
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Refuge Manager
Kenaitze Indian Tribe	Cultural Director

V. Cross-Jurisdictional and Interdisciplinary Concerns

There are numerous issues at the KRRC that are more easily addressed with cross-jurisdictional management and interdisciplinary collaboration. As an example, one of the most urgent issues that the RRICG is addressing is the increase in human-bear encounters. Agency staffs note that encounters, as depicted in Figure 4, have become more frequent in the KRRC since the 1990's.

The increase in frequency of the encounters between bears and anglers and the resulting public safety concerns have led the agencies to take a closer look at the issue. The agencies have found that bears are routinely attaining human-generated food sources such as filleted-out fish carcasses, coolers with food, stringers of fish, and other food and trash items from visitors in the KRRC as shown in figure 5 and figure 6. Biologists from ADFG – Division of Wildlife Conservation believe that bears which might otherwise pass through the Russian River drainage in July are remaining in the area due to the concentrated availability of high quality food in the form of filleted-out fish carcasses and other human generated attractants.

At the KRRC, adverse encounters between humans and bears have resulted in personal injury to visitors. In July of 2003, a 25-year-old angler was seriously mauled along the Russian River. Again, in July of 2006, a visitor at the CNF's Russian River Campground was awakened from his sleep when a bear jumped onto his tent and bit his shoulder. In 2007, while many bears were still observed at the KRRC, the agencies reported no major conflicts. However, in 2008, the RRICG saw a season of heightened bear activity that started to happen as soon as the upper Kenai and Russian Rivers opened to anglers in June.



Figure 4. Close encounter of bears and anglers at the Kenai-Russian Rivers confluence.
Source: Interagency Brown Bear Study Team, 2006

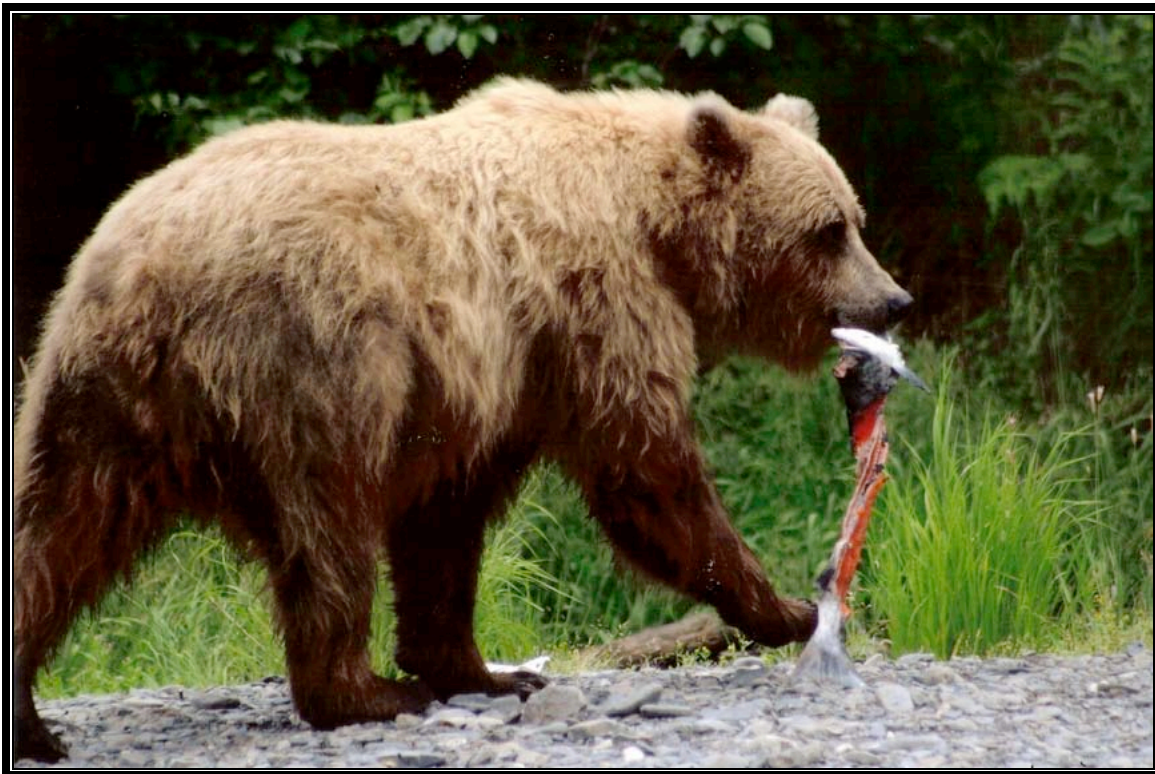


Figure 5. Brown bear attaining filleted-out salmon carcass.



Figure 6. Brown bear attaining human-generated attractants.

The 2008 season resulted in an increased number of bears killed in the KRRC and the Kenai Peninsula. Data from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, depicted in figure 7, shows that the level of brown bear mortality in the KRRC in the 2008 season was the highest ever recorded. According to ADFG, the data is intended to represent a measure of the number of reported brown bears killed in the KRRC vicinity through the defense of life or property (DLP) and through other non-hunting related incidents such as vehicle related mortality. DLPs usually occur when a bear acts aggressively toward a human and gets shot in defense by members of the public or by agency personnel.

Identifying strategies to minimize adverse human-bear encounters, lowering DLP brown bear mortality, and ultimately reducing potential for human injury are areas that require a great deal of interagency and interdisciplinary cooperation to ensure that effective strategies are consistently implemented within the entire KRRC and adjacent areas.

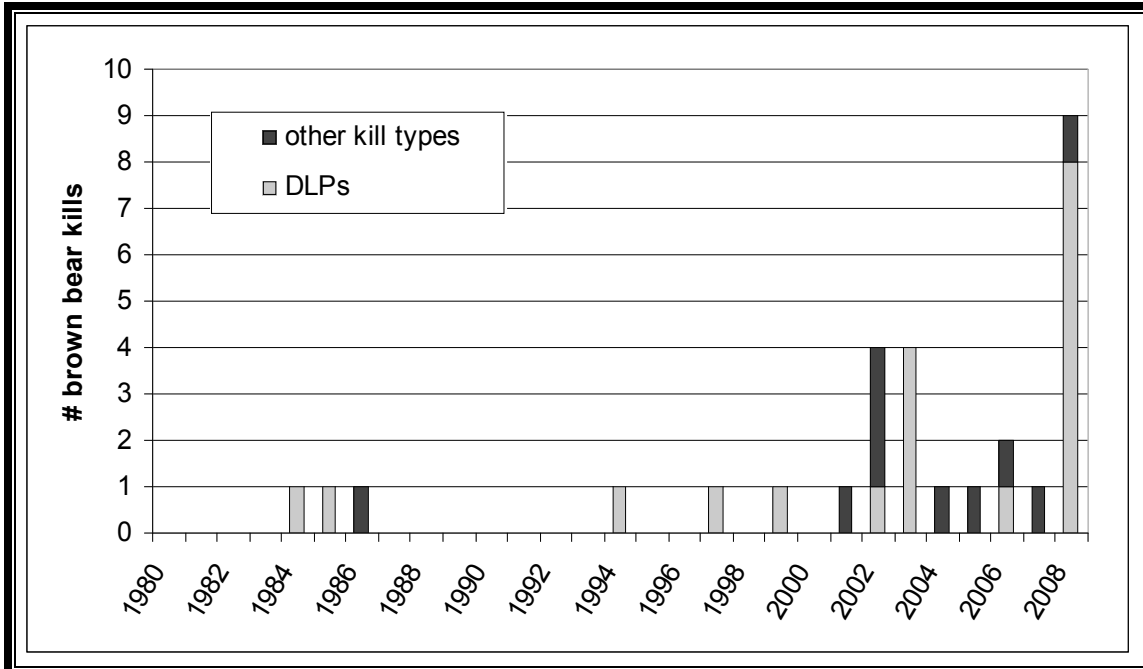


Figure 7. The above graph depicts the total number of brown bears killed in the Russian River vicinity (not Cooper Landing) from 1980-2008. Source: ADFG, Thomas McDonough, 2008

Additional management considerations resulting from intensive human use also warrant cross-jurisdictional and interdisciplinary management and response. Examples include:

- ◆ public safety hazards
 - human-generated bear attractants
 - irresponsible firearm use
 - insufficient toilet facilities
- ◆ cultural resource preservation
- ◆ erosion and riparian area restoration and preservation
- ◆ invasive species management
- ◆ emergency management and response

VI. Cooperative Management Challenges

The cumulative impacts from intense human use of the KRRC show that the burden of management can not fall on any one agency's shoulders alone but instead across the spectrum of state, federal, and tribal interests. To address this challenge, the managing agencies have been developing an effective interagency and interdisciplinary organizational model to facilitate and sustain strategic and operational planning, decision making, implementation, problem solving, and resource sharing to cooperatively manage the KRRC.

Interagency planning efforts have been seen as critical for over 30 years. For example, the Russian River Interim Management Plan (1979) and the Upper Kenai River Cooperative Plan (1997) were initiated to address concerns which were similar to those in this strategic planning document. However, management recommendations outlined in the past planning documents were only marginally supported and/or implemented. This resulted in the need to revisit the

issues and to identify attainable goals and pragmatic solutions that all agencies can support, implement, and sustain.

VII. Interagency Strategic Priorities

PRIORITY #1:

Adopt a collaborative integrated management paradigm which facilitates cooperation and implementation

The agencies recognize that cross jurisdictional and interdisciplinary challenges warrant doing business differently. This includes changing management coordination, getting staff buy-in, institutionalizing policies and operational agreements, and developing consistent regulations.

A. Strategy: Develop and define interagency organizational model

Action 1:

Develop operations plan document which clearly define roles and responsibilities of agencies and concessionaire by May 2009.

Action 2:

Align operations plan with interagency strategic plan and communicate to staff during annual meeting by May each year.

Action 3:

Develop and identify necessary mechanisms to enable resource sharing (i.e. law enforcement and education/interpretation staff) where deemed appropriate (i.e. agreements) by November 2009 and annually thereafter.

Action 4:

Target at least \$50,000 in grant opportunities to leverage existing financial resources by November each calendar year.

Action 5: Evaluate interagency progress based on measures of success identified by the RRICG and submit annual report annually during the fall meeting.

Action 6: Review effectiveness of strategic plan and revise accordingly every two years.

B. Strategy: Develop consistent regulations and law enforcement plan

Action 1:

Identify appropriate option for developing consistent regulations by May 2009 (i.e. joint rulemaking, mirrored regulations).

Action 2:

Identify law enforcement resources necessary to ensure presence during the height of the fishing season (between June 11th and September 1st) by February 2009 and annually thereafter.

C. Strategy: Explore a partnership of existing and potential supporters

Action 1:

Canvass the communities of the Kenai Peninsula and Anchorage, along with at least 5 diverse interest groups, and existing supporters such as Stream Watch to gauge interest in concept by November 2009.

Action 2:

Host partnership event to facilitate the development of the group in April 2010.

PRIORITY #2:

Proactively manage intense human use to mitigate impacts to natural and cultural resources while emphasizing visitor responsibility

Each visitor to the KRRC has a personal responsibility to minimize their impacts to natural and cultural resources that exist in this area while working in concert with the management objectives and strategies of the responsible agencies. The agencies are committed to setting up operational strategies to prevent or minimize conflicts before they arise but it is up to every visitor involved to take responsibility for their own actions which requires pre-planning and environmental awareness.

A. Strategy: Manage human behaviors to minimize adverse human/bear conflicts

Action 1:

Cooperatively enforce public safety regulations and evaluate compliance in recreation sites within Kenai-Russian River Complex annually.

Action 2:

Provide at least 10 bear-resistant food storage containers within campsites in the Kenai-Russian River Complex by September 2010 and consider further needs thereafter.

Action 3:

Identify strategies to minimize the attainment of fish waste by bears by June 2009. Begin implementation of the strategy in the 2009 season.

B. Strategy: Develop a standardized public communications strategy

Action 1:

Develop a comprehensive communications plan for the KRRC by September 2009 and implement with creative delivery tools (i.e. signs, website) by September 2010.

C. Strategy: Provide opportunities for appropriate human waste disposal for visitors

Action 1:

Explore new options for toilet facilities in KRRC by March 2009. Implement at least 1 new toilet facility by September 2009.

Action 2:

Explore and encourage use of creative disposal methods (WAG Bags) by May 2009.

D. Strategy: Creatively manage for demand

Action 1:

Explore creative additional opportunities to access and utilize the fishery by 2010.

Action 2:

Assess current public use trends and present impacts to resources within KRRC by 2011.

Action 3:

Develop a vision for responsible public use while protecting natural and cultural resources within KRRC by 2012.

Action 4:

Revise and update strategic plan to identify opportunities to reach our vision by 2012.

E. Strategy: Preservation and restoration of cultural resources

Action 1:

Finalize MOU with CIRI to formalize the Russian River Lands Act Settlement Agreement by June 2009.

Action 2:

Develop a cultural resource management plan for the Squilantnu Archeological District with the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and CIRI to understand and mitigate impacts of public use while identifying and resolving data gaps by September 2011.

Action 3:

Develop a cultural resource interpretative plan for the KRRC and K'Beq Site with the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and CIRI to promote awareness of the Squilantnu Archeological District to our visitors by September 2012.

F. Strategy: Minimize conflicting human uses

Action 1:

Identify areas of concern with conflicting uses on a case by case basis, address accordingly, and mitigate conflicts annually where possible.

PRIORITY #3:

Agencies use an ecosystems approach for planning short and long term changes to the resource and landscape within and around the KRRC.

The agencies recognize that being a good neighbor means to proactively plan for the many short and long term changes that proposed developments may have on resources and the landscape in and around the KRRC. Proposed projects and resource considerations should be deliberately discussed in a holistic way to ward off instances of poor planning and decisions made without open dialogue and coordination.

A. Strategy: Actively coordinate on internal planning efforts and proposed projects (i.e. trails, watershed restoration efforts)

Action 1:

Engage interdisciplinary and interagency staff by December of each year and at the onset of a newly proposed project to ensure non-conflicting uses with future desired condition of the KRRC.

Action 2:

Align internal and external human and financial resources to ensure efficiency with planning and implementation of the proposed projects by February each year.

B. Strategy: Proactively participate in planning efforts with adjacent land owners

Action 1:

Engage partners such as Kenai Peninsula Borough, Cooper Landing Community Club, Alaska Department of Transportation, Federal Highways Administration, CIRI, and Cook Inlet Tribal Council to discuss critical issues, proposed projects, and upcoming planning efforts, by September 2009 and annually thereafter.

C. Strategy: Ensure habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors

Action 1:

Map wildlife corridors within the KRRC and adjacent lands to facilitate understanding of how development and proposed projects may change wildlife habitat connectivity by October 2010.

Action 2:

Identify and promote alternatives to mitigate impacts to wildlife corridors as projects are planned and proposed.

D. Strategy: Ensure wilderness values are conserved

Action 1:

Evaluate proposed projects to ensure compatibility with congressional wilderness values and identify alternatives to mitigate impacts that may degrade the wilderness character.

VIII. Implementation Strategy

The implementation strategy outlined in this section includes an organizational structure and action plan that can address critical cross-jurisdictional and interdisciplinary management needs in the KRRC. This pragmatic approach to management stresses cooperation among federal and state land management agencies and tribal and stakeholder interests. The approach also recognizes each agency's distinct mission and mandate and assumes that many intra-agency efforts will remain autonomous to ensure efficiency.

Organizational Structure and Decision Making Approach

The following organizational structure is intended to define roles and responsibilities among interagency staff at varying levels of leadership to understand how things are organized in order to develop strategic priorities, make decisions, and to implement management actions at the KRRC.

The decision-making approach that the interagency partners will employ is based on a conditional consensus model. The conditional-consensus approach gives an incentive to staff to resolve issues through genuine collaborative processes at the lowest level possible in the organization.

When the need arises, interagency issues can be elevated to upper level leadership for clear and definitive resolution. An Executive Interagency Leadership Team (EILT) may be requested by a member of the Russian River Interagency Coordination Group (RRICG) to step in as the final arbitrator on specific interagency matters. This form of decision making is meant for issues which cannot be resolved at the local level and strategic-level decisions and not for day-to-day operational decisions. Additional decision makers and staff may need to be consulted at the discretion of the EILT. Members of the EILT may delegate issue resolution to other EILT members to resolve specific issues that are brought forth.

The EILT could consist of the following membership:

- Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Director, Alaska Region-USDOJ Fish and Wildlife Service
- Executive Director, Kenaitze Indian Tribe
- President, Cook Inlet Region, Incorporated

- Regional Forester, Region 10-USDA Forest Service

The Russian River Interagency Coordination Group (RRICG)

The RRICG consists of the following membership:

- Cultural Program Director, Kenaitze Indian Tribe
- Refuge Manager, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
- Regional Supervisor/Regional Management Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game-Division of Sport Fish
- Regional Supervisor/Regional Management Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game-Division of Wildlife Conservation
- Seward District Ranger, Chugach National Forest

Role

The RRICG sets policy and overall direction for the management of the KRRC, develops long-term goals and objectives, and gives general direction for development of strategic and annual operating plans to the Interagency Steering and Implementation Committee (ISIC) and ad hoc interagency committees. The RRICG concurs with proposed annual operating plans and assists implementation by arranging financing and/or contributed services to the management of the KRRC in accordance with operating plans. In addition, the group assigns appropriate membership to the ISIC and ad hoc interagency committees and adds or deletes members from groups as needed. The committee may meet twice a year with other meetings convened as deemed necessary by the membership of the group. Coordination of the RRICG's meetings will be the responsibility of the Interagency Management Coordinator (IMC) and the facilitation of meetings will be the responsibility of a professional consultant when possible.

Accountability and Implementation. To ensure accountability and effective implementation of interagency management priorities, the RRICG will meet each spring to review and agree to annual operations plan drafted by the ISIC and associated staff. The annual operations management plan will be reviewed to ensure that financial and human resources are aligned with the operating plan. The strategic plan will also be reviewed and evaluated every two years or earlier if the need arises.

Agreements. The RRICG also develops subsequent agreements as needed. Agreements will be necessary on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of individual agencies. Common agreements may include a memorandum of understanding, challenge cost-share agreements, stewardship contracts, and other legal instruments that may be necessary to facilitate cooperative management approaches.

Interagency Steering and Implementation Committee (ISIC)

The ISIC consists of the following membership, appointed at the discretion of the RRICG:

- Area Management Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game – Division of Wildlife Conservation
- Area Management Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game – Division of Sport Fish
- In-Season Operations Manager, Chugach National Forest
- In-Season Operations Manager, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge

- Interagency Management Coordinator (IMC), Interagency Position

Role

Members of the ISIC act as interagency liaisons and provide technical and operational expertise as needed to the RRICG and ad hoc interagency committees. The ISIC may meet at least quarterly or when directed in order to address strategic and annual operations planning needs. Annual proposed operating plans will be developed by the ISIC and approved by the RRICG. The In-Season Operations Managers will act as liaisons to private companies that may operate the Russian River Campground and the Angler Access Site. Members assume leadership for accountability and implementation of the operating plans and maintain a coordination link between field implementation and the RRICG.

Interagency Coordination and Planning. Interagency strategic planning and interagency annual operations planning will primarily be developed by the ISIC and associated interagency ad hoc committees and reviewed by the RRICG. The operating plans, tiered to strategic priorities, can be used by the ISIC and associated intra-agency staff to secure funding through agency specific budget processes. The ISIC will develop a report on the past year's accomplishments that will be submitted annually to the RRICG. Additional intra-agency operations plans will be developed by the individual agencies for efforts outside the scope of the cooperative management priorities. Opportunistic coordination between all staff will be encouraged in order to align and leverage human and financial resources.

In-Season Annual Operations Implementation. In-season operations implementation will be the responsibility of the ISIC and associated interagency staff. An annual operations plan, outlining the program of work, standard operating procedures and protocols, and necessary human resources, will be drafted by the ISIC and associated staff. The plan will be approved annually by the RRICG and will be considered as an addendum to this strategic plan. The annual operation plan will also address the roles and the responsibilities of the campground and ferry operators. Opportunistic coordination between all staff will be encouraged in order to align and leverage human and financial resources where possible. In-season weekly meetings, facilitated by the Interagency Management Coordinator, will be held approximately between June 1 and September 1, and ISIC members are strongly encouraged to attend. Additional ISIC members may be added or deleted at the discretion of the RRICG.

Interagency Management Coordinator (IMC)

The IMC is an interagency position, hired and/or appointed from existing staffing resources at the discretion of the RRICG.

- Currently, USDA Forest Service-Natural Resource Specialist

Role

Under the leadership and direction of the RRICG, the IMC's primary role is to coordinate the implementation of interagency strategic priorities identified annually by the RRICG and ISIC. In addition, the IMC's role is to serve as a liaison between agencies, disciplines, partners, and the public to ensure and encourage coordination, open dialogue, and transparency. The IMC will also coordinate RRICG, ISIC, and other committee and planning meetings, as needed, to ensure

alignment to the priorities set forth in this strategic plan. The IMC is also expected to coordinate the contracting process with facilitation service providers.

Ad Hoc Interagency Committees

Ad hoc committees may be created at the discretion of the ILT. They currently include the following:

- Fish Waste Management
- Public Communications
- Regulations

Role

Using the goals, objectives, and direction of the RRICG and/or the ISIC, the committees develop and/or revise specified strategies or products for the management of the KRRC. At times, the committees will also assume leadership for implementation and will maintain a coordination link between field personnel and the ISIC. They will also prepare and present written and verbal reports to the RRICG or ISIC as needed.

Stream Watch Volunteer Program

The Stream Watch Program is a volunteer-based organization that works to educate anglers and other visitors in the KRRC on ways to minimize their impact on the area.

Role

The Kenai and Russian Rivers Stream Watch Program will provide assistance to the agencies on educational efforts in the KRRC. The program will be managed by a volunteer coordinator who functions as a liaison to both the KENWR and CNF. At this time, the interagency program and coordinator will be supervised by the IMC, to ensure that educational messages are tiered to the strategic priorities outlined by the ISIC and RRICG. Financially, the program will be supported by partnership resources and alternative funding sources from the various agencies.

Resource Technicians/Forest Protection Officers

The Resource Technicians provide education to visitors of the Kenai-Russian River area on both CNF and KENWR lands. The Technicians are also trained as a Forest Protection Officer (FPO) to perform low level enforcement duties, if needed, while in the capacity of their position on USDA Forest Service lands. The technicians have cross-jurisdictional abilities and will work on both federal land bases in the KRRC. The technicians provide professional and technical support to the IMC for functions and activities related to managing the Kenai-Russian River Complex.

Role

- To educate anglers about new management strategies (i.e. food storage order, fish carcass management, proper angling behavior in bear country).
- To patrol the KRRC (including developed recreation sites and anglers trail)
- To enforce federal regulations when needed
- To collect data as it relates to documenting human/bear observation and adverse encounters
- To add support to the Stream Watch Coordinator and volunteers

Public Safety Officers and Law Enforcement Resources

Public safety and protection of agency resources is one of the most vital aspects of management of the KRRC. Law enforcement officers from the interagency community respond to emergency situations, violation of regulations and laws, and investigation crimes against people and property.

Role

Law Enforcement officers from KENWR and CNF protect visitors, government property and resources on a large scale. In the area of the KRRC, officer can respond to emergency situations, violations in progress, and provide investigative support across agency boundaries based on agreements between the secretaries of agriculture and the interior. The program will be supported by an interagency cooperative agreement that spells out specific authorities and processes. In addition to officers from the KENWR and CNF, Alaska State Troopers, Alaska Wildlife Troopers, and River Rangers from the Alaska State Parks also support the public safety efforts at the KRRC.

Concessionaire

A private entity operates the Kenai-Russian River Ferry under contract as a concessionaire and the Russian River Campground under a special use permit as a concessionaire. The ferry shuttles visitors and fisherman across the river to provide access to the fishery. The Russian River Campground contains 83 campsites and two day-use parking sites.

Role: Kenai-Russian River Ferry

The contractor is responsible to maintain existing facilities in the Russian River Confluence area, including rest-rooms, buildings, parking lots, and revegetation sites. They furnish the ferry itself, and provide adequate personnel to operate the ferry and maintain the area in a manner consistent with Refuge policies and in the interest of public health and safety. Maintenance of the area includes trash pickup, providing safe and orderly parking, collecting fees for parking and the ferry, and cleaning/maintenance of rest-rooms. Contractor operations are available 24 hours each day from the period of Memorial Day through Labor Day (and beyond, with approval of the FWS Contracting Officer).

Role: Russian River Campground

The concessionaire is responsible to operate and maintain the Russian River Campground and day use parking lots from mid May through early September. This includes providing all staff, equipment and materials necessary to maintain all facilities in a safe and presentable condition, manage orderly visitor use of facilities, collect fees, and provide public information in a manner consistent with the terms and condition of the special use permit.

Human Resources and Performance Measures

Staffing resources and associated costs will continue to be the responsibility of each agency. Resource sharing will be encouraged within the KRRC where possible. The annual operations plan will identify opportunities to align interagency staffing needs with existing and potential

human resources. Agency personnel at all levels of leadership need to champion the cooperative approach toward managing the KRRC. Performance measures will be identified and tied to personnel and their ability to work more efficiently and effectively through aligning work across program areas to accomplish strategic priorities.

Budget and Cost Sharing

A major concern that was considered was the expense required to implement this cooperative approach. To ensure efficiency, budgets will continue to be autonomous and the responsibility of each agency. However, the cooperative approach will encourage coordination and cost sharing between agencies where possible. Successful implementation of this plan will require a strategy to generate new income sources to provide enhanced services.

A successful cooperative approach can reduce the funding impact and spread financial responsibility across numerous program areas so that the cost is not substantial to any one agency. The amount of federally appropriated funding needed to cover costs associated with interagency priorities could be reduced contingent upon the level of participation by federal, state, tribal, and non-profit partners. Alternative resources and donations from the private sector could also be sought for specific projects, as well as grants from various businesses and foundations. A full budget analysis would need to be completed to understand where resource leveraging can be most advantageous.

The KRRC is a dynamic place, warranting adaptive management flexibility and discretion. Because of this dynamic nature, the proposed organizational structure and action plan may need to be adjusted to compensate for variables and circumstances unknown at this time.

Appendix A: Russian River Interagency Coordination Group Charter

Russian River Interagency Coordination Group (*RRICG*)

CHARTER

I. Introduction

Alaska's Kenai Peninsula is one of the most popular recreational destinations in the state visited each year by national and international visitors, in addition to local Alaskans. Many visitors coming to the Kenai Peninsula are drawn to the area to experience the magnificent clear-running waters of the Russian River fishery. The Russian River lies within driving distance of two main population centers, 110 road miles south of Anchorage and 40 miles east of Soldotna, surrounded by the Chugach National Forest and the Kenai National Wildlife Refuge.

For over 9000 years people have been drawn to the Russian River area. Archaeological evidence and oral history show that Alaska Natives and early settlers harvested the abundant sockeye salmon runs. Today, the Russian River area is visited by thousands of people each summer.

As road access became available to this area in the early 1950's, the Russian River quickly became one of Alaska's first "hot spots" on the recreation map. Use by anglers, hikers, campers, and photographers has increased which helps to support Alaska's local and regional economies. The recreational use also comes with a price of increased impacts to the ecological and cultural resources that exist.

The legacy of the Russian River carries on as it continues to sustain indigenous cultures, the Kenai's modern economy, quality recreational experiences, and a diversity of fish and wildlife species.

Today, a unified approach is needed between the resource management agencies and other stakeholders to coordinate the diverse management objectives.

II. Management Overview

Resource management in the Russian River complex (5 mile radius from Russian and Kenai River confluence) is unique due to the geographical location of the river and the varying ownership and jurisdiction of the land base, fish, and wildlife species that exist. The associated agencies have all agreed that they have common and shared interest to not only maintain, but to enhance the recreational experience, protect the visiting public, and to safeguard the natural and cultural resources for current and future generations.

III. Purpose

The primary purpose of the RRICG is to develop a unified and successful interagency approach to management of resources at the Russian River complex. The RRICG will be comprised of one staff member from the Forest Service, USFWS, State Parks, the Kenaitze Indian Tribe, ADF&G Wildlife Division, and ADF&G Sport Fish Division.

The coordination group will direct efforts associated with the Russian River ranging from enforcement and educational outreach to vegetation and fish carcass management on both sides of the river.

Further, the RRICG will meet as necessary to ensure that coordination and communication remain paramount in all Russian River efforts. The RRICG will strive to agree on approaches and projects, determine who should implement them, and participate as appropriate in the implementation process in order to achieve the following objectives.

Objectives- The specific objectives of the RRICG are to:

- Facilitate coordination and communication between agencies and partners;
- Facilitate consistent education, regulation, and enforcement to allow for a safer and more enjoyable recreational experience for all users;
- Develop strategies and protocols to address human/bear interactions, and to protect natural and cultural resources;
- Develop a consistent public communication strategy;
- Actively engage in and steer Russian River Complex planning process.

IV. Decision Making Process

The RRICG is encouraged to use a consensus-building process to form decisions. In some cases consensus may not be possible. In these cases, members will document the points of disagreement to be included in the appropriate meeting summary. It is expected that the RRICG will work diligently to reach consensus on even the most difficult issues.

V. Evaluation


The RRICG will evaluate its success annually (based on the date that the charter is adopted) to determine if:

1. The RRICG has made progress in meeting its objectives;
2. The RRICG should continue or disband; and if,
3. The RRICG decides to continue, should modifications be made to improve the effectiveness of the group.

VI. Resources and Constraints

The group understands the constraints associated with personnel resource needs and are committed to finding creative ways to sustain the partnership and coordinator position. The agencies acknowledge the critical importance of this effort and will continue to work diligently towards supporting it.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

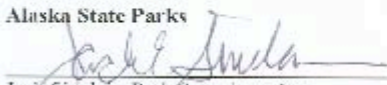


Tom Lawson, Director of Administration

8/22/07

Date

Alaska State Parks

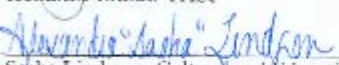


Jack Sinclair, Park Superintendent

7/13/07

Date

Kenaitze Indian Tribe



Sasha Lindgren, Cultural and Educational Director

7/17/07

Date

USDA Forest Service

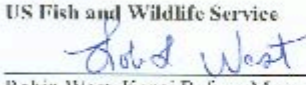


Jeni Evans, District Ranger-Seward Ranger District

6-7-07

Date

US Fish and Wildlife Service



Robin West, Kenai Refuge Manager

06-07-07

Date