

Notes from the 3 Rivers Meeting from 8:30-12:00 on 19 August 2008

Location: Chugach National Forest Supervisor's Office Conference Room, Anchorage

Participants: USFS (SO) – Darla Lenz, Andy Schmidt, Sharon Randall

USFS (GRD) – Elizabeth Brann, Tim Charnon, Alison Rein, Sean Stash,
Paul Clark

SOA DNR – Sally Gibert, Joy Biedermann, Monica Alvarez, Sue Magee

ADF&G – Andrew Levi, Chuck Brazil, Colton Lipka

Summary of the meeting (drafted by Paul Clark)

Introduction and purpose of meeting – Elizabeth Brann

The meeting opened with introductions and review of the purpose of the meeting, which was “to begin a working relationship between agencies, capable of looking past jurisdictional concerns to address resource management in a way that best serves the public.” Sally confirmed the state is interested in focusing on issues and appropriate management solutions, not trying to resolve jurisdiction.

Presentation on the Gulkana River plan (BLM – SOA) – Andrew Levi

Andrew reviewed the background information about the Gulkana process, including the authorities and reasons the BLM and SOA decided to work jointly during the planning process (1984 navigable river designation, 1985 MOU focusing on ‘protecting the resource’, and Ahtna’s role). Impacts and user conflicts on the river led to decision to update the management plan in 1998. He also reviewed:

- the collaborative process and its benefits, including joint public meetings, joint development of research materials and analysis of results, joint development of alternatives, and seamless management across multiple jurisdictions that keeps it simple for the public.
- overview of the Special Use Land Designation (SULD) process.
 - used to restrict a generally allowed use.
 - must undergo a public process.
- adaptive management strategy – phased approach to implementing management actions along the river. He noted that access restrictions must be based on measurable impacts.

Presentation on Twentymile, Portage, and Placer Rivers (3 Rivers) – Paul Clark

Paul reviewed the Forest Service management prescriptions for the rivers and some of the current issues found on Twentymile river. The presentation showed:

- increased use on the rivers over the past five years
- capacity studies used to determine number of client days offered to outfitter/guides
- issues on Twentymile include safety at the boat launch/parking area, blind corners on upper river, conflicts between user groups (especially sightseeing (75%) vs. fishing

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(25%) for outfitter/guide use), and potential effects on spawning grounds and erosion of river banks

-Tim mentioned that the reason to look at all 3 rivers holistically is because of the likelihood of increased use on all three rivers, especially spill-over from Twentymile River.

AK Fish and Game – Chuck Brazil (for Dan Bosch)

Chuck stated that fishing stocks are healthy in the three rivers based on aerial surveys and catch and harvest data. F&G does not see any issues related to health of the fisheries on the rivers, but if infrastructure is improved (i.e. Twentymile parking lot), then there will likely be increased use and issues – both positive and negative – that may arise from that. He noted that there were not enough responses from Placer or Portage to report on catch and harvest there.

Shawn mentioned he was happy with the full closure after 14 July on Carmen River, noted the problems of by-catch before that date.

There was also a discussion about the limitations associated with aerial surveys and catch and harvest data, as well as challenges to conducting further research on any of these rivers.

A question was also raised about where the fishermen in this area are coming from.

State Tools – Monica Alvarez and Sally Gibert

Monica mentioned there is a document listing the state tools applicable in joint/federal management activities and will send that on to the Forest Service personnel. Some of these apply regardless of land status. She also stated:

- SULDs can be difficult politically, and that the legislature must be involved if dealing with an area larger than 640 acres.
- management agreements as tools (e.g. ILMAs, Cooperative management agreements, MOUs)
- DNR use limits must be implemented through regulations.
- the Kenai River Special Management Area (KRSMA) provides examples of regulatory restrictions.
- outside of parks or other special legislative areas, DNR is constrained by Statute (AS 38.04.200) from restricting traditional public access for esthetic purposes.

Federal Tools – Tim Charnon

Tim outlined a few of the federal tools used in land management. He specifically discussed:

- The Forest Plan - provides management prescriptions for desired future conditions. If there is a change in use levels, the plan must be amended
- Capacity analysis – research to establish the amount of use in a certain area.

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- Forest Orders – address specific operational aspects, i.e. closures, on a temporary basis.
- NEPA process – establishes the public participation process for federal agencies during planning and implementation of projects.
- Special use permits – Provides the outfitter/guides with specific guidance on operations and use limitations through permit stipulations. DNR has recently changed in that commercial operators now need to register with DNR. DNR does not have citation authority, however, so management agreements can help with enforcement.
- Prospectus – Advertise to public to attract interest, and to select operators that will support the desired future condition.

Update on Glacier Jet - Tim

Tim provided a brief review of the history of Glacier Jet's operations on Twentymile and the current issues regarding their request for more client days. Sally felt it was important for the state to know about this issue as they might also be approached by Glacier Jet.

Next Steps – All

Sally stated that we are currently in communication, and there was discussion about the timeline of the USFS-SOA communication and coordination. Tim stated that the goal was to have a joint management plan in place by May, but that this is probably not feasible.

Tim mentioned that he did not foresee a great deal of conflict over this issue during future public participation, but that the USFS does not want to lose credibility with the public. He also stated that Glacier Jet has already requested client days on Placer River. Monica and Sally pointed out that it is hard for the state to move fast, and that we must first agree on the issues to know if working together will be productive.

The next step is to clearly define the issues on the 3 Rivers. While doing this, Tim suggested that the USFS may begin the public involvement process and that the State could be in attendance at any meetings. Sally stated that it is particularly important to agree on any issues affecting the waterway. For issues with an upland component, the State has less jurisdictional interest in the outcome, even though the State still wishes to cooperate.

The point of contact for the Forest Service is Paul Clark at 754-2352, e-mail pdclark@fs.fed.us.

The point of contact for the State of Alaska is Sue Magee at 269-7529, e-mail susan.magee@alaska.gov.

3 Rivers Assessment GRD Meeting Notes

October 30, 2008 0900-1200

Participants: Elizabeth Brann, Teresa Benson, Tim Charnon, Alison Rein, Betty Charnon, Heather Hall, Carl Skustad, Paul Clark, Merlyn Schelske

1. Review/management direction

Elizabeth provided an overview of the 3 Rivers Assessment and management direction

- a. The two main topics are
 - Short-term resolution of the Glacier Jet / O/G pressure
 - Long-term – development of a river management plan
- b. Forest Plan intentionally does not say much about the issue of navigability on any of the rivers, as we did not want to ‘pick a fight’ with the state over the issue. The ‘ball is in the state’s court’ concerning this issue.
- c. Elizabeth wants to make sure we have identified our issues on the rivers and not move ahead with any ‘false issues.’

2. Research and results

Alison provided a review of creel survey results and use on Twentymile.

- a. Results include:
 - 48 people wanted to see improvements of some sort.
 - 9 were against air boats on the river.
 - 8 negative comments about Glacier Jet - people seemed to be getting used to having Glacier Jet on the river (fewer negative comments compared to previous years).
 - 7 had safety concerns.
 - 10 camping trips
- b. Guided use generates fewer encounters/person - more people on each boat as compared to independent users - and they spend less time on the river.
- c. Mentioned the importance of visual monitoring and gave example
 - had 26 encounters in one day of observation.
 - noted that cameras only captured 50-60% of boats that were visually observed.
- d. Data from photo monitoring in 2008 has not yet been compiled.

Fisheries and Ecology staffs also gathered visual data. Sean S. will meet with Alison to consolidate data into a use report (which will include creel survey results, final O/G use, and observation data).

Fisheries also identified 12 high use fishing sites. 5 of those sites were damaged by heavy use.

Merlyn provided results from the Chinook spawning survey work on Carmen River.

- a. Identified 21 sites as potential spawning grounds. Fish were found spawning in an additional 19 sites.
- b. Peak number of salmon observed was 91 in one day.

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- c. Further work will be done next year at these additional sites. Teresa noted that this project will not likely get funded after next year, due in part to concerns that this is a recreation, not a resource, issue. She also mentioned that there are a couple of studies that address the issue of jet boat impact on spawning habitat.
- d. ADF&G have no issues or concerns about this fishery, but also do not have much information. GRD staff will provide them with results from this year and see what their perspective is.

Betty reviewed the work done this season by the Ecology staff:

- a. Sensitive plant survey – sensitive plants only found in Portage Valley.
- b. Systematic inventory of invasives.
 - Twentymile had the most invasives, especially around the cabins.
 - Invasives were found from Carmen Lake to the river mouth.
 - Found fewer in Portage Valley, and the least along the Placer, though some were found at Spencer and near Luebner Lake at the rafting take-out site.
 - Found invasives around campsites.
- c. Educational information and rec fee funds are possible ways to help mitigate the problem of spreading invasives. It is possible to develop a map that shows the location of invasives.

Heather gave an update on Heritage work done in the area.

- a. Section 106 compliance in Portage, the proposed cabin site at Carmen Lake, and the Iditarod Trail section. Also recorded saw mills and roads up Twentymile.
- b. No known prehistoric sites, but have been transportation corridors both in prehistoric and historic times.
- c. Noted that as part of the river management plan we should consult with Tribes.
- d. Mentioned the potential issue of erosion along the banks, and that special use permits include avoidance of historic sites.

Teresa B. stated that there was no wildlife-specific work done in the area this year. Concerning the topic of erosion, she mentioned that Dave Blanchet and Bill Macfarlane do not consider erosion as a significant issue for the Twentymile watershed.

3. Trends

- a. New types of boats are being used on Twentymile, including increased pack raft and jet skis. Carl S. noted that pack rafters typically get out of the water when they hear a jet boat coming.
- b. Invasives will be a greater problem with increased human use, climate change, and other forms of disturbance.
- c. Gas prices may have increased use on Twentymile this year.
- d. Parking area is getting a lot more use.

4. Management options

These options focused on the short-term issue of O/G permitted use on Twentymile. Tim listed four options:

- 1. No action

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2. Look at encounters only above the main fork in the river
3. Change the management strategy and capacity level
4. Time-specific (time of day and seasonal) increases

Teresa B. was concerned about option 4 because of a lack of information to make accurate predictions. Alison was also concerned about option 4 because of public expectations (i.e. a boater goes out early in the day to avoid commercial jet boats and ends up seeing/hearing them). Betty argued that we have 3 years of data showing we are at the current capacity, and that we could also identify the lack of knowledge about the impact on fisheries to back up a decision.

Elizabeth stated that options 1 and 4 were the only feasible ones based on our current understanding. Both she and Tim emphasized the importance of looking at the use study and then meeting with Glacier Jet to explain the options (whether more days are available or not). Paul stated that all O/Gs should be informed, not just Glacier Jet. We will try to meet with O/Gs in December once the use study is complete.

River management plan direction

Paul noted that next step is meeting with the state, probably in the first two weeks of December. After that the next step will be starting the public process. Elizabeth and Tim described the public process and its goals.

- a. Meet with the state to give an update on issues and discuss management options (what would they agree with?)
- b. Identify interested parties. Packets explaining our issues and GRD decision space will be handed out to participants.
 - Alison and Paul will work on identifying sideboards on decision space
 - Further internal discussion will be necessary to make sure we clearly define our decision space to the public
- c. Begin a collaborative learning process to develop our proposed action. Elizabeth gave one year from now as the tentative time for developing a proposed action.

To-do list

Elizabeth – provide Forest Plan interpretation and decision space guidance

Alison – compile a use study no later than the beginning of December

- identify and review case studies (regional or national) of other rivers with capacity studies using ROS guidelines.
- work with Paul on establishing tentative sideboards on decision space

Sean - work with Alison on the use study, especially with observation data

- compile fisheries data for ADF&G to assess

Paul – schedule a meeting with the state in first two weeks of December

- Begin developing a public participation plan

3 Rivers Meeting Notes

December 18, 2008, 0900-1100

CNF SO Conference Room

State Participants: Sue Magee (ANILCA Program), Dan Bosch (DFG), Chuck Brazil (DFG), Sally Gibert (ANILCA Program), Andrew Levi (DFG), Monica Alvarez (DNR), Ellen Simpson (DFG), Scott Ogan (DNR), David Schade (DNR)

USFS Participants: Joe Meade (CNF SO, Forest Sup.), Mike Novy (CNF SO, Resources), Andy Schmidt (SO, Lands), Elizabeth Brann (GRD, Acting DR), Tim Charnon (GRD, Rec.), Paul Clark (GRD, Rec.), Heather Gott (SO, Public Affairs), Teresa Paquet (GRD, Special Uses), Sean Stash (GRD, Fisheries)

(Notes drafted by Paul Clark and revised by Sue Magee and other State participants)

Distributed 1/27/09

Purpose: To review current issues on the 3 Rivers and explore ways to cooperate.

0900-0915 Introductions and USFS overview of the 3 Rivers project – questions about these topics? (10 minutes)

- Current management prescriptions
- Capacity study
- Safety plan
- Any other considerations?

One question was asked regarding the level of public involvement for the Recreational Carrying Capacity Analysis and the Boater Safety Assessment & Plan.

Response: The Recreational Carrying Capacity Analysis was an internal document that reflected the larger public involvement that occurred during the previous revision of the Forest Plan. The Boating Safety Assessment & Plan was based on new public input and some of the action items were developed by the public. The Coast Guard initiated the public meeting, which was attended by commercial permittees and recreational users.

During the introduction, Chugach Forest Supervisor Joe Meade expressed his commitment and desire to see the Forest Service and State work together to best manage the resources of the 3 Rivers for the public. Our interest is in finding a common way forward.

0915-0945 Findings from 2008 research (30 minutes)

- Invasive species
- Chinook spawning habitat
- Creel survey/use study

Paul Clark and Sean Stash reviewed the results of USFS studies conducted in 2008. Invasive plants were most common along 20-Mile, especially near the private cabins. Fisheries staff found Chinook spawning in all areas pre-selected for monitoring, plus more than a dozen other locations in Carmen River. The primary concern is the effect of more recreational use on spawning in the area. The USFS wants to generate a map of spawning areas to provide to the commercial guides, the primary users of the Carmen River, so they can avoid known spawning areas. The study suggested that the July 14th closure is adequate to protect spawning Chinook salmon, but that some Chinook are being caught before that date by anglers using bait and saying they are fishing for Dolly Varden.

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The use study showed that recreational use during August meets or exceeds the capacity determined by the Forest Service (15 encounters) and that the majority of use during the peak season (July 11-August 31) is for non-commercial fishing by the public. Use is lower during the non-peak season, with more commercial use in June and early July and more non-commercial use in September. The study showed that use has increased since 2006, although data from ADF&G shows a decline in overall fishing effort between the 1980s to the present, possibly due to the Coho salmon stocking efforts (more efficient fishing) and easier access at Bird Creek and elsewhere.

There was some informative discussion about state and federal regulatory authority on the river, but that we hoped not to focus on jurisdictional issues but rather try to find where management authorities and/or shared issues may allow the State and Forest Service to work together.

0945-1015 Overview and discussion of Issues (30 minutes)

- Recreation
 - Demand for more use
 - Conflict between user groups
- Safety

Since the creel survey/use study shows that recreational use during the peak season is currently at or exceeding the capacity currently prescribed in the Forest Plan, increased demand by commercial guides and the public is an issue. If authorized commercial demand alone could generate a 100% increase in commercial user days in the near future. The USFS is trying to balance competing recreational demands on 20-Mile. By state law (AS 38.04.200) DNR cannot restrict public access for aesthetic purposes (i.e. encounters in this case) and must have a compelling reason regarding public safety or resource damage to limit access along waterways. Some members of the public mention that they don't go to 20-Mile any more because it is a different river, a situation found on other rivers in Alaska as well. There was also concern about new types of boats showing up at 20-Mile and the challenge of enforcement (where the jurisdictional issue manifests itself).

There was a lot of discussion dealing with the issue of safety. The biggest safety concern occurs on the Carmen River where dangerous conditions are caused by shallow water that requires boaters to stay on step, in combination with very narrow channels and blind turns. Commercial operators are currently using radio to advise each other of their whereabouts; however, that does not address potential conflicts with non-commercial users who are either not radio-equipped or unaware of the communication protocol. User conflicts also occur downstream where pack rafts put in at the end of the Winner Creek Trail. Pack rafts are difficult to maneuver, difficult to see from other boats, and are currently advised to stay near the banks. Log jams and sweeper hazards are also a concern; however, it was pointed out that debris removal is not recommended as it is fish habitat. (ADF&G noted it has only received complaints on the 20-mile about commercial jet boats.) While safety is an issue that the State and USFS could potentially agree on, it is a challenge to quantify this issue and identify any capacity based on safety. One recommendation was to talk about the number of boats or launches on the river rather than encounters, potentially making it more possible for both parties to agree on issues. Both parties noted that it may be hard to defend limiting use strictly for safety reasons, but there is interest in

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continuing to explore opportunities to cooperate on safety issues outside of limiting access. It was noted that in addition to the safety provisions included in commercial operators' plans of operation, there is signage at the launch point.

What to do with the increased demand from Glacier Jet? The USFS will continue to work on the issue of managing increased demand from commercial guides, but the State cannot formally engage on the specific Glacier Jet situation as long as the jurisdictional dispute continues.

1015-1030 Break: (10 minutes)

1030-1100 Prospects for cooperation (30 minutes)

- Areas for cooperation
- Public meeting plans
- How to facilitate cooperative effort – some options may be:
 - a. Cooperative planning
 - b. Facilitation during the public meetings
 - c. Monitoring and evaluating conditions
 - d. Working team
 - e. Advising
 - f. Enforcement
- Next steps – funds, personnel, information exchange, etc.?
- Timeline

Following the break, we discussed the current litigation surrounding the Stikine River and how it may or may not work as a precedent for jurisdictional issues on the Chugach. We also discussed three possible areas to explore: 1) commercial use of the uplands, 2) the boat launch, and 3) impacts on uplands due to river use. Questions were raised on 2) and 3). DNR PAAD office plans to send surveyors out to the boat launch area to help clarify boundary issues there along with USFS personnel. Both parties agreed that it would be very helpful to clarify land ownership at the boat launch area. It was noted that the State has a high bar concerning the 'nexus' issue, which requires identifying user impacts on adjacent Service uplands.

Way forward? At this point, neither the USFS nor the State are in a position to launch a joint river management planning effort for the 3 Rivers, but are committed to continue the dialogue and brainstorming. In the short-term, the USFS will likely meet with commercial guides to deal with the immediate issue of increased demand.

Both the USFS and State plan to have further internal discussion about the next steps in dealing with the 3 Rivers. No further meetings have been scheduled at this point, but informal communication is encouraged.

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Twentymile River Preseason Outfitter/Guide Meeting Notes
3/30/2009, Glacier Ranger District Office, 6:30 – 8:30pm

Participants: Guides: Chris Maynard, Glacier Jet Alaska
Andy Morrison, Alaska Backcountry Access
Geoff Gross, Chugach Adventure Guides
Forest Service: Andy Schmidt, Acting Glacier District Ranger
Tim Charnon, District Public Services Staff Officer
Teresa Paquet, District Special Uses
Paul Clark, Recreation Planner
Alison Rein, Recreation Planner (note taker)

Not able to attend – Barbara Wright & Mel Hisop, Hope Fishing Charters, Mark Ryan, Alaska River Jet Safaris.

Tim Charnon introduced Andy Schmidt to guides, noting that he's our Acting Ranger until Kate Walker arrives on April 6, and his role as the Chugach National Forest's Lands Officer, a position that manages the Forest's special use permit program.

Andy Schmidt relayed the purpose of the meeting tonight – keep communication open, let guides know what the District's plans are regarding permit administration, and inform guides that we are coordinating management of these rivers with the State of Alaska.

Paul Clark presented a powerpoint describing last season's monitoring efforts, what we'd like to continue with this summer (expand camera monitoring to all 3 rivers, no creel surveys), and the 2009 requests for use for all three rivers. Paul also shared a timeline for producing a management plan for the Three Rivers – with this meeting essentially being the first step in that process. Goal is to have a plan that allows commercial use to be allocated in a way that results in successful, sustainable, business operations for all three rivers. He emphasized the importance of input from guides and the non-commercial river users to help guide the planning process. O/G suggestions and other public input is critical in trying to identify acceptable management actions that river users could live with. Powerpoint attached.

Chris Maynard asked about the use on Placer where the district had allocated 4000 client days, wondering if the days that have not been used would be re-allocated and how we determined this capacity – answer: capacity determination, completed in 2003-04, was based on what train can carry. The Forest Service is not planning to re-allocate any to motorized permits this year.

Portage commercial use noted to be low, guides relayed this river is not marketable due to proximity of road, and low water. Geoff said they may try a salmon-bake float on Portage this summer. Andy Morrison has found that people are more willing to pay for a motorized experience and that he has to charge nearly the same for motorized vs non-motorized trip.

Andy Morrison wanted to know if we have any intentions of managing the non-commercial users, since our monitoring shows the non-commercial (or independent, non-guided) use is causing the over-capacity situation in August. As examples (not necessarily his recommendations for implementation), he suggested working with AK F&G to reduce bag limits

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– as a way to reduce angler use in August, or require all boaters to have insurance or initiate a lottery or permit system. Guides are concerned that their clients are being denied this recreation opportunity due to local users and that this is not fair since the resource is public, and their clients should be considered members of the public. Geoff felt non-commercial users resent that guides are making money by providing this service.

Andy Schmidt and Tim both responded that limiting non-commercial use would be a hard sell with current river users, and we're hopeful the planning effort with public participation will determine solutions.

Andy Morrison said he was a proponent of people using the land, getting out, but if the Forest has capacity limitations, then where can people go? Chris Maynard shared that they use rivers on state lands where there is not a capacity issue, even though people want to go on Twentymile.

Discussed mid-season re-allocation, have used a different process every year and would like to adopt consistent approach.

Chris Maynard felt re-allocation should be based on how many days a business already has, those with more days should get a larger share of mid-season re-allocation. (divvy out based on percentage of original use)

Andy Morrison felt re-allocation should be split evenly between all businesses, and felt this allocation should extend to initial allocation as well, that is, if we have a certain total number of client days available, they should be shared equally between all businesses.

Discussed changing peak season, starting it 10 days later. Currently, Guides have less launches during peak season to offset increase in non-commercial use. Monitoring has shown that use does not build up especially mid-week, until late July.

Discussed 2009 allocation – Andy Schmidt explained that District plans to allocate to same level of use as 2008.

Teresa Paquet briefly presented policy changes for permits, known as “Chapter 40”; in the future, there will be no more temporary use days issued for businesses that are on-going, non-temporary operations. Initially, guides need to request that their temporary days be converted to “transitional” use by mid September 2009. Teresa can be contacted to share how new policy will affect them and what they need to do to request their temporary days be changed to comply with new policy. Intent of policy is to provide businesses with more secure base for their operations where they can book trips and be assured they have the client days available for longer terms than temporary use allows. Another change in policy requires different limited liability insurance levels. Guides didn't think insurance changes would affect them, since they already need higher levels based on other, non-Forest Service requirements.

As meeting was wrapping up, Andy Morrison & Chris Maynard shared some closing comments: both want to continue to provide their service to the nation's public, and want to stay involved with and informed of anything that affects how, where and when they can operate.

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Andy Morrison – wanted the Forest Service to know that our allocation limits have resulted in changing how he operates; since he has fewer days overall he tries to make each day count more by booking longer trips; however, when a trip is overnight it counts as 2 days, even though the amount of time on the river is the same as a daytrip (one trip up river, one trip down river). He sees opportunities to work more closely with the Forest Service, noted the Begich Boggs Visitor Center fee change as a way to work in a cooperative fashion. He'd like copies of all our use data.

Chris Maynard – he appreciates the Forest Service taking an in-depth look at the situation, would like some change of the peak season, number of launches, and very interested in how we decide to do mid-season re-allocation.

3 Rivers Public Meeting Notes

May 27, 2009 1830-2000

Girdwood Community Room

Paul Clark facilitated, notes taken by Teresa Paquet

Other FS personnel in attendance: Kate Walker, Sean Stash, Alison Rein, Elizabeth Brann,
Sharon Randall

Questions

“How do you use these rivers?”

- Use depends on access – Placer is limited to RR access and mouth of Placer
- Airboats – noisy and shouldn't be allowed
- Alternatives for access – Berry Pass, jet skis in addition to jet boats
- Several of the attendees use all three rivers for all types of uses (one primarily used Portage and 20-Mile)
- Motors on 20-Mile are noisy and are a detriment to the fish resource

“Activities you like/don't like to see?”

- Question – ‘How is FS going to manage high traffic in August on 20-Mile [non-commercial]? Permit system was discussed, but the FS recognizes that in Alaska, that would not be a popular idea and it would be management intensive for the FS.
- Any plans to upgrade the 20-Mile boat launch? No plans at this time – recognize that some people do not want to see improvements, as it may lead to higher use.
- Were hunting uses and types broken down in Creel survey? Tried to break down types of fish and location, though fowl season is in September (mostly after survey was done).
- Are there plans to change prescription to Wild and Scenic? Congress must designate, but the Forest Plan recommends 20-Mile as Scenic and Portage as Recreation River.
- No guide should be authorized for commercial fishing.
- Concerns about Placer? Would like to see garbage cans at the boat launch; lots of garbage.
- Railroad use? About 3000 people took the rafting trip.
- One person likes motorized access to Carmen Lake.

“Natural resource issues?”

- Already mentioned were garbage at Placer and fish issues in 20-Mile and Portage.

“Safety issues?”

- Always safety concerns anywhere on 20-Mile due to logs and rechanneling. FS understands that there are risks inherent in recreational use of the river.
- More packrafting use witnessed on the rivers.
- Glacier River doesn't allow much room to maneuver.
- Anybody in a non-motorized boat is subject to more risk.
- One person suggested to limit size of boat or timing restrictions. Currently there is no size restriction.

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- FS should make accommodations for non-motorized boat operators, such as a take out at 20-Mile launch point.

Other discussion

- Status of Iditarod Trail to the west of 20-Mile River? There are still plans for a trail along the river, with potential for access points along the river.
- Discussion about 15 encounters – one person didn't think 15 encounters is too restrictive.
- How can a river that allows jet boats, jet skis, etc., be eligible as W&S?
- What is the limit for commercial jet boats? FS limits by launches and 1250 service days.
- What kind of use is there in May? Not as much as there used to be, maybe users have been displaced?
- One comment is that the 20-Mile boat launch is used to access Placer as well.
- Have we noticed erosion of banks since the jet boats have been running? No specific data has been collected, and it is difficult to accurately gauge how much is caused by one source in a dynamic system.
- One person would like to see follow-up studies on fish spawning impacts, especially the hooligan fishery (feels there has been a significant decline in numbers) – tough to tell due to so many factors involved in anadromous fish counts.
- Why 50%/50% split between commercial and non-commercial use on 20-Mile? Why can't the public have a higher %? The percentage is determined by the Forest Plan, and the idea is that the FS aims to provide use to all public not just local users.
- Consider higher fees for commercial use.

Forest Service River Access in Upper Turnagain Arm; Chugach National Forest Site Visit

The US Forest Service (Service) conducted a site visit of the streams along Upper Turnagain Arm on July 22, 2009. Sarah Bosch and Dan Bosch represented the Department of Fish and Game (ADFG). The Service wants to improve access to Twenty Mile River, Portage Creek and Placer River. The Luebner and Spencer Lake access points were not viewed due to flooding but all other points were visited.

Twenty Mile River

The boat launch and parking lot are just off “The Arm” side of the Seward Highway and are in good condition. This access point is extremely busy during hooligan (May) and Coho (August-September) fishing seasons. On busy days many cars park on the mud flats due to lack of space in the parking lot, which currently holds 14 to 15 vehicles. Dan Bosch stated it would be ideal to keep fishing pressure as low as possible, and if the parking lot was increased in size, bag limit reductions would have to be examined because neither the Service nor ADFG want to increase pressure on the wild stock of Coho in the Twenty Mile drainage. The Department of Transportation (DOT) representative suggested adding trailer-size parking spots in the middle of the lot, which would resemble the parking at Bear Valley near Portage, to accommodate boats and trailers. DOT suggestions for a new highway design (Ingram Creek to Girdwood), which include bridge replacement, are due to be released very soon (within a week) and this will allow an examination of access at Twenty Mile and consider the potential for a safe vehicle turnaround at the site. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is going to survey the land between the parking lot and the water to determine land ownership.

An additional access point and parking lot on the other side of the Seward Highway has public safety issues. This location tends to act as an overflow lot during the approximately three week hooligan season; however, the short narrow road leading to the river bank causes a bottle neck from too many cars parking along its sides when the small parking area is full. The railroad tracks run adjacent to the primary fishing site presenting a danger to anglers and elevating the concern of railroad administrators. The issue of concern for this locations planning process is how much access should be provided? This will determine what improvements should be made.

Portage #2

This access point, also adjacent to the Seward Highway, is used as a staging point for float trips and for fishing during Coho season. It has a good sized parking lot that has never been documented as completely full. It is unknown what improvements may be planned at this location, if any.

Bear Valley

On the other side of the tunnel that runs past the Begich-Boggs Visitor Center is a trail from the parking lot down to Portage Lake that was constructed to allow easy access for kayaks and canoes but to discourage anyone with a jet ski or other motorized water device. There is a boating closure on a vast majority of Portage Lake for aesthetic reasons; the Begich-Boggs Visitor Center does not want visitors to see boats on the lake after the movie. The middle

parallel spaces in this parking lot are the trailer sized spaces that were suggested for the Twenty Mile parking lot.

Portage Visitor Center

The large space provides plenty of room for trailers, boats and vehicles, but most use is associated with visitors viewing Portage Lake or visiting the Begich-Boggs Visitor Center.

Portage Creek Airstrip Access

Mostly used by motor boaters during the fishing season, this location is in good condition. At the time of the visit the parking area was flooded, making it smaller, but it is much larger when water height is at normal levels.

Placer River 1

The entrance (and exit) for this access point is dangerously located next to a bridge making it difficult to pull in and out without backing up traffic. The steep boat launch makes it complicated for people to drop their boats off and get their trucks back on level ground. The USFS wondered if it would be more beneficial to improve this access or the Placer Overflow. Dan Bosch stated that the fishery on Placer River could withstand more angler effort and improvements to the boat launch would be ok.

Placer River Overflow

As the name suggests, this site is used as an overflow for Placer River 1, but seems to be more popular. As with Placer River 1, the entrance and exit are located next to a bridge making it equally dangerous to enter and exit. A boat launch is needed and the limited parking area makes it difficult for trailers to maneuver. Both Placer River 1 and Placer River Overflow are popular snow machining destinations in the winter.

One of the USFS goals is to provide additional access to the rivers in the area because they are not at identified capacity levels and can accommodate increased use. A more in depth analysis of use is needed but the Service is unable to conduct the necessary work during the 2009 field season.

A release date has not been set for the proposed action plan but it is expected to be around March 2010. Important things to take into consideration are the DOT highway plan, which will consider potential actions concerning the Seward Highway, and the DNR land survey to determine land ownership at Twenty Mile.

The Service appreciates and encourages any suggestions, comments or concerns about the access points discussed and anything else deemed important as soon as possible.

Whistle Stop Commercial Services Meeting

12/17/09 1000-1200

Participants: Kate Walker, Tim Charnon, Carl Skustad, Paul Clark

Notes drafted by Paul Clark

The purpose of the meeting was to identify the types of recreational opportunities the Glacier Ranger District (GRD) will include in a prospectus for commercial services on the Whistle Stop Project. Prior to the meeting, the participants reviewed responses to the solicitation of interest (dated Oct 14, 2009) and held a public meeting on December 2, 2009, in Girdwood. The following notes are a record of discussion identifying decisions made and the rationale for each decision.

1. Recreational opportunity: Motorized boat trips up Placer River to Spencer Lake. Decision: Will not be considered at this time, or included in the prospectus.

Rationale: Several guides have expressed an interest in providing motorized trips up Placer River for sightseeing and fishing. Motorized trips will not be permitted for the following reasons:

- Improves the likelihood that the Forest Plan prescriptions will be met (particularly the Semi-Primitive ROS) by preventing commercial two-way traffic and reducing the number of encounters (see Forest Plan 4-34).
- Increases the quantitative and qualitative aspects of commercial and non-commercial non-motorized trips. If commercial traffic is limited to one-way non-motorized traffic, a significantly higher number of user days may be authorized while still meeting ROS guidelines. It also improves the opportunity for quiet and solitude during the float.
- Provides a variety of recreational experiences (commercial and non-commercial) across the Upper Turnagain landscape area (Twentymile River, Placer River, Portage Creek). There are numerous opportunities for guided motorized trips on Twentymile, where the predominant use is motorized. Furthermore, there is limited access at Twentymile for non-motorized use. On the other hand, the predominant commercial use on Placer is non-motorized, and non-motorized access has improved with the development of the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop. Similar to management of motorized and non-motorized winter recreation (see Kenai Winter Motorized Access plan), this decision seeks to provide for, but separate, two types of activities that may conflict. This may also create an opportunity for non-commercial fishing trips and relieve some pressure from the Twentymile River. This also supports the Forest Plan direction that “during the summer season...nonmotorized use will predominate across the [Kenai Peninsula Geographic] area” (Forest Plan 3-15). Two more narrowly defined motorized options were discussed: trips only to Luebner Lake, and fishing trips. To try to maintain the best non-motorized experience, the GRD plans not to authorize any types of commercial motorized trips on Placer River, except for one guide that has an existing permit.
- Reduces safety concerns. Because the Placer River is narrow and shallow in several areas, one-way commercial travel reduces the chance for head-on collisions. Because we anticipate an increase in down-river use, this risk would potentially increase if motorized use increases.

2. Recreational opportunity: Non-motorized boating trips down Placer River (rafting, kayaking, pack rafting)

Decision: Will be considered in the prospectus.

Rationale: Three guides and two existing permittees all desire to provide some sort of non-motorized trips from Spencer Lake down Placer River. With improved access via the Whistle Stop(s), the limited amount of existing motorized use, and the limited opportunities for non-motorized trips on Twentymile, this type of use will be emphasized on Placer River to provide a variety of recreational opportunities.

3. Recreational opportunity: Non-motorized boat rental on Spencer Lake

Decision: Will be considered in the prospectus

Rationale: The GRD sees a potential need for this opportunity since overnight use has increased dramatically in the Spencer area. The number of boats allowed will be determined at a later date, but will be guided by the Forest Plan and Whistle Stop ROD.

4. Recreational opportunity: Recreational prospecting

Decision: Will not be considered or included in the prospectus

Rationale: One guide wanted to offer guided recreational goldpanning in the Spencer Lake and Placer River area. The GRD decided against this type of opportunity for the following reasons:

- The existing valid mining claims in the Spencer area. These claims cover much of the area and it is illegal to conduct recreational prospecting on these claims. It would be difficult for a guide to know if s/he is off of those claims, and there are not many areas free of both existing claims and Whistle Stop infrastructure (see valid existing claims map).
- There is not a history of gold discovery in the area, even on the valid existing claims. Thus, it isn't likely that goldpanning would be very successful.
- The impact of recreational prospecting could be detrimental to the natural and visual resources of the area. Most of the likely sites for this activity would be near the Spencer Glacier Trail and would affect the experience on this trail.

5. Commercial overnight accommodations, including a huts-style structure

Decision: Will be considered in the prospectus

Rationale: The Huts Association has expressed their interest in providing a 16-bunk hut in lieu of 2 public use cabins authorized in the Whistle Stop ROD. A hutkeeper would be on-site during the peak season(s). While the huts concept is the only one that GRD has received regarding this recreational opportunity, other types of overnight accommodations would be considered during the prospectus process. We also discussed the option of having an area in the Developed Recreation Complex, south of Placer River, where O/Gs could provide overnight stays for clients. This would provide the option of extended commercial trips while not impacting the number of non-commercial opportunities. Advantages to having commercial overnight accommodations include:

- Provide a top-end option in a spectrum of accommodations (dispersed camping – group campsite – public use cabin – hut/commercial facility) with more amenities.
- Help build support for continued Whistle Stop development.

- Provide overnight opportunities for outfitters and guides. A couple of guides have expressed a need for this service.

During public scoping and open houses in April-May 2009, a number of pros and cons were identified (see the overnight accommodations coding document). These issues were primarily concerned with the huts concept. Another concern discussed was the possibility that the relationship between the permittee and Forest Service could sour, maybe after the permittee has made a significant capital investment in the facility. While this is potentially an issue, there are other examples on the District (Portage Day Lodge, Ptarmigan building) and throughout the Forest Service that have been successful. The issue of cost was also discussed, but was not considered a major issue because this facility would likely be at the high-cost end of the overnight accommodations spectrum.

The group discussed two other options not included in responses to the solicitation of interest: glacier/guided hikes and bike rentals.

6. Recreational opportunity: Glacier/guided hikes

Decision: Will be considered in a prospectus

Rationale: The GRD sees a potential need for this opportunity, particularly guided hikes on the glacier. The number of user days allowed will be determined at a later date, but will be guided by the Forest Plan and Whistle Stop ROD.

7. Recreational opportunity: Bike rentals

Decision: Will not be considered in the prospectus

Rationale: One O/G has expressed some interest in offering bike rentals at Spencer. This is not appropriate in the Spencer area because the Whistle Stop ROD states that Class 4 trails, including the Spencer Glacier Trail, will be managed for pedestrian use only to avoid conflicts between hikers and bikers (Whistle Stop ROD, 5). While biking is allowed in other parts of the Spencer area, it is likely that visitors would choose to ride on the Class 4 trail. Also, the Class 3 trail system currently being constructed is not conducive to bike traffic, though biking is allowed on all Class 3 trails on the Whistle Stop Project.

Next steps

Tim and Carl will meet with Teresa P. and Alison R. to build on the decisions made here, including identifying the appropriate amount of use for each activity. This group will work with the Chugach Special Uses Team to develop and issue a prospectus in spring 2010.