

Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan



Appendix B. Literature Review



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Introduction

Background

The Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) trail program was formally initiated in 1980 in response to local trail concerns and the continued loss of existing trails due to private development and other changes in land uses. The original Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan (Trails Plan) was adopted in 1985 to provide guidance to the Borough for the protection and management of local trails. The FNSB Trails Plan is a tool used to identify, preserve, and manage important recreational trail corridors throughout the FNSB. The existing plan has three functions: it establishes a categorized system of trails, establishes maintenance policies for trails, and calls for a trail dedication authority to protect public access to trails. The Trails Plan is part of the Borough Regional Comprehensive Plan, which the Planning Commission oversees, with staff support from the Community Planning Department. The Trails Plan is implemented by the FNSB Parks and Recreation Department with advisory support from the Trails Advisory Commission.

Need for the Plan Update

The list of trails included in the Trails Plan has not been updated since 2006 and the identified issues, goals, strategies, and objectives identified in the Trails Plan remain artifacts from its original draft produced in 1985. Since 1985, FNSB communities have experienced considerable changes in local plans, ordinances, land uses, demographics and recreational pursuits and use patterns. These changes have impacted how Borough residents use and access recreational trails. Updating the 2006 Trails Plan will improve its usefulness and relevance, addressing the most salient needs of local trail users.

This project's vision is to collaboratively develop a new Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan with a system-wide approach that will be the primary decision tool guiding FNSB and its partners to prioritize available resources for local trails. The updated Trails Plan will be based on the most recent available data and public participation to identify goals, policies and guidelines with actionable strategies to carry the FNSB through the next 10-20-years of trail management and development.

Literature Review

Planning documents provide guidance on development, change, and decision making for implementing agencies and the communities for which they apply. This literature review report summarizes adopted plans, policies and studies applicable to the location, dedication, maintenance and management of trails throughout the Borough. The report will review relevant goals, objectives and actionable recommendations of higher-level plans (such as the FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan) that may support the content of the Trails Plan, as well as review specific actions or projects identified in area-specific plans (such as the AK DNR State Parks Recreational Trails Plan). The review will specifically focus on reviewing plans that have the potential to impact access to and use of recreational trails throughout the Borough.

An important use of the literature review is to determine what trail-specific action items, projects, or policies identified in the planning documents have actualized. Findings from the literature review will advise the FNSB and Trails Advisory Commission during the development of the updated Trails Plan, as well as help foster a greater understanding of plan applicability, interdependency and functionality.

This literature review organizes plans, studies, municipal code and State statutes as follows:

1. Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan, 2006 – This plan is the most relevant resource for the Trails Plan update and requires a complete and thorough review.
2. State Statutes and Municipal Codes – This section discusses the most relevant codes and statutes that provide the legal context and limitations of Trails Plan recommendations.
3. Adopted Area Plans – These plans have a legal basis for implementation due to adoption in municipal code and generally have more direct relevance to the Trails Plan, since they affect the same geographic context (in whole for FNSB-wide plans and in part for sub-area plans).
4. Functional Plans and Studies – these plans focus on a particular function within a given area rather than comprehensively addressing an area. Some of the recreation-related plans specific to areas within the FNSB are highly relevant to the Trails Plan and have the additional weight of adoption in municipal code. Statewide plans described in this section may provide useful policy guidance, but often with limited recommendations specifically for FNSB trails. The studies mentioned in this section may be highly relevant for the Trails Plan update but are not adopted in code.
5. Ongoing Plan Updates and Initiatives – These plans, studies, and initiatives may have significant relevance to the Trails Plan, but information is often limited since they are not yet complete. The purpose of listing these ongoing plans and initiatives is to remain apprised of relevant findings and find opportunities to complement planning work.

Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan, 2006

The 2006 Trails Plan is a tool to assist the Borough and other public agencies in identifying and preserving important recreational trail corridors and this intent will be carried forward in the current Trails Plan update. The Plan identifies priority trail corridors and Borough policies that will help facilitate the coordination of trails with other land development. It also provides a framework for the recreational trails program, investments into recreation facilities and programs and makes a connection between improved recreational opportunity and potential economic gains for the Borough.

Trails Plan Applicability

The Trails Plan update will draw from the 2006 version, serving as a primary basis for comparison between past and current recreational trail needs, issues, and goals, and recommendations. Elements of the vision and goals are likely relevant today—trail users still want a variety of accessible, maintained trails suitable for their desired recreational activities.

To maximize the benefit of collective institutional and local knowledge, stakeholder meetings dedicated to reviewing the recommended policies and projects in the plan to determine what has already been completed, and whether incomplete recommendations remain relevant, will be conducted during the Trail Plan update process.

2006 Plan Structure

The 2006 Trails Plan is structured into two principal reports, the Background Information Report and the Trails Plan. The Background Report consists of five individual background papers:

1. review of existing trail program,
2. jurisdictional responsibilities and trail inventory,
3. legal constraints,
4. financial constraints, and
5. summary of public comment.

The Trails Plan document contains the three main elements discussed below, two maps which provide the general locations of priority trails proposed for public dedication, Borough policy recommendations and recommendations for specific trails.

Three main elements the 2006 Trails Plan establish:

1. A three-category system of trails:
 - a. Federal and State recreational trails (Category A)
 - b. FNSB recreational trail system (Category B)
 - c. Neighborhood recreational trails (Category C)
2. The “Adopt-A-Trail Program”
 - a. Proposed program to establish agreements with trail user groups, service organizations, neighborhood associations or other interested parties to provide maintenance or other specified work on individual trails
3. Trail dedication authority for trails identified in the Trails Plan which cross land undergoing the subdivision process.

- a. Identifies priority trail corridors that the Borough and other public agencies should pursue for public dedication
- b. Provides a process for trail additions into the plan at the request of citizen groups
- c. Eminent Domain powers will not be used and circumstances change with time. There is no guarantee all trails included in the plan will become dedicated to the public in their entirety – therefore the Trails Plan is a dynamic document which may change with changing circumstances.

The Three-Category System of Trails is anticipated to be carried forward in the current Trails Plan update. The established system provides clear delineation of primary management, maintenance, and funding authority, as well as how Borough right-of-way acquisition authority and dedication processes will apply. It is usable and understandable by FNSB staff and other agencies as well as the public.

The volunteer Adopt-A-Trail Program will be re-evaluated through this Trails Plan update. The primary focus of the program was to establish a more formalized version of the user-maintained trail system that existed at the time and to minimize Borough maintenance and operation costs overall. Volunteer trail user groups, service areas, homeowners' associations or service organizations would assume responsibilities specified in cooperative agreements with the Borough. Agreements could range from minimal safety inspections of trail conditions to regular grooming and track setting on competitive cross-country ski trails. The implementation, degrees of use, and success of the Adopt-A-Trail Program will be analyzed from the time of 2006 Plan adoption to current day.

Trail dedication authority will remain a primary component of the Trails Plan Update. The Borough must provide authority to require trail dedications in new subdivisions for existing and desired trail corridors to be realistically reserved for public use. Since it was established, this authority has been the primary method of trail establishment for the FNSB. Trail rights-of-way can also be acquired on a cooperative basis across private land not undergoing subdivision; however, if an easement cannot be negotiated, trails must be realigned or abandoned. FNSB has the authority to require dedication for trails which are included in the adopted Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan and which are in Category A or B under the overall Borough Subdivision Ordinance (Title 17). Thus, this recommendation of the original Trails Plan has been actualized and is essential for establishing current and desired future trail corridors within the Borough as the Borough's dedication authority only applies to trails identified in the Trails Plan. The updated Trails Plan will reflect the use of FNSB Code Title 17 trail dedication authority as well as make recommendations for improvements and additional means to encourage trail dedication.

Goals, Policies & Objectives

The Trails Plan identified goals (a long-range statement of what the program hopes to accomplish or where the community wants to be), policies (specific guidance or means to achieve a goal), and objectives (specific actions or representative statements to move towards goal fulfillment that is consistent with policy statements). This section of the 2006 Plan has not been updated since the Trails Plan's inception in 1985. A primary component of the Trails Plan Update will be to examine the complete list of goals and their policies and objectives for their applicability and accuracy for the modern FNSB community:

- **Issue 1: Agency Jurisdictional Responsibilities**
Goal: Define responsibilities of different departments of FNSB and public agencies within the

Borough which are involved with establishing recreational trails for all trails within the Borough which are included in the Trails Plan.

- **Issue 2: Right-of-Way Acquisition**
Goal: Establish legal reservations which protect recreational uses for all recreational trails included in categories A or B in the Trails Plan.
- **Issue 3: Recreational Trail Use Designations**
Goal: Provide for a permanent trail system of both multiple use and non-motorized trails which is geographically distributed throughout the Borough and which can accommodate all trail user groups.
- **Issue 4: Requirements for Trail Maintenance**
Goal: Develop a defined trail maintenance and safety review program for all trails within the Borough Trail System which are identified for public use.
- **Issue 5: Ensuring Legal Use of Recreational Trail ROW**
Goal: Ensure that all trail ROW included in the Trail System are used for their intended and legally defined uses.
- **Issue 6: Liability Related to Trails**
Goal: Work towards minimizing trail liability within the FNSB Trail System.

Program Implementation

This section of the plan outlines guidance and responsibilities for implementation of the trail program and individual trail projects, and recommends changes in responsibilities and clarification of existing tasks. During the subdivision process, Parks & Recreation has the primary responsibility to review plats for compliance with the Trails Plan and works closely with the Community Planning Department staff. During ROW acquisition outside of the subdivision process, Parks & Rec works closely with the Division of Land Management to negotiate easements. The Trails Advisory Commission's roles and responsibilities are established, as well as personnel requirements of a Trail Planner. General funding recommendations are included in this section, as well as the identified need and process for revising the Plan.

The six sections in Program Implementation will be evaluated in depth through the Trails Plan update process and are anticipated to undergo the most revision. Significant changes in FNSB policy, operations and structure, and community desires have occurred since 1985 when this section was adopted. Some of the sections have been implemented, some never materialized, and others are out of date and therefore lack relevance. For example, Section 1 recommends primary responsibility for the Recreational Trails Program should be transferred to the Division of Parks and Recreation; this has been implemented with responsibility transferred to the Parks & Recreation Department. It recommends the establishment of the Adopt-a-Trail program; this has not occurred. Section 1 also makes recommendations related to the trail dedication process that reference outdated departments and process; the trail dedication process has been established in Title 17, so the intent of the recommendation was implemented but the

process was different. Results of a detailed evaluation will provide context and guidance for goal and recommendations development for the updated Trails Plan.

Specific Trail Recommendations

Finally, a list of forty-eight recreational trails or trail systems that are presently established or proposed for public dedication are provided along with narrative descriptions and specific recommendations. The list of trails, their descriptions and recommendations will be reviewed through the Trails Plan Update inventory process. A review will determine which trails lack public access and where, which trail projects actualized, which are no longer relevant, and which should be carried forward. The definitive list of trails will also be updated and may include additions and/or omissions from the 2006 Trails Plan list.

State Statutes & Municipal Codes

The following section is a review of applicable Alaska state statutes and FNSB codes that will inform Trails Plan recommendations.

FNSB Title 17, Subdivision & Trail Dedication

The subdivision and platting process outlined in FNSBC Title 17, Subdivisions has played a significant role in the identification and preservation of trail corridors for well over three decades. In fact, the current wording of 17.56.040 *Trail Easements* is nearly identical to the language that first appeared in a major Title 17 revision that became effective November 1, 1985.

As part of the subdivision process, FNSB Code requires that easements be dedicated for Category A & B trails. The easement width and intended use for existing and realigned trails, as well as some limited grade, slope and geometry requirements are included.

While Title 17 is a powerful tool, it's an unavoidable fact that many properties in the Borough have already been subdivided. Unless a property owner wishes to subdivide their property further, the provisions of Title 17 will not protect trails. Other methods of establishing or preserving trail corridors are necessary to maintain a viable trail network within our community. The planning process to develop the Trails Plan may uncover gaps in Title 17 and result in code change recommendations to strengthen Title 17 as a tool for trail preservation and will help identify and develop additional methods.

In 2011, FNSB Parks and Recreation prepared a flow chart that outlines the complexities of establishing easements on public and private land, including FNSB-owned lands. As a reference document, the flow chart provides a good overview of the process. However, a thorough discussion with state, federal, and major large landowners (i.e., Native corporations, University of Alaska, etc.) should be conducted to see if the timeline can be streamlined further.

Although utility easements are mentioned in the flow chart, the status of these easements for trail uses is problematic. Utility corridors are an attractive and ready-made physical corridor, but the easement rights granted by the owner are typically limited to utility purposes only. A separate permission is necessary from both the utility and the underlying property owner to use the corridor for trail purposes.

FNSB Title 18, Zoning

While Title 17 provides an avenue for the FNSB to dedicate new trails, the zoning codes in Title 18 help preserve larger portions of land for existing and future trails and other recreational uses without needing to rely on subdivision. Aside from preserving specific trail alignments, certain zoning districts and overlays, such as the Outdoor Recreational District, Open Space and Buffer District, and Waterways Setback Designation help reduce incompatible uses adjacent to recreational trails.

Limitations of zoning codes applied to trail development may include areas that lack connectivity between the previously mentioned districts, allowing other development to interrupt potential trail connections.

FNSB Title 15, Buildings & Construction, Floodplain Management Regulations

Trail development in special flood hazard areas may provide opportunities for season-specific recreational trail use; however, development activities such as filling, grading, and paving will require a floodplain permit. This will include certification by a registered professional engineer, hydrologist, architect or other registered professional's statement that the proposed encroachments will not result in any increase in flood levels within the community during the occurrence of the base flood discharge.

FNSB Title 20, Land Acquisition, Management & Sale

Title 20 details the acquisition, management, and sale of FNSB land. Chapter 20.12 describes the FNSB's options for acquiring land, including negotiated purchases, exchanges, receipt of land dedications, satisfying debt obligations, and the exercise of eminent domain (only if used by the borough or public for the latter). Land acquired by these methods may be used to preserve or develop trails, but Assembly authorization is required.

20.16 describes how Borough-owned land is to be managed. Codes for temporary uses (20.16.050) and casual uses (20.16.060) of Borough land provide limited measures to protect land and trails from misuse and damage. 20.16.030 describes easements on borough land. The borough may grant easements for public use as a way of accessing public or private land adjacent to borough land. While the FNSB can grant private access easements, the borough retains the right to unilaterally amend the private access easement to make it public.

Borough land may also be nominated for sale or retention. Chapter 20.24 dictates the process for determining which borough lands may be sold or retained for public purpose, public use or other reason. Note 20.24.030 that "the mayor may not sell, lease, grant an easement on...or otherwise transfer retained borough land unless authorized to do so by ordinance."

Alaska Statute Title 29

AS 29.35.210 describes second class borough powers. One of the most significant limitations of second class boroughs is the lack of areawide and non-areawide road powers. Road powers are held by Road Service Areas, which often limits the ability to address regional road network issues. In response, road ROW and trail easements are often dedicated through the subdivision process, although an areawide vote is another means of using areawide funds for road construction and purchasing trail easements.

AS 29.40.90 Abbreviated Plats & Waivers limits a municipal government's power to obtain ROW or Trail easements. An abbreviated platting process to subdivide a single lot into four or fewer lots may not be used if the subdivision requires public dedication of a street, ROW, or other area. This could affect the ability to complete trail connections by relying on subdivision to dedicate trail easements.

Alaska Statute Title 9

AS 9.65.202 Tort Immunity is relevant to the Trails Plan given the existence of private landowners who allow recreational activities on their land but do not charge a fee. This statute is intended to provide some protection from liability for landowners who are providing access to their land for public use. The limitations of this statute may affect Trails Plan recommendations related to private landowners allowing public access for recreation purposes.

Alaska Statute Title 34

AS 34.17.055, Tort immunity from personal injuries or death arising out of the use of land subject to a conservation easement, provides protection from liability for landowners specifically with land that has a conservation easement 50 feet or less in width, except in cases of gross negligence or reckless or intentional misconduct. This may be another useful tool to obtain trail easements.

AS 34.17.100, Public recreational use easements, describes the requirements for dedicating a public use easement. This should be reviewed for compatibility with FNSB code, and any recommendations should be reviewed and approved by the Borough attorney.

Adopted Area Plans

FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan, 2005

The FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan provides the foundation for future growth, stewardship of major community attributes, and the framework for making land use and development decisions. It is a guide intended to respond to community change and which establishes the vision that guides the Borough through the next few decades. The Comprehensive Plan provides strategies and actions which, when implemented will move the Borough towards vision actualization. Part of that vision includes the creation of development opportunities while minimizing land use conflicts, providing essential human services that support the needs of the population, and integrating development with responsible stewardship of our resources.

Trails Plan Applicability

The Regional Comprehensive Plan is the highest-level, Borough-wide planning document and the updated Trails Plan will be adopted as part of it; therefore, recommendations made in the updated Trails Plan cannot conflict with recommendations made in the Comprehensive Plan and, ideally, directly support or implement recommendations made in the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals and Strategies

The following goals and strategies pertain to the Recreational Trails Plan Update.

- Land Use Goal 1: to recognize that the foremost aspect of land use involving private property is the retention and maintenance of private property rights
 - Strategy 2: work for community end goals with a minimum impact and disruption of individual private property rights
 - Strategy 3: to work to reduce, to the fullest extent possible, the natural conflict that develops between private property rights and community needs and interests
- Land Use Goal 2: to continue public land use and sale programs
 - Strategy 4: Plan for, designate, and retain sufficient lands for future public purpose prior to the sale of public lands.
 - Identify, acquire, or retain sites appropriate for public facilities and trails
 - Assure that public land sales have legal and physical access
- Economic Development Goal 1: To strengthen and expand the existing economy
 - Strategy 2: encourage opportunities for economic growth while ensuring continued public access to wilderness areas
- Transportation & Infrastructure Goal 1: to have a safe, efficient, multi-modal transportation system that anticipates community growth
 - Strategy 2: support multi-modal transportation linkages
 - Strategy 3: Make the Borough more pedestrian-friendly in urban and suburban areas and safer in rural and remote areas

- Strategy 4: Integrate safe multiuse trail circulation into road networks and maintain multiuse trails for commuter and recreational purposes
 - Promote a comprehensive multi-use trails plan that links communities, incorporates maintenance, links public facilities including schools and parks, addresses safety considerations, creates a map of multiuse paths, provides urban ROW to rural trails
- Environment Goal 2: to promote responsible stewardship of the Borough Ecosystem
- Environment Goal 3: to protect natural systems
 - Strategy 10: Borough public land and open spaces – identify and provide public borough land for open spaces that can maintain, enhance, and conserve outdoor recreational opportunities, wildlife, marginal lands, drainage areas, linkages between existing public open spaces, natural vegetated areas near urban development, public open spaces along transportation corridors between borough communities, and tourism opportunities.
- Environment Goal 4: to protect and enhance both the natural and formal landscape
- Community & Human Resources Goal 1: to have services and facilities that enrich the quality of life for all residents
 - Strategy 3: Provide opportunities for community recreation.
 - Action C: Maintain a Recreational Trails Plan that addresses easements, maintenance, multiple-use trails, and cooperative recreational use agreements of military land, e.g. the Tanana Flats

North Pole Land Use Plan, 2010

The North Pole Land Use Plan, adopted as an element of the 2005 FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan, incorporates smart growth principles on mixed land uses and sound transportation and pedestrian circulation. It represents the values of North Pole residents and the physical assets that make North Pole unique. The Land Use Plan is comprised of community goals, a land use framework map, recommended implementation strategies, and proposed transportation, trails and pedestrian/bicycle and parks/open space maps. These components are based on North Pole’s preferred future land use scenario; recommendations and land use categories identified are intended to provide direction when considering future land use decisions.

Trails Plan Applicability

The Trails Plan will incorporate trail-related recommendations from the North Pole Land Use Plan—previously implemented recommendations will be noted in an existing conditions assessment; unimplemented recommendations will be addressed in the Trail Plan’s final recommendations. New trail recommendations will need to be compatible with current land use designations.

Goals and Recommendations

The following community goals are identified in the plan that relate to or support the intent of the Trails Plan Update:

- Provide more parks and recreational trails, promote a healthy and safe community, and promote activities for families, youth and seniors.

The Land Use Plan recommends the establishment of public recreational sites and trails along the Beaver Springs Creek corridor with the cooperation of land owners through a formal land use agreement. It also recommends the establishment of an off-highway vehicle (OHV) land use area to be located southwest of the Tanana River Levee / 200-foot railroad re-alignment corridor, to extend north to 9 Mile.

Areas in the North Pole Land Use Plan designated as Open Space/Natural Area are intended to remain in a natural state, deemed not suitable for development. Natural areas may be minimally improved, such to provide access to or through them, or to accommodate a trail.

The North Pole Land Use Plan Pedestrian / Bicycle Facilities Parks & Trails map identified existing multimodal facilities and proposed facility alignments. It maps the recommended OHV land use area, designated parks or open spaces, and pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan, 2019

The Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan is intended to serve as short and longer-term guide and resource for housing, transportation, recreation, utility and commercial decision making. The plan offers recommendations that strive to protect Salcha-Badger Road Area resident values while benefiting and enhancing the quality of life for current and future residents. The plan was developed in response to rapid growth in the project area and the anticipated arrival of two squadrons of F-35A fighter jets at Eielson Air Force Base, expected to bring approximately 3,300 new residents to FNSB; the plan was written to guide development during and following this anticipated growth. Following its adoption in 2019, the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan is part of the FNSB Regional Comprehensive Plan.

Trails Plan Applicability

The high growth rate in the areas addressed in the road plan, paired with residents' expressed value for recreational space, creates a sense of urgency in protecting trail alignments. Trail protection becomes more difficult, and potentially costly, after development occurs. Additionally, being aware of road recommendations will help mitigate conflicts between planned road and trail development, fostering complementary development.

Plan Vision

The Salcha-Badger Road Area is comprised of communities in the FNSB renowned for their rural small-town feel, respect for personal freedoms, thriving businesses and services, and access to year-round outdoor recreation. Residents in this subarea expressed that year-round, outdoor recreation access was extremely important, making it a guiding value for the road plan. The plan area includes The City of

North Pole, as well as the subareas of Badger West, Badger East, Moose Creek, Eielson Farm Road, Eielson Air Force Base, and Salcha.

The Area Plan identified that a significant constraint to development is the presence of extensive wetlands and floodplains. These physical constraints, along with large tracts of public land and natural features like the Tanana River, mean that more future growth will concentrate in existing neighborhoods and existing communities, rather than extending out into new, undeveloped lands. Residents recognize that existing FNSB land use, infrastructure and fiscal policies are not adequate to sustain and improve what residents most value about the project area while supporting anticipated growth. In the face of growth, active planning is essential and Salcha-Badger area residents recognize improved policies are needed to guide growth while respecting land use freedoms.

The Transportation section of the Area Plan addresses recreational trails. Key issues and challenges identified for the recreational trails include:

- Enforcement in trail use types (motorized and non-motorized)
- Conflicts frequently arise between user groups
- Motorized use of non-motorized facilities can damage existing trail infrastructure
- Challenges for an interconnected trail system include maintenance, legality, liability and jurisdictional responsibilities as the public recreational trails often cross private lands or multiple land management jurisdictions.

The plan identifies the most needed recreational facilities are walking and biking trails that link roadway pedestrian and bicycle facilities to regional trails and recreational areas. Trails are transportation options that fall outside of traditional transportation planning, funding and development mechanisms. There will be a continued need to leverage funding from sources outside the FNSB, including federal, state, local and private funds.

Goals

The following goals are identified in the plan that relate to the Trails Plan update:

- Maintain a balance between the area's predominately small town and rural character with ready access to open space as well as vital community commercial areas in population centers like the City of North Pole
- Provide for continuing access to open space, trails, and outdoor recreation
- Protect the natural environment and recognize existing floodplain and groundwater hazards
- Retain and improve outdoor recreation opportunities
- Develop an interconnected recreational trail system that considers all users and abilities and serves as a foundation for tying the Salcha-Badger Road area together.
- Ensure recreational trails are planned, design, constructed and maintained in such a manner that the environment is respected, long-term maintenance needs are kept to a minimum and associated costs are within the reach of the land managers

Strategies

These strategies offer recommendations to help achieve the vision and goals for the Salcha-Badger Area and are related to or directly support the Trails Plan update:

Trails Strategies

- Update the 2006 Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan (Priority Strategy #9)
 - Plan for a north/south trail connection from Badger to Salcha subareas, maximizing the use of easements associated with the “23-mile Ag Sale” lands in the Eielson Farm Road area
 - Plan for an east/west regional trail from the FAI airport to the Chena Lake trail system. This would connect the communities of Fairbanks, North Pole, and the Badger Road area to recreation resources in the Chena Lake Recreation Area (CLRA). This coincides with recommendations for Plack Road and Peede Road open space developments.
 - Coordinate with partner agencies and land managers to prioritize missing recreational trail connections and trailheads that are critical to the complete overall network
 - Identify areas for appropriate motorized use and identify any seasonal restrictions, when applicable
 - Identify recreational trails that cross private lands to either remove them from the inventory, obtain legal easements, or identify alternative routes
 - Clarify agency jurisdictional responsibilities for the establishment, ownership and maintenance of trails.
- Based on the updated trails plan, require dedication of trails and trailheads during the subdivision process (Priority Strategy #10)
- Strategically work with private property owners and developers to obtain critical trial easements
- Encourage other agencies to incorporate priority trails in local comprehensive plans, planning studies and projects
- Develop systematic approaches for ongoing maintenance of trail infrastructure.

Additional Applicable Strategies

- Guide location and intensity of land use through implementation of the Salcha-Badger future land use map (Priority Strategy #1)
 - Public Multi-Use Designated Lands: Primarily state and federal land with multiple uses, to remain in public ownership; including flood protection, habitat value, recreation outside of developed recreation areas, and timber.
 - Open Space/ Natural Area Designated Lands: (same definition defined above in the North Pole Area Plan). Includes public lands (federal, state and municipal) used for parks and dispersed recreational activities or identified as import habitat such as ponds, lakes and riparian corridors.
- Convene local economic development partners to identify actions that will increase time and money spent by visitors traveling in and through the region
 - Working from a regional perspective, develop recreation and tourism strategies for the project area in cooperation with Explore Fairbanks and other partners.
 - Expand and better publicize the area’s outdoor recreational opportunities.
 - Focus on recreation improvements that benefit both residents and visitors, including maintaining and improving trails.
 - Promote and encourage winter tourism where appropriate.

Eielson Regional Growth Plan, 2018

In 2016, the Air Force announced their final decision to station two squadrons of F-35 Lightning II fighter jets at Eielson Air Force Base. By 2022, the arrival of the F-35s will bring approximately 3,300 additional residents, businesses and employment opportunities, construction and infrastructure investments, and more to the FNSB. FNSB obtained a grant from the U.S. Department of Defense, Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) to develop this Regional Growth Plan to assess and prepare the community for the potential impacts and benefits from the F-35 arrival by identifying current and projected needs in programs, services and infrastructure and recommending strategies for addressing gaps. The Growth Plan focuses on housing, utilities and infrastructure, transportation, planning and zoning, early childhood development and education, workforce development, health and social services, public safety, quality of life, and fiscal impacts.

The Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan developed in parallel with this plan, and an overarching theme was identified:

FNSB and partners should initiate more active and effective planning, working to better integrate planning for land use, transportation and utilities.

Trails Plan Applicability

As with the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan, the Eielson Regional Growth Plan highlights the anticipated level of growth in currently rural areas. Continued growth will include new residents interested in recreational trail use. This will put pressure on existing trails through crowding and additional wear and increase demand for new trail capacity.

To accommodate the anticipated new housing development and accompanying utility expansions, new subdivisions will need to occur. FNSB-dedicated, legally accessible trails are primarily created during the subdivision process, where trail easements can be established. There are anticipated opportunities in the short-term to provide and secure legal public access to outdoor recreation in alignment with the Eielson Growth Plan, the Salcha-Badger Area Plan, and the FNSB Trails Plan.

Key Plan Takeaways

Key takeaways were identified for each focus area of the Growth Plan. The following are applicable to the Trails Plan Update:

- **Housing Demand:** Approximately 1,474 new F-35 Eielson Air Force Base personnel and their families will relocate to Fairbanks, and will need 974 housing units off-base.
 - There is a preference for housing in the North Pole Zip Code (99705): 85% of Air Force personnel who live off base opt to live in the Greater North Pole area; this trend is expected to continue for the new personnel.
 - 532 new units in North Pole will be needed to meet demand
- **Utilities:** Expansion of water and sewer will be needed for increased housing demand and doing so will concentrate development and address air quality challenges (and other community priorities)
- **Planning and Zoning:** Recommendation to use the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan to guide growth, and better integrate land use and infrastructure planning

- **Quality of Life:** Military families enjoy the extensive outdoor recreation opportunities unique to Interior Alaska, including hiking, hunting, fishing, boating/rafting, gold panning, camping, visiting the hot springs and viewing the northern lights (aurora)
 - Improve education and outreach about the availability of existing facilities and outdoor recreation options
 - Develop guided programs to introduce newcomers to Alaska’s unique outdoor recreational opportunities
 - Expand bicycle and pedestrian connectivity in FNSB
 - Support implementation efforts to increase bike and pedestrian safety in high-use areas already identified in previous transportation planning
 - Continue to work with landowners and developers to establish designated recreation areas, including creating and preserving access to trails and recreation from residential areas.

Funding for the development of the updated Trails Plan was provided by a federal grant from the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation as an implementation of the Eielson Air Force Base Regional Growth Plan.

Functional Plans and Studies

FNSB Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan, 1990

The Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan provides direction for the development and improvement of facilities to meet Borough residents' unique recreation needs. The 10-year-horizon plan includes an inventory of facilities; standards for assessing recreation needs; goals, objectives, and policies and ways to implement them.

Trails Plan Applicability

Parks and Recreation facilities are destinations that trails can originate from, connect, and support. Most facilities are public and can provide recreation amenities complementary to trail use. Large-acre park facilities or recreation sites may contain stand-alone trails or offer opportunities to expand nearby trail systems. The Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Plan acknowledges the strong relationship between park facilities and trails; Objective E of the Plan is to implement the Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan to connect new recreation areas, facilities and programs to provide year-round recreational opportunities for all Borough residents.

A review of existing and potential recreation sites will support the Trails Plan inventory, future corridor identification, and the process of prioritizing recommendations.

Goals and Recommendations

Most goals and objectives identified in the 1990 plan are still applicable and support the Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan update. The most directly applicable goals include:

- Goal 1: Provide year-round recreational opportunities for all Borough residents.
 - Objective C: Increase winter recreational opportunities.
 - Objective E. Implement the Comprehensive Recreation Trail Plan.
 - Policy 1. Consult the Trails Advisory Commission on all matters involving trails
 - Policy 2. Refer to the Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan in planning any trail
 - Policy 3. When possible, connect new recreation areas, facilities, and programs with the Borough recreation trail system.
- Goal 2: Fully utilize existing facilities.
- Goal 3: Maximize volunteer efforts.
- Goal 4: Insure [sic] sufficient public land for recreational use
 - Objective A: Designate adequate Borough lands for passive and active recreation

Alaska Recreational Trails Plan, 2000

This plan is primarily informational, enabling trail users to help sustain their favorite recreational trails. The plan provides a framework for research, education, local/regional need prioritization and funding for stakeholders and the public to use.

Trails Plan Applicability

The plan includes a trails checklist to help with trail inventorying. For each trail, the user would determine whether it is historically/culturally significant, dedicated, identified, designated for specific uses, improved, managed, maintained, adopted by volunteers, signed, mapped, and whether it has a public trailhead. This could be a useful resource for the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan to ensure robust data when inventorying FNSB trails.

Additionally, the Alaska Recreational Trails Plan specifically references Fairbanks, stating that the concentration of people and increasing demand for use of limited trails has contributed to the growing loss of access opportunities and increasing user conflicts. This message is consistent with other plans and highlights the urgency of protecting and improving existing trails and designating alignments for future trails.

Plan Recommendations

General recommendations relevant to the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan include establishing legal access and trail protection, trail management, addressing trail conflicts and safety, providing educational resources, and securing private sector support.

The plan outlines the characteristics of an Alaska Trails System Trail, the procedure for nomination and acceptance of a trail into the system, and funding sources.

Alaska State Parks Strategic Plan, 2007-2017

Alaska's Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation created this plan to "improve policy analysis and priority setting" for outdoor recreation on state lands over the following ten years. The plan is flexible to accommodate unexpected challenges and changes, maintaining a big-picture view to guide the Division.

Trails Plan Applicability

Understanding the identified issues, priorities, and recommendations in the Alaska State Parks Strategic Plan enables complementary Trails Plan development, including improved connections from non-State land. Showing consistent recommendations in State and FNSB plans also improves competitive funding opportunities.

FNSB can collaborate with Statewide Parks and Recreation to address trail issues on State land that affect FNSB residents. Staff collaboration would be useful during Trails Plan development, ensuring consistency between trail recommendations in State and Borough plans.

Strategies

The action strategies proposed in this plan are in priority order for each listed objective. Relevant action strategies include:

- Addressing the deferred maintenance backlog (planning, funding, preventive maintenance).
- Conducting a trails inventory and condition assessments on all high-use trails in the park system to help prioritize maintenance needs.
- Pursuing additional funding to maintain and upgrade trails.
- Addressing present and future park access needs when reviewing proposed subdivisions, plats, and easements.
- Directing users to lesser-used facilities and during non-peak times to lower pressure on the most popular facilities.
- Maximize federal funding through matching fund availability.
- Complete a set of baseline natural and cultural resource inventories by 2016, utilizing GIS (data source for the FNSB Recreational Trails Plan).
- Create an interactive trail website accessible to the public—an inventory of all maintained trails in the state park system.

A particularly relevant finding in the plan was that user fees have made up a larger proportion of the Division's budget, while the state general fund support has decreased. The overall result has been a loss of purchasing power due to inflation. This affects the Division's range of options for making improvements to recreational trails within the FNSB. The plan also explains how the most successful state park systems have a diverse range of funding sources—something Alaska does not have; making plan implementation extremely sensitive to state budget fluctuations.

Chena River State Recreation Area Management Plan, 2006

The Chena River State Recreation Area (CRSRA) Management Plan was completed by the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation the year before the 2007-2017 State Parks Strategic Plan was completed. The plan was developed in response to concerns over the loss of traditional outdoor recreation activities in the Chena River Valley due to timber harvesting, mining, and subdivision. This plan seeks a balance between providing a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and protecting natural systems in the Chena River State Recreation Area (CRSRA).

Trails Plan Applicability

Although the land addressed in the CRSRA Plan is State owned, FNSB residents make up a large proportion of the trail users. FNSB residents likely had a significant role in developing this plan's goals and recommendations. Trails and developments highlighted in the CRSRA plan and managed by other agencies can provide context for available trail opportunities and needs and help focus the FNSB's role in providing trail opportunities. It is important to ensure consistency between trail recommendations in the Trails Plan and CRSRA Plan and to look for complementary development opportunities.

Goals and Recommendations

Plan Goals involved creating compatible recreational opportunities within the CRSRA, protecting the area's natural and scenic character, providing adequate maintenance, and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of management to contribute to recreation and tourism.

The CRSRA plan described proposed trail improvements, such as hardening, water control, drainage ditches, boardwalks, and rerouting trails to dry ground. Recommended trail repairs or rerouting included:

Multiple-use motorized trails

- Colorado Creek Trail – reroute to higher ground, harden trail, consolidate to one route
- Angel Creek Trail – reroute to higher ground, harden trail, allow winter-only motorized use
- Stiles Creek Trail – harden trail, consolidate to one route
- Chena Hot Springs Winter Trail – manage trail, improve condition
- Compeau Trail – maintain condition

Non-motorized Trails

- Granite Tors Trail – replace boardwalk across wet areas
- Angel Rocks Trail – install boardwalk across wet areas. Reroute to avoid erosion, harden trail to eliminate cutting switchbacks
- Chena Dome Trail – harden or reroute segments subject to erosion
- Mist Creek Trail – brush trail and install trail markers

The Plan did not specifically propose new trail alignments, but it did mention possible future connections, such as a connection between Colorado Creek Trail and Stiles Creek Trail, and a connection between the Mist Creek and Granite Tors trails.

Sub-area plan maps can be found on pages 38-59. Appendix D shows the types of trail classifications in the CRSRA (pgs. 137-138).

Chena Riverfront Plan, 1997

This plan highlights the importance of recognizing and restoring the Chena River as the crown jewel of the community, correcting past mistreatment and recommending improvements. The plans includes recommendations to improve the vitality and use of the Chena River.

Trails Plan Applicability

Chena River is a major recreation corridor used year-round, and enhancing trail access in this area would benefit users. While specific projects mentioned were limited, the following goal and objectives serve as a reminder to address Chena River recreation access in the Trails Plan.

Goals, Policies, and Objectives

Relevant goals, policies, and objectives in the plan include:

- Goal IV: Create and enhance physical and visual access to the river for all people.
 - Policy 1: Incorporate the river into the community’s daily life by increasing visual and physical access to and along the river when it is compatible with riverfront habitat sustainability.
 - Objective A: Improve existing access points with landscaping, parking, signage, maps and seating where practical
 - Objective C: Add new public access points to the river designed to accommodate public use for year-round activities.
 - Objective D: Construct new paths along, above, and as close as possible to the riverbank in order to take full advantage of river views.
 - Objective F: Enhance trails along the riverfront.
 - Policy 2: Encourage public and private partnerships that facilitate appropriate access to, on and along the river.
 - Objective B: Develop year-round transportation and design linkages that will serve and connect riverfront attractions to other nearby attractions with emphasis on the downtown core area.
 - Objective D: Develop new bike path routes that are compatible with adjacent land use and are safe and relaxing to use.
 - Objective G: Work to enhance the connection between Pioneer Park and downtown along the river corridor.
 - Policy 3: Ensure that the urban riverfront corridor is pedestrian friendly.
 - Objective C: Support public events scheduled along roadways adjacent to the river, including events that involve pedestrian-only roadway use.

University of Alaska, Interior Alaska Community Recreation Study, 2016

This study assessed characteristics of desired Interior Alaska recreation trips of resident in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. A 40-question online survey was conducted during the summer of 2014. Respondents were asked to detail a hypothetical, ‘ideal’ trip within Interior Alaska based on one of three primary variables: length of trip, companions, or activity. Respondents were then guided through questions that solicited information regarding desired conditions, onsite experiences, longer-term outcomes, and history with the activity. They then explained whether current areas meet their needs for their ideal trip, and if not, why. The survey was designed not to prompt respondents by the mention of any particular management area, so respondents would not be constrained by current management conditions.

Trails Plan Applicability

The Trails Plan can utilize the study’s relatively recent data, providing insight into the range of recreational activities FNSB residents want, more effective volunteer formats, and important trail locations. The Trails Plan should account for survey results in this study.

Study Results

Results of the study identify different types of trips FNSB residents want, the settings where they might occur, and how management areas can provide meaningful recreation opportunities. This may aid future planning, resource allocation, and raise the community's capacity to meet important needs.

The survey was not randomized, and therefore results are not generalizable across any population. The intent is to reveal the range of recreation needs in the Interior community.

The highest recurring responses for the "most important factors" of a successful trip were:

- Availability and quality of trails
- Presence or absence of other user groups (primarily motorized)
- Proximity to home or work
- Parking availability

The most commonly mentioned constraints to trips on public land were:

- Insufficient trail quantity and quality
- Lack of information about resource conditions and access
- Presence of other use types (primarily motorized)

There is a concern that new, local development can displace the shorter-length trails typically found closer to developed areas.

The most selected ideal trip characteristics were:

- Length of Trip: "2-3 night" trip duration (21.4%).
- Companions: Trip participants were "friends" (26.8%) or "friends and family (26.8%).
- Summer season (68%), followed by fall (35%), winter (29%), spring (25%) and year-round (8.3%).
- For a plurality of respondents, proximity was not important to the trip.

Results show trip duration and choice of companion(s) drive decision making for other trip characteristics.

- Longer trips may require routes farther from the road and other unique setting requirements such as public use cabin availability.
- Proximity to home or work is closer for shorter, more frequent recreation.
- The presence of family & children significantly affected the type of trip taken.

Trail preferences for BLM-managed areas (p.61):

- Natural-surface trails to be present and accessible in winter and summer
- Desire for a variety of trail types to accommodate many activities, from narrow to wide, challenging to nontechnical, very long to suitable for day trips, very detailed signage to basic route markings
- Some level of maintenance was usually important, especially for winter travel
- Knowing that a winter trail would be passable and packed by snowmachines or possibly groomed would be very important for a successful winter trip to this area

Trail preferences for State Parks:

- Extensive and diverse system
- Maintained for summer and winter uses
- Good on-site trail markings and signage on many trails

Trail preferences for regional, undeveloped, mixed management areas:

- Accessible trails in good condition and roads with smooth surfaces (for biking)
- Trails that are well maintained
- Few/no encounters with other people

Trail preferences for Fairbanks developed, mixed-management areas (covering many of the FNSB Trails):

- A wide variety of trail types, surfaces, and widths to accommodate many activities in all seasons
- Desired trail types include: singletrack and wide natural surface summer trails in summer; groomed, packed and singletrack trails in winter; paved paths and smooth roads for walking and road cycling
- Trail connectivity

Trail preferences for UAF:

- Accessible trails very near home or work
- Well maintained and marked trails and frequent grooming in the winter
- Summer and winter trails that can allow hiking, running, skiing, and dogs
- Avoid conflict between different uses (such as winter dog walking and skiing)
- Avoid motorized traffic

Volunteerism Preferences:

- Recreation organization/club members were more likely to volunteer for public lands management needs. The most preferred way to volunteer was as an individual, followed by volunteering as part of a group.

Information Source Preferences:

- Public land management agencies were the most preferred source of recreation information.

The two tables below show the types and locations of activities mentioned by survey respondents.

Table 3. Activities Associated with Ideal Trips for FNSB Community Recreation Study

Activity	n ¹	Activity	n	Activity	n
Non-motorized boating ²	39	Off-Highway Vehicle ³	10	Photography*	5
Cross Country Skiing	27	Berry picking	9	Skijoring	5
Hiking*	26	Snowmachining†	8	Multi Activity*	4
Backpacking*†	22	Climbing*	7	Walking†	2
Camping*	22	Fishing*	7	Triathlon†	2
Hunting	15	Horseback riding†	7	Geocaching*†	1
Trail running	15	Road Cycling†	7	Swimming†	1
Dog mushing	11	Packrafting†	7	Trapping	1
Mountain Biking	10	Boating motorized	5	Wildlife viewing	1

¹Results were not generated from a random sample and, thus, do not imply any particular activity has a higher rate of participation/demand.

²These 39 responses consist of canoeing/rafting (which was listed as an activity; n = 33). "Other—write in" responses included kayaking and stand-up paddleboarding.

³"Off-Highway vehicle" was not explicitly listed as an activity. These 10 responses consist of those who selected "ATV riding" (which was listed as an activity on the survey), and the "other – write in" categories of "4x4 offroading," "full-size jeeping."

*Individual trips of these activities would occur in during all season.

†These activities were not explicitly listed as activities and were written in by respondents under the "other" category.

Table 4. Existing Interior Places Mentioned, Grouped by Prevailing Management Agency or Quality

Bureau of Land Management Eastern Interior (n=129*)	Alaska State Parks Norther Area (n=126)	Regional, Undeveloped, Mixed-Management (n=71)	Fairbanks, Developed, Mixed-Management (n=68)	University of Alaska Trails (n=19)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White Mountains National Recreation Area (124) • Steese National Conservation Area (49) • Beaver Creek (21) • Birch Creek (21) • Wickersham Dome (8) • Pinnell Mountain Trail (7) • Mt. Prindle (4) • Nome Creek Area (3) • TableTop Mountain Trail (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chena River State Recreation Area (119) • Upper Chena River (24) • Chatanika River (19) • Granite Tors Trail (18) • Angel Rock Trail (12) • Salcha River (8) • Harding Lake (6) • Quartz Lake (5) • Delta-Clearwater River (4) • Birch Lake (3) • Olnes Pond (2) • Chena Dome Trail (1) • Compeau Trail (1) • Stiles Creek Trail (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ²Steese Highway (22) • Tanana River (16) • Parks Highway (9) • Murphy Dome (8) • ³Elliott Highway (8) • Tanana Valley State Forest (5) • Chena Hot Springs Road (5) • Grapefruit Rocks (4) • Tanana Flats (4) • Richardson Highway (4) • Yukon River (4) • Cleary Summit (3) • Minto Flats (3) • Nenana River (3) • Bonanza Creek Experimental Forest (2) • Ft Wainwright Yukon Training Area (2) • Tolovana Hot Springs (2) • Goodpaster River (2) • Tolovana River (2) • Hutlinana Hot Springs (1) • Salcha, AK (1) • Pedro Dome (1) • 100 Mile Loop (1) • Fairbanks-Circle Historic Trail (1) • Iditarod and Yukon Quest Trails (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ⁴Fairbanks, Trails In Town (27) • Chena Lakes (17) • Ester Dome (16) • ⁵Goldstream Valley Trails (12) • Lower Chena River (11) • Birch Hill (10) • ⁶Creamer's Field (10) • ⁷Isberg Recreation Area Trails (5) • Skarland Trail (4) • Tanana Lakes (4) • North Pole, AK (3) • Skiboot Hill Area Trails (3) • Moose Mountain (1) • Salcha Elementary Trail System (1) • 100 Mile Loop (1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UAF North Campus Trails (18) • Skarland Trails (4) <p>• Beyond Study Area (n=19)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delta Junction Area (8) • Denali National Park (6) • Alaska Range (4) • Brooks Range (2) • Healy, AK (2) • Donnelly Dome (1) • Delta River (1) • Mt. Healy Trail (1)

*Note: Number of trip descriptions that mentioned this setting. Some trails or areas are included in multiple place analysis groups.

¹"White Mountains National Recreation Area" also includes "Ophir Creek Campground" and "US Creek Road."

²"Steese Highway" includes mentions of 12-mile summit and Eagle summit waysides and trails around Central and Circle, Alaska.

³"Elliott Highway" includes mentions of "Livengood mining district."

⁴"Fairbanks, trails in town" includes mentions of urban bike paths downtown and on Chena Pump Road, Trails on Chena Ridge, Sheep Creek Road trail, and unspecific mentions of trails or facilities "in town" or "near town."

⁵"Goldstream Valley Trails" includes mentions of "Eldorado Creek Trails," "O'Connor Creek Trails," "Waterford Road Trails," "trails behind Goldstream Sports," and general mentions of trails in the Goldstream Valley or Goldstream Hills.

⁶"Creamer's Field Area" includes responses describing the dairy-turned-wildlife refuge to the South and the Alaska Dog Musers Association-maintained trails to the North.

⁷"Isberg Trails" also includes mentions of "Cripple Creek Trails."

Limitations of/Recommendations for Existing Places:

- **BLM Constraints**
 - Mostly centered on increasing the quantity of trails
 - Need to improve trail surfaces for summer use & OHV use
 - Maintain boardwalks in wet areas
 - One respondent said prevalence of nonmotorized areas limits their ideal OHV trip
 - Accessibility limited by lack of information about trail systems. Requested information includes trail easement maps, property ownership, cabin availability, river and trail conditions
 - Better online information needed
- **State Parks Constraints**
 - Desire for more trails
 - Desire for summer trails to accommodate OHVs
 - Online access to reports about stream and trail conditions
- **Regional, Undeveloped, Mixed Management Constraints**
 - Needs for road access and vehicle parking
 - Public easements blocked near residential areas
 - Need for land ownership information, trail maps, and on-site trail markers & maps
 - Desire for longer trail distances, better trail connectivity, increased number of trails
 - Maintenance needed due to OHV use
- **Fairbanks, Developed, Mixed Management Constraints**
 - Increased trail distances
 - Improve quantity of trails near town
 - Maintain trail surfaces & public accessibility, especially the easements in and around residential areas
 - Improve trail connectivity
 - Lack of facilities near home
- **UAF Constraints**
 - Expand dog accessibility in the winter
 - Improve winter surfaces for walking & running
 - Expand parking
 - Expand trail system or improve connectivity to other trail systems for longer distances

Alaska Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), 2016-2021

Alaska's SCORP was funded by the National Park Service to evaluate the availability of outdoor recreation resources, analyze trends, and identify public recreation improvement priorities and strategies. It must be regularly updated for Alaska to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) State and Local Assistance matching grant program. The state was broken into three sections, with FNSB included in the "Railbelt."

Trails Plan Applicability

A new SCORP is currently being developed on the same timeline as the Trails Plan, providing an opportunity to improve its relevance to the FNSB context. Input from public involvement during Trails Plan development can inform comments on the SCORP to create mutually reinforcing recommendations. Complementary recommendations between Borough and State plans is an effective way to attract trail development funding.

Plan Findings

Some interesting survey findings in the SCORP:

- Maintaining existing facilities was the highest-rated management need, organized programs was the lowest-rated need.
- Trail improvements and restrooms were the highest-rated facility need.
- Lack of knowledge about where to go and ADA accessibility were the primary barriers to using outdoor recreation sites.

Note that the number of survey responses was low, potentially affecting the usefulness of results.

FNSB Joint Land Use Study, 2006

The Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) sought to pursue compatible development between Eielson AFB, Ft. Wainwright, and the surrounding community. This would reduce future conflicts and the potential need to relocate a military base.

Trails Plan Applicability

As it pertains to recreational trails, interviews conducted during the study included recreational user groups, such as the local Nordic Ski Club, Running Club North, Trail Riders, Fairbanks Snow Travelers, etc. It was mentioned that the 100 Mile Loop Trail crosses military lands. There was also concern over the long-term status of the Birch Hill Recreation Area, since the trail system in that area relies heavily on access to the base.

Decision making for military base land also used for public recreation purposes can affect the efficacy of Trails Plan recommendations and can create uncertainty about future trail use on military land. A change in command could affect removal of public access, whereas a lease agreement would provide more certainty of continued use. An example is that some trails through Eielson AFB were previously used to access State lands, but are no longer open to civilians. Following the land use recommendations in the study and continued engagement with the leadership at Eielson AFB and Ft. Wainwright will mitigate land conflicts and help secure long-term trail access for the public on military lands.

As military mission expands in the Interior, population growth follows, and recent experience at Eielson AFB has shown that off-base development can directly result from personnel increases. Since military personnel and their families are often also trail users, personnel increases can add pressure on trails from increased use. Development resulting from military personnel increases reinforces a sense of urgency to protect trails on base, and in the surrounding communities that will face the most development pressure.

Study Comments

Other comments referenced potential recreational trail use on bases. The Sonot Kkaazoot ski race includes portions of Ft. Wainwright. The Tanana Flats Training Area is used by dog mushers and skiers and snowmachiners. One comment mentioned that the various recreational users are funneled onto one corridor, creating conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized users.

Public Law 87-327 and AR 200-3 allow portions of the Ft. Wainwright training areas (especially the Tanana Flats Training Area) to be used by civilians and off-duty military personnel for outdoor recreation such as hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking, hiking and nature photography.

While there were no action items or strategies associated with recreational trails mentioned in the JLUS, the discussion regarding concerns over continued recreation access indicates the importance of collaboration to preserve outdoor recreation opportunities on base land.

The Historic Preservation Plan, 2006

This plan was prepared by the Commission on Historic Preservation, City of Fairbanks, and FNSB. The plan guides preservation management for historic resources within the FNSB.

Trails Plan Applicability

This plan mentions several trails in the FNSB that bear historic and cultural significance. The Trails Plan will address these historic trails and provide recommendations for continued preservation, if still existing.

Trails Mentioned

Trails mentioned in the Historic Preservation Plan are:

- Valdez-Fairbanks Trail (currently known as the Richardson Highway)
- Circle-Fairbanks Historic Trail
- Bonnifield Trail
- Chena Hot Springs Trail (Also known as the “Winter Trail”)
- Gilmore Trail
- Fairbanks Livengood Trail

The plan noted that all except the Bonnifield trail are partially incorporated into the modern road system.

Ongoing Plan Updates and Initiatives

Alaska Trails Initiative and Alaska Long Trail

A coalition of trails organizations developed the 2020 Statewide Trails Investment Strategy to determine ways to expand trail infrastructure in order to boost the economy, attract and retain residents, and improve quality of life for residents.

Planned Trail Projects

Chapter 2 describes the Greater Fairbanks area. It notes that many of the trail access points are informal and not widely used. Recommendations include developing more four-season trails, improving signage, upgrading trail heads, mapping, and marketing. The following table shows the recommended projects:

Table 1: Greater Fairbanks Area Projects Summary

Greater Fairbanks Area Projects Summary			
Project	Lead and Support	Estimated Cost	Priority & Status
1. Angel Rocks Trail	Alaska State Parks	\$1M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
2. Angel/Stiles Connector	Alaska State Parks	\$150,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
3. Equinox Marathon Trail	FNSB	\$1.4M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
4. Wayfinding, signage, mapping & marketing	Alaska State Parks, FNSB, Visit Fairbanks	\$500,000-\$3M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
5. Fairbanks to Nenana "Long Trail"	DNR Division of Forestry and local trail organizations	\$500,000	Mid Term - Planning in Progress
6. Isberg All-Season Trails	FNSB	\$3.1M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
7. Delta Junction Riverwalk Trail and Park	City of Delta Junction, Delta Junction Trails Assoc., Nat'l Park Service RTCA	\$200,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)

The investment strategy document provides additional information for each of these projects.

The Alaska Trails Initiative also describes the Alaska Long Trail. This is another trail project that would affect FNSB—the proposed project would extend from Seward to Fairbanks, comparable to the Appalachian Trail or Pacific Crest Trail.

Trails Plan Applicability

The trail project list includes recommended projects in the 2006 Comprehensive Recreational Trails Plan. Completing the Long Trail project and Alaska Trails Initiative have the potential to expedite trail development for complementary trails in the FNSB and raise outside awareness of additional FNSB trails noted in the Trails Plan.

BLM Alaska White Mountains & Steese Transportation and Travel Management Plans

The Bureau of Land Management is conducting initial inventory review of the roads and trails in the White Mountains and Steese areas. This is the first stage of the Transportation and Travel Management Plans development process. Following inventory completion, draft plans will be developed that address motorized and non-motorized access, allowable types of motorized and non-motorized use, road and trail networks, and conflicts between user groups. Travel on Birch Creek and Beaver Creek will also be addressed. An environmental assessment will be prepared in conjunction with the plan and a Record of Decision will accompany the final plans.

Many trails included in the FNSB 2006 Trails Plan connect to White Mountains National Recreation area to the north and the Steese National Conservation Area to the northeast. The FNSB Trails Plan update will be completed prior to the finalization of the White Mountain & Steese Transportation and Travel Management Plans.

FNSB Comprehensive Roads Plan, (currently being updated)

This plan will update the FNSB's 1991 Comprehensive Road Plan. Its purpose is to ensure future development aligns with long-term road development needs. As a second-class borough without road powers, FNSB is limited in its ability to provide adequate, comprehensive road infrastructure; this plan ensures adequate ROW is provided for future roads during the subdivision process.

While this plan does not directly pertain to recreational trails, it provides insight into the areas of FNSB where significant development is expected, such as Moose Creek in the Salcha-Badger Road Area. This has implications for existing trails in those areas that may not have adequate protection.

Collaboration in developing this plan and the Trails Plan will help predict and mitigate future roadway and trail conflicts, improve policies for addressing nonmotorized needs adjacent to roadways, and improve synergy during the subdivision process—especially given the similar constraints the FNSB faces for road and trail dedication as a second-class borough. Comparing and negotiating future trail and road alignments will improve the long-term efficacy of both plans' recommendations.

FNSB Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2016 (currently being updated)

This report identifies economic trends in the FNSB and proposes goals, objectives, and strategies to achieve the Borough's economic development goals.

There was little mention of recreational trails in this document, but there was a note that trail networks had received increasing use in the past years.

There was one relevant objective pertaining to physical infrastructure, to "Support the design, construction and maintenance of trail, road, rail and air transportation systems that improve access to the region." The report also discussed leveraging the natural environment for recreational activity as a means of promoting regional resilience through diversification away from natural resource extraction.

Generally, the quantity and quality of trails in the FNSB has quality of life implications and also contributes to the desirability of the FNSB as a tourist destination. Trail development—combined with marketing the improvements—has economic benefits by attracting visitors and retaining residents.

FNSB Land Suitability Analysis (currently being updated)

The following is a GIS analysis of several factors affecting suitability for future development within the FNSB. The factors (e.g. slope, elevation, hydric soils, soil subsidence, flood & wildfire hazard) are individually classified then assigned weights. The composite of each factor on each area within the borough yielded a number that pertained to its relative development suitability.

This analysis did not reference recreational trails; however, overlaying a trails shapefile on the composite land suitability map could be useful in understanding which trails are on land with high vs. low development suitability. Determining new trail alignments would similarly benefit from use of this map to help FNSB maximize the use of its lands. Following a consistent theme of trail protection urgency, land deemed highly developable is likely to experience the highest development pressure. Locating existing trails in these areas will inform Trails Plan implementation priorities by focusing limited financial and time resources to first protect the most at-risk trails.

Aside from existing trails, highly developable land may also be the best place for new year-round trails (i.e. where ground is still solid in the summer). Without unduly hindering non-recreational development by reserving highly developable land for trail use, there are opportunities to collocate trails with compatible development, rather than relegating all new trails to wetland areas unsuitable for other development.