

# Chugach State Park Access Plan and The Hillside

Article by Matt Moore, 4-26-2010

In 2002, a cataloging of all access points for CSP was performed. The intent was to list all of the access points available by car, pedestrian access, ski, bike, equestrian, etc. With so much acreage available in the park, approximately 500,000 acres, park supporters felt that an infinite number of access points should be available. This did not mean park officials and park users wanted parking lots, RV hook ups, and barbecue pits every 100 yards along the boundary of the park. The intent was to make the park accessible as if it were a true wilderness/urban interface that would allow anyone reasonable access along the park boundary. Ideally this could be done while preserving the beauty of the park itself.

Do we need all of these access points? No, we do not need the infinite number that the park officials state we do need. When we look to the past, it would have been better planning for the present day if more effort were placed on securing access points. Knowing that, we must plan for the anticipated future needs and use of the park. Without planning we will repeat the problems of park overuse, crime and vandalism at trailheads. I would refer to the great number of people who use the Glen Alps and Prospect Heights access points and the problems that have accompanied those locations of overuse.

As the Anchorage Bowl population increased, increasing the number of access points to the CSP has become more problematic. Developers are now required to provide public access to the park on subdivisions that are contiguous to the park boundary. It is unfortunate that the MOA P&Z did not address the issue of access more aggressively 25 years ago. Now the burden falls to those few who develop/subdivide their property last. It is also likely that the properties that are contiguous to the park that are awaiting development are smaller than the parcels available 25 years ago. I would argue that it places a disproportionate burden on those who develop their properties today compared to those of just 10 years ago.

Ideally, access would be provided in many locations to decrease the impact on the park due to over use at focused points. Park access has always been a touchy subject and that has not changed today. Different user groups try to protect their access rights while isolating other user groups in the process.

We went through this eye opening process recently with the members of the Basher Community Council. The park identified several access points in our neighborhood that were either existing access points or potential sites. The existing access points were nonissues but the proposed access points were a more sensitive subject. Some neighbors who did not participate in the process wondered out loud if those who worked on the neighborhood trail access committee pushed access to certain parts of the neighborhood and away from others.

For those of us who worked on the committee it was like a slap in the face for our hard work. We had to explain the process and point out that some of the requests were not viable due to deed restrictions dating back over 35 years. Others were limited in nature as land for parking was not available. Others were limited due to extreme slope grades. Some access points were best assigned as a Neighborhood Pedestrian Trail. Neighborhood pedestrian access is a great way to spread the trail use over a large area within a neighborhood. Many compromises were made by all neighbors and in the end we voted 42 in favor of a resolution supporting CSP access which made sense for our community with none opposed and one abstaining.

The biggest hurdle in the entire process was dealing with change and fear of the unknown. We still do not know if the trail access will be exactly what we want or if we will not like what we wished for. What we are sure of is that compromise will yield the most access points and neighborhoods will retain the qualities that prompted us to live there in the first place.

For those of you who will go through this process, I would recommend the following:

Realize that more opportunities for access along the hillside means less traffic and less people at all trailheads.

Keep all neighbors in the loop as you move ahead. Some will not understand the process nor agree with the results but it is important to keep them informed.

Matt Moore