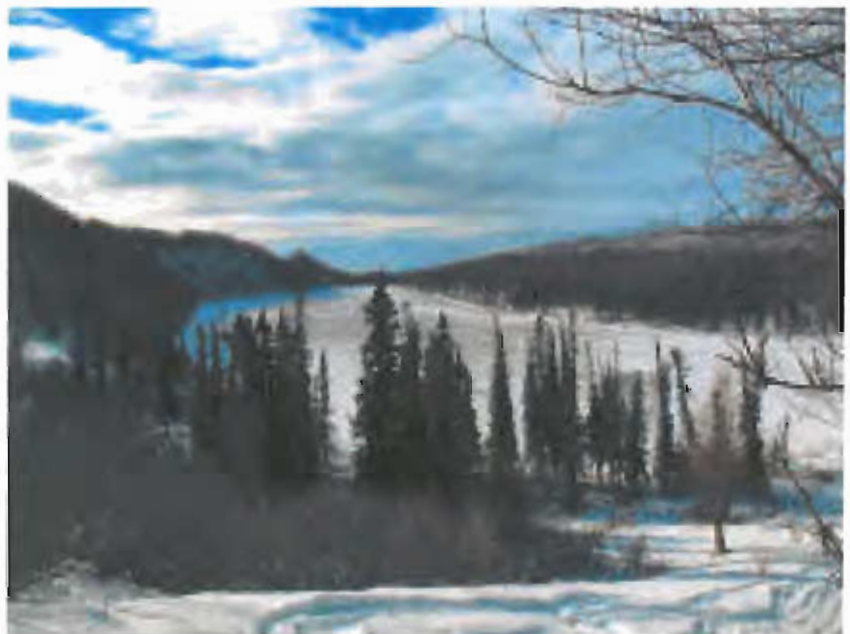


Recommendations:

- Petition the Borough to initiate a lake management plan to address issues such as horse power limitations on watercraft, quiet hours, shoreline erosion and protection of waterfowl and loon nesting sites.
- Implement quiet hours of 10:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.
- Provide signage at the public access point and information to property owners to alert lake users of waterfowl nesting sites and to avoid their disturbance.
- Provide and maintain trash containers at the public access point.
- Encourage the use of less polluting four-stroke motors.

TRAILS AND PUBLIC ACCESS

The Sutton Planning Area contains spectacular scenery and excellent recreational opportunities. Many residents and visitors enjoy access to world class recreational opportunities literally “right out the back door” of Sutton. However, easy access to the back country can also have a negative impact, by increasing the potential for private property trespass, vandalism, illegal trash dumping and trail degradation. Access to public land



Wishbone Hill photo found at
<http://crust.outlookalaska.com/Skiing2008>

takes place via a variety of roads, trails and trail heads, some of which are legally established and some of which are not. Some have been identified as year round and some can be used only seasonally. Winter motorized use has less of a negative impact on the trails than summer motorized use. Many of the existing trails crossing private land have no dedicated public access. Unless dedicated public access is obtained, it is likely these trails will eventually be blocked or closed by a present or future landowner.

Historic mining and timber harvesting around Sutton created a network of trails, many of which continue to be used today for recreation and access to public lands. Many of the trails in the mining areas of Jonesville and Wishbone Hill are former mining roads. Some of the routes are likely to be used for heavy equipment travel and portions of the area are likely to be altered if coal mining is again pursued in the planning area. Additionally, some public and private properties and some existing roads and trails could be closed to public access to prevent accidents with heavy machinery and other hazards at the mine site. Recent coal exploration and mining leases in the Chickaloon and Sutton areas have created community concerns over protecting natural resources, mitigating potential traffic, safety and health impacts, and preserving water quality. While the Sutton community has expressed a desire to preserve and enhance trails and other outdoor recreational opportunities in the planning area, they recognize the need to balance that goal with the protection of natural resources, water quality and water availability, as indicated in the April 2007 community survey.

In 2000 the Borough adopted the MSB Recreational Trails Plan. The MSB recreational trails planning process began in 1995 through an extensive planning and public involvement process. The resulting overall goal of the trails plan is:

Within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough there exists awe inspiring landscapes and world class recreational opportunities. Many of these areas and recreational opportunities require trails for access and enhanced enjoyment. It is the desire of the Borough to provide exciting trail recreation opportunities for visitors and residents alike in conjunction with the desires of its populace.

The local desire and initiative for trail development and maintenance already exists and is producing significant results. It is not the Borough's desire to usurp these trail development efforts but rather to complement these efforts and provide local government support.

The Borough should work in cooperation with community councils, cities, the state of Alaska, businesses, property owners and trail advocacy groups to provide a system of trails throughout the Borough to enable the public to engage in outdoor recreation activities and to ensure future preservation of trails. The Borough should work to coordinate the numerous local trail development efforts into an effective and efficient recreational trail system and preserve the existing popular recreational trails. Trail facilities are to provide for the ever increasing outdoor recreation needs of the resident population and recreation industry.

The plan goes on further to establish goals, policies and objectives on the specific topics of primitive trails, separated paths, legal access, impacts on private property, liability, management recommendations (reduce conflicts and degradation), trail information, trail funding and the

evolution of trails into roadways. Trails in and around the Sutton area that were identified in the 2000 plan are Kings River Trail, Young's Creek Trail and Permanente Road/Castle Mountain Trail. At the time of this plan update, the trails plan is also undergoing an update, and additional trails could be nominated to be included in the trails plan.

The Sutton Trails Map included with this plan in Chapter Eight also shows the Premier-Baxter Mine Trail and Loop, Wishbone Trail system (lake, hill and strip mine), Seventeen Mile Lake Trail, Eska Falls Trail, Red Mountain Trail, Young's Creek Trail, and the beginning of the Kings River Trail also known as Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail. Numerous other trails exist in the planning area. The Borough and state should work to preserve public access along those trails identified on the Sutton Trails Map.

There are several threats to the existing primitive (unpaved) trails within the planning area including:

- Closure of trails by private landowners;
- Closure of trails due to mining activities on public lands;
- Degradation of trails due to erosion and mud resulting from overuse or misuse; and
- Degradation of trails due to overuse by motorized vehicles.

TRAIL AND ACCESS RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Establish a recreation and trails committee in the community to examine trail maintenance and funding.**
- **Engage residents to take an active role in the maintenance of existing public trails.**
- **Update and inventory trails within the Sutton Area. Consider a trails master plan.**
- **Inventory, maintain, and protect existing trail uses (both motorized and non-motorized), public access points and public facilities.**
- **Solicit input from community members on trail concerns and issues.**
- **Ensure sustainability of trails.**
- **Seek trail designation for a balance of motorized and non-motorized uses.**
- **Encourage coordination with Borough, state, and federal entities to ensure that reclamation efforts include developing and dedicating trails on former mined lands.**
- **Ensure that exploration, mining and mining reclamation efforts maintain access to recreational trails and uses, as much as possible. When access must be limited, the company should be encouraged to create temporary alternate routes.**

- **Work with the proposed mining operations and the State of Alaska to preserve the area’s recreational trail opportunities possibly by constructing temporary, alternative trails around proposed mine operations on state lands.**
- **Ensure that reclamation efforts (revegetation and recontouring) occur in a timely manner following mining activity, to ensure safety of trail users, prevention of erosion, maintenance of high water quality and restoration of habitats for wildlife. Trails should be rerouted off of private property whenever possible.**
- **The Borough and the community of Sutton should negotiate with private landowners to obtain voluntary dedications of public access.**
- **The community should work with the Borough and Alaska DNR to identify funding opportunities to legalize trails and trail heads, maintain trails, and enforce appropriate trail use.**
- **The community and the Borough should work to identify financial incentives such as tax deductions or other measures that may encourage property owners to dedicate a trail.**

SPECIFIC TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS:

KINGS RIVER TRAIL

Recently private landowners donated a public access easement along the historic route of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail near Kings River. This critical link assures public access to popular state recreational land in the Kings River Valley and provides the Borough or the state sufficient public interest to more actively manage the trail. This is currently the only commonly used trail taking off from the Glenn Highway in the Sutton area that does not trespass across private lands. The Kings River trailhead area receives very heavy use from campers and day users and is in a degraded and unsanitary condition. Additionally, the trail is in a degraded condition from heavy motorized use, with significant trail erosion and mud.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage the state to develop and maintain a wayside including a dedicated trailhead, public restrooms and trash receptacles at the Kings River Trailhead.**
- **Designate the ski trails at Kings River, which have been constructed and maintained for human powered uses (such as hiking, biking and skiing), as a non-motorized trails system.**

YOUNG’S CREEK TRAIL/CHAIN LAKES TRAIL

This trail is an offshoot of the trails leading to Red Mountain, Ruby Lake and the Kings River Trail. The Young’s Creek Trail accesses a high alpine meadow. The topography is such that an ATV can travel anywhere through this meadow region, on or off the trail. There is community concern that this sensitive, alpine meadow could be damaged by ATV and off-road vehicle traffic. Additionally, the route immediately beyond Ruby Lake is well suited for hiking but is currently difficult to negotiate with an ATV and is an unsuitable habitat for ATV use including sensitive, alpine meadows.

Recommendations:

- **Motorized ATV use should be limited to the existing trail system and posted in the Young’s Creek, Chain Lakes and Ruby Lake areas. A map should be posted just beyond Ruby Lake on the trail leading to the alpine meadows depicting the existing trails system.**
- **Manage activities affecting air, water and land to maintain or improve environmental quality, to preserve wildlife habitat, to prevent degradation or loss of natural features and functions and to limit risks to life and property.**
- **Encourage a balance between motorized and non-motorized use, particularly in the high alpine, sensitive areas.**

RAILROAD TRAIL

The Borough has expressed an interest in improving and formally dedicating the rough trail along the old railroad bed from Moose Creek to Sutton. Although, portions of the railroad right-of-way between Moose Creek and Sutton have completely eroded away, this section of the railroad right-of-way could accommodate winter recreational use when the bank of the Matanuska River has frozen. Since the last Sutton Comprehensive Plan edition, the Alaska Railroad granted permission to establish a trail along the old railroad bed between Moose Creek and Palmer.

Recommendations:

- **Support efforts and coordination with the Borough and local trails groups to continue maintenance and construction of the trail established along the old railroad bed between Moose Creek and Palmer.**

MOOSE CREEK TRAIL

The former state Moose Creek Recreation Site and Campground is an ideal trailhead location. If a trail is established along the railroad bed between Palmer and Moose Creek, then it is desirable for the campground area to be connected. Currently, there is a historic trail leading north from the former campground site and then crossing Moose Creek and fading into game trails. A trail could be constructed to connect the Moose Creek Campground into the Jonesville/Buffalo Mine Trail passing on the south side of Wishbone Hill, which once served as a mining road.

Recommendation:

- **Encourage the Borough and local trail groups to construct a legal route from the Moose Creek Recreation site to the Jonesville/Buffalo Mine Trail.**

ESKA FALLS TRAIL

Eska Falls Trail is a 2.5-mile long trail reached via Jonesville Road and then by reclaimed mining roads on state land. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough and Alaska DNR have a cooperative management agreement for the easement and lands along this trail. The Borough Parks, Recreation and Trails Board passed a resolution in early 2006



Picking blueberries beneath Eska Falls;
photo provided by Jessica Dryden-Winnestaffer

to close the trail to motorized use due to the extreme damage to the trail and surrounding areas from very heavy off-road vehicle use. The Sutton

Community Council also passed a resolution to close the upper, alpine portion of the trail to motorized use (ATV and off-road vehicle use, between breakup and adequate snowfall, approximately May 1 and October 30).

A series of public meetings held by Alaska DNR in Sutton in 2006 and 2007 polled users of the trail. Management and enforcement of laws was favored by the community of Sutton to prevent

continued destruction of wetlands, wildlife habitat and watersheds, and to protect steep and sensitive terrain, soils and vegetation from unsuitable and inappropriate ATV and off-road vehicle use.

This area is Sutton's backyard and is a beautiful and cherished asset to our community. Protection to ensure its continued sustainable use is greatly desired by the community of Sutton.

Recommendation:

- **Encourage a balance between motorized and non-motorized use, particularly in the sensitive areas.**

PAVED TRAILS

Paved trails are an important aspect of any community plan as they provide a safe transportation alternative and recreation opportunities. Paved trails are most commonly funded through the State Transportation Improvement Program.

The Glenn Highway needs a paved, separated path for both local pedestrian and bicycle traffic from Palmer to Sutton and from Granite Creek to Kings River. During DOT's Glenn Highway Rehabilitation Project from Milepost 55 to 61, construction included a paved separated path along the north side of the highway from Jonesville Road to Granite Creek. The Glenn Highway itself does not accommodate safe bicycle or pedestrian traffic.

In addition to construction of a paved path from Palmer to Kings River, the planning team recommends that separated paths be constructed along the following routes for public safety:

- Chickaloon Way/Wright Way, between the Glenn Highway and the Sutton Elementary School.
- During the realignment process of the Glenn Highway over the Moose Creek Bridge, beginning at about Mile 54, highway planning should include a separated paved path from Mile 54 to Kings River. The paved path should connect to the existing bike path at Mile 61, should include a separate bridge for trail use over the three creeks (Moose Creek, Eska Creek, and Granite Creek) and end at Kings River.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage DOT to construct a paved, separated path for pedestrian and bicycle traffic from Palmer to Sutton and from Granite Creek to Kings River.**
- **Encourage the construction of paved, separated paths for pedestrian and bicycle traffic along Chickaloon Way and Wright Way.**

PUBLIC LAND AND TRAIL DEGRADATION

Trails can degrade from overuse or misuse to the point that they are no longer useable or they can only accommodate certain forms of trail recreation. The increased weight, power and terrain capabilities of ATV's and other off-road vehicles often increase the rate of trail degradation and can require much more intensive trail maintenance to keep the trail in condition suitable for hikers, mountain bikers, and other trail users. There is a community desire to provide non-motorized trails that are separated from the detrimental effects of motorized recreation. Most of the existing trails in the Sutton planning area are commonly used by motorized recreational traffic including ATVs, snowmachines, and four-wheel drive vehicles.

Some of the area's roads have been subject to extensive heavy equipment use and earth moving as a part of federally-funded mine reclamation efforts of the Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) Program. Many of these reclamation efforts occurred 30-70 years after mine closure. Community concern has been expressed that some of the past reclamation efforts have not benefited the environment or the trails since they occurred well after the area had naturally revegetated and soil had stabilized. Much of the past AML reclamation efforts have increased the mud and erosion of these trails, and softened the trail/road surfaces to the extent that they are impassible in some areas.

Recommendations:

- **Encourage the designing, construction and designation of some new trails for minimum impact non-motorized activities such as hiking, biking and skiing.**
- **Encourage government to design a network of trails and trail systems, where appropriate, that meets the needs of diverse users.**
- **Encourage outreach and education to trail users to explain the impact of their activity and encourage responsible recreation.**