

**HATCHER PASS RECREATIONAL AREA ACCESS,
TRAILS AND TRANSIT FACILITIES**

**Scoping
Summary
Report**

May 2009



**SCOPING SUMMARY REPORT
HATCHER PASS RECREATIONAL AREA ACCESS,
TRAILS AND TRANSIT FACILITIES**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CIRI.....	Cook Inlet Region, Inc.
DEC.....	State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
DNR.....	State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources
EA.....	Environmental Assessment
EIS.....	Environmental Impact Statement
EPA.....	Environmental Protection Agency
FTA.....	Federal Transit Administration
MSB.....	Matanuska-Susitna Borough
NEPA.....	National Environmental Policy Act
NOAA.....	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
PAI.....	Potentially Affected Interests
SPUD.....	Special Use District

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Federal Transit Administration and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough are proposing a project to construct transit facilities, access roads, parking lots, and trail connections for two day-use areas that would provide an opportunity for skiing and other non-motorized recreational opportunities for local and regional residents in the Hatcher Pass area. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough's goal is a moderate sized development that would include Alpine and Nordic skiing, snowboarding, biathlon, mountain biking, hiking, sledding, and equestrian access in Hatcher Pass, Alaska. The project proposes development of Alpine and Nordic ski areas:

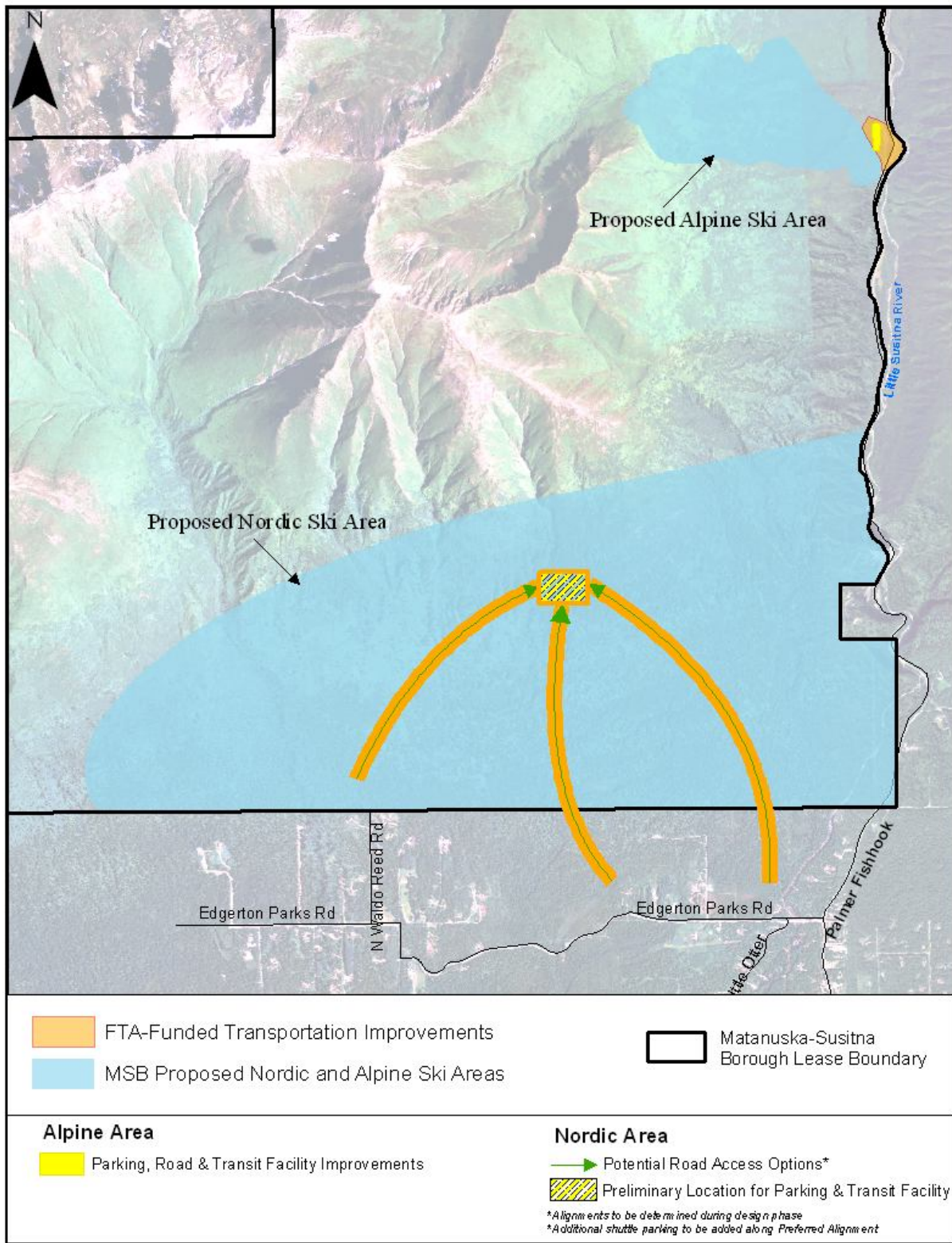
Alpine ski area:

- Reconstruction of an existing gravel access road, not more than 2,000 feet in length.
- Reconstruction of an existing gravel parking area.
- Construction of a covered 20- to 30-passenger transit shelter at the south end of the parking lot.

Nordic ski area:

- Construction of a new access road off of Edgerton Park Road, approximately 5,500-feet in length.
- Construction of a parking lot, overflow parking, and trailhead connections.
- Construction of a covered 20- to 30-passenger transit shelter.

The following components are not part of the Federal Transit Administration-funded project. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough plans to construct two Alpine ski lifts, Alpine trails, and a small day lodge providing food and ski concessions as part of the overall Alpine ski area development; Nordic and other non-motorized multiple use trails and a small chalet and conference facility as part of the overall recreational area development.



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) are initiating the Hatcher Pass Recreational Area Access, Trails and Transit Facilities project. The purpose of this project is to support development of infrastructure improvements at Hatcher Pass. Development at Hatcher Pass will be phased over time beginning with access roads, trails and transit facilities.

The process of gathering information from the public and agencies on the purpose and need for a project, potential alternatives, and possible issues and concerns that need to be addressed during the environmental review and design, is called “scoping”. This report, with its appendices, summarizes the public and agency scoping methods used, identifies issues and concerns, and lists comments received to date along with their sources. Comments were received from a variety of stakeholders (or interested parties) including local residents, resource agency representatives, and interested organizations.

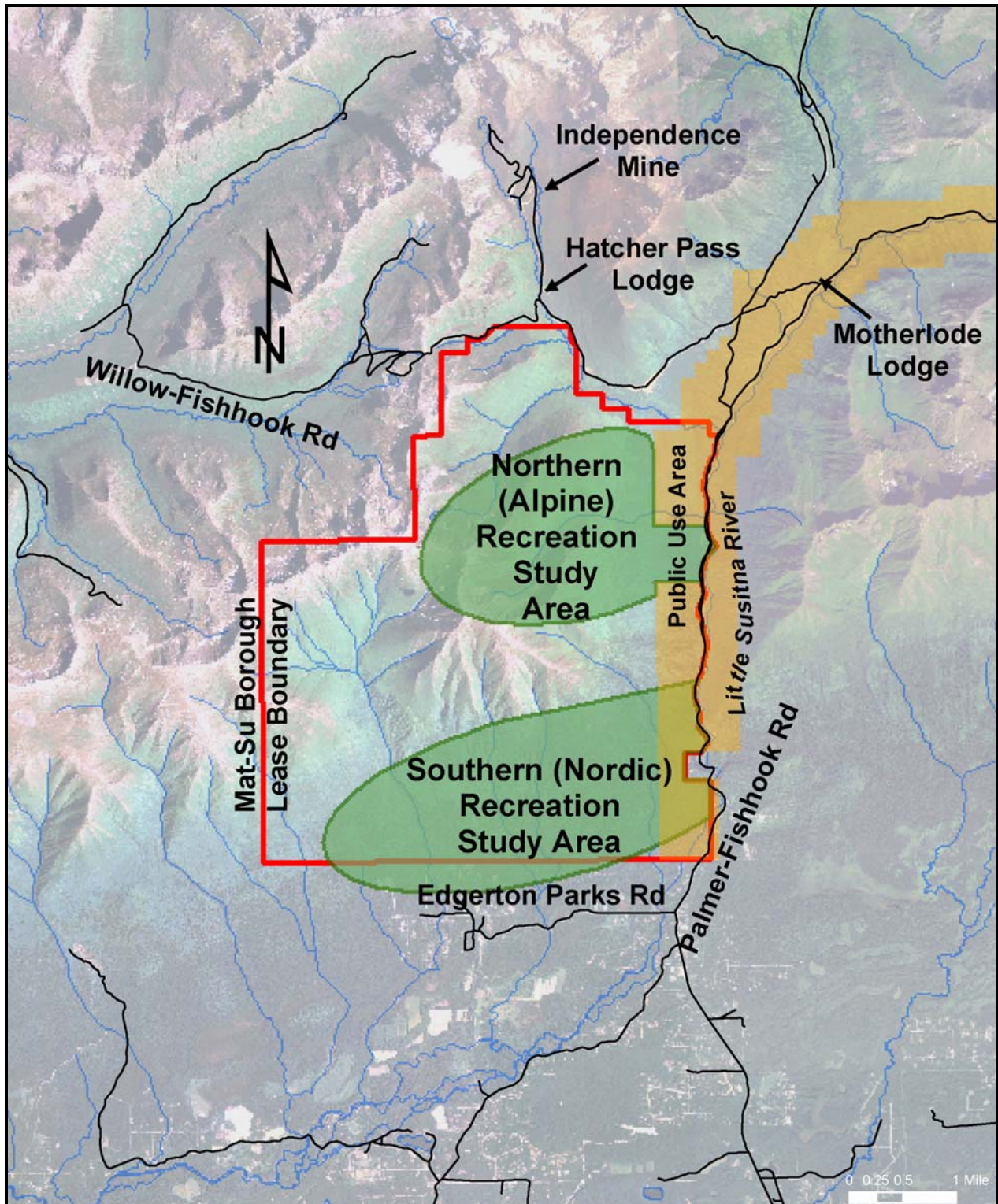


Figure 1: Project Location Map

1.2 Project Team

The project team for this project is listed below.

Contracting Agency

MSB, Project Management and Engineering

- Ron Swanson, Project Manager
- Brad Sworts, Transportation Planning and Environmental Manager
- Patty Sullivan, Public Affairs Director
- Linda Brenner, Community Development Director
- John Duffy, Borough Manager

Prime Consultant

DOWL HKM

- Stewart Osgood, Project Manager
- Steve Noble, Project Engineer
- Kristen Hansen, Environmental Lead
- Heather Campfield, Environmental Specialist
- Maryellen Tuttell, Public Involvement Lead
- Kristi Stuller, Public Involvement Planner

1.3 Scoping Method

The following scoping methods are included in the Public Involvement Plan and were used to inform the public and local, state, and federal resource agencies about the project, its objectives and the environmental and design processes:

- Public Scoping Meeting
- Agency Scoping Meeting

- Other Community Meetings
- Project Website
- Project E-Mail Address
- Newsletters and Flyers
- PowerPoint Presentations and Display Boards
- Project Office

1.3.1 Mailing List of Potentially Affected Interests

Two mailing lists have been developed for the project. They include a general public list and an agency/officials list. The general public list was assembled by identifying all residents and property owners within the vicinity of the project and adding to it those persons, who, through the course of advertisements and scoping, showed an interest in this project or had expressed an interest in previous projects in this area. The agencies/officials list includes local, state, and federal resource agencies and officials who might have an interest or concern, environmental or otherwise, in the project. The two lists were combined to form the Potentially Affected Interests (PAI) mailing list, which contains approximately 5,100 names. A map of the mailing list boundaries is included in Appendix A.

In addition to the mailing list, an e-mail distribution list has also been created. The e-mail list contains approximately 150 e-mail addresses.

1.3.2 Meeting Announcement

A meeting announcement was developed and mailed to the members of the PAI mailing list to announce the upcoming public scoping meeting. The announcement contained a project and meeting overview along with project contact information. A copy of the meeting announcement is included in Appendix B.

1.3.3 Advertisements

Advertisements notifying the public of the potential for wetland and floodplain involvement, and the date and time of the public scoping meeting appeared in the Anchorage Daily, News Mat-Su

addition, on November 26, 2008. The advertisement also appeared in the *Frontiersman* on November 25, 2008. Copies of the public meeting advertisements are included in Appendix C.

1.3.4 Community Councils and Other Interested Parties

The project area includes two community council areas and other interested groups. DOWL HKM contacted the presidents of the community councils (Fishhook, Buffalo/Soapstone) and supplied them with information on the project. The project team will present information to the Buffalo/Soapstone Community Council in the future if requested.

- The project team presented to the Real Property Asset Management Board and the Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board on January 14, 2009.
- The project team presented to the Fishhook Community Council on January 15, 2009.

At these meetings, staff gave an overview of the project, an update on the project schedule and scoping process, and information on how to submit comments. The team also responded to questions.

The attendance lists/sign-in-sheets and notes from the meeting with the Real Property Asset Management Board; the Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Board; and the Fishhook Community Council are attached as Appendix D.

1.3.5 Project Website

A project website (www.hatcherpass.com) was developed to provide specific information regarding the project area, objectives, schedule, project documents, team members, and a place to review and make public comments. Copies of the project website pages are included in Appendix E.

1.3.6 Project E-Mail Address

For persons wanting to communicate about the project via e-mail, an e-mail address (hatcherpass@dowl.com) has been created. This address was included in the public scoping meeting mailer announcement, in the newspaper announcement, on the comment forms passed out at meetings, and announced at the public and agency scoping meetings.

1.3.7 Project Handout and Comment Form

A project comment form and project information handout were developed and passed out at the public scoping meeting to solicit public comments. The form included an area to add contact information for those that wished to be added to the project mailing and e-mail lists. A copy of the handout and comment form is included in Appendix F.

2.0 PUBLIC SCOPING

2.1 Public Scoping Meeting

The public scoping meeting was held at Colony Middle School, 9250 Colony Schools Drive, on Thursday, December 11, 2008. To announce the public scoping meeting and help the public understand the purpose of the project, a flyer (Appendix B) was sent to all persons on the mailing list, e-mail distribution list, and posted to the website.

The public scoping meeting began at 5:30 p.m. and concluded at 8:30 p.m. Community members signed in and met with the project staff one-on-one to discuss individual issues and concerns. At 6:00 and 7:00, p.m., project staff made half-hour presentations about the project. Display boards with information about the project were stationed around the meeting room. A copy of the boards on display and the presentation used for the public scoping meeting is included in Appendix G. It should be noted that the graphics in the presentation are not current as they have been updated since the scoping meeting.

The following topics were covered in the presentation:

- Project description and components
- Past project comments
- Current activities
- Purpose and need
- Project areas, phasing and facility concepts
- Environmental documents, field work and scheduling
- Public involvement process

At the conclusion of each presentation, time was allowed for public questions and concerns. The meeting sign-in-sheets and notes are included in Appendix H. Approximately 55 people, not including project team members, attended the meeting.

2.2 Documentation of Public Comments

All written and verbal public comments received as of January 16, 2009 (the conclusion of the scoping period), have been reviewed and are included in Appendix I. Comments received have also been paraphrased and listed below. The list attempts to group the comments into common issues and concerns.

In Favor of Project

- Support project location, types of development and implementing project quickly.
- Project benefits families and the economy.
- Support responsible development of area.

Not in Favor of Project

- Oppose any development of the area.
- Oppose charging for use of the area.
- Apprehensive about developing the area during this economic downturn.
- Area will not be used adequately.

General Comments

- Plan needs more publicity.
- People are tired of seeing studies without any action or results.

Alignments

General Comments

- The Waldo Reed road option should be reviewed quickly, then discarded.
- Build an access into Hatcher Pass from Palmer-Fishhook Road with a bridge.

- Keep Edgerton Parks Road as it is.

Neighborhood Impacts

General Concerns/Comments

- Concerned about the location of any new access to the southern portion of the Hatcher Pass Ski Area.
- Concerned about the impact on the local area for the residents, including light pollution, noise pollution, increased traffic, safety issues, trespassers and overdevelopment.
- Do NOT do this in a quick, easy and slipshod manner. Please think long range.

Development Suggestions/Requests

- Facility should be a borough owned and operated asset.
- Design for many types of uses.
- Restroom and warming facilities, picnic tables and fixed grills are important to encourage family activities.
- The transit facility and parking should be located more on the southern end of the access road.
- Develop a smaller downhill ski area (maybe community owned model) as a first phase. The ski area can be expanded in later phases.
- All the people want is a lift and a day lodge and a Nordic facility to host events.
- It is crucial that trails are put in along Palmer-Fishhook Road.
- Access to the trailhead and main parking areas should be the most direct with the least impact on the current residents or dwellings.
- The initial gravel road in the south side development needs to be built to school bus standards.
- Power to the Nordic area needs to be included in Phase 1 so that high school ski meets can be held at that location.

Special Use District Comments

- Important to have the Hatcher Pass Special Use District (SPUD) completed and approved before any work should begin.
- Support a residential development plan in the SPUD that follows the recommendations of the Environmental Assessment (EA).

Residential Development Comments

- Opposed to residential development.

Funding

Funding Concerns/Comments

- Against using public funds for ski area development.
- Area seen as a money loser, economics do not work, will lose money for the MSB.
- Cross-country skiing is not feasible economically, only Alpine skiing is feasible.

Recreation

Non-Motorized Transit/Snowmachine Comments

- Provisions should be made for motorized vehicles in the area.
- Establish a motorized corridor along the Edgerton-Parks Road/utility easement.
- Motorized use must be restricted, should not be allowed within the ski area.
- Keep snowmachines on the north side of Government Peak.
- Need daily enforcement to keep snowmachiners from using restricted areas.
- Difficult to enforce non-motorized trails.
- No one wants snowmachines behind residential areas.

Nordic Development Comments

- Do not develop the southern Nordic development area.
- In favor of pursuing the Nordic trails first – do not tie them to Alpine development.
- Nordic trails can be used in winter and summer.
- Cross-country trails are less expensive than an Alpine area.
- Ensure there is a true beginner trail loop system of at least one mile.
- The trail system should be wide enough to allow traditional classic skiers as well as skate skiers.
- Construct a biathlon range in such a way that it could be used year round.
- Do not ban hunting or firearms.

Alpine Development/Lift Comments

- If multiple lifts are built, they will never be removed when the ski area proves to be a financial burden to the MSB.
- Build a mid-mountain unload/load for the high-speed quad.
- Use lifts year round with chairs capable of carrying mountain bikes.
- Paragliding opportunities should not be overlooked.
- Against snow-making on the north side.
- Consider a simple rope tow for Phase I.
- The mid-mountain chalet seems like an unnecessary feature.
- A ski area in the middle of one the best back country ski runs would ruin another wild area.

Other Area Use Comments

- Has a tubing/sledding hill been considered?
- Picnic table hill has an existing sledding hill that should be incorporated.
- Emphasize maintaining the backcountry skiing experience at Hatcher Pass.
- I think marketing the area will take away from the backcountry feel.
- Hunting, hiking, skiing, etc. are compatible as they generally occur during separate seasons and one should not be favored over another.
- Do not turn this area into an “exclusive use” area, leave it open for hunting, horses, snowmachines, 4-wheelers etc.
- No one asked for zoning snowmachine trails behind residential areas, bans of hunting or firearms.
- Concerned about safety for users if area developed for uses other than skiing or hiking.
- Removing the alder brush is necessary to clear the ground for skiing; will be a first step in the creation of summer pasture for the local farmers to keep some animals.

Environmental Comments

Environmental Concerns

- A thorough EA could avoid many issues if it was completed before commercial and/or housing development is allowed in the south side.
- Concerned about visitor impacts on water quality, soils, wells, sewage, noise, roads, traffic, views, lighting and animal habitat (salmon runs) etc.
- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should fully encompass the terrain modifications needed, potential for a water reservoir mid-mountain and other associated development.
- Please do not mess with the creeks with snow making.
- What will be the impact of all the additional septic systems in the area?

3.0 AGENCY SCOPING

3.1 Agency Scoping Meeting

The agency scoping meeting was held on Monday, December 8, 2008. A pre-scoping announcement was sent out in May 2008. E-mails were sent out on November 4, November 26, and December 3, and a letter was sent to the agencies on December 2, 2008 that provided background information on the project and invited them to participate in the scoping meeting. A copy of the e-mails and letter are attached as Appendix J. A copy of the attendance list, presentation and notes are included in Appendix K. It should be noted that the graphics in the presentation are not current as they have been updated since the scoping meeting.

3.2 Documentation of Agency Scoping Comments

All written agency comments received as of January 16, 2009, have been reviewed. The following is a summary of the agency comments received through January 16, 2009. The details of each comment can be found in Appendix L. The project received written correspondence from the following persons and agencies:

- Gary Prokosch, State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
- Wayne Biessell, Alaska State Parks
- William Ashton, State of Alaska Department Environmental Conservation (DEC)
- Doug Limpinsel, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Habitat Conservation Division
- Robert D Mecum, NOAA Habitat Conservation Division draft comments
- Jennifer J. Curtis, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Reviewer
- Cindi Bettin, Cook Inlet Region, Inc. (CIRI)

3.3 Agency Scoping Comment Summary

Gary Prokosch - DNR

- Mr. Prokosch stated that water rights acquirement will be necessary if the water withdrawal is intended from the Little Susitna River. He said that there is an in stream

flow reservation in place for the Little Susitna River to protect the fisheries located along the river. We should be aware of two proposed microhydroelectric projects located off of two tributaries upstream from the project area.

Wayne Biessell - Alaska State Parks

- I noticed you excluded anything within the Hatcher Pass Public Use Area boundaries; I am assuming there will be developments within these boundaries, and should be included within the study area.
- Review the Alaska Coastal Management Program, and conduct historic surveys, and eagle nests surveys.
- Please look at these issues:
 - Compatibility with HP Public Use area restrictions
 - Compatibility with current uses/locals
 - Illegal motorized use/enforcement
 - View shed impacts considered (especially from Milepost 14 to 16)
 - Summer trail design, layout
 - Impacts the state site and Government Peak

William Ashton - DEC

- Mr. Ashton stated that the main issue at this point is that the Construction General Permit is used under stormwater during construction.

Doug Limpensell - NOAA, Habitat Conservation Division

- Is the information and data collected in recent field seasons to facilitate the December presentation currently available in report form?
- Has there been any other work/surveys conducted or reports generated other than those mentioned here, between the 2003 and 2008? Any survey reports or summaries specifically addressing wetland delineations, water quality/quantity, and aquatic populations such as fish or inverts within tributaries, distribution, etc?

Robert D. Mecum - NOAA, Habitat Conservation Division

- Of primary concern to National Marine Fisheries Service Habitat Conservation Division is the identification and characterization of anadromous fish species and associated habitat in the affected landscape. Studies conducted to satisfy NEPA and the permitting process must include identification and characterization of each of these processes within the potential impact area of road and trail crossing.
- As part of the EIS, all foreseeable cumulative, direct and indirect impacts need to be presented and discussed. For complete recommendations please see the full comment located in the Appendix L.

Jennifer J. Curtis, EPA NEPA Reviewer

- The EPA submitted detailed comments on the Notice of Intent for the EIS. Their recommendations encompassed the range of alternatives, air quality, water quality, public drinking water, aquatic resources, wetlands and riparian areas, river, stream and riparian areas, ecological connectivity, roads and facilities, invasive species, the Endangered Species Act, indirect impacts, cumulative impacts, monitoring, mitigation, climate change, permits, use of existing reports and information, coordination with federally-recognized tribal governments, historic properties and cultural resources, public participation and environmental justice, community impact assessment and health risk or impact analysis.
- The EPA also included suggestions for construction mitigation measures used in other areas, mitigation measures to reduce emissions during construction, information on the clean air act and information on NEPA and the Council of Environmental Quality. For complete recommendations please see the full comment located in the Appendix L.

CIRI

- Our lands near the area are subsurface estate and are not located in the Hatcher Pass Management Plan area. What is developed at Hatcher Pass is ultimately of value to both the greater Wasilla and Anchorage areas.

4.0 SUMMARY

The above public and agency comments provide valuable insight into the issues to be resolved during the project. All comments will be reviewed and addressed, as the environmental document is prepared. Any comments received after the end of the scoping period (January 16, 2009) will also be reviewed by the team and addressed in the environmental document.