

Expansion of motorized area of Hatcher Pass considered

ASSEMBLY: ATV riders, snowmachiners want access expanded.

By RINDI WHITE

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PALMER -- The battle between motorized and nonmotorized users in Hatcher Pass may come to a head next month when the Mat-Su Borough Assembly will decide whether to recommend a new corridor for snowmachiners and other off-road users along the Carle Wagon Trail.

Motorized use is currently allowed in some areas of the Hatcher Pass Management Area. But snowmachiners and ATV riders have asked for more access on the southern side of Hatcher Pass, which would be provided by the corridor from Edgerton-Parks Road to Gold Mint Trail. Lynn Turner, a longtime resident of the area, said he and others have been using the area for years. The resolution would ensure future use.

"I'm for sharing it with everybody and respectfully so," Turner said.

But previous management plans have said the area is off-limits to motorized use and expanding motorized use in Hatcher Pass has proven controversial. Hikers and other nonmotorized users see the area as a peaceful bastion and don't want their enjoyment disrupted by the sound of motors or the environmental damage they fear will follow.

"These lands are cherished precisely because they are wild lands to which access is difficult," said Andrew Weaver, a lifelong resident of the area.

Joe Irvine, a member of a new nonmotorized user group he called "Hatcher Pass, the Not-So-Silent Majority," asked the Mat-Su Assembly to set the measure aside. At his request, more than 30 other nonmotorized users in the audience raised their hands to show they, too, wanted the borough to kill the resolution.

About 10 motorized users raised their hands to show they wanted the Mat-Su Assembly to move forward with the resolution.

The resolution would be directed to the state Department of Natural Resources, which has spent much of last year holding public hearings with both user groups in an attempt to update the plan on what's allowed in the protected area. An update to motorized and non-motorized spaces is expected to be part of the new plan.

Irvine said a draft of the new state rules is expected to be released in March. Public hearings about the proposed rules are expected to follow.

Assemblyman Ron Arvin sponsored the borough measure along with Assemblyman Mark Ewing. Arvin said he wanted the resolution to be delivered to the Department of Natural Resources before the new management plan is final.

"This resolution is meant to ensure that DNR is compelled to consider motorized and nonmotorized

access," he said. "It's not meant to be exclusionary; it's not meant to pit one group against another."

The Mat-Su Assembly had not yet taken up the measure at press time. If a vote is taken, the results will be available online at adn.com.

If the measure passes, it will come up for a public hearing at the assembly March 2.

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