



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

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March 25, 2009

PRESS RELEASE

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Information coming together for Hatcher ski project New road to Nordic side under study

MAT-SU—Last night the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Assembly and the Borough Planning Commission were given a detailed overview on the Hatcher Pass Ski Area as the project makes its way through the environmental study process.

The Borough received \$5.6 million from the Federal Transit Administration to improve access to the popular recreation area by developing roads, parking areas, trailheads, and transit facilities. The federal money requires an environmental study. Field work began last summer on 11,000 acres in the Talkeetna Mountains and foothills. The Borough owns 3,000 acres and holds a 55-year lease on the remaining land with an option to renew. The Environmental Impact Statement is expected to be completed by winter of 2010. If funding is identified, construction could begin by 2011.

Phase 1 of the project will cost \$24.8 million. The federal funding reduces the amount needed for the project to about \$19 million.

The main features proposed in Phase 1 of the project include two chair lifts, a day lodge with snow sports school, rental equipment, night-lighting, and snowmaking on the northern Alpine side. On the southern Nordic side: 10 kilometers of competition trails, 10 kilometers of recreational family trails, road access and parking.

A New Road

Stewart Osgood, President of DOWL HKM, gave an overview of three potential alternatives for a road that would access the Nordic area. The goal is to avoid wetlands, anadromous fish streams, and cultural resources.

“We want something that didn't push traffic into the local neighborhood and didn't create its own crossing of the Little Su,” Osgood said.

In the Alpine side the entrance to the proposed ski area has a driveway at mile 11 of Hatcher Pass Road. The driveway would be widened, paved, and its grade reduced, he said.

Agency Meetings

In December, the project team met with the agencies that issue the pertinent permits. The National Marine Fisheries Service had concerns about impacts to anadromous fish. In the fish survey, dolly varden were found to be the dominant species. Some fish made it high up the mountains in trickles of water. The Alaska Dept. of Natural Resources had concerns about water withdrawal from the Little Susitna River. The Environmental Protection Agency is concerned about impacts to cultural resources, among other issues.

“The good news is there's no particular show-stoppers here. The project is just going through the process for what's envisioned,” Osgood said.

Public Meeting

Osgood also gave an overview of a Dec. 11, 2008 meeting with the public when some 55 people attended an open house. Nearly 100 comments have come in from the meeting, through the mail, and on the Web site.

“It was nice to be involved in project that has so much support,” Osgood said of the public comments. Those will be posted on the project web site. Many Nordic skiers turned out at the meeting. One resident asked if the Nordic and Alpine projects could be separated. Answer: Once the EIS is complete, the Borough can decide how to move forward.

For Alpine, an economic study indicates that on a typical weekend some 700 to 1,500 skiers per day would ride the lifts at Hatcher Pass. The Hatcher Pass area is easily accessible by more than half the state's population.

In late May, DOWL HKM plans on holding public meetings to show and discuss the preliminary alternatives for the road. Following the public meetings the alternatives will be finalized and preferred alternative will be selected by fall, 2009.

“Plans, rules, and studies for the project are interrelated” Project Manager Ron Swanson of RWS Consulting said. “When the environmental analysis is completed, three other documents will need to be amended to reflect the study.

- The project plan: Hatcher Pass — A New Beginning is a flexible framework for the project and open to change with results from public comment and environmental studies.
- The SPUD or local land use rules are a draft today.
- The Hatcher Pass Management Plan, is a state plan for state-owned land within the project area.”

Much more information, including public comments, is on the project web site <http://www.hatcherpass.com> You can also find it on the Borough Web site under “projects.”

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