



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Office of Public Affairs

350 East Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, AK 99654
(907) 745-9577 • psullivan@matsugov.us



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PRESS RELEASE

Patty Sullivan
Public Affairs Director

Regional ski area concept at Hatcher gets unanimous Assembly support Discussion of financing options begins

PALMER – Tonight the Assembly unanimously agreed to the concept of a day-and-night-use ski area at Hatcher Pass that would serve Southcentral Alaska. The concept that was approved would include modest Alpine and Nordic skiing amenities, but not the four-season resort nor the residential housing plans of the past.

"I'm very excited that the Borough Assembly has decided on a course of action to develop a Hatcher Pass ski area, both Alpine and Nordic," said Borough Manager John Duffy. "It's great, and we're moving forward."

The pared-down or scaled-back approach is laid out in a plan called Hatcher Pass "A New Beginning."

"This is a major step forward in changing the vision from a four-season resort to a regional ski area," said Ron Swanson, the consultant who wrote the plan.

"The plan provides a framework on what Hatcher Pass Ski Area will look like, but it is a fluid document and will be open to change as we get the environmental information and hear from the public," Swanson said.

Work on an Environmental Impact Statement began this 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 "New Beginning" development plan proposes that a regional Alpine and Nordic ski area be built in a phased approach. The ski proposal begins modestly with phase 1: two chair lifts, a day lodge, night lighting and snowmaking. The

lodge would host the essentials: a snow sport school, snow sport equipment rentals, modest food and beverage service, ski patrol and immediate care medical facilities, along with necessary administrative and maintenance facilities. On the south side of the mountains, north of Edgerton Park Road, phase 1 for the Nordic ski area would include: 10-15 km of Nordic trails, both recreational and Olympic level, and an access road.

Some \$5.7 million in federal funds will pay for the necessary environmental analysis and transportation improvements. The federal funding will also help build the access roads and parking, reducing the phase 1 project cost to about \$18 million.

Assemblymember Rob Wells represents the Hatcher area.

"16 mile will remain 16 mile. You can still ski for free there if you can pay for the gas and if you can stay in the back of the pickup as they race up and down the mountain," Wells said, referring to a popular run where youth currently ski a 16-mile trail and often hitchhike on the road in order to access the slope again. "It is that safety: avalanche patrol, ski patrol that a ski area will bring. It's the secondary and tertiary economic benefits that it will bring, not to mention that the ski area will operationally pay for itself," Wells said.

An economic study indicates that on a typical weekend some 700 to 1,500 skiers per day would ride the lifts at Hatcher Pass. No firm numbers have been estimated yet for the Nordic ski area because little data exists on the number of skiers and where they like to ski.

The General Manager of Eaglecrest Ski Area in Juneau, Kirk Duncan, told the Assembly that based on the population figures, the ski area at Hatcher Pass would likely pay for its operations. The Hatcher Pass area is easily accessible by more than half the state's population.

How to pay for the capital costs is a discussion still on the table. The Assembly discussed various financing and management options, but no conclusions were reached. "More discussions will have to be held between the Assembly and our constituents," Assemblymember Tom Kluberton said.

The Assembly also discussed taking a scientific poll as one method of hearing views on the project and on how to fund it.

All members of the Assembly were present, except the Mayor who is out of town.

Attached is possible management options from the plan. Among the ideas: the Assembly will be considering a separate board to independently manage and operate the ski area.

The full plan can be read under documents at <http://www.hatcherpass.com>
Comments can be sent to the web site.

For more information call Manager John Duffy at 745-9689 or email jduffy@matsugov.us