

Prince William Sound Marine Trail Community Meeting – Cordova

Friday, May 1, 2009
Meeting Notes

15 people attended the workshop held at the US Forest Service Court Room in Cordova. The workshop was facilitated by Chris Beck and Shelly Wade of Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC, as part of the Prince William Sound Marine Trail Project.

Topic:

Introduction, Background + Overview – Why this Project?

- Tony Turrini from the National Wildlife Federation led a PowerPoint presentation describing the Project.
- PWS Marine Trail has the following goals:
 - Manage tourism (respond to the changing and increasing use of PWS)
 - Provide an infrastructure for sustainable tourism by creating a niche for smaller, locally-owned tourism businesses
 - Attract the small groups and independent travelers who spend the most money locally with the fewest impacts
 - Educate & increase awareness by visitors to protect Sound resources, promote safe use, address trespass issues
 - Help create a broader, stronger constituency for conservation

Group Discussion

The meeting attendees offered feedback on the Marine Trail concept and goals in general, how best to protect the resources and quality of Prince William Sound and the Project process.

Marine Trail Concept - The meeting attendees discussed the merit of a Marine Trail as a response to increased use in PWS. Many ideas, concerns and questions were raised. Overall, more people expressed ambivalence or concern about the project than immediate support. Specific feedback from meeting attendees is listed below:

- Concerned about any project that might encourage more use in this region
- Not convinced it is possible or sensible to “get out in front” of anticipated change. Like planning paths at a university campus, best to wait to see where people are actually going than respond...?
- Need to consider liability issues – most people aren’t ready for PWS wilderness. Who’s responsible?
- Suggestion made to step back and look broadly before concluding that the Marine Trail project is necessarily the most important near term action, e.g. – “these are the trends, these are issues; what options, including Marine Trails, might be the best response to issues of increasing and changing recreation and tourism use?” This approach would be better than quickly concluding that a Marine Trail is best solution. Need to consider whether we should do it or not. State PWS area plan is dated – need to update of ’88 plan.
- Generally feels good – sincere effort, but worry about what it might trigger e.g. - 2000 mile Jetski race? Don’t want to see another Waterworld project (proposal for floating gas station).
- Would the trail boundaries lead to designation of a “protected area” which could interfere with commercial fishing? Commercial fishing is constantly facing threats – concern about trail future and potential restrictions. For instance, Glacier Bay tourism has had negative impacts on fishing.
- Concern about impact on Native communities and their traditions, and particularly on risk of vandalism at archeological sites.
- Who would use this trail? Mostly Alaskans are currently using ferry

- Local subsistence users – concern this use triggered by marine trail could interfere with local hunting and fishing
- A benefit of the trail is that it could relieve congestion; could direct people to appropriate areas, and, by not sharing information, keep some places quiet
- There are many existing sources of information about the sound - Lethcoe Guidebook, Twardock Guidebook and others – how will this be different?
- Concern that project will bring in more people from outside Cordova, urban people
- There was broad consensus around the Marine Trails goal of expanded awareness and education, to ensure that PWS users are well prepared, low impact and considerate users of the Sound. Among meeting participants, there was more caution or opposition than support for a proposed major trail linking Whittier, Valdez and Cordova. More support was voiced for routes for locals and visitors in areas closer to Cordova. More notes below:
- Community strongly supports the Marine Trails goals of greater awareness and information – programs to reduce impacts of current and future use would be valuable. Education of next generation is key idea behind concept.
- This is opportunity to try to direct behavior – education and awareness is root of whole project
- Need to address real problems and remediate – for example, are there currently specific sites that need to be hardened, as has been done, for example, at Decision Point?
- Don't show people where to camp, teach them how to camp, how to be safe (education is key)
- Trail improvements in areas closer to Cordova could be good for locals and visitors. Interesting options include:
 - Portage between Port Fidalgo and Port Gravina – this is not a sure thing, but offers benefit of being able to explore two beautiful parts of the sound, and a safer route than going around Knowles Head. The route of this portage includes potentially unsafe tidal “rapids” and areas with high bear populations. With the right tide, a substantial portion of the route can be traversed in a small slough.
 - Hawkins Island canoe crossing – this is a long established cross island route. Opening up this route would provide more options, and a relatively safe short loop out of Cordova. Different views were expressed regarding the physical viability of this portage – some said it was a great idea but would require a lot of work to develop and maintain, others said it was viable today on the right tide.

Other Marine Trails – Many attendees commented that they would like more information about the success or challenges of existing Marine Trails in other parts of the country. Marine trails in other places have been developed with the goals of guiding growth and fostering locally-beneficial economic development (e.g. lodging, guide-services, restaurants, shops). Meeting participants would like to know more details about actual results. Specific suggestions included:

- Look to SE marine trail as example of how this approach might be working
- SE trail – Admiralty Island crossing trail – what are the numbers? How are things maintained? Concern with sustaining trail if it happens.
- What have communities experienced along BC Marine Trail and Maine trail?
- Would be good to see all the potential upsides and downsides – changes in use levels, local economic benefits, construction and operation costs, schedule, liabilities

Development Process – Meeting participants wanted to better understand the past steps and proposed next steps: how the trail would be developed; what on-land developments might be part of the trail, by whom, on what land, etc.?

- Jack Blackwell is State of AK contact (*answer: “trail” is largely a line on a map. The State of Alaska, Dept of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation is interested in on-land improvements associated within Marine Parks Option include hardening campsites, public use cabins, or day use*

areas. Such improvements would happen depending on available funding. Division of Parks is seeking funding for these types of projects. If funding is available, the Division would work directly with local communities to plan any on-land improvements. The USFS also potentially make improvements on its property, but currently has very limited funding. Any such planned improvements would be required to go through a similar community review process).

- How does process fit in with land owners? – right now, hard to tell, any proposal would be subject to formal review
- Be sensitive about locations of private land. Current maps show some but not all such lands.

Meeting Announcements – while many people attending the meeting said the event was well publicized, several people said more should have been done to get the word out. Options include:

- Earlier notice – by email, radio, local papers, harbors
- Specifically talk to Joy L. at the paper
- Bulk mailing announcements to every community
- Post on the Chamber's Community Calendar
- KCHU – coffee break
- Announce at City council and Chamber meetings
- Include Fairbanks PWS user groups

Project Process – a number of questions were raised about the project process, with the general theme that to be successful the process needs to be more user-driven. Opportunity for greater collaboration, need to work with specific user groups

- Aim to make this a community project - bring all decision makers together around sustainable development and conservation; make dialogue inclusive
- Talk with CDFU, PWS keeper, Red Zone, etc.
- Involve fishermen (“conservation is the most important thing we can do, as fishermen”)
- Rural communities need to be heard because PWS is State's playground
- It would be very helpful if there was greater collaboration between commercial fishing and environmental organizations. These entities ultimately have many common interests, but tend to not work together. One example of collaboration: opposition to proposed lease sale 79. How can we create a stronger process? – make allies so we have a larger, united voice

(Response: the main sponsors of this project are the National Wildlife Federation and the State of Alaska, Dept of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation. Additional partners, as outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding, are Chugach National Forest, the National Park Service, and PWSEDD. A project steering committee (see attached list of members) was established in early 2008 and meets periodically.)

Miscellany, Next Steps + Wrap Up

- Pressures for growth and change are real. Issue is how to best respond to these pressures.
- Need to develop stronger collaboration among diverse PWS groups, e.g. commercial fishing and environmental groups. Cooperative thing between two groups is critical. Don't want to come together only when there's a catastrophe (liabilities).
- More work is needed with Cordova to understand local concerns and to shape the project to respond to these concerns.

PWS Marine Trail Project Steering Committee

Tony Turrini	National Wildlife Federation
Jack Blackwell	Alaska State Parks
Heather Rice	National Park Service; Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program
Deborah Daisy	Chenega Corp.
Angeline Sawden	Chugach Alaska Corp.
John Johnson	Chugach Alaska Corp.
Kristin Smith	Copper River Watershed Project
Martin Moe	Cordova Chamber of Commerce
Harold Blehmh	Valdez
Dean Rand	Whittier
Ricky Kompkoff	Tatitlek
J. Wright	Tatitlek
T. Valsoff	Tatitlek
Sue Cogswell	PWS Economic Development District
Aaron Poe	USFS Chugach National Forest
Sara Boario	USFS Chugach National Forest
Heather Gott	USFS Chugach National Forest
Ann Mayo-Kiely	AK Geographic
Rebecca Talbott	Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council
Vince Kelly	Valdez State Parks Citizen Advisory Board
Paul Twardock	APU