

Prince William Sound Marine Trail Community Meeting – Whittier

Wednesday, May 27, 2009
Meeting Notes

5 people attended the workshop held at the City Council Chambers in Whittier. The workshop was facilitated by Tanya Iden of Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC, as part of the Prince William Sound Marine Trail Project.

Meeting Attendees: Mark Earnest (Whittier City Manager), Dean Rand, Matt Abbey (Whittier City Administrator), Peter Denmark, Diane Olthuis

Project Team Members: Tanya Iden (Agnew::Beck), Heather Gott (USFS), Lisa Oakley (Alaska Geographic), Tony Turrini (NWF)

The following notes describe the project. No formal presentation was given at the meeting, rather an informal conversation occurred.

Topic:

Introduction, Background + Overview – Why this 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

Group Discussion

The Meeting attendees offered feedback on the Marine Trail concept in general, small scale tourism in the Sound, management of the Sound, and discussed specific locations to direct users and improvements that would be required for a Marine Trail in PWS.

Marine Trail Concept

- Safety is a big concern. Must couple the Marine Trail effort with adequate safety information
There is a need for safety and preparedness education to accompany the project:
 - Develop “local hazards fact sheet”
 - Kayakers MUST have good sense to sit it out. Critical to successful kayaking is a strong instinct for “self-preservation” and an awareness of all the variables in the Sound.
 - Share information about the Kayaking industry standards for safety
- A benefit of the Marine Trail is that it could disperse use throughout the Sound. There are definitely areas experiencing overuse.

Tourism in PWS

- Kayak guides make 80% of their revenue for the year in approximately 60 days.
- It would be great if tourist season could be extended in some way.
- Little known that May is a great month for Kayaking in the Sound (beat the tourists, bugs, and weather.)

Management of PWS

- Inconsistency amongst management agencies. State charges less for permits than USFS.
- Some grumbling that USFS historically has not assisted with rescue efforts in the Sound.

Specific Trail Routes, Issues to be mindful of and Infrastructure Improvements

- “Overuse is manifest in Blackstone Bay and Harriman Fiord, they are above capacity”
- Ferry to Chenega with a paddle back to Whittier would be super.
- Spurr trails are a good idea.
- Link water routes to historic walking trails
- Camping: provide information about campsites, there is definitely a difference in the “campability” of the sites.
- Launching a Kayak in Whittier is an issue and requires a lot of interface with motor boats.
- The state marine parks nearby Whittier are more “stopping points” but not destinations. Not sure they are ideal locations for improvements.
- Valdez Arm and Passage canal have very similar volatile wind conditions. Need to be very thoughtful about directing people through these areas.
- College Fiord and Kings Bay do not have good places to stop, take shelter – would not direct people to these areas in their kayak.
- Work with the Alaska Marine Highway to develop ferry out/kayak back (and *vice versa*) routes.
- Tatitlek to Valdez or Cordova would be good routes but a 110 mile crossing from Valdez to Whittier is a major challenge,
- Culcross passage and Esther passage are great “novice” kayak trips.
- 40 mile circumnavigation of Perry Island is a great trip. This would be a good location for a cabin/improvement.

Note: Discussion took place while reviewing a map of the Sound. Notes were also made on the map.

Next Steps + Wrap Up

- More work is needed with Whittier and other user groups 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