

France Road Asset Management Plan

Final Draft

August 2007



Completed for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough
by Agnew::Beck Consulting, LLC

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INTRODUCTION

The Matanuska Susitna Borough (MSB) in cooperation with the City of Palmer is developing an asset management plan for 156 acres of Borough land south of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, on North France Road, along the eastern border of the Crevasse Moraine trail system.

The broad motivation for this plan is the continued rapid growth in the core area of the Borough and related demands for new land for recreation, residential and other uses. An additional, specific reason for the France Road 156 plan is the planned incremental expansion of the adjoining MOA Central Landfill. The Crevasse Moraine trail system is located on this landfill property. The trails were built under a 1989 agreement between several borough departments. The agreement makes clear that landfill-related activities have precedence over other uses, but allows trails on an interim basis. The expansion of the landfill, which will occur gradually over the next 50 years, will result in at least portions of the existing trail system being lost, but also in the eventual reclamation of the site for trails and other recreation uses.¹

This project provides the chance to determine the best future use of the France Road parcel, in light of general growth trends, as well as the changes on the landfill/Crevasse Moraine parcel.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to establish policies to manage this land for the benefit of the surrounding community, based on a consideration of future public and private needs and the suitability of this parcel to meet those needs.

The policies for this parcel will be shaped by anticipated land uses and development trends on the parcel itself as well as immediately surrounding lands and uses in the broader Palmer-Wasilla area.



View over the site, looking north

Scope

This Asset Management Plan will recommend policies for the MSB's 155.69 acres on North France Road. It is also likely to propose policies for integrated management with adjoining public lands, especially those in the Crevasse Moraine trail area.

This plan will include a concept-level site plan showing approximate locations of future uses. Certain types of future development may require master planning or detailed site planning, subsequent to adoption of this general land use plan.

¹ The proposed landfill plan, "MSB Future Cell Sequencing Plan, Onsite Leachate Treatment Evaluation, and Closure Cost Evaluation," which has not yet been approved by the MSB calls for the closure of the existing Crevasse Moraine trailhead by 2019 and the gradual closure of 40 percent of the existing trails (in miles) by 2057. The remainder of the trails will remain intact, with minor realignment possibly required for some trails. Filled landfill cells may also become available for recreation and trail usage over this time period.

The France Road 156 Asset Management Plan will provide:

- Recommendations for future use;
- Recommendations for future land ownership and land use classification;
- Concept-level site plan;
- Management guidelines; and
- Implementation steps.

Planning process

The Matanuska Susitna Borough and the City of Palmer worked together to prepare this plan. The draft plan was prepared by Agnew::Beck Consulting. Funding for the project was provided by the Matanuska Susitna Borough.

Planning process timeline

- Preliminary scoping: agency contacts, stakeholder identification, informal interviews. (done)
- Resource information analysis: compilation of data on the physical characteristics, surrounding land ownership and uses, development trends, and changing demands for public services and facilities. (done)
- Issues and options scoping meeting: a public work session held on May 10 in Palmer. (done)
- Alternatives analysis: alternatives will be discussed at a work session with City and Borough decision makers.
- Public review of draft plan: a public work session in Palmer. (done)
- Public review of revised plan: the draft will be revised or refined in response to public and agency comments and presented for public hearing to the appropriate Borough and City advisory boards, commissions and Borough and City Council Assemblies. (fall '07)
- *Note:* the Matanuska Susitna Borough is now working, in a separate process, to prepare and approve plans for the landfill, mentioned above, west of the project area. For more information on the landfill planning process, contact the Mat-Su Borough Public Works Department.



View of areas immediately east of the site, looking south

Map I. Location map and study area.

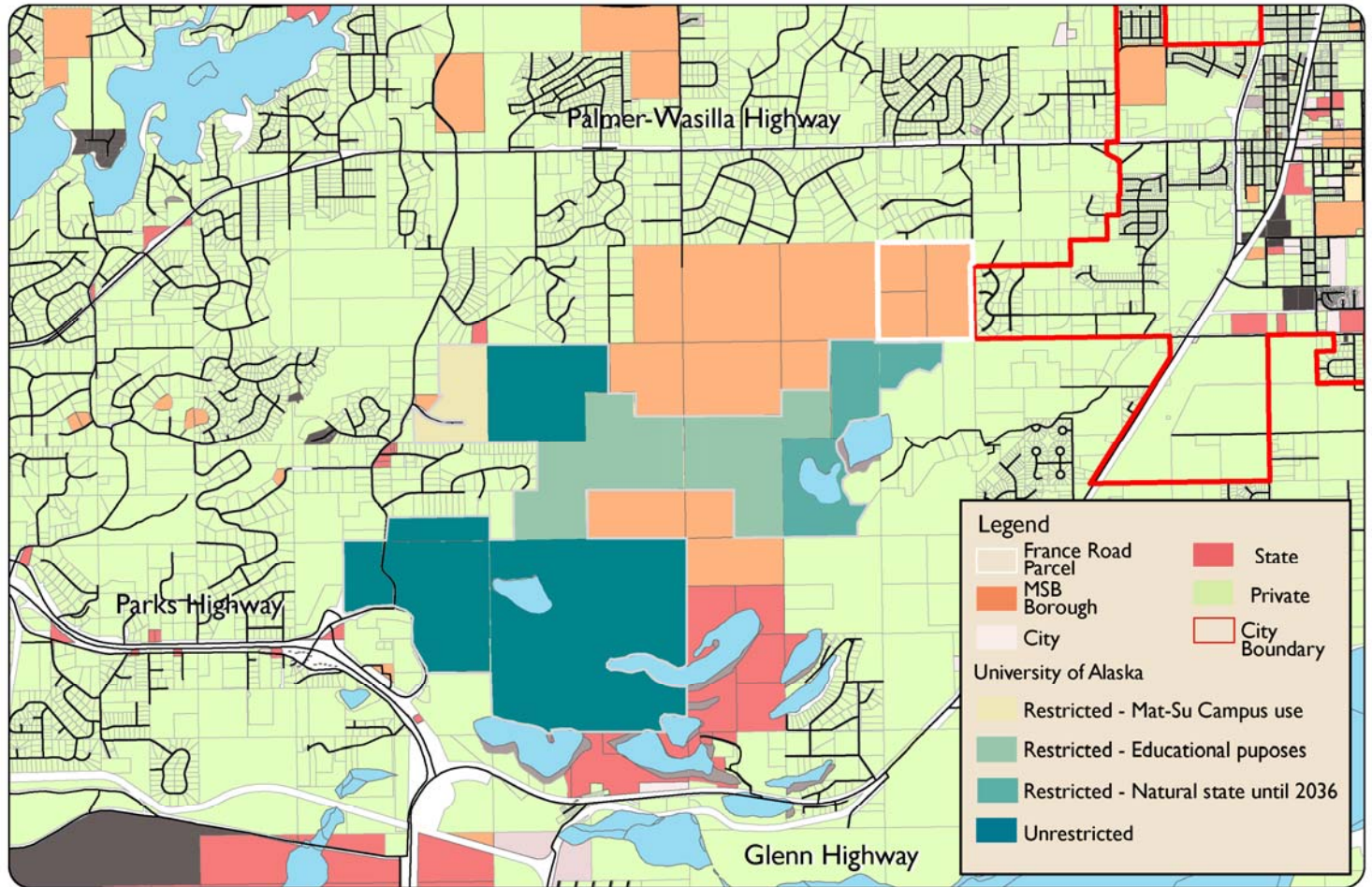


France Road 156 Asset Management Plan
 Matanuska-Susitna Borough
 Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1983
 July 26, 2007



Information from MSB and CH2MHILL.

Map 2. Surrounding land ownership

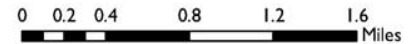


France Road 156 - Regional Land Ownership

Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1927
June 14, 2007



Map from Agnew::Beck Consulting.
All data courtesy of MSB.



■ PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SITE

Topography and slopes

The terrain of the France Road 156 was shaped by relatively recent glacial action. The topography is complex and undulating, with moraine ridges running generally in a northeast-southwest direction. The elevation in the parcel varies between 180 feet above sea level to approximately 285 feet above sea level. Slopes are generally steep with grades of around 20 percent. There are several plateau areas of relatively high, level terrain in the south-west corner of the parcel. The northwest corner has several deep hollows entirely enclosed by steep ridges. For those familiar with the dramatic ups and downs of the Crevasse Moraine area, this area has very similar terrain. Map 3 - Topography (page 7) gives more detail.

Soils

The soils on the France Road 156, as well as on Crevasse Moraine to the west, are Knik Silt Loam. These soils are largely coarse gravel and sandy soils (over 85 percent) and appear to be well-drained but highly erosive. The excavation of gravel on neighboring tracts indicates gravel depths exceeding 20 feet.

Streams and wetlands

There are no mapped wetlands or streams on the tract. The tract has not been field-inspected in the wettest seasons: there is potential for meltwater to collect on low-lying terrain while the ground is frozen in spring. On similar terrain at the Crevasse Moraine trail system, meltwater ponds, one- to two-feet deep, collect in swales in April, and may persist for several weeks until the ground beneath them thaws and allows drainage. The upland vegetation in these low spots indicates there is not persistent ponding.

Vegetation

The tract has a semi-canopied mixed forest, typical of the well-drained terrain in the Mat-Su Valley. The forest appears to be primary growth, in a successional stage toward a more mature, or climax, spruce forest which will have a mostly-closed canopy with little understory. This succession has been slowed by mortality of large spruce from spruce bark beetles.

Birch is the predominant tree species, with 40 percent or less of white spruce. Both species are estimated to be 50- to 60-feet in height, with lower trunk diameters of 12 inches or less. The undergrowth is typically spindly shrubs under 4 –feet high, such as Sitka rose and high-bush cranberry. The undergrowth does not obscure visibility or prevent human passage; however walking through the area is challenging due to fallen trees, primarily beetle-killed spruce, as well as a range of shrubs.

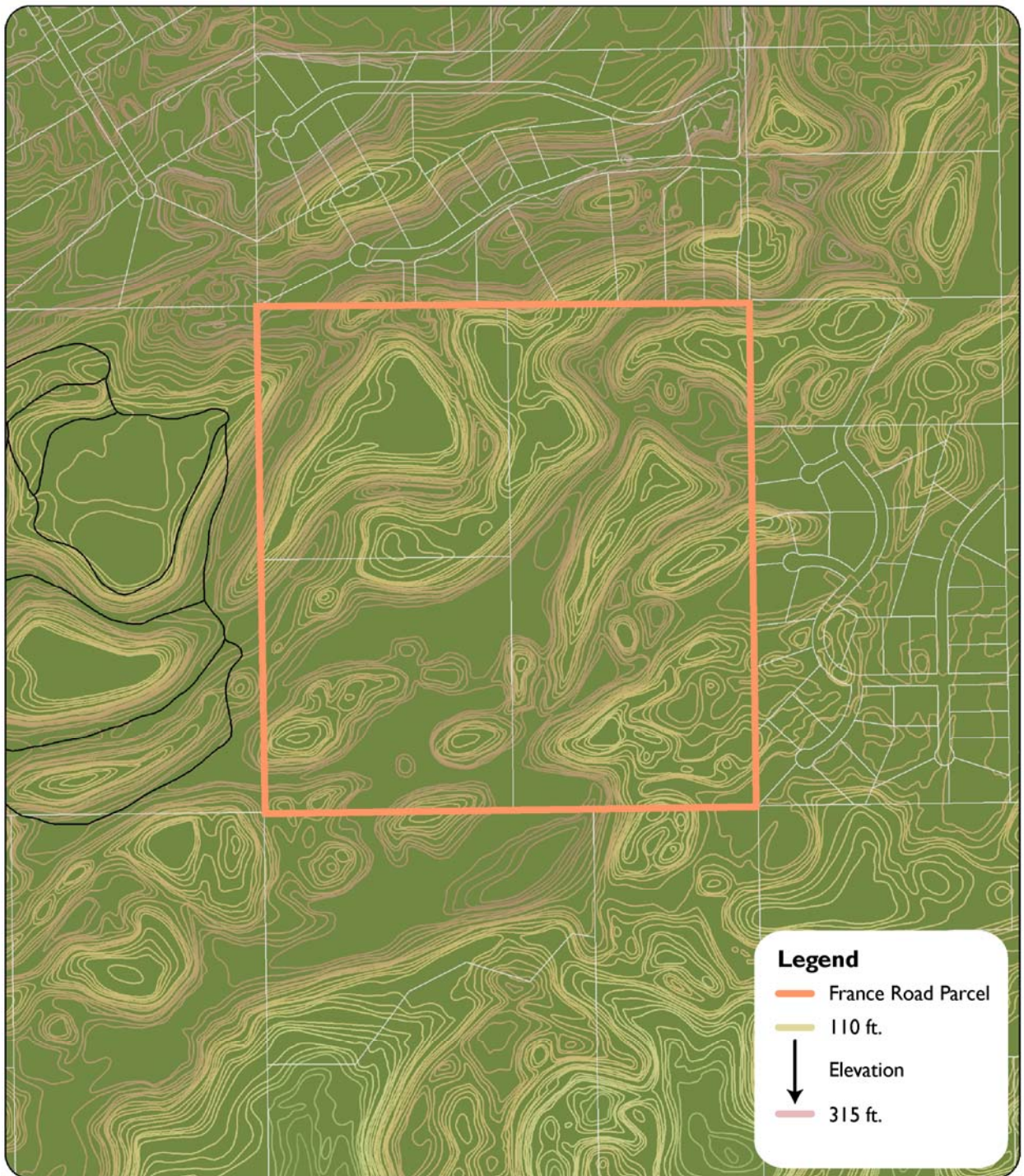
Wildlife habitat

According to the regional Department of Fish and Game habitat biologist, this parcel and adjoining Crevasse Moraine have habitat value for moose; slightly more so in fall-winter-early spring when moose seek lower-elevation terrain such as this. Other large species pass through this area.

This type of semi-open forest is likely home range to a variety of small fauna typical of a semi-open forest: red squirrels, snowshoe hares, and resident and migratory birds such as chickadees, wrens, and vireos.

There are no known areas of high wildlife concentration or outstanding high habitat value on this tract. The tract does not appear to be over-browsed, which would indicate reduced habitat value to browsing species, because the nutrition is high in regeneration/new growth of leaves and shrubs.

Map 3. Topography

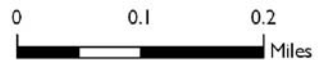


France Road 156 - Development Reference

Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1927

May 2, 2007

Map courtesy of Agnew::Beck, based on data from MSB.



FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PLAN

Current Land Uses and Infrastructure on the France Road parcel

Access

The only developed access is via North France Road, to the northeast corner of the parcel. North France Road is a two-lane road that extends ½ mile south from the Palmer-Wasilla Highway. The road serves the Valley Pathway School as well as a few private residences. North France Road is paved to the subdivision entrance, and gravel from there south to the school. The gravel section of the road is scheduled to be paved in 2007.

MSB has noted the need to pave North France Road and improve the intersection of North France Road and the Palmer-Wasilla Highway, with turn pockets, acceleration lanes, and lighting (MSB Resolution 05-017). As discussed further later in this report, there may be a need to add a bike lane or other pedestrian facilities along the edge of this road.

Potential access

There are two additional access easements on the north boundary: a section line extending from the highway to the northwest corner of the parcel; and a platted easement on Hilda Rose Circle that has a stub between two residential lots. This stub accesses a ridge top that extends into the France Ridge parcel.

From the west, there is potential for a road extension across the northern edge of Borough land from North Loma Prieta Drive, to the northwest part of the France Road parcel.

There are no platted access easements from the south or east, but undeveloped residential lots and a large tract to the south offer a possibility of future road connections. In addition, there is also potential for a narrow public access easement from the end of Kangaroo Ct. in Palmer West subdivision to allow pedestrian and bicycle access from the east, Helen Drive area (see Map 4, small arrow on eastern side of property).



France Road, looking south

Recreational use

The France Road 156-acre parcel is largely undeveloped. The lack of trail access has meant that informal recreation is minimal to non-existent. There is limited casual hiking and horse riding on game trails.

The regional ADF&G biologist notes that the land is open to hunting, and is a probable area of ruffed grouse and snowshoe hare habitat. There is no specific record of hunting.

City of Palmer Lease

In 1971, the City of Palmer obtained a 55-year lease to the France Road acreage from the then-owner, the State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The parcel was later transferred to the Matanuska Susitna Borough. The lease file shows that the City originally had intentions for a landfill on this site; but the Borough's Central Landfill has served the City's needs; and the City of Palmer has not used the acreage for other purposes. The lease runs until March 9, 2026.

The City of Palmer and Matanuska Susitna Borough have worked together to prepare this plan regarding preferred uses of the site. As is outlined in the remainder of this plan, through this planning process public recreational uses were established to be the primary and highest and best use of this area. Both the City and the Borough have agreed this parcel should play a very important role in meeting regional recreation needs, including a regional trail system. Because of this conclusion, the Borough and the City have agreed to work toward the transfer the lease to the Borough.² The implementation section of this plan presents the specifics; the general approach will be for the Borough to address the City of Palmer's interest in the property and compensate the City for this interest, most likely through a land exchange.

School

In 2005, Valley Pathways High School obtained a use agreement for 20 acres at the northwest corner of France Road (MSB Assembly resolution serial number 05-017). The high school had 212 students in grades 9-12 in the 2006-2007 school year. The school provides an alternative, small-scale setting. In addition to core academic courses, Valley Pathways offers courses in employment readiness and social/emotional health. The Valley Pathways school facilities currently consist of 10 relocatable buildings and an asphalt parking lot occupying less than five acres. According to the principal, the rugged terrain of the remaining acreage hinders school use, but if there were trails or other access, the MSB land offers excellent opportunities for staff and students to incorporate outdoor learning and recreation into the curriculum of the high school.

Valley Pathways High School is working actively to fund permanent buildings on this site. The school enrollment will be targeted to remain at roughly its current size, with capacity for 250 students. The School has submitted Capital Improvement Program (CIP) requests for facilities planning to the Borough and State.

Utilities and utility easements

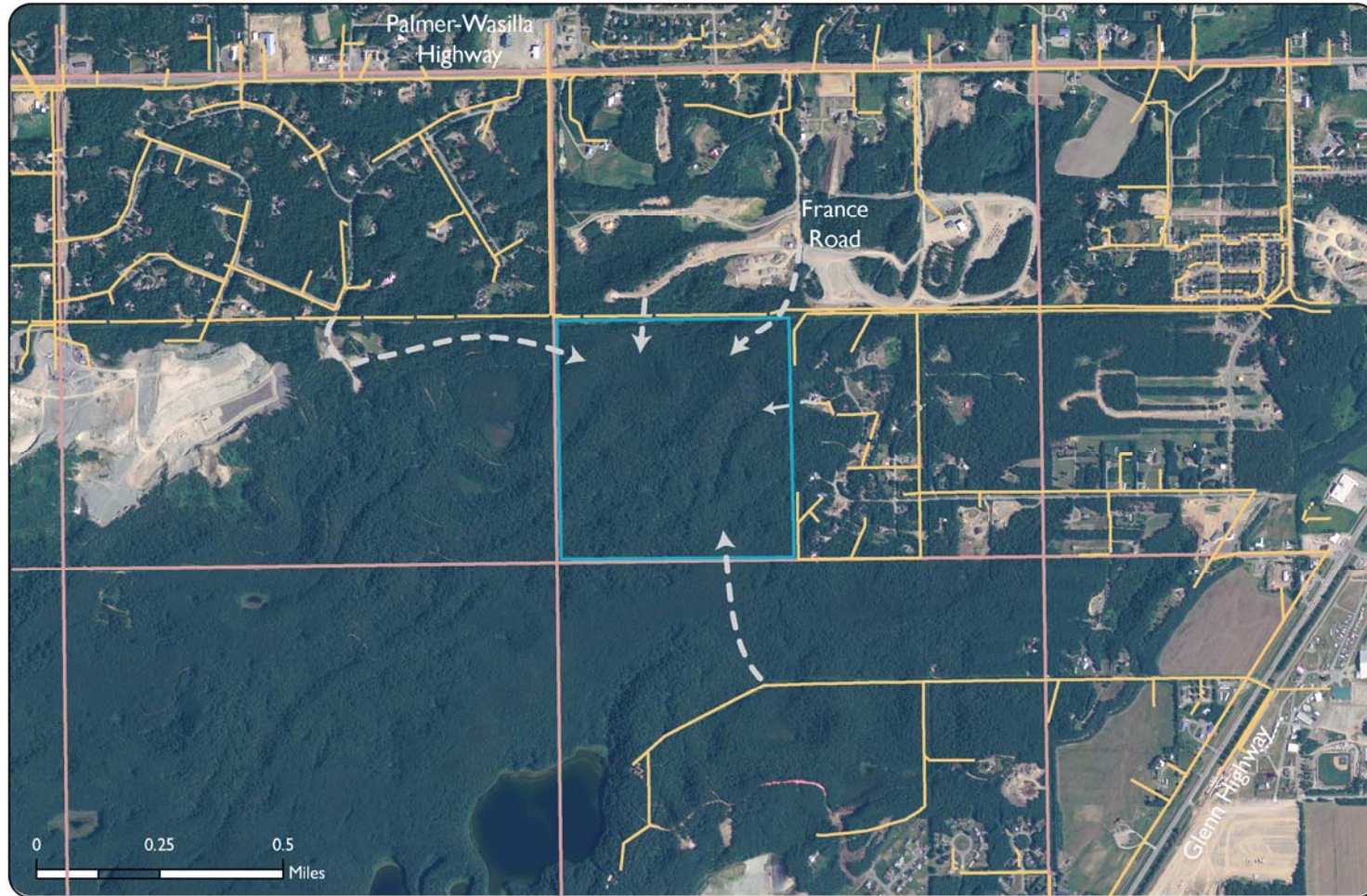
An electrical transmission line runs along the north boundary of the France Road tract. Another electrical distribution line follows the parcel's lower east boundary, serving an adjoining subdivision.

The closest water and sewer lines are in a subdivision about ¼ mile southeast of the France Road parcel. The City of Palmer recently prepared a long-range plan to extend water and sewer to the Southwest Palmer Service area, and eventually to the entire service area bounded by the Glenn and Parks Highway, Trunk Road and Palmer-Wasilla Highway. However, the terrain makes this particular parcel expensive to serve with sewer and water line extensions. Near term development is likely to require onsite well and septic systems. Development must consider the community's priority of protecting onsite well-water resources from depletion or contamination.

ENSTAR, the natural gas company, has not identified transmission pipeline corridors to serve new customers in the core area between Palmer and Wasilla.

² The parcel currently lies outside of the current City of Palmer boundaries.

Map 4. Access and Utilities.



France Road 156 Asset Management Plan
Matanuska-Susitna Borough

AGNEW BECK
 Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1927
 Map courtesy of Agnew::Beck, based on data from MSB.



- France Road Parcel
- Power Line easements
- Sections
- - - Potential Access Points

May 2, 2007

Adjoining land uses & infrastructure

Residential

There are partially-built large-lot residential subdivisions to the north and east. The homes are typically built atop the ridges with commanding views. However, the land immediately to the north of the France Road parcel has been excavated, leaving level, low-lying terrain and re-contoured slopes. The easterly adjoining neighborhoods lies within the City of Palmer and is zoned large-lot residential.



Crevasse Moraine Trail System

The France Road parcel is bordered on the west by the Borough-owned Crevasse Moraine trail system with approximately 6.7 miles (10.8 kilometers) of trails built on a network glacier-formed ridges and depressions.

These trails attract a wide range of non-motorized users, including high school ski teams, mountain bikers, equestrians, walkers and hikers. The local support for these trails is evidenced by numerous groups who use and help to maintain the trails, including the non-profit Crevasse Moraine Trails Association. The Arctic Orienteering Club has invested several thousand dollars to produce a fine-resolution map of the topography. According to several local trail designers, the steep terrain on the France Road site will require field investigation to identify future trail connections from Crevasse Moraine trails into the France Road area as there are no obvious connections along or between ridges. The Crevasse Moraine trails are on acreage designated by the MSB for Reserved Use – Public Facilities/Landfill. The MSB has authorized the trails as a secondary use compatible with the landfill.



Crevasse Moraine Trailhead

The Crevasse Moraine trailhead is on Loma Prieta Drive on the north-central boundary of the Crevasse Moraine parcel. The current parking area has an area of roughly 38,000 square feet and a capacity for roughly 60 vehicles. The trailhead has a brick restroom building with outhouse-style toilets and a second, small building intended as a warming hut, but never used. There is also a sledding hill. Although popular for modest local events, the parking and trailhead is not adequate for large events such as high school ski races. The Crevasse Moraine Trails Association has received bed tax money to install a pavilion (roofed picnic-type shelter) in 2007, and also for trail lighting for about 1 mile of trail on the Bottom Swamp Loop.

The Crevasse Moraine trails occupy land ultimately intended for expansion of the Borough landfill (see paragraphs below). The new trailhead improvements will be installed in a manner that allows relocation when the landfill expands to the trailhead (estimated to occur by 2014).

MSB Central Land Fill

The entrance to the MSB Central Landfill is located approximately 1 mile due west of the France Road parcel. The total MSB acreage contiguous with the landfill is 640 acres. About 20 acres are actively used at any one time. The public entrance & drop-off for the landfill will remain at its current location on N. 49th State Street even as the fill areas are extended east. More information about the land fill is presented on the following pages.

Uses on other MSB lands

There are approximately 200 acres of isolated, undeveloped MSB lands south of the landfill property. They are largely surrounded by University lands, and the only access is by trails across University land. They are classified as Public Recreation.

University lands

There are approximately 1,900 acres of land owned by the University of Alaska extending from the southern boundary of the France Road parcel south and west to Kepler-Bradley State Recreation area (see Map 2, page 4). These lands are largely undeveloped. Current uses include the Mat-Su campus of the University of Alaska, and the University agricultural and experimental farm.

Several roads and trails cross through these private lands, radiating from Crevasse Moraine to Baird Lake and to the Kepler-Bradley State Recreation Area trail system approximately 2 miles to the southeast. The trails crossing University land do not have permanent easements; they are traditional trails but future use is will be determined by the University.

The University and the Mat-Su Borough have discussed a process to reserve a continuous public route from the Crevasse Moraine trails to Kepler -Bradley SRA, to generally follow the route of the Long Lake Connector. There are two connecting trails between the two areas. The Long Lake trail (see Map 1, page 5) passes through both Borough and University lands and is the most commonly used access between Kepler-Bradley SRA and the Crevasse Moraine trails. The other connector is the Old Well Monitor Road. This route is only rarely used by official vehicles for MSB well monitoring near the landfill; otherwise, use is recreational hiking, biking and skiing. The road was laid out with some thought of recreational value but may not be the best permanent trail alignment and passes through more University-owned lands than the Long Lake trail. The University and the Borough have discussed options to reserve a trail connection connecting Kepler Bradley and the Crevasse Moraine/France Road area, including considering a possible land trade. The general conclusion is that the University can support a connection *if* the route can be flexible and perhaps be changed in the future in response to University land needs.

Kepler-Bradley State Recreation Area

Kepler-Bradley SRA is a popular regional recreation destination located just north of the Glenn Highway, southwest of Palmer. The State Recreation Area encompasses 345 acres, including several lakes, and is connected by trails to the Crevasse Moraine area. Fishing, camping and trail use are the dominant activities. The area is open year round, but access into the parking lot is only available during the non-winter months. A campground at the Matanuska Lake entrance is operated seasonally by a concessionaire, with 6-10 camping spots. Approximately 6 parking

spaces are available in the off-season, outside the gated entrance to Matanuska Lake. There are secondary access points with toilets and small parking lots off of residential roads.

Bicyclists and skiers enjoy long-distance outings that include touring from Kepler-Bradley SRA to Crevasse Moraine trails. While still offering some challenging hills, overall the area is somewhat flatter than the steeper ridges in the Crevasse Moraine area.

Existing plans and regulations

This is the first planning effort for the France Road parcel since the Borough acquired title from the State Department of Natural Resources in April 2005. The MSB has classified these lands for Reserved Use – Public Facilities. There are City and Borough plans for the surrounding areas, and these give some direction to the future management of this parcel:

- Matanuska-Susitna Borough Central Landfill Sequencing Plan (internal review draft - 2007)
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2001)
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreational Trails Plan (2000)
- Matanuska-Susitna Borough revised Core Area Comprehensive Plan (last updated 1997; Planning Commission review draft June 2007)
- City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan (2006)
- City of Palmer Annexation Alternatives Analysis (Spring 2007)

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Central Landfill Plan

According to the Central Landfill Sequencing Plan (prepared in 2006 and currently undergoing revisions), landfill activity will expand eastward into the Crevasse Moraine trail area, but not into the France Road parcel. Approximately 40 percent of the existing Crevasse Moraine Trail System will be overtaken by the planned expansion of the Central Landfill, with the trailhead and main loops being displaced in approximately 2014-2016. As specific areas of the landfill are filled to capacity, the landfill operator will cap, contour and restore those areas for compatible uses, such as open space or playfields. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough Central Landfill Plan, created in 2006, outlines the expansion of the current landfill to accommodate the growth in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. The expansion will be done through “cells”, each having a lifespan of approximately five years, moving east and displacing approximately half of the current Crevasse Moraine trail system. The Landfill Plan outlines alternatives for the trail system to maximize the accessible trail area. The area to the east of Crevasse Moraine Trail System (France Road area) is noted as being reserved for trail expansion.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreational Trails Plan

The Mat-Su Recreation and Trails Plan, adopted March 2000, identifies a connecting trail between the two established trail systems as “a regionally significant primitive trail.” See discussion above and in the implementation section regarding options to reserve such a trail.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2001)

The MSB Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan establishes categories of parks borough-wide, based on the acreage, the facilities or uses available at the park, and the proximity of the users, whether primarily from the nearby neighborhoods, the larger community, or the region.

The Park, Recreation and Open Space plan did not provide specific management recommendations for the France Road and Crevasse Moraine parcels; rather it highlighted the high public value of retaining core area open space, comprised of Borough, University, and State Parks lands, for public recreation uses. The Crevasse Moraine trail system (and the adjoining France Road acreage) fall into the category of regional park: 100-200 acres, serving users from the region, and offering well-developed facilities.

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan makes the following findings relevant to the France Road and Crevasse Moraine parcels:

- When looking at the geographic distribution of regional parkland, the “central area” [of the Borough] where the largest population lives, lacks a sufficient amount of park land to meet current or future needs. In addition, neighborhood and the community/athletic park lands, which are the foundation of the local park system, fail to meet current levels of demand. This shortage is projected to grow over the next twenty years as the population increases and existing undeveloped lands are lost to residential and commercial expansion. (page vi)
- Community Parks - The Borough, in conjunction with the cities of Palmer and Wasilla, will need to identify at least three additional community/athletic park sites in the immediate future to meet growth in the central region. *Note:* since the adoption of the Park plan, Palmer and Wasilla have both adopted park powers that previously rested with the Borough; consequently the primary responsibility for community parks has now shifted to these cities.
- Regional Parks - The Borough should focus development on regional parks close to the central region that meet special recreational needs that are not now being provided for within the State Parks system. This should include the development of large special use areas for dog mushing, skiing, equestrian, snow machines, ATV and other activities. Any large tract land sales or developments offered by the Borough should have requirements for regionals parks within the development requirements. “Immediate priority areas include: the Crevasse Moraine/Kepler Bradley Area.” The borough should place priority on lands that are critically located to serve existing or future park needs and/or that have valuable natural features and conservation values.

Specific Park Plan Goals relevant to the Crevasse Moraine and France Road areas:

- Goal Number 2: To provide quality recreation as close to home as possible, that meet locally defined needs as established through community involvement.

- Action 4.1.2. Set aside or reserve public lands that are suitable for public facilities, schools, parks and corridors and adopt as part of an open space system.
- Objective 4.2 Establish a network of public recreational corridors and open spaces along existing natural corridors, both in the central area and Borough-wide.
- Objective 5.1 Combine park, recreation and community facilities with school sites in order to best serve residents of the area and reduce duplication of services.
- Action 7.1 Establish connections between parks, especially regional and community/athletic parks, along an open space corridor system.
- Action 8.4.2 Establish a regional park around the existing Crevasse Moraine Trail system with links to the university and Kepler Bradley State [Recreation Area] utilizing State lands where appropriate. Work to resolve issues related to expansion of the borough landfill.

Mat-Su Borough Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update (Planning Commission review draft June 2007)

This draft Comprehensive Plan notes a deficiency, both current and future, in the amount of parks, open space and public recreation facilities in the “Core Area” between Palmer and Wasilla. It notes that “the largest and most popular open space in the Core Area” consists of the contiguous state, Borough and University parcels described in the above inventory of adjoining land uses. Based on standards established in the Borough Parks plan, the Core Area has a deficit of about 1,450 acres of parks and open space for its present population and needs an additional 1,825 acres for additional residents by 2025.

The Core Area Comp Plan update includes a Community Survey (2006) showing 61.5 percent public support for the statement “Over the next 10 years, the Borough will need to develop/preserve more park land.”³

Goal 3 of the Core Area Comp Plan is titled: “Parks and Open Space: Establish a permanent system of natural open space, parklands, greenways, corridors, and habitats for the enjoyment of present and future residents.”

City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan and Annexation Analysis The City of Palmer Comprehensive Plan (2005) notes the importance of the Kepler Bradley and Crevasse Moraine Parks. The plan did not include any specific recommendations for use of land outside city boundaries. The plan does however suggest the importance of trail connections into and through France Road area. An extract from the plan is presented below:

(Provide for) “trail connections and an associated trailhead linking the Palmer-Wasilla Highway area and downtown Palmer with the trail system in the Kepler Bradley Lakes and Crevasse Moraine area. Trail connections into this large open space park will add greatly to the value of remaining city trails, and provide an important amenity to the community. One possible route is along North France Road beginning at a grade-separated crossing of the Palmer-Wasilla Highway and extending past the alternative school into the Crevasse-Moraine trail system” (from the transportation chapter).

³ Of the remainder, 24.3 percent disagreed with the statement and 14.2 percent had no opinion.

During the spring of 2007, the City of Palmer evaluated the option to annex areas surrounding the city, including this parcel. The public generally expressed opposition to this proposal, and after several public meetings, the City Council decided not to proceed. The end of this round of annexation does not close the local discussion on how to serve and manage growth outside the city boundaries, however. This land has potential to contribute to the adopted goals of Palmer's Comprehensive Plan, whether within or outside of the City of Palmer boundaries.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Long-Range Transportation Plan

The Borough's Long-Range Transportation Plan was adopted in June 2007. No road connections are shown through this parcel. The only proposal somewhat related to this parcel is the recommendation (in the LRTP and the Palmer Comp Plan) to relieve congestion at the Palmer Wasilla Highway and Glenn Highway intersection by extending and upgrading of Hemmer Road, east of North France Road, as a 2-lane minor arterial connecting the Glenn and PWH.

Development trends

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough has been the fastest growing region in the state. From the period 1990-2003 population growth in Alaska has been 5.9 percent but for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough that rate has been 24.8 percent.⁴ This growth has focused mainly in the Palmer-Wasilla area, specifically the suburban/rural area between the two cities (identified as the Core Area) which has grown at a rate faster than the Borough generally.

The city of Palmer, because of this population growth, has little area for future expansion within its current boundaries and is expanding out into undeveloped land outside of the city limits. This growth has placed development pressure on the available land. As of 2005, in the Core Area, 42 percent of total 53,559 acres was developed, almost all of that (94 percent) being privately owned. Of the remaining, vacant land, almost two-thirds of that is privately owned. As more of this private land is made available for private development, which given the current population trends could be fully subdivided and largely developed over the next two decades, attention will be needed to protect and expand this areas lack of parks and open space.⁵ The Core area has less than 300 acres of dedicated local parks and open space, compared to the much more densely populated Anchorage Bowl, with over 10,800 acres of parks and open spac

MSB Parks Department Maintenance Shop

The MSB wants to relocate its Parks Department Maintenance Shop away from a cramped site in a residential neighborhood in the center of Palmer, where some of the neighbors have raised objections to the equipment and operations. The MSB has identified the France Road parcel as a suitable location for the Maintenance Shop for several reasons:

⁴ Matanuska-Susitna Borough Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update: Public Review Draft. March, 2007.

⁵ Ibid.

- There is ample acreage at France Road for the MSB shop facilities, which would include a 5,000 square-foot shop for vehicle storage and repair, outdoor storage of equipment, a green house and plant nursery.
- There can be substantial buffers between the Shop and adjoining residences.
- The central location of the France Road site is efficient for dispatching MSB Parks staff and equipment to work at widespread MSB park sites. In addition, this site is well located to maintain trails on adjoining public lands.
- There is potential cost- and time-efficiency for locating the maintenance shop at France Road 156 because this MSB facility could be designed, built and operated cooperatively with the proposed high school and trailhead to reduce the cost of new infrastructure and to enhance security of all the sites.



Housing in the area north and east of the site

Environmental sensitivity and suitability analysis

This parcel is not known to have any critical or highly sensitive habitat; nor any unique natural, historic, or cultural features. However, the natural terrain does have educational value as a pronounced and dramatic example of glacial moraine geomorphology, little of which remains untouched in the Core Area.

Site constraints

There are several conditions which may pose constraints for some types of development:

- Access. Platted access currently exists only on the north boundary of the parcel. One of the access easements is a rural-type hilly road that passes through a residential subdivision. Whatever use may occur at the France Road parcel, residents expressed concerns regarding future traffic impacts on their privacy and road maintenance.
- Utilities. Cost and unknown schedule for extension of water and sewer lines. The hilly terrain creates high costs for extending public water and sewer lines into the parcel.
- Groundwater recharge and protection. The gravel soils suggest rapid penetration of surface water into the aquifer that supplies surrounding residential subdivisions. Surrounding homeowners have a strong interest in protecting both the quality and quantity of their well water source. Certain land uses might negatively impact the existing water supply: water intensive uses; uses that produce or use potential water contaminants; and uses with major alteration of the land surface that might affect drainage and absorption rates.
- Slope stability. Construction in this steep, gravelly terrain may involve a larger disturbance area than flatter terrain or more cohesive soils. It may require slope easements. Disturbance to the terrain can be minimized by shaping the development areas to the natural terrain; however, this reduces the developable area.
- Run-off and erosion. If development results in large areas of impermeable surface (from roads, parking areas, or buildings), surface run-off will be more intense and could result in erosion on steep slopes and ponding in the hollows.
- Residential density. The steep slopes and gravel soils are constraints for residential development. A subdivision that retains natural contours will result in low density development, with houses on the ridge tops for the best views, and with the steeply enclosed hollows or pits remaining virtually inaccessible open space.
- Trail users may not perceive the France Road parcel as an equal replacement for Crevasse Moraine trail system because the acreage is smaller and will support fewer trails. The Core Area needs larger, not smaller, acreage for a trail system that can handle more numerous and more diverse trail users. Therefore France Road should be seen not as a replacement for trails lost from the Crevasse Moraine system, but as a step toward designating a larger public open space and recreation area that is sorely needed at the heart of the fast-developing Core Area.

Site opportunities

- Location. The central location is easily and quickly accessible to several thousand Core Area residents from their homes as well as an increasing number of workplaces.
- Gravel soils. The apparently deep gravel formations offer potentially lucrative gravel sales. These soils also are relatively easy to re-contour to create flat development sites.
- Established non-motorized recreation area. There is general community recognition and acceptance that the Crevasse Moraine trails is one of few non-motorized recreation opportunities in or near the Core Area. This established history as a non-motorized area may avoid the common conflict between motorized and non-motorized uses.
- Trail connectivity. The France Road 156 parcel is connected to Kepler-Bradley SRA with an agreement for a recorded public easement across University-owned land. This same easement connects the France Road 156 parcel to 200 acres of Borough land designated for public recreation in the central part of the area.
- Potential benefits for high school. The Valley Pathways High School may benefit from opportunities on the France Road parcel for student recreation, outdoor studies, and community service projects.
- Potential benefits for University. The parcel is part of contiguous public open space and trail network that extends to both UAF's Matanuska Experimental Farm and UAA's Matanuska-Susitna College. If the open space is preserved, the universities may benefit from access to future recreation trails, and to opportunities for natural resource studies.
- Cost-efficient co-location of multiple public facilities. Co-locating the high school, a recreation trailhead, and the Borough Parks department Maintenance Facility would gain the maximum return on public investment in road upgrades, parking, and other infrastructure. It may also create efficiencies for maintenance and security.
- Aesthetic value of natural area. The France Road 156 parcel is largely undeveloped and undisturbed except for the high school site. Residents have expressed value in access to natural areas as a respite from modern stress and urbanity.
- Glacial geomorphology. The dramatic esker-and-kettle topography is a textbook example of glacial moraines, and therefore has natural history and educational value.

Community Input Process

This planning effort solicited input from community representatives and residents on the potential uses for this France Road parcel. The discussion of France Road invariably broadened into a discussion of public lands in the Core Area.

The methods for soliciting public input were:

- Review of previously adopted plans (section above).
- Scoping session with the Borough Parks, Recreation and Trails Advisory Committee at their regular meeting on April 23.

- Informal telephone interviews conducted by Agnew::Beck planners to identify issues, opportunities, and constraints. The interview list included users of the Crevasse Moraine trails area (ranging from trail designers to trail maintenance volunteers, diverse recreation users to Scout organizers); as well as representatives from state, Borough and city agencies (such as Valley Pathways School, the Borough landfill, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.)
- An initial public work session on May 10 to inform interested people about the planning process and discuss options for use of the site.
- A second work session to review the Draft Plan (Tentatively scheduled for September 12).
- Public outreach, including: a mailing to all property owners within 600 feet of the France Road parcel; E-mail notices to user groups; published announcements of the project in the Valley Frontiersman; and a project website.

Community Input Summary

The opinions of the public, as expressed during this plan and also in previous plans, have been very consistent. Community interests thus far have strongly favored public recreation-oriented uses for the site.

The public work session on May 10 was well-attended by a cross-section of neighborhood residents and recreation users. The strong consensus among those attending the meeting is summarized below:

- The France Road parcel should be retained in public ownership and should not be developed for gravel extraction, landfill, or residential use.
- The management plan for the France Road parcel should emphasize open space and trail-based recreation.
- The MSB should consider the France Road parcel not as a replacement for Crevasse Moraine trails but as step toward designating a larger public open space and recreation area that is sorely needed at the heart of the fast-developing Core Area.
- Don't consider this parcel as a discrete planning area. The plan should consider how this parcel fits with the Core Area land pattern and recommend broad actions regarding Core Area open space and recreation lands.

RECOMMENDED ALTERNATIVE

Alternatives Considered

A set of alternatives for the future use of the area were developed as a starting point for discussion at the May 10, 2007 Public Workshop. Summary descriptions of each alternative (in the form that was presented to the public) are shown in Appendix B; the three alternatives are listed below:

Alternative 1: Recreation – Emphasize trails and regional open space.

Alternative 2: Residential – Develop up to half of parcel (50 to 75 acres) as large-lot residential neighborhoods; remaining acreage for community-scale trails and open space.

Alternative 3: Extraction – Sell most of parcel for gravel extraction; consider option for near term use as landfill, and future use for mixed-density residential neighborhoods

The first alternative is the recommended approach for managing the France Road parcel. A discussion at the end of this section presents the rationale for this decision.

Recommended Alternative - Regional Park and Open Space

The recommended alternative is to designate the France Road area for parks, recreation, and open space, with specific inclusion of a high school site and the Borough Parks maintenance shop. This decision reflects the important role this site can play in establishing a regional open space and recreation area serving the large and growing population of the southern Matanuska Borough.

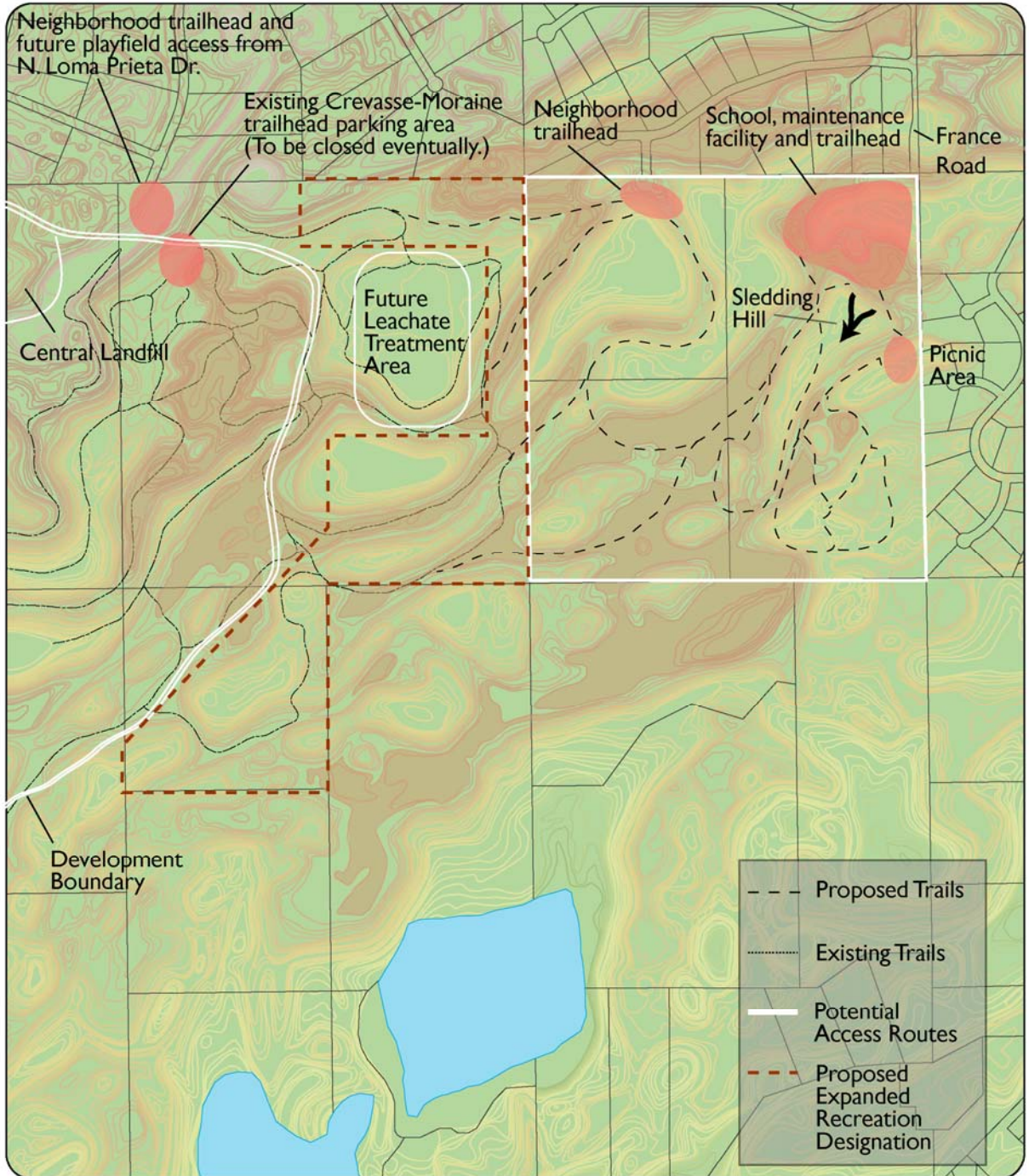
The management plan section that follows provides details about the future uses of the site; the remainder of this section summarizes the main planned uses.

- Retain the area in public ownership and manage predominately for recreation and open space values
- Provide access at one main trailhead (the school) as well as smaller future pedestrian and neighborhood connections from surrounding residential areas. In the long term consider an additional access point from the south.
- The trail system would be designed to support all-season use by a broad range of users, from cross country ski races to scenic, easy summer strolls.
- Use this site to partially offset and replace existing trails that may be lost at Crevasse Moraine as the landfill expands.
- In addition, as is called for in several adopted Borough plans, connect this area via trails to Kepler Bradley State Recreation Area.
- Structures and improvements for trails and recreation similar to that at Crevasse Moraine, for example, day use facilities (restrooms, parking, benches, warming hut, etc.)
- Other public facilities may be located here if they complement and contribute to public recreation and can be integrated into the natural setting.

- Trailhead⁶: Establish day use parking for 60-120 vehicles. Plan parking to take advantage of the chance to share at least some parking with the high school, but not be disruptive to high school operations.
- Add and designate additional borough land to the west of the France Road parcel to create a larger regional park. The MSB would adopt a primary co-designation of recreation for the portions of the Crevasse Moraine trail system not slated to be displaced by the landfill expansion. The MSB would adopt a secondary designation of recreation for the areas of the landfill that will be capped and landscaped after they are full; these areas could become recreation fields.
- High school – provide an area for the operation of a high school in the northeast corner of North France Road parcel. This location works well today, and provides convenient, efficient access by road and road upgrades and for possible future utility extensions. Acreage needs are likely to be 15 to 20 acres, depending on terrain limitations and potential co-use with other public facilities and uses. Specific structures and improvements for a 250-student high school are likely to include:
 - 28,000 square feet of interior space,
 - 560 parking spaces,
 - 2 playfields (soccer/football/track, baseball/softball),
 - France Road upgrades with separated trail from Palmer Wasilla Highway,
 - Connection to municipal water and sewer.
- Borough Parks Department Maintenance Facility – provide space for this facility, also in the northwest corner of the project site. The location should be somewhat screened from trailhead and school-related uses for aesthetics and noise. Acreage should be approximately 2 acres. Specific structures and improvements for this facility are likely to include:
 - 5,000-square-foot shop with drive-through vehicle service and storage, wood work and metal shop, small engine repair, as well as 3 office spaces, meeting/conference room, restroom and first aid station.
 - Covered vehicle and truck storage areas
 - Greenhouse, exterior nursery planting areas, and chemical storage building
 - Perimeter fencing and gate
 - Security lighting

⁶ Size of the trailhead parking lot will depend on the availability of joint parking with the school and remaining parking at the proposed N. Loma Prieta Dr. trailhead.

Map 5. Preferred Alternative Conceptual Site Plan

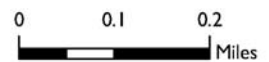


France Road 156 - Recreation

Alaska State Plane, Zone 4, NAD 1927
May 2, 2007



Map by Agnew::Beck.
All data courtesy of MSB.



Rationale for Selecting the Preferred Alternative

This section presents a general review of the rationale behind the selection of Alternative 1. The goal of preparing alternatives was to provide a tool for working with the public to explore options for the future use of the area. The preparation and evaluation of alternatives was not an extensive, rigorous process as might be done as part of a formal Environmental Impact study.

Alternative 1 was described on the previous pages; below is an overview of Alternatives 2 and 3.

Alternative 2: Residential – Develop up to half of parcel (50 to 75 acres) as large-lot residential neighborhoods; remaining acreage for community-scale trails and open space.

- Housing – House lots of 2 to 5 acres would be created in view locations on approximately 75 acres, focused on ridge lines and other higher elevation areas. Housing would be located to minimize road costs and to retain public recreation values on portions of the site.
- Recreation – As in Alternative 1, in this alternative a trailhead would be developed with a midsized parking area and toilets, and trails connect to the existing Crevasse Moraine trails. Those portions of the property not used for housing, as well as remaining Crevasse Moraine trails, would be designated as permanent recreation land. The overall length and variety of trails at France Road is less than in Alternative 1. Loops near and through the housing areas would be designed and aligned more for neighborhood recreation than to meet the technical requirements of skiing and biking. Large events such as high school ski meets would not be easy to accommodate under this alternative.

Alternative 3: Gravel Extraction & Housing – Sell most of parcel for gravel extraction; consider option for near term use as landfill, and future use for mixed-density residential neighborhoods.

- Overall – This alternative assumes sale of most of the parcel, with the option for two or three phases of use: gravel extraction, followed by landfill and eventual reclamation for recreation; a related alternative would allow for gravel extraction, followed by mixed-density housing. This alternative deliberately packaged an intensive set of developments, so that these options could at least be considered. While not impossible, it is not likely that this full set of uses would occur at this site.
- Resource extraction – The France Road area has extensive gravel resources. Under this alternative much of this gravel would be extracted for sale in the Southcentral area. Access roads and phasing would need to be planned to minimize impacts on school and on surrounding housing. Access would likely be from the direction of the landfill, north or south of the leachate treatment pond. If the area were to be used for landfill after gravel extraction, extraction would have to be limited to depths that would ensure protection of local aquifers.
- Possible landfill – Over the long term, the area to the east of France Road currently designated for the Borough Central Landfill use may reach its capacity, and additional landfill areas would be needed. Under this alternative, landfill could follow the gravel extraction. Through this process, some of the elevation of the parcel could be restored, but uses would be limited.
- Housing – If housing were to follow the gravel extraction, finish grades and elevations will have to be configured to allow road connectivity to the surrounding, mostly-high

terrain. Small lot and or clustered housing on future reclamation areas would meet affordable housing needs and would retain open space for public use.

- Trails – Trailhead and trails would be located to skirt the areas of extraction, with corridors to maintain some natural feel.

Alternatives Analysis

The reasons for selecting Alternative 1 are summarized below:

- Value of France Road for public recreation and other public uses vs. private uses – The southern Mat-Su borough has grown dramatically over the last 3 decades. This trend is likely to continue. There is little public land remaining in the area to provide the access to natural areas and public open space that is one the area’s original attractions. The France Road site offers regional recreation/open space areas that are already in demand, and are likely to be even more valuable as the area continues to grow.
- Connection to Adjoining Public Lands – The France Road parcel offers the opportunity to link several of the other publicly owned parcels in the area, creating a larger regionally significant open space and recreation area, providing an accessible recreation area for Palmer, Wasilla and other core area neighborhoods.
- Options for residential and other developed uses – This point is the flip side of the previous item, that is, while this area could offer land for residential and other developed uses that are reasonable for the larger southern Mat-Su area, there are many other locations that can support such uses. Likewise, the land fill plan identifies sufficient space to accommodate foreseeable land fill needs.
- Support in past plans – A wide range of previous plans prepared by the Borough and the City of Palmer identify this general area as appropriate for recreation and opens space.
- Public Preferences – Public views to date have expressed a strong preference for keeping this area in public ownership, and managing the area primarily for recreation. Arguments for this view were consistent with the points above, that is, use at Crevasse Moraine is large and growing; this is a good site for recreation and offers the chance for a more diverse set of trails than is available at Crevasse Moraine; there is a need for open space in core as documented in previous plans.

MANAGEMENT PLAN

The remainder of this plan sets out specific policies for managing the France Road parcel.

Goals for France Road 156

This section presents goals for the management of the France Road 156 parcel.

As stated in the MSB Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan (2001) and the MSB Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update⁷, and re-stated often during this planning process, community residents have a strong desire to maintain a centrally-located open space area to allow convenient, daily access for residents to outdoor recreation and the natural setting. The population of the Core Area is currently underserved in terms of national standards for parks and open space. As rapid development continues in the Core Area, the deficit of accessible recreation land increases, and the opportunities to acquire public recreation land decrease.

A number of residents noted that France Road is part of the only significant tract of public land within the fast-developing Core Area, and that residential development or gravel extraction would represent an irreversible conversion of natural land to urban uses. Meeting participants did generally agree that development of part of the France Road parcel for permanent school facilities and the Recreation Department Maintenance Shop can be compatible with and complementary to management of the land for public recreation and open space.

There is general agreement that the France Road is valuable for public recreation development in its own right, but is part of much bigger opportunity for a regional recreation destination on public land at the heart of the Core Area. Meeting participants expressed several ideas for collaborative planning between the Borough and various branches of the University to create opportunities for natural resource education and to preserve contiguous, connected open space in the Core Area.

Goal 1: Retain the France Road 156 parcel in public ownership to be managed primarily for public non-motorized outdoor recreation.

Goal 2. Serve diverse recreation needs while minimizing conflicts among users.

Goal 3 Develop public facilities that are complementary to the goal of public outdoor recreation and integrated into the natural setting.

Goal 4: Provide improved access and connectivity to neighborhoods, with most public use directed to main entry points, and convenient, neighborhood-scaled connections to adjoining residential areas.

Goal 5: Design a compact development footprint on the France Road parcel in order to allow efficient, cooperative operation of facilities and to retain much of the parcel for recreation and open space.

Goal 6 Integrate planning of trails and other recreation facilities on the France Road parcel with planning for adjoining public lands.

⁷ Matanuska-Susitna Borough *Core Area Comprehensive Plan Update Public Review Draft, March 2007*

Goal 7: Initiate a broader planning process for public recreation, open space, and natural resource education on contiguous public lands in the Core Area.

Policies for France Road

Policy I: Access

Policy I.1 Main entry roads.

The main vehicle entry to the France Road 156 parcel will be from North France Road to minimize traffic impacts on residential neighborhoods. North Loma Prieta will continue to be a vehicle entry road to the Crevasse Moraine area whether this area continues to be a main trail system or eventually is used for landfill; the vehicle access would serve a trailhead and connecting trails to France Road and possible future sports or play fields atop the capped and reclaimed landfill. The intent of main entry roads is to reach staging areas near the perimeter of the parcel and not to fragment the parcel, thus reducing cohesive recreation development.

Do not extend entry roads any farther into parcel than necessary, to avoid fragmenting the acreage with roads.

Policy I.2 Separated pathway along North France Road.

There should be a multi-use pathway(s) along North France Road from Palmer-Wasilla Highway to the France Road parcel to encourage and provide for safe student pedestrian use and to reduce the need for all users to drive.

Design guidelines for the pathway include: separated from the roadway, adequate to serve two-way travel, minimize driveway crossings, and if the pathway is paved, include an unpaved shoulder for runners, dogs and others.

Policy I.3 North France Road upgrade.

North France Road will require intersection upgrades at the Palmer Wasilla Highway, including a safe pedestrian/bicycle crossing to the bike path on the north side of the Highway.

Design speed for North France Road shall take into account the intended mixing of traffic from the high school, recreation facilities, and maintenance shop as well residential subdivisions.

North France Road extension onto the France Road 156 parcel should include a distinctive gateway feature at the entrance to public land, such as a curve and or median island with signage and plantings, to slow traffic and identify the transition from roadway to school and recreation land.

Policy I.4 Secondary entry points.

Connecting to existing and future neighborhoods on the north, east and south side of the parcel will enhance recreation access and reduce driving. The easement at E. Helen Drive should have a neighborhood trailhead.

- The MSB should seek to obtain platted public access easement(s) to the south side of the parcel and to the northeast side of the parcel across currently undeveloped large tracts.

These access points would be intended to reduce driving, and would be scaled to the neighborhood: with either pedestrian access and no parking, or 2-3 parking spaces.

- Vehicle turnaround should be provided at pedestrian-only entry points; and barriers should be created to prevent vehicle incursion into the public land. Signs regarding parking and use of public land should be posted.
- As surrounding lands are developed, MSB shall encourage the platting and development of pedestrian connections to the public land boundary, and develop spur trails onto public land, to encourage neighborhood users to arrive on foot rather than by car and to deter unplanned short-cuts or trespass trails.

Policy 1.5 Parking.

Parking size: the capacity of the main parking area, to be located at the France Road entry point, should be determined based on peak number of users. (Peak use will depend on the scale of the recreation facilities, and on the longevity of the current Crevasse Moraine trailhead which is not yet known. The current best guess is for parking for 75-150 vehicles, as well as space for buses that would come for events such as cross country ski races.) The school and the recreation area are likely to have offset times for peak parking, and parking lots should be designed for cross-over use, with safe pedestrian connections and with gated driveways to allow separation of uses when needed.

Parking location: Parking areas shall be located to allow visibility from neighboring areas without compromising the privacy of neighboring uses. Parking areas should be designed to allow installation of gates for off-hours closure if the need develops. All parking areas shall have barriers to prevent unauthorized vehicle incursion onto adjoining land.

Parking timing: development of parking at North France Road should take advantage of the high school construction or Maintenance shop construction. If the school and shop are built while trails are still usable at Crevasse Moraine and before a trail system is developed at France Road, it may be advisable to clear and grade the proposed trailhead parking for eventual trailhead use.

Policy 2: Integrated management with other public lands

Policy 2.1 Integrated management with MSB Central Landfill

- The MSB will work with the Crevasse Moraine trail user groups to incorporate into the Central Landfill plan revision a phasing plan to maintain the use of existing trails as long as possible and to re-configure trails on top of closed sections.
- The Landfill Plan shall include standards for marking and fencing or barricading natural areas and trail segments that are to remain outside the landfill construction zone, to avoid trespass and damage from either landfill operations or vandals.
- To ensure convenient and safe recreation access, it is recommended that the Borough identify a recreation parking area in the general vicinity of the Crevasse Moraine trailhead, and if the best site is in or near the landfill expansion zone, commit to continuous availability of recreation parking during development of the landfill. This parking will open the option for a future sports field complex or other recreation

development on the reclaimed landfill cells, with a different character and intensity from the more natural setting envisioned at France Road.

- In addition, the Borough shall apply a public recreation designation and public trail easement to the buffer zone along the northern and eastern borders of the proposed Central Landfill expansion. The designated trail easement will ensure neighborhood connectivity to future recreation development at France Road and will allow pedestrian off-street access to the school. The width should be adequate for two parallel trails and retention of natural vegetation as screening from the landfill and adjoining residences.

Policy 2.1 Eastern and southern boundary of the Central Landfill.

The MSB will determine, through public and agency review of the Central Landfill plan revision, the optimum eastern boundary of the Central Landfill that serves both the needs for landfill capacity and the value of conserving the natural terrain in the Core Area for recreation and open space.

- To the greatest extent possible, the eastern boundary should skirt natural terrain features that could serve as either trail locations or buffers to the trail system envisioned to connect from France Road to the Kepler-Bradley State Recreation Area.
- A plan should be prepared for the landfill area to meet two objectives 1) sufficient land is available to meet land fill needs, and 2) consistent with this first objective, land not needed for landfill uses (or already used and reclaimed) should be designated for public recreation and be managed as part of the France Road parcel regional recreation area.

Policy 2.2. Reclamation of Central Landfill for developed recreation uses.

The MSB, in the Central Landfill Plan revision, will adopt phasing and design standards to enable expeditious reclamation of closed cells near North Loma Prieta Dr. to meet the current and future needs for developed recreation, such as sports fields.

Policy 2.3 Use of Central Landfill perimeter road.

The MSB, through the Central Landfill Plan revision, should include phasing, connectivity, and design standards for the landfill perimeter road to be used as a recreation loop for non-motorized trail uses.

Policy 2.4 Regional trail corridor.

Dedicate an easement for a public trail corridor northeast to southwest across the France Road parcel and along North France Road to Palmer Wasilla Highway as part of the north-south regional trail connection to Kepler Bradley SRA advocated in adopted MSB plans. The corridor width shall follow terrain, with buffers of natural vegetation from adjoining uses. Because this trail is a regional corridor intended to serve diverse users, the easement shall be wide enough for two separated trails that may be developed either for one-direction travel or with different widths and surfacing (e.g. a wide, gentle compacted trail suitable for groomed skate skiing, and a narrow “single track”, primitive trail.)

Note: this Management Plan is not intended to provide a detailed layout for a trail system on the France Road 156 parcel. Detailed trail planning should be a part of a subsequent master trail plan for France Road and adjoining public lands. However, the public process identified guiding principles for trail planning, which are incorporated here as policies.

Policy 3: Recreational Trails

Policy 3.1. Trail Master Plan/Diverse trail types

Development of a trails master plan will help to locate these uses to match the natural site conditions and avoid conflicts among uses. Uses expected to occur at this site include a range of trails including:

- multi-use unpaved loop trails. Include a range of gradients for different skill levels, including steep and technical trails for skiing. Design some of the trails to meet technical specifications for competitions, as well as community recreation events.
- gentler trails for strolling and sightseeing, with benches and viewpoints
- soft trails for runners and hikers
- separated equestrian trail(s) – flatter gradient, with a surface to support use by horses without trail damage.
- paved, low-gradient, universal access trail, for summer walking, biking, roller-blades; and multi-purpose winter non-motorized use (this could be located on the perimeter road that will encircle the landfill area after it is fully closed out).
- single-track trails for mountain biking and exploration
- areas for off-leash dog exercise

Policy 3.2. Before trails are constructed, the recreation community should refine specific trail user needs, and design and construct trails for specific purposes. A range of trails should be provided.

Use specific design standards to attract different users to specific trails, as a positive and proactive way to separate users and avoid conflicts. For example, design some loops for advanced technical skiing to attract competitive athletes; and design gentler, meandering loops with speed-reducing features and stopping points for skiers who want to move at a leisurely pace. Specific standards shall include:

- Trail surface
- Trail tread width and clearing width
- Trail grades, both maximum and sustained
- Intended trail speeds
- Sight lines and curve radii, both for safety and challenge; trail passing areas
- Lighting
- Areas to be reserved without formal trails (for exploration, nature study, orienteering, etc.).

SEE APPENDIX C FOR MORE TRAIL DESIGN STANDARDS

Policy 4: Other Recreational Facilities

Policy 4.1 Use of and maintenance of the natural setting.

Recreation uses that benefit from a natural setting and make use of natural terrain without substantial modifications are the preferred uses at France Road 156. Areas that have previously been cleared or leveled, whether at France Road or in the vicinity, are preferred to virgin natural areas for sports fields or other developed recreational uses.

Policy 4.2 Range of Recreational Facilities

Provide for diverse day use recreation activities, including:

- Diverse trails (see previous section)
- Events staging area consisting of a level clearing and timing/officiating building, and areas for spectators.
- Other recreation facilities to include:
 - Benches
 - Trash receptacles
 - Restrooms, drinking fountains
 - Competition/events staging area, with the option for a warming hut/chalet similar to those at Russian Jack or Kincaid parks in Anchorage
 - Sledding hill
 - Picnic shelters
 - Equipment storage shed (could be shared with Borough maintenance site)
- Take advantage of the presence of the planned maintenance building (see more in Policy 5 below)

Policy 4.3 Non-motorized uses.

France Road parcel shall be a non-motorized recreation area, in keeping with traditional non-motorized use at adjoining Crevasse Moraine trail system, and to avoid conflicts with surrounding residential use.

Policy 5: Public facilities at France Road

Policy 5.1 Public facilities complementary to recreation and open space uses

Public facilities other than those described above may be located here if they complement and contribute to primary intended management purpose of public recreation and open space and can be integrated into the natural setting.

Policy 5.2 Footprint of public facilities.

The development footprint for buildings, parking lots, and other built infrastructure (other than trails) shall be as compact as possible to avoid fragmenting open space and foreclosing recreation opportunities.

Policy 5.3 Design for joint use.

Public facilities shall be designed for joint use and shared maintenance to the greatest possible extent to minimize the acreage, infrastructure, and operating costs. For example, for initial facilities development at France Road 156, equipment storage might be co-located for community recreation groups and the Maintenance Shop; and playfields, parking, and locker rooms for the school might be configured for off-hours use by sports groups.

Policy 5.4 Design for low cost maintenance, and to minimize vandalism

Plan the location and character of the maintenance shop, school and other public facilities to reduce the odds of vandalism. This can be done, for example, by locating the maintenance facility where staff can keep an eye on activities at the primary trailhead and day use area.

Policy 6: Outdoor and natural resource education

The France Road area should be available for educational activities by the University of Alaska, the MSB School district and Valley Pathways High School. This site could offer opportunities to engage students in hands-on, field-based projects. Projects might include activities related to resource management, resource stewardship and recreation management. For example, classes could be involved in surveys of recreation users, monitoring reclamation of the landfill, or the construction and maintenance of trails.

Policy 7: Land use

The France Road area will be primarily used for public recreation. Other public facilities – such as the High School and maintenance facility - may be located here if they complement and contribute to public recreation and can be located and designed to maintaining the predominately natural character of the area.

IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines recommended steps to implement plan policies. More discussion is needed on these topics between the Borough and the City of Palmer

- Resolve the property interest (lease) of the City of Palmer in the France Road parcel. As outlined earlier in this document (page 8), the city of Palmer has a lease on this property which runs through 2026. It is in the best interest for the Borough to terminate the lease and to compensate the City of Palmer through a land exchange or some other means. During the development of this plan it was suggested the best option for compensating the City would be for the Borough to transfer the MSB land currently used for the Borough Parks and Recreation Maintenance Facility to the City of Palmer. This parcel (located at the corner of Gulkana Street and Auklet Ave.) is zoned residential and should be used for that purpose. This trade could be finalized when the maintenance facility is moved from its current location to the France Road parcel. The City and Borough support this concept, but both parties need to work together to finalize the details, including timing, comparative values, and the formal means of implementing this trade. This topic needs to be resolved before the other policies presented in this plan can be finalized.
- Designate France Road 156 plus adjoining lands along edges of landfill (north, east, southwest) for the uses outlined in this plan. On the France Road parcel this would result in a primary designation of public recreation, and a secondary designation of public facilities.
- Take an active approach to recreation planning as part of the Landfill Plan to determine what recreation facilities will evolve on that acreage, and the timing of these developments. Encourage an open public process for land fill planning.
- Task the existing MSB Parks Recreation and Trails Board to coordinate recreation planning, landfill planning, school planning, maintenance shop relocation and road upgrades.
- Reserve a public easement or corridor for a north-south regional trail, linking the Crevasse Moraine/France Road area with the Kepler Bradley area. Ideally, this route should extend from Palmer-Wasilla Highway, to and diagonally across the France Road parcel, and then continue south to the Glenn Hwy at the entrance to Kepler Bradley State Park.

The Borough needs to complete the process begun with the University of Alaska to establish this connection across University lands, and do so in a manner that respects the University's mission and need for flexibility in the future use of its properties. In addition, work is needed quickly regarding the current France Road upgrade project, so that the upgrade will not foreclose a future road-side trail.

- Set a schedule and outline and identify funding sources for a trails Master Plan, and for priority recreation facilities. Priorities include:
 - Pathway along France Road (nominate pathway project for France Road to MSB STIP)
 - An initial, multi-use loop trail, connecting to the existing Crevasse Moraine trail system, and thence to Kepler Bradley (see bullet above)

- Trailhead and basic day use recreation facilities (designed jointly with the high school and maintenance building staff)
- Dedicate trails within the future trail system on the France Road parcel and adjoining MSB lands. Formal dedication ensures that trails are not treated as a temporary or secondary use and cannot be easily disrupted or displaced by other uses.
- Set up a process with the City of Palmer, City of Wasilla, State of Alaska Division of Parks and Recreation, the University of Alaska and the Mat-Su Borough and to further discuss and plan for a proposed Core Area Regional Park.

Appendix A. Public Involvement - Website

As mentioned in the text (page 19), this plan was prepared with advice and input from a range of advisory bodies and the general public. One element of this process was the project website <http://www.agnewbeck.com/pages-portfolio/matsu/france160.htm>

The homepage of this site is shown below:

The screenshot shows a website with a navigation bar at the top containing links: WHO WE ARE :: SERVICES :: CURRENT PROJECTS :: PUBLICATIONS :: CONTACT :: HOME. The Agnew::Beck logo is on the left. The main content area features a 'portfolio' section with the title 'France Road 156 Asset Management Plan'. Below the title, project details are listed: Project Date: 2007, Lead: Nancy Pease, Client: Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and Location: Palmer. A teal box contains a 'Plan Update' section with a 'Public Workshop' sub-section. The workshop text states it was held on May 10th at 7pm in the Borough's Conference Room, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer, and that it informed interested people about the planning process and options for site use. A link for 'Workshop Summary (2,254 KB)' is provided. Below this, a section titled 'Background Report Available Soon' states that background information on resources and uses is being compiled and a preliminary report will be available soon. To the right of the text are three images: a snowy landscape with a building, a snowy forest, and a snowy road with a yellow vehicle. A '<< Back' link is visible at the top right of the image area.

WHO WE ARE :: SERVICES :: CURRENT PROJECTS :: PUBLICATIONS :: CONTACT :: HOME

AGNEW::BECK

portfolio

France Road 156 Asset Management Plan

Project Date: 2007
Lead: Nancy Pease
Client: Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Location: Palmer

Plan Update

Public Workshop

A public workshop was held on May 10th, 7pm in the Borough's Conference Room, 350 E. Dahlia Avenue, Palmer. This initial public work session informed interested people about the planning process and options for use of the site were discussed.

- [Workshop Summary](#) (2,254 KB)

Background Report Available Soon

We are compiling background information on the resources and uses of France Road and the surrounding area. A preliminary report on background information will be available soon. Check back for a downloadable copy.

<< Back

Appendix B– Preliminary Alternatives

Excerpted below are the posters that were presented at the May 2007 public workshop.

Alternative I: Recreation – Emphasize trails and regional open space.

Land use pattern

- Designate most of the acreage (140-150 acres) for public recreation and open space.
- Recommend designating additional MSB land (80 -110 acres) to the south and west of France Road for recreation.
- Recommend future restoration of closed portions of the landfill for playfields, with trailhead at N. Loma Prieta.
- Main trailhead for trail use & events near school site. Secondary trailheads give neighborhood access and future playfield access.

Specific features

- Multi-use unpaved loop trails with range of challenge levels (5-7 km total length).
- Scenic viewpoints and destination points.
- Separated or designated equestrian trail – flatter gradient, durable surface.
- Possible paved, low-gradient, universal access trail on the landfill perimeter road for use after it's closed (3-4 km).
- Staging area to include timing/officiating building and areas for spectators.
- Identify options for indoor space (gathering, warm-up, gear changing).

Alternative 2: Residential – Develop up to half of parcel (50 to 75 acres) as large-lot residential neighborhoods; remaining acreage for community-scale trails and open space.

Land use pattern

- Sell 50 to 75 acres with conditions for large-lot residential subdivision.
- Retain 75-100 acres in public ownership and designate for public recreation and open space.
- Recommend designating additional MSB land (80-110 acres) to the south and west of France Road for recreation.

Specific features

Housing

- House lots of 1-5 acres would be created on high terrain with views.
- Housing would be located to minimize road costs and retain public recreation values.

Recreation

- A trailhead near school site would have a mid-sized parking area, toilets and trails to connect to the existing Crevasse Moraine trails.
- The overall length and variety of trails at France Road is less than in Alternative 1. There would be 3-4 km of continuous trail. Trails near housing areas would be designed more for neighborhood recreation.
- Large recreation events such as high school ski meets would not be easy to accommodate.

Alternative 3: Extraction – Sell most of parcel for gravel extraction, private or public landfill, future mixed-density residential neighborhoods.

Land use pattern

- Sell 75 – 100 acres in west and south parts of parcel, with conditions for gravel extraction and potential land fill or housing.
- Access road for resource extraction would be across MSB land to the western side of the parcel.
- An open space corridor would be retained to connect neighborhoods to future regional trails in the Kepler Bradley and Crevasse Moraine area.

Specific features

Resource (gravel) extraction

- MSB could require a master plan for gravel extraction to minimize impacts on surrounding uses. Master plan could specify post-extraction uses: either landfill, housing, or recreation.

Following gravel extraction: landfill

- The protection of the aquifer would have to be ensured.
- Landfill would restore some of the original elevation of the parcel. Reclamation of the landfill as public playfields is a possible end-use.

Following gravel extraction: mixed-density housing

- Finish grades and elevations in the gravel pits will have to be configured to allow road connectivity to the surrounding, mostly-high terrain.
- Small lots and or clustered housing on future reclamation areas would meet affordable housing needs and would retain open space for public use.

Recreation

- Smaller trailhead than other alternatives; no events staging area.
- Trails would be located to skirt the areas of extraction, within greenbelt corridors to maintain some natural feel.

Appendix C –Trail Design Details (Supplement to Policy 3)

Policy 3.2. Trail sustainability.

Any future trails shall be designed to meet “sustainability” standards, which means designed to support current and future recreation use efficiently without long-term degradation of the landscape or a need for frequent maintenance or rehabilitation.

Specific sustainability standards include:

- Incorporate low-impact but functional crossings for wet areas that must be crossed.
- Produce negligible soil loss or movement while protecting natural vegetation.
- Minimize removal of vegetation, but recognize that pruning or removal of certain fast-growing vegetation and root systems may be necessary for maintenance.
- Minimize the long-term needs for maintenance.
- Avoid the need for re-routing in the foreseeable future.
- Foster enforcement of this plan’s policies (e.g. use boulders as barriers around parking areas to prevent incursion of vehicles onto trails or staging areas).

Policy 3.3 Trail aesthetics.

- Except for trails designed for speed circuits or intended for spectator events, trails should promote the feeling of being in a natural area.
- Trails shall have a sense of destination and keep users oriented to the surroundings. This is a particular design consideration because the natural terrain is jumbled and complex.
- Trails shall offer cut-offs but also include long circuits away from the trailhead that do not require continual way-finding.
- Trails shall avoid directing visitors onto private property.
- Some trails should have signage pointing out natural features, geology, vegetation, views etc. along the way.

Policy 3.4 Trail Management

- Trails may be closed at the discretion of the MSB to protect the resources (e.g. during spring breakup).
- The MSB will work supportively with volunteer groups and its own staff to establish maintenance and grooming programs.
- Provide a gate for off-hours closure.

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