

Fish and Numbered Lakes Management Plan

ROUND 2: REVISIONS & NEW OPTIONS

MAY 11, 2006

Project Overview

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) is preparing management plans for two parcels of land (240 acres near Fish Lake, 740 acres surrounding Numbered Lakes) off the Spur Road, south of Talkeetna.

In accordance with the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan, the Talkeetna Community Council requested in October 2005 that the MSB reclassify the land as “Park and Preserve,” and develop a park and preserve master plan for the area.

The MSB hired Agnew::Beck Consulting of Anchorage to conduct a planning process for these lands, which began with a community-wide mailing and a well-attended community meeting in March to identify issues

An initial “Issues and Preliminary Recommendations” document was prepared and released for public review in March. This report was discussed at a well-attended community meeting in April. Over 120 individual comments were submitted after the workshop. The agnewbeck.com website has a summary of public comments received on the Preliminary Recommendations.

This document, Round 2: Revisions and New Options, addresses public comments received in April. There will be a Community Worksession to discuss these Round 2 Revisions on May 24, 2006 at Talkeetna Elementary School from 6 to 9 p.m.

Organization of this Document:

A. Options on Tough Issues

1. Goals
2. Developed Recreation
3. Commercial and Educational/Institutional Use
4. Motorized Use

B. Review of Draft Plan by Policy

Fish Lakes

Numbered Lakes

I. GOALS FOR FISH AND NUMBERED LAKES

These are the March 2006 goals, carried forward for discussion and possible revision:

- Goal 1. Maintain the natural, largely undeveloped, character of the area.
- Goal 2. Protect the productivity of the fish and wildlife habitat.
- Goal 3. Provide reasonable opportunities for public access consistent with the first two goals.
- Goal 4. Provide for and manage low to moderate levels of non-motorized recreation compatible with the first two goals.

What people said:

- People value the close-to-town location of these parcels: residents view these areas as important community recreation and open space resources rather than a regional destination.
- Past or current recreation patterns have not changed the intact natural condition of these lands.
- When Talkeetna residents envision the future, they want these parcels to give the next generation a close connection to nature and wildlife, and to the kind of “out-the-backdoor” access to recreation and the natural world that has been possible in the past.
- Continued growth in Talkeetna will likely create much greater recreation demand and growing pressures on currently undeveloped natural areas and wildlife habitat. These Borough parcels will inevitably be the focus of growing demands for community recreation and open space uses.
- The Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan sets the direction to preserve these lands in their natural condition.
- A few commenters voiced philosophical opposition to creating any parkland in Talkeetna, stating that Alaska has enough parkland already.

Response to comments on goals:

The recommended goals for Fish and Numbered Lakes parcels are consistent with the goals and objectives of the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan (TCP). The Land Use and Community Development Goals (TCP pg. vii) include:

- 1) To guide development in a manner which enhances Talkeetna's natural appeal.
- 2) To protect and conserve the wilderness values and natural resources of the lands surrounding Talkeetna.
- 3) To maintain Talkeetna's major recreation and ecologically sound tourism economy and avoid conflicting activities.

In the April 2006 comments, there was little critique, direct or implied, of the first three goals. A number of community residents explicitly endorsed the concept of retaining patches of wild land, in the midst of rapidly growing Talkeetna. MSB Borough staff pointed out that the Borough does not manage land for the primary goal of protecting habitat – such lands should be held by the State of Alaska and managed by Fish and Game.

The fourth goal's prescription for non-motorized recreation generated the most-heated comments of any issue.

Suggested revisions or new options for plan goals:

Retain the first and third goals as written. The language is general enough to allow discussion of future recreation facilities while conveying the community's widely- and passionately-held intent to preserve the natural setting and habitat. Modify the second goal as shown below to better reflect the Borough's mission:

Goal 2: Provide natural areas for the public to enjoy while protecting a unique open-space eco-system and habitat area.

Review the fourth goal after further community discussion (see notes below).

2. DEVELOPED RECREATION FACILITIES

What people said:

- There is a need for a comprehensive look at all the public land in the Talkeetna area, to determine which places are best for which uses, and to ensure places are reserved for a full spectrum of recreational uses, now and into the future.
- Talkeetna needs places for snow machines, for ballfields and other developed recreation uses, even if it is not on these two parcels.
- One person passed a recreation survey among neighbors, which elicited a range of desires for recreation facilities, including: playgrounds, skateboard park, basketball court, ATV/motocross/dirtbike riding area; better swimming access; easy walking trails for the less-mobile; walking trails with a destination; running trails; variety of groomed ski trails in the woods; horse trails; legal, accessible area for kids to snowmachine; areas with no trails for just wandering.

The diverse perspectives on developed recreation are well-presented in these quotes from residents:

- We must be creative in our planning process for recreational areas so that we have places for non-motorized and motorized users, equestrian and bike users, our senior population, and our growing population of families with younger children. Community recreation areas should meet the needs of the community, not just one or two user groups who speak with the loudest voice and most force.
- I believe that as much of the land in question as possible should be designated as a natural area with as little development as possible in order to minimize impact to Talkeetna's quickly diminishing wilderness areas. The community has expressed again and again their desire to keep large chunks of land such as this in its natural state. Please do more than lip service to the community by implementing a plan for these areas that is as low impact as possible and that keeps the land accessible to only those who are willing to make an effort by non-motorized means to access these areas.
- Our family's recommendation is to have these parcels designated park land but...we DO NOT want this park land designated "kept natural", if this meant we could not ever go back and add a playground, running trails or whatever. We would eventually like to add some developed uses to these lands. Our feeling is that there is enough public land here with restricted uses.

Response to comments on developed recreation facilities:

The Talkeetna Park Advisory Committee (TPAC) is starting a valuable process to inventory the recreation and leisure needs of all residents, and to look at the lands that might meet these needs. The Advisory Committee is working to structure this process so it will ensure the full community is involved. This process, while just getting started, reflects a very important commitment to meeting the recreation needs of the full community.

A detailed community-wide inventory of recreation needs and resources is beyond the scope of the Fish and Numbered Lakes plan. However, some of the pieces of this puzzle are currently in hand. This information is briefly summarized below. In general, areas intended for more intense use and development are located at the northern end of the community, where residents, businesses and visitors are concentrated.

Location	Status – Intended Use
Downtown	Adopted Plan – reserves softball field
Downtown Riverfront Park	Adopted Plan – west side: includes day use, camping, parking for residents, visitors, businesses; east side: boat launch, leased land for camping and associated uses, some undeveloped & unleased land
East Talkeetna MSB Land south of the Talkeetna River	No adopted plan, classified public recreation – past community discussions suggest this area may be suited for multi-use recreation activities, including motorized recreation uses. More planning needed.
Talkeetna Elementary School	Playground, ballfield, ice skating – option for more facilities?
Christensen Lake (several parcels)	Classified Public Recreation - offers a well-used day use park for boating, fishing, and swimming.
Talkeetna Lakes (“XYZ lakes”)	Adopted Plan – canoeing, camping, fishing, extensive trail development for summer hiking, biking, groomed ski trails in winter; option for equestrian uses, option for day use facilities; motorized recreation not permitted; limited commercial use is allowed. With its proximity to town, this general area may be suited for additional developed recreation, such as a ballfield west of the access road.
Fish Lake area, parcel west of Spur Road, south of Light Wood Subdivision	No adopted plan, classification? – mix of wetland and forested landscapes, more planning needed.
Community Trail System	Adopted Borough Trails Plan – addresses some but not all important trails. More work is needed to reserve key trails, including snowmachine trails that provide access to the Bald Mountain area; to the Talkeetna, Susitna and Chulitna Rivers; the area west of the Parks Highway, mile 121-131 and areas of Denali State Park.
Other, smaller MSB Parcels; various lakes	Mix of options; lakes provide summer boating and winter snowmachining and skiing.

This Fish and Numbered Lakes planning project will continue forward over the summer and fall, and take advantage of ongoing efforts of the TPAC process, as well as what is already known about current and likely uses of other public lands in the area. We welcome comments, corrections and expansions to the (admittedly simplistic) table above. All this information provides a helpful context for the completion of the Fish & Numbered Lakes project, to occur next fall.

Suggestions, revisions or new options on developed recreation facilities:

The general sentiment expressed in two community meetings is that Talkeetna's public lands should provide a spectrum of recreation and leisure time uses, and that the public land base is large enough to spread different uses out according to their best locations.

The current direction for use of the Fish and Numbered Lakes parcels reflects the physical characteristics and recreation potential of these two parcels. The current conclusion is that parcels closer to downtown are generally better suited for developed recreation uses such as a skateboard park or ballfields, in terms of physical characteristics and location in the community. Fish and Numbered Lakes are farther from downtown, and have been used and should continue to be used, for open space, natural area, and dispersed recreation and leisure time activities. More discussion on these topics will take place over the coming months.

Developed Recreation: Suggested Approach for Numbered Lakes

Limit near term recreation development at Numbered Lakes to trailheads, narrow trails and where needed boardwalks or small bridges. This assumes that developed day use sites (picnicking, boating and swimming) are better suited at the above mentioned sites that are closer to town and less ecologically sensitive.

Developed Recreation: Suggested Approach for Fish Lake

The general approach for Fish Lake is to have limited public facilities. However, this area can support somewhat more developed recreation activities than at Numbered Lakes. This includes, over time, the option to develop hardened trails and a lakefront day use site at the western end of Borough land. This would replace current lake access on private land, meet the expressed demand for additional variety of trails, and serve growing neighborhoods south of town.

In addition, the community should discuss reserving the option, for the long term future, to use some of this land for more developed recreational and leisure time uses. One possibility, if a road was built along the public access right-of-way, would be to use Borough roadside lands for low scale, minimal impact developed facilities. Portions of this area offer gentle terrain and suitable soils for possible facilities.

3. COMMERCIAL & INSTITUTIONAL/EDUCATIONAL USES

This category addresses the issue of commercial uses such as guided hikes or canoe trips, and also use of the area by organized non-commercial groups, such as educational groups or school field trips. Most of the comments focused on commercial activities, but the issues and impacts are similar and so are covered together.

What people said:

A number of people stated concerns about commercial use of these public lands. The primary reason is the concern that commercial users might be more numerous and concentrated than independent users, and therefore would greatly increase the overall human use and impacts to the natural setting. There was also the concern that commercial users have degraded other natural places in the vicinity, and that tourism in general has “overrun” Talkeetna. There were also several comments in favor of limited commercial use.

- If visitors make their way to the Numbered Lakes, that is fine. But, the repetitive use from a commercial operation, no matter how conscientious, that brings people every day would lead to negative impacts....If commercial uses or leases are allowed, they must be limited in number, size, where in the park they can go. Permits should not be for more than one year, and there should be provisions for canceling the permit if the park is being damaged.
- The number of commercial vendors has exploded since CIRI and Princess have moved in, and their effects on places that used to be as quiet and untrammled as the Numbered Lakes are pretty sad....we've had plenty of wildlife-baiting “nature guides,” operators who won't pick up their own trash, and worse. It has the potential to become a nightmare, and once commercial operators are in, changing the Management Plan to non-commercial could meet a lot of resistance and be pretty tough to pull off. It's better to leave this Pandora's Box closed so we don't have to open the box of mitigation measures.
- I believe that small-scale "eco-tourism" is appropriate for park lands in Talkeetna, including the Fish and Numbered Lakes parcels. It is in keeping with the stated goals of the TCP and could create businesses with a vested interest in keeping the park lands healthy.
- If commercial uses (defined broadly) were completely prohibited it would severely restrict how the community could use the parks. Any organized group activity could be considered “commercial”, and would thus be illegal. This would limit education programs, use by community organizations, and trail construction, maintenance, and use.

Response to comments on commercial and institutional uses:

The impact of commercial and non-commercial educational/institutional group users varies greatly, depending on the scale and frequency of activity. The assumption that any form of commercial or organized use would lead to overuse or abuse of public resources is not well-substantiated. Guided visitors, required to “Leave-No-Trace,” could have less impact on the natural setting than unguided visitors.

Limited, responsible commercial and educational use of these parks is consistent with the Talkeetna Comprehensive Plan. The plan states that these park areas should be managed to maintain Talkeetna's economic base of outdoor recreation and ecologically sound tourism economy. Use by educational groups, such as school groups or non-profits groups such as wildlife groups, also seems to be consistent with the general goals for these areas, if the use is managed appropriately.

Impacts from human use can be controlled in numerous ways:

- Frequency of visits and total number of visits
- Size of group
- Concentration or dispersal of users: limited routes and hardened sites vs. requiring guides to rotate among alternate routes
- Off-limits areas to protect sensitive habitat

- Leave-No-Trace techniques
- Selection of concessionaires
- Monitoring of impacts

Suggested revisions or new options for commercial and educational uses:

In general, these areas should be open to commercial & institutional/educational group uses, *if* these uses are well managed. This conclusion is based on the idea that, while these are primarily natural open space areas, actions should be taken so the special qualities of these areas can be enjoyed by a range of users. This should include young people and older folks who may not be as able to explore trail-less terrain, but who will appreciate the chance to experience a natural setting and see wildlife. Meeting the needs of these users, while not creating damage to the site, will ultimately require several short, well-located trails, and in some areas, boardwalks to cross streams or wetlands.

Specific strategies for discussion:

1. Nature-based activities. Commercial and educational use, if allowed, should be limited to activities that depend on and do not diminish the natural, largely undeveloped natural setting, such as birdwatching, hiking, skiing and nature study.
2. Permits. Group use should be allowed by permit on a case-by-case basis to concessionaires and organizations with proven records of low impact use. Permits should be of limited duration and revocable to allow tracking of impacts and permit-holder's performance.
3. Revocation. Inspections should be done to monitor impacts to the resources, and permits should be subject to cancellation if terms are violated.
4. Leave-No-Trace. Operators should be required to practice Leave-No-Trace techniques.
5. Group size. Group size should be limited: to 10 people if they are staying on the trails, to 5 people if they are going further into the Natural Areas.
6. Frequency. Limit frequency of visits to, at most, 2-4 times per week, at the north and south ends of the area. Set up a system to establish priority among different types of groups.
7. Dispersal or concentration. Operators must identify routes and demonstrate that their pattern of use minimizes impacts through either dispersal or concentration of visitors.
8. Facilities. Facilities should be developed to protect habitat and other resources. Other than trails and simple viewing area, commercial or non-commercial operators should not be allowed to erect structures or leave equipment or supplies at the parks. *See Part 2 regarding trail and entry area parking proposals.*
9. Public service. Operators should be required to provide benefits to the park and the community through service projects such as organizing an annual cleanup or free education programs.
10. No advertising. Commercial operators should not be allowed to advertise the park as a destination.

4. MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED USES

What people said:

- For 25 years I have been frequently using [by snowmachine] the areas specified in the proposal. For nine years my three children have been enjoying these areas too. These areas are vast and inaccessible by foot for most of the general population. People from out of town will likely never experience these properties should these new and silly restrictions be put in place. Why lock out the general population?
- Year by year there are increasing numbers of snowmachine and ATV "tourists" coming to this region, and their impact on the environment is dramatic everywhere they are able to access. Given the vast terrain accessible by road for these mechanized pursuits, there is no justification for allowing these activities in environmentally delicate parks in residential neighborhoods.
- Even if the area were only for locals, machines and times have changed significantly. With paddle tracks, tuned exhausts and huge engines, snowmachines have devolved from the old family pick-up to muscley dirt bikes. Kids don't just putt around exploring, as nearby families observed recently. Neighborhood kids made spaghetti tracks as statements to stake their claim.
- Three of my four kids now can drive on their own and the Numbered Lakes area is one location that is not private land so we can use that area legally without trespassing on private lands...One of the attractions on why we chose this community to live in was so that we could enjoy the beautiful creation in respectful and unrestricted ways. We do not want to have to travel elsewhere just to recreate when we have been doing these things essentially in our backyards. This closing of the land into a park type restriction will greatly impact our family and their future families as well as many of our neighboring families.
- I think it is important to preserve our natural areas that are untouched so that future generation can enjoy them...without hearing the roar of an engine or the smell of gasoline in the air. I feel it would be a tragedy if my son grows up without knowing the peace that being in nature can bring.
- I have lived in this area all my life and would like to keep snowmachining with my friends and dad back there. It's one of the few open areas close to home that I can still go.
- I strongly believe that everyone should have an opportunity to recreate in the manner they choose, but not in every place they choose. Snowmachiners need vast amounts of space. They travel fast and they travel far. The Numbered Lakes is an immense area for skiers, snowshoers, and walkers, but a tiny area for snowmachiners. It cannot accommodate motorized use. Snowscapes would be lost immediately, and the small trees and shrubs of the muskeg would be decapitated, one by one, until none were left...That said, I would support a permit system designed to accommodate responsible use by the very few people that now use the area and their family members.
- As a community, we need to look at the areas that we are setting aside to ensure that we are meeting the needs of all user groups. Perhaps this could mean looking at ways to provide access for all user groups whose needs are not currently being met, either in the current area or in new areas.

Response to comments on motorized and non-motorized uses:

The preliminary recommendation to close these park lands to motorized recreation sparked debate on deeper issues: respect for all users, compatibility of uses, and fair allocation of public lands. The debate raises the broader issue of the need to consider the long-term allocation of land for a range of types of recreation in Talkeetna as a whole, and the entire North Borough.

There is consensus among nearly all residents on several points related to this issue:

- Borough lands at Fish Lake have attracted little to no snowmachine use, except for use of Fish Lake itself and a travel corridor across the east end of the Borough parcel to several private cabins.
- Snowmachine activity at Numbered Lakes has traditionally been limited. Almost all use that does occur is by neighbors. The majority of winter use in the Numbered Lakes area, especially recent winters, has been exploration on skis and snowshoes, also primarily by neighbors.
- With very few exceptions, existing levels of snowmachine use have caused scant physical evidence beyond occasional tracks.
- Patterns of winter recreation are changing. Skiers and other non-motorized winter recreationists are sometimes displaced by snowmachine use. Snowmachine riders can cover vast terrain and fear the shrinkage of their riding areas through closures of private land. There is demand among non-motorized recreationists for separate recreation areas, away from the disruption seen to be caused by snow machines.
- Future use at these parcels is limited by their compact size, forest cover, and areas of sensitive habitat. Year-round open water channels at Numbered Lakes further limits snowmachining riding opportunities. Neither of these parcels meet the local or regional interest in long-distance, challenging snowmachining.
- Continued privatization and development of land in the area is narrowing opportunities for traditional recreational uses – both motorized and non motorized – in Talkeetna and throughout the Borough.
- Neither parcel has a history of summer motorized use. Neither parcel is well-suited for such use because of compact size, forest cover, wetlands and habitat sensitivity. While a few comments suggested otherwise, there appears to be broad agreement that the Numbered and Fish Lakes areas are not appropriate for summer ATV use.
- In general, there is an agreement in the community that the Talkeetna area should not become a destination for out of town snowmachining activities due to the terrain, vegetation, and property ownership patterns. Other places, such as the land off the Petersville road and Parks Highway, are more appropriate as snowmachine destinations.

In addition to the above points of general consensus, there are several common but polarized viewpoints in the debate. There is widespread feeling among non-motorized users of being displaced by snowmachines in many traditional natural settings, and a sense that the vast majority of public lands are open to motorized use. There is a frustration among some snowmachine users that they have already been closed out of some public lands in Talkeetna, and the proposed closure of these parcels without some guarantee of other local riding opportunities implies disregard or disrespect for motorized recreation.

Revisions or new options on motorized and non-motorized uses:

Two paths suggest solutions to this issue:

1. Evaluate the big picture of snowmachine recreation in the greater Talkeetna area. Use this process to identify and reserve options to meet the needs of local snowmachiners, including snow machine areas within the community, and access corridors to public lands lying outside the community.
2. Explore options for codifying the existing, infrequent, low-impact winter motorized use of Numbered Lakes by local residents, without opening the door to increasing the frequency or intensity of snowmachining.

Our suggestion is that both these options be investigated. Specific options to be discussed further are presented below:

1. Evaluate Community-Wide Snow Machining Options
As mentioned above, the Borough Trails plan provides a starting point for identifying corridors linking the Talkeetna area with public lands to the east and west. One option identified in the plan is a corridor along Birch Creek Road that allows access for motorized and non-motorized use into public lands east of Talkeetna. More work is needed to determine the benefits and problems associated with responding to snowmachine interests in areas outside of Fish and Numbered Lakes.
2. Explore Range of Options for Snow Machining at Fish and Number Lakes
(see attached page)

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC POLICIES

Topics are organized around the policies presented in the Draft “Issues and Preliminary Recommendations Report,” available on line at www.agnewbeck.com. Fish Lake is discussed first, followed by Numbered Lakes.

General note: Many of the issues and solutions outlined here are dependent on high quality, attentive on-the-ground public management. The Borough is expanding its field management capacity; further expansion of this capacity is needed, including more arrangements to partner with local communities.

FISH LAKE

Fish Lake Policy 1: Access to MSB Fish Lake lands.

- Draft recommendation generally confirmed, timing modified: Use the existing 60-foot-wide borough ROW extending west from Spur Road to provide future public access to this parcel.
- Change the proposal for when to make access improvements. Recommendations for discussion:
 - start the process now to improve public access to the lake front on Borough lands unless it is clear that public access can be secured across the private property at the west end of Fish Lake
 - develop access incrementally. Start with a foot trail and bridge; later expand if needed to provide auto access closer to Fish Lake
 - design the trail/road to protect natural features and maintain the largely undeveloped character of the area. This will include the need for a bridge over Gator Creek, and providing only basic improvements at the lake edge
 - see parking discussion below
- The community should continue to work to secure an option for public access of private land at the lake outlet.
- New recommendation: the map should show the section line easement approaching from South Birch Creek Road. This section line is legal access but hilly, and probably not practical for hauling in a canoe.

Fish Lake Policy 2: Access easement across Fish Lake to lands to the east.

- Change in recommendation: keep the existing public right-of-way across Borough lands. Road alternatives proposed in the draft plan are not practical. However, shift the alignment of the ROW so that it no longer crosses the middle of the Fish Lake parcel. Instead, shift it north to follow the topography toward the north boundaries of the park. This will have the following benefits:
 - minimize fragmentation of the Fish Lake parcel
 - minimize impacts to natural features, wildlife habitat, open space
 - create opportunities for public enjoyment if and when the ROW corridor is developed; e.g., viewpoint over ponds, access to level terrain for trailhead

Fish Lake Policy 3: Parking.

- Draft recommendation revised: improve parking along the borough ROW, just off the Spur Road. This is preferred to extending the parking and the road further east to the edge of or into MSB lands. Parking can be legally accommodated within 60-foot-wide ROW that extends east from Spur Road.
- Parking location: parking should be close to Spur Road but screened from sight of Spur Road behind a natural vegetation buffer 25- to 50- feet wide.
- Parking size: approximately 6 cars, with room to double capacity.

Fish Lake Policy 4: Lakefront Facilities.

- Draft recommendation generally confirmed: Fish Lake lakefront day use facilities will be developed when and if needed to: protect the shoreline, habitat values and water quality; reduce user conflicts; provide for sanitation, and improve the quality of the experience.
- Recommendation on timing is revised: drop draft document recommendation of a specific time frame (1 to 5 years) for developing facilities. Instead, decision should be “criteria driven”, that is, there should be a set of criteria that help guide the timing and the character of improvements. The Borough will work with the local Parks Advisory Committee in making this decision. Possible criteria include:

Evidence of demand

- Crowding at other public lakefronts
- Significant neighborhood growth
- Multiple groups and activities occurring in the same area of Fish Lake
- Unsanctioned activities needing enforcement (campfires, underage parties)
- Loss of existing lake access options

Evidence of impacts from human use

- Loss of vegetation or bank erosion at entry points into the water
- Disturbance or displacement of wildlife
- Trash
- Human or pet waste in evidence
- Multiple entry points or informal trails developing along a short segment of shoreline
- Conflicts among users

Fish Lake Policy 5: Trails.

- Draft recommendation generally confirmed: MSB lands at Fish Lake are suitable for a system of relatively narrow trails for skiing, hiking and similar uses.
- The extent of trails at Fish Lake should respond to the community desire for trail choices and to minimize impacts to the natural setting. Over time trails at Fish Lake may be upgraded to improve quality of recreation, while retaining the area’s generally natural setting and habitat. The terrain at Fish Lake is varied enough to offer several levels of trail challenge that would serve a broad cross-section of the community.
- Trails should be designed for low impact: narrow (“single track”) trails, rather than, wider trails that require more clearing and change to the landscape. At minimum, the area should include routes that can be groomed for single track cross-country skiing, with minimal

evidence of ski trails in summer. Single track trails with a width averaging 4 to 6 feet can still allow grooming for cross country skate-skiing.

- More discussion is needed regarding the proposed development of additional trails, also narrow and low impact, but providing for all-season non-motorized use. Design would avoid areas of sensitive summer habitat, wetlands or unsuitable soils.
- Trails that approach or parallel the north side of the lake should have observation points but not invite random access down the steep slopes to the waterfront.

Fish Lake Policy 6: Management of recreation uses, including proposed non-motorized area.

- Draft recommendation revised; needs more discussion.
- Residents have noted there is almost no motorized use on uplands at Fish Lake. Snowmachine use occurs on the lake in winter, but the steep slopes and forest cover deter motorized recreation in all seasons. At the April 5th workshop, there was a strong consensus supporting designation of a winter snowmachine corridor crossing the parcel and providing access to private lands to the east, and then closing the remaining area to motorized use. A portion of the comments received after the meeting stated opposition to closures; however most of these comments appeared to be addressing Numbered Lakes.
- More discussion needed – see coverage of this issue under “tough issues” section of this document.

Fish Lake rules for uses

- Draft recommendations generally confirmed: Conclusions summarized below.
 - Prohibit overnight camping use at or near trailheads or parking areas.
 - Allow for informal camping further into the area, except for a possible camp or park host.
 - Campers should follow Leave-No-Trace practices. Signs for Leave-No-Trace use should be placed at the trailhead and at any future lakefront public use sites. Prohibit fires.
 - Prohibit overnight camping use on wetlands or sensitive shoreline at the east end of the lake. A small sign should be placed at the Birch Creek inlet channel to advise protection of sensitive habitat and species
 - Prohibit firewood gathering except by permit to reduce hazard trees, remove downed timber, or salvage wood from trail or facility maintenance.
 - Prohibit plant transplanting, plant harvesting except personal use sustainable harvest of berries, mushrooms and herbs.

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS REGARDING NUMBERED LAKES

Question Lake access

- Draft recommendation revised: defer decisions on Question Lake access; do not decide in this plan. Action is needed to provide reasonable public access to Question Lake: however, this issue should be addressed through a process that will explicitly amend the established Question Lake Management Plan. That process should consider the need for improvements to MSB lands for private property access and public access to the lakefront, with appropriate controls to minimize impacts to neighbors and the natural setting.
- Public comments related to that future discussion:
 - Consider access to the waterfront for person who are mobility impaired.
 - Don't develop a boat launch: small skiffs, canoes are appropriate.
 - Consider leasing borough property for access to individuals who need it.
 - Concern expressed that public access requires maintenance and enforcement.

Numbered Lakes Policy 2: Roadless area.

- Draft recommendation confirmed: no roads extending into the area other than short spur roads, less than 300 feet long, to reach trailhead parking areas.

Numbered Lakes Policy 3: Development of entry points.

- Draft recommendation generally confirmed, timing modified. Comments confirmed the need for limited access, developed incrementally, to respond to and guide demand rather than aggressively encourage new use. Details of this approach include:
 - To respond to inevitable growth pressures and make this area a community facility, it is recommended that at least two small entry point parking areas be developed in the near term (one north, one south). Unless entry area parking spots are developed, users will park at multiple, unintended entry points, leading to site damage, unsafe roadside parking, trash and other problems.
 - Entry areas will consist of small parking areas fringed with natural barriers such as boulders to discourage ATVs or vehicles from venturing into the parcel.
 - Additional location: plan for future access on eastern edge of the area; no more than three entry-point parking areas.
 - Discuss locating north entry point parking area at the northeastern corner of the east side of the “Panhandle”, and then providing a simple foot trail from that site, south to connect with the existing path (on the existing right of way).
 - Option for discussion: develop an entry point/parking area on Birch Creek Boulevard, with access to the Natural Area via an easement granted by the property owners of the parcel abutting both Birch Creek and Barge. Benefits: parking would be separated from residents; a slightly larger parking area could be developed (5 – 7 cars); and no parking or trailhead facilities would encroach into the Natural Area. The drawback would be that the trail from parking lot to the Natural Area would have to cross Barge Road. Property owners offered to keep the parcel wooded so that users feel they are in the park while traveling the trail to the Natural Area.

Numbered Lakes Policy 4: Reserve SW site (Borough parcel on the Spur Road) for open space and potential access.

- Draft recommendation partly confirmed: retain public ownership of that part of the Borough's materials parcel that lies east of Spur Road. Add it to the Numbered Lakes Natural Area, and reclassify it to Public Recreation/Watershed.
- Manage this area to keep it in its largely natural condition, to expand and buffer the Natural Area.
- Do not use this area for a roadside parking. Instead, locate the south entry point parking area at the edge of the original natural area, on the south boundary over the crest of hill.

Numbered Lakes Policy 5: Non-motorized area.

- Draft recommendation is re-opened for discussion. See discussion on motorized and non-motorized Uses.

Numbered Lakes Policy 6: Facilities at Question Lake.

- Delete this policy. Deal with this issue in Lake Management Plan amendment.

Numbered Lakes Policy 7: Protection of habitat and the natural setting.

- Draft recommendation generally confirmed.

Numbered Lakes Policy 8: Timing and character of any future facilities.

- Draft recommendation generally confirmed – see discussion above regarding entry point parking areas, and discussion below re trails.

Numbered Lakes Policy 9: Trails.

- Draft policy on trails is generally confirmed, timing is changed. The general objectives for deciding how to develop trails remain the same. These include protecting fish and wildlife, wetlands and waterbodies, and natural quiet and open space, as well as increasing the enjoyment of public users.
- Revisit the draft recommendation regarding timing of trails
 - Current recommendation: no formal trail construction until recreation use begins to cause unacceptable impacts to habitat or the natural setting. Presumption is that informal winter trails will be developed for skiing and snowshoeing, and will have minimal evidence of existence in summer.
 - Revised recommendation: develop two narrow winter/summer trails to be located along resilient terrain from north and south entry points to a destination feature. A portion of the existing right of way in the “panhandle area” may be a logical location for one such trail. Providing these short trails would open the area to broader community use, in particular, it would allow more educational activities, and also make the area more accessible to people who don't have the skill or fitness to explore trail-less terrain.
- Trail design should meet "sustainability" standards which include:
 - Support current and future use with minimal impact to the area's natural systems, and not adversely affect the area's bird, aquatic and animal life.
 - Incorporate low impact but functional crossings for water bodies or wetlands, such as boardwalks or small bridges.
 - Produce negligible soil loss or movement while protecting natural vegetation.

- Minimize removal of vegetation; preferably no tree cutting; recognize that pruning or removal of certain plants may be necessary for proper maintenance.
- Design trails to avoid the future need for rerouting and for minimal long-term maintenance.
- Parties proposing to construct trails must provide solid evidence of commitment and funding to maintain and modify the trails to avoid impacts to the habitat and natural setting.
- Design trails to match motorized use policies, e.g., use boulders as choke points at entry area parking lots to prevent use by ATVs.

Options for rules at Numbered Lakes (for discussion):

- Draft recommendation regarding motorized uses – see tough issues section.
- Confirm draft recommendation: no horses or bikes – the pattern of upland and wetland terrain can not support these uses without damage
- Revise draft recommendation on camping and plants: see Fish Lake section
- Lake management plans can recommend no-approach zones around nesting areas.