

Subject: Public Meeting, Parks Hwy Scenic Byway

Date: 9/27/07

Time: 6:00pm – 8:30pm

Location: Byers Creek Lodge, Byers Creek, AK

Attendees:

Aneta Synan—ADOT State Scenic Byways Coordinator

Penny Bauder—Planner, Alaska State Parks

Matt Green—Natural Resource Technician, Alaska State Parks

Miriam Valentine, Talkeetna—Denali National Park planner

Dan Valentine, Talkeetna—Denali State Park ranger

R.N. Marsh, Trapper Creek—Mat-Su Commission for Historic Preservation

Julia Potter, Healy—Denali Citizens Council, Healy Chamber of Commerce

Cass Ray, McKinley Village—Denali interpreter

Rose (Dell) Stevens—Owner, Byers Creek Lodge

Mike Stevens—Owner, Byers Creek Lodge

Ted Adams—Landowner, Byers Creek

Beverly Grentz—Denali Outpost Bed and Breakfast, Byers Creek

Reinhard Grentz—Denali Outpost Bed and Breakfast, Byers Creek

Penny started the meeting at approximately 6:10pm.

The participants introduced themselves, and Penny reviewed the evening's agenda.

Miriam observed that it has been difficult to formulate and maintain continuity in one plan for the entire Byway, since it stretches a considerable distance and involves multiple distinct communities.

Penny asked Aneta Synan, DOT, if this has been a problem with other scenic byway plans. Aneta replied that this can be a challenge; one example where this has been dealt with is the Marine Highway System, which has developed a series of 4 plans for 3,300 miles of byway. They appointed regional representatives for the committee, who could spread the news from meetings in their area. This idea was discussed for the Parks Highway Scenic Byway.

Reinhard asked what the different byway designations meant. Penny explained that the Parks Byway is currently designated at the state level, and that this is necessary before obtaining federal designation. The designation does not result in regulation. Aneta clarified that the same funding is available for state byways as for federal byways, if they have a corridor partnership plan. Every byway needs a plan. Federal designation has two levels, and gives a slight, not huge, advantage when applying for grant funds. National designation also allows byways to obtain technical assistance from another organization, the American Byways Resource Center.

The Federal Highway Administration also does marketing for federal byways. National designation is more prestigious.

Penny asked if national designation is something the Parks Highway Byway partnership group wants to pursue.

A participant asked if there are disadvantages to designation. Penny replied that the only disadvantage is if more highway visitors are not wanted.

Someone asked if national designation makes any park land available for development. Penny replied that it does not do so.

Aneta stated that national designation would provide a small advantage in applying for grant funds; the advantage in apply for state DOT funds varies by governor's administration.

The group agreed that they wanted to apply for national designation; Penny stated that she will write the corridor plan with this in mind.

Penny suggested that the group consider changing the plan's stated intrinsic values to natural and recreational, rather than natural and scenic. The reason for this is that other Alaska byways have applied for national designation based on scenic qualities, and it would be advantageous to apply using different qualities. What does the group think of this?

Aneta agreed that it would be advantageous to use different qualities than other byways. The federal program has been pressured to cap the designations.

The group discussed this issue, and eventually agreed, since many of the byways qualities overlap anyway, to highlight natural and recreational resources as the byway's primary intrinsic qualities. Scenic, cultural, and historic resources will be highlighted also, but secondary to the natural and recreational resources.

Penny asked for comments on the draft plan (supplied to all participants) by October 15th; the group agreed to do this. The next project meeting will be after the beginning of the year, and will focus on implementation.

The group read and discussed the Parks Highway Scenic Byway vision statement.

Reinhard asked if the purpose of the plan was to bring in more visitors. Penny replied that this is not the case; the visitors are already coming in larger quantities each year, and the plan will help to provide them with a better experience. Norwood pointed out that increasing visitors is a strategy listed in the plan, and that we should consider deleting this goal. Multiple participants stated that development should be sustainable, and that the byway needs year-round infrastructure to deal with increased traffic—restrooms, trash cans, etc. Aneta stressed the need for specifics in the plan, to help her know how to handle funding requests.

Aneta asked if the group had any desire to have a customized name for their byway; Alaska is unusual in that designated byways are usually named after the road they are located on, rather than a custom name. The group agreed to consider this and decide at the next meeting

The group agreed to approve the vision statement, and to provide any comments to Penny; any changes that individuals request will have to be approved by the rest of the group.

Norwood clarified that one of the plan's goals, related to the '59er Trail, should be changed – there isn't one. Penny stated that this was based on information at a previous public meeting, and that it will be changed since it is evidently inaccurate.

Aneta suggested that the plan's goals be worded to "encourage" certain ends, since the plan is non-regulatory. For example, the plan can "encourage" protection of natural resources, but doesn't have regulatory power to protect resources in and of itself. The goals can also name the agencies that do have regulatory power, that the community will try to work with to accomplish specific goals. For example, working with DOT to try and create a bicycle trail along the highway.

The group discussed changing the bicycle path goal to be a multi-use path, which would allow using snowmobiles in the winter. There was also discussion of adding signs at entry points to the byway, to encourage visitors not to "trash" the byway.

Penny asked what the best method is to communicate about future changes to the plan; the group responded with specifics on who can communicate via email and regular mail. It was also suggested that Penny provide monthly updates on changes made to the draft, especially any changes/additions to the goals and strategies, including the reasoning behind each change. It was pointed out that Ahtna, Inc. needs to be included in information dispersal.

The group discussed the draft plan's maps. It was agreed to add a symbol for sites with scenic views.

A participant suggested adding a goal to clear brush that interferes with scenic views.

The group agreed that it would be good to change the plan's inventory to add columns for restroom facilities, informational kiosks, and whether various resources are available year-round or seasonally.

Penny stated that the final plan will include maps for each type of resource, as well as a set of maps for existing resources, and one for recommended future projects.

Aneta Synan gave a brief presentation regarding the possibilities for the byway group's structure, including advantages and disadvantages of forming a non-profit organization. She recommended a simple solution. It is possible to create bylaws for an organization without having a formal non-profit structure. Aneta provided informational printouts for the participants to review, and described examples of byway organizations in Alaska.

The meeting ended at approximately 8:30pm.