

WACO
Willow Area Community Organization
Linda Oxley Chair
chair@waco-ak.org

P.O. Box 1027 • Willow • AK 99688
(907) 495-6633
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E1 - 7365

Rec'd 5/29/08

David Navecky
STB Finance Docket No. 35095
Surface Transportation Board
395 E Street, SW
Washington, DC 20423

Re: Willow, Alaska--Community Input--

Port MacKenzie Rail Extension

Dear Mr. Navecky:

Below and attached find a series of comments in opposition to the variously named Corridor 3-the Willow Route to connect Port MacKenzie with the existing main railroad track. You will find them powerful statements in and of themselves.

The element that they do not reflect is that of regional perspective. We have been sorted into smaller communities for this rail extension discussion. However the decision is expected to have regional impact in support of commerce and earnings for both the State of Alaska and the Mat-Su Borough. It will also have a regional impact on the future health of the majority of Alaskans.

How so? There is a growing body of literature that describes a health condition, Nature Deficit Disorder. Currently there is easy access to nature for the 60% of our states population located in Anchorage and the Palmer-Wasilla corridor. But as fuel prices rise, the percent of Alaskans who will live in these two areas is expected to rise significantly. Many people in the rest of Alaska will be forced to choose urban life to survive the cost. And as all cities have done, Anchorage will grow on its own foundation of business and commerce. Anchorage in particular, and to some degree, Wasilla and Palmer are locked into a land mass that cannot broaden to much more. Anchorage is bounded by mountains and water. Other cities so locked have grown vertically, the most dramatic of these New York City and San Francisco. It is expected that Anchorage will also grow vertically. Green will go, stress of urbanization will grow.

Currently the majority of people living in Anchorage come to the Valley, especially to our community and further north to recover. This will continue and will be increasingly needed. As the costs of travel increase, we should expect and support people getting to this place of recovery. We should protect this unspoiled wilderness so perfectly positioned for the future while we develop our commerce and urbanization.

Enclosed are Letters and Resolutions that oppose Corridor 3-the Willow Route. These have been individually filed with both the Mat Su Borough and Alaska Railroad during last falls preliminary scoping and report to the STB as part of the application. The Community of Willow wants to make sure this packet of letters and resolutions and concerns are now part of Willow's official comments to the STB.

This packet contains important user groups and stakeholders that will be adversely impacted by a Corridor 3- the Willow Route. These are as follows:

- Willow Area Community Organization (WACO) /Letter
- Iditarod Trail Committee, Inc.--The Last Great Race on Earth/Letter
- Willow Dog Mushers Association (WDMA)/Resolution
- Mat Su Parks Advisory Board/Letter
- State of Alaska, Dept of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Wayne Biessel, Area Park Superintendent/Letter
- Tesoro Iron Dog/ Letter
- Willow Trail Committee/ Letter/Willow Comprehensive Trail Plan
- Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau (Mat-Su CVB) Board/Letter
- Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau Membership/Resolution
- Anchorage Skijor Club/Letter
- Alaska Travel industry Association (ATIA)/Letter and Fact Sheet
- Bob Chlupach/Letter

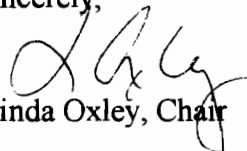
In addition, the Community of Willow wants to cite the City of Houston's desire to host the Rail Extension Project with the Mac West-Houston South Route which causes far less environmental concern, is shorter, meets the needs of the Alaska Railroad, is the least expensive route and is fully supported by the Official Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Criteria Matrix. This study was conducted by the the joint applicants- the Mat-Su Borough and the Alaska Railroad. The Mac West-Houston South route clearly is the best route. We also submit the following:

- City of Houston/Letter -Resolution
- Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Criteria Matrix
- City of Houston, Alaska/Newspaper Articles/Requests

Thank-you for considering our concerns and stopping a route through Willow which will have a lasting negative impact on the majority of the states population, the Community of Willow and so many important user groups.

Dated this 10th day of March, 2008.

Sincerely,


Linda Oxley, Chair

Cc:

Distribution-

Sarah Palin, Governor

Tom Irwin, Commissioner-DNR

Jim King, Director-State Parks

Ted Stevens, Senator

Lisa Murkowski, Senator

Don Young, Representative

Curt Menard, Mayor-Mat Su Borough

Tom Kluberton, Mat Su Borough Assembly

Charlie Huggins, State Senator

Mark Neuman, State Representative

John Binkley, Chairman-ARR Board

Mark Begich, Mayor-City of Anchorage

Sandy McDonald, Acting Mayor-City of Houston

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Patty Sullivan, Public Affairs Director
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
Office of Public Affairs
350 East Dahlia Avenue
Palmer, Alaska 99645

October 3, 2007

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

The Willow Area Community Organization (WACO) approved a motion in the February general meeting to oppose a rail corridor through Willow as described in the 2003 Rail Corridor Study.

Two railroad corridors within our small community, the existing line and the proposed line, will have significant negative impacts on residents and businesses with no clear advantages. Further, the proposed corridor was selected based on an unrepresentative public involvement process.

Having two railroad lines running through one small community will have undue hardship on residents. Many homes will be displaced and dreams destroyed. According to a 2004 survey sponsored by Willow2020 and the borough, 90% of respondents chose Willow as a place to live and recreate because of "quiet" and "rural." Due to the close proximity of the tracks, many residents will be disrupted from two different directions. This "surround sound" for their homes is not what was intended when they moved here and will diminish property values and quality of life.

Safety is also a concern by Willow residents. The risk factor of two railroad lines in a residential area is not acceptable as children would have easy to access tracks and bridges. Recently, there was a fatal accident of a child sleeping on the tracks near Willow Creek.

Willow is widely known as a year round recreational community. A large portion of our local economy relies on fishing, hunting and boating in the summer to snow machining and dog mushing in the winter. Visitors from around the world come to experience natural resources that are increasing in demand; wilderness, wildlife, beauty, and quiet. Two rail lines, one hauling coal at 50 mph does not fit into the Alaska mystique that visitors have come to see.

The route as proposed in the 2003 Rail Study would be built through the heart of the Willow Creek State Recreation Area, home to an internationally renowned fishing stream. The route continues through the middle of the West Gateway Trail System, the venue for the Iditarod, Junior Iditarod, the Iron Dog, and many other community, state, national and international events that depend on open spaces and a contiguous trail system. Further along, the rail line would run adjacent to the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, continuing to compromise the natural and aesthetic qualities that the image of Alaska

Patty Sullivan, Public Affairs Director
October 3, 2007
Page 2

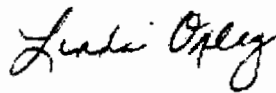
projects and Willow and the tourist industry is trying to sell. Local businesses would suffer, quality of life will suffer.

As stated by the Matanuska Susitna Borough, the intent of the rail extension is to haul coal and other commodities from the interior to Pt. MacKenzie for shipping. As a selling point, the borough touts the line for passenger service as well. In fact, the Alaska Railroad has no plans for a terminal or station for commuters or tourists. If there were, a station could be proposed or built on the existing line. Even so, passenger service to where? The Knik Arm Bridge is speculative and, certainly, the existing line can handle any proposed plans for tourism or commuter traffic.

The public involvement process upon which the Willow corridor was selected was held in the town of Houston. Three public meetings were held at Houston High School during 2002-2003, during which time, several corridors closest to Big Lake and Houston were eliminated and the selection of a corridor through Willow was chosen as a preferred route. Houston High School is approximately 20 miles from the Willow Community Center and as far as 50 miles from people who live in Willow. For a decision that made in large part by public comments, this was a poor example of a fair public process.

The intent of WACO's action to oppose an additional rail corridor through Willow does not mean the community opposes the extension in itself. There are many other viable alternatives where the line would be consistent with another community's vision. It is not consistent with our vision. Therefore, the Willow Area Community Organization opposes the Pt. MacKenzie rail extension through Willow.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Linda Oxley".

Linda Oxley, Chair



Willow Dog Mushers Association

P.O. Box 858
Willow, Alaska 99688

October 24, 2007

Ms. Patty Sullivan
Public Affairs Director
Mat Su Borough
350 E Dahlia
Palmer, AK 99645

Re: Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Project

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

Attached is Resolution Number 07-10-01 from the Willow Dog Mushers Association in opposition to the Port Mackenzie Railroad Project Extension – Willow/Corridor 3.

We had representatives from our organization attend all the Rail Corridor Open Houses the first week of October and we hosted the recent Public Forum. So, we have reviewed this project very carefully and found it not to be compatible with our mission statement of protecting and preserving the musher's way of life for today, tomorrow and future generations.

Please enter this Resolution No. 07-10-01 as our official comment.

Sincerely,

Erin McLarnon
President

WILLOW DOG MUSHERS ASSOCIATION
Willow, Alaska

RESOLUTION NO. 07-10-01

**A RESOLUTION OPPOSING THE PORT MACKENZIE RAILROAD EXTENSION PROJECT-
WILLOW/CORRIDOR 3**

WHEREAS, the Willow Dog Mushers Association is a recognized State of Alaska non-profit organization formed to protect and preserve the dog musher's way of life for today, tomorrow and future generations as well as to protect and preserve our historical trails and Willow's vital mushing habitat, and

WHEREAS, the health of Willow dog mushing is significantly tied to a rural, and open recreational environment within our three historical trail systems (West Gateway, Haessler-Norris and Emil-Stancec), our parks, rivers, and our wetlands, and

WHEREAS, Willow is home to the West Gateway Trail system, a world class trail system, which utilized by mushers and other types of winter recreationalists such as but not limited to snowmachiners, skiers, and hikers, and

WHEREAS, Willow's economy is based on these many recreational opportunities, and

WHEREAS, the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race is Alaska's most important winter event which supports dozens of local mushers and attracts thousands of fans from around the world, which has started six (6) of their past eight (8) races in Willow utilizing the West Gateway Trail System, and

WHEREAS, the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Project-Willow/Corridor 3 crosses the West Gateway Trail System in over ten (10) locations that have easement protection, which divides the existing historical trail system, as well as crosses through miles of wetlands commonly used by mushers and other winter recreationalists, crosses through Willow Creek State Park and Recreation Area, and crosses Willow Creek as well as several other small anadrmous fish streams, and

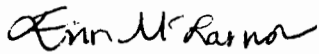
WHEREAS, the alternative corridors south of Willow are shorter, cross fewer trails, harm less wetlands and meet the needs of the Rail Extension project, and

WHEREAS, the Willow Dog Mushers Association had representatives attend the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Project Open Houses held the first week of October in Wasilla, Big Lake, Willow, Knik and Houston, and hosted a Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Public Forum in Willow, Alaska on October 24th, 2007 that was attended by representatives of the Mat-Su Borough, the Alaska Railroad Corporation, our members, and the Willow community.

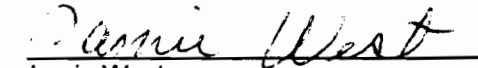
NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Membership of the Willow Dog Mushers Association opposes Willow/Corridor 3 as an acceptable route for the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension.

CERTIFICATION:

The foregoing resolution was passed and approved by a duly convened meeting of the Willow Dog Mushers Association this 24th Day of October, 2007, by a unanimous vote.



Erin McLarnon
President



Jamie West
Secretary

Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board

HC 32 Box 6706, Wasilla, Alaska 99654
(907) 745-3975 Fax (907) 745-0938

October 19, 2007

Patty Sullivan
Director of Public Affairs
Matanuska Susitna Borough
350 Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645

RE: Comment to Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

The Mat-Su State Park Citizen's Advisory Board wishes to respond regarding the Port MacKenzie Rail Project. The Board has a special interest in this corridor because of the direct impact to the Willow Creek and Nancy Lake State Recreation Areas and the West Gateway Trail System, a popular winter recreation area.

Because the Board felt this railroad location is incompatible with the mission of State Parks and Outdoor Recreation, when there are viable alternatives, the Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board voted unanimously to oppose the Willow Corridor (corridor 3), as described in the 2003 Rail Corridor Study and in the more recent project map.

The proposed railroad corridor 3 would disrupt existing trail systems, surround Nancy Lakes SRA with railroad activity on its east and west boundaries, divide Willow Creek SRA, and needlessly destroy the peaceful character of a prime natural recreation area bounded by the Parks highway and the Susitna River.

There are few places in Alaska or the United States where there is such a wealth of recreational opportunities so close to an urban area as there are in Willow. It is uniquely Alaskan recreation: snowmachining, dog mushing, skiing and skijoring, hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking and ATV riding over miles of open areas, maintained trails and parks. A 2004 survey by Willow 2020 and the Mat-Su Borough found that over 90% of respondents chose Willow as the place to live and recreate because of the open country, beauty and quiet. (The survey can be

Board Members

Mary Anderson, Chair
Roy Wahl
William Royce
Glenn Goodman, Vice-Chair
William Fitzgerald

Ralph Baldwin
Garret (Gary) Brown
Shelis Jorgensen
John Strassenburgh, Vice-Chair
Panthea Redwood (1st Alternate)

Steve Charles
Charles Leet
Darin Markwardt
Howard Carbone
Bruce Brockett (2nd Alternate)

seen at www.waco-ak.org). While the full time resident population of Willow is small, on many weekends the actual population is multiplied many times by south central residents enjoying second homes and cabins - drawn by the recreational activities.

The 2003 Rail Corridor Study by Tryck Nyman Hayes, Inc. vastly understated the importance of such recreation in the study area, barely mentions two very popular state recreation areas and does not address any mitigation measures for the damage or impacts from the rail line. For example it states on p. 49, "The project [Corridor 3] would be expected to have some direct impacts on recreation, especially trail use and limiting access to recreation sites particularly if mitigation measures such as below and above ground crossings over trails for example are not utilized".

Premier recreational areas affected by corridor include:

Willow Creek State Recreation Area

Home to international renowned salmon and trout fishing, corridor three will be the second railroad line to cross Willow Creek within a few river miles and will bisect the recreation area. There are no possible mitigation measures for "surround sound" trains. The railroad line will cross Willow Creek, a recognized RS2477 trail, Lucky Shot Trail and the main road to the SRA, all within a half mile. This scar will open up and expose the heart of the SRA.

It will also safety bring issues as this area already has problems with visitors walking on and fishing from the existing railroad trestle. Recently, a child was killed by a train after fishing from the tracks.

Nancy Lake State Recreation Area

This popular recreation will be impacted by the rail line running adjacent to it's western boundary and will have similiar recreational compromises as those in the Willow Creek SRA. Alaska residents and out of state visitors come to Nancy Lakes SRA in the summer and fall to enjoy peaceful canoe trips through dozens of lakes. If corridor 3 is utilized this chain of 130 lakes and ponds will be bound by railroads immediately to the east and to the west of the park. The 2003 study states the rail line will follow the lateral moraine adjacent to Red Shirt Lake which will bring it very close to recreational cabins. In contrast, the borough public notice places the rail line in the Big Swamp wetlands. Either option is bad news for resource and recreational protection. It is poor public policy to establish a railroad corridor west of the park. It is particularly troubling when a shorter route exists which would join the existing line south of Houston.

West Gateway Trail System

Working together over many years the Willow community, snowmachiners, mushers, and skiers have created a premier winter recreational area with one hundred miles of groomed and community maintained trails. All the trails have easements, are included in the Mat Su Trails Plan and are considered "regionally significant." Any given winter weekend will see hundreds of trail users exploring this semi

wilderness area which boasts open views of Denali, the Talkeetnas, and the Chugach Range. A railroad bisecting the Willow and Big Swamps will ruin this Alaskan experience.

The West Gateway Trails support many international and regional races including the Iditarod Restart, Klondike 300, Don Bowers 300 and the Junior Iditarod sled dog races and the Klondike 400 and Aurora 200 snowmachine races. Since much of the area is wetlands, trail/rail crossings will be few and expensive, thus these races will find other venues. These same trails support a vital training for such Iditarod teams as from Martin Buser, Dee Dee Jonrowe and many others.

Tourism and recreation in our state are dependent on maintaining accessible natural country. The strip of land north of the Little Su and west of the Parks Highway is an example of accessible wilderness quality adventure done right. The proposed Willow to Port McKenzie Railroad Corridor will destroy the visions and dreams and hard work now enjoyed on any given weekend by hundreds of visitors. There are other viable alternatives for a Port MacKenzie rail extension such as the Houston North and South and Big Lake routes that will have less impact on important recreational areas. The Mat-Su State Parks Citizen's Advisory Board recommends that the borough eliminate the Willow Corridor #3 from consideration for the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension Project and, instead, consider a route in an area that would benefit from railroad development.

Sincerely,

Mary Anderson

Mary Anderson, chair
Mat-Su State Parks Citizens Advisory Board

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF PARKS AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

SARAH PALIN, GOVERNOR

MAT-SU / COPPER BASIN AREA

HC 32 Box 6706

Wasilla, Alaska 99654

phone: 907/ 745-3976

fax: 907/ 745-0938

webpage: <http://www.alaskastateparks.org>

November 14, 2007

Brian Lindamood
Alaska Railroad Corporation
PO Box 10700
Anchorage, AK 99510-7500

Re: Port MacKenzie Railroad Corridor Alternative Comments

Dear Mr. Lindamood,

I have reviewed the Port MacKenzie Railroad Corridor proposal and the various alternatives that are being considered. The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is responsible for more than just managing the Alaska State Park system, as we are also charged with promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation outside state parks. One example of this is through our promotion of trails for motorized and non-motorized users with funding grants or expertise in designing or managing trails, or by establishing easements. As such, we offer the following comments regarding the proposed rail extension from both a State Park as well as a general outdoor recreation perspective.

We recommend that the Houston South – Houston – Connector 3 – Mac East alternative be chosen as the preferred alternative.

This route minimizes impacts to the major recreational/public use areas, eliminates additional bridges over the Little Susitna River and Willow Creek, and focuses the rail line adjacent to existing road corridors.

Although we understand that the Willow Corridor is favored as a route from a design perspective, and because it may have better soils and fewer crossings of private lands, we object to this alternative as this area provides outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities that would be significantly impacted with a railroad bisecting the area. The limited private property is what makes this area so valuable in terms of recreation -- and one of the reasons that many residents live along this corridor.

From an outdoor recreation perspective, a rail line through the Willow Corridor is the least favorable option presented.

The following provides additional detail to illustrate our significant concerns with the Willow Corridor:

1 **Willow Creek State Recreation Area would be significantly impacted.** (DNR: Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation)

The park encompasses almost all of Willow Creek from the Parks Highway to its confluence with the Susitna River. The Willow Corridor would pass through the heart of the undeveloped portion of the park, requiring either a major (one mile long) cut and fill across the river valley or an extensive overhead trestle. Either method would constitute a major feature that would ultimately change and dominate the ambiance of the park. Willow Creek is used predominately by fishers, with peak use occurring during the king salmon season, although it hosts all five salmon species. Silver salmon is the second biggest fishing attraction through late summer, with rainbow trout fishing third. Use is concentrated along the lower creek section between the Parks Highway and the confluence with the Susitna River. "Fishing tubes" are very popular on the creek. The park receives less use in the winter, with almost 100% being winter trail use.

The historic Lucky Shot Trail was a major transportation corridor from the Susitna River to the Lucky Shot Mine near Hatcher Pass, and passes through the park. This trail is still heavily used during the winter months as a major groomed winter trail. A historic trappers cabin remains at one of the proposed rail alignments across Willow Creek.

There is also a high potential for impacting prehistoric cultural resources within the Willow Creek SRA. The following reported archaeological sites are located within the park south of Willow Creek. All sites contain cache and house pits (cultural depressions) likely associated with late prehistoric Dena'ina culture:

- TYO-014: between 10 and 15 cultural depressions;
- TYO-041: at least 10 cultural depressions (two of them double celled);
- TYO-060: at least 12 cultural depressions;
- TYO-061: over 100 cultural depressions.

Based on the maps provided, two of these sites (TYO-014 and TYO-060) will be directly affected by the Willow Corridor. While the other reported sites are outside of the railroad footprint, they may be indirectly affected by staging activities associated with this project or by resulting increased development or other activity within the Willow Creek SRA. In addition, there could be other archaeological sites in the area that are currently unreported.

Additional information:

- a. Method Established: Legislatively Designated
- b. Date of Establishment: 1987
- c. Acreage: 3,000 acres
- d. Visitation:

Visitation Type	FY2007	FY 2006	FY 2005	FY 2004
Day Use	22,483	18,387	20,048	10,973
Camping	10,966	15,445	11,792	10,013

for its natural, quiet qualities. Residents along Red Shirt and Nancy Lake have organized homeowners associations.

3 **Little Susitna State Recreational River would be significantly impacted.** (DNR: Division of Mining, Land and Water)

Although the Little Susitna River is not managed by the Division of Parks, it is a high-use river corridor managed for the primary purpose of recreational float trips. Fishing, hunting, camping, boating and paddling are the primary uses. The river hosts all five species of salmon, and receives the heaviest sportfish use of all the Mat-Su Valley rivers. It provides a very popular float from the Parks Highway Bridge (River Mile 69.8) since there are two takeouts: Skeetna Lake at River Mile 54.6 (ties into the Nancy Lake Canoe Trail system); and Little Susitna Public Use Facility at River Mile 28.5 on the river. Additional bridge crossings along this corridor will detract from the wild qualities of this popular multi-day float trip. We strongly discourage any routes that will cross the river to maintain the current recreational integrity of this important river corridor.

Additional information:

- a. Acreage: 18,218 acres
- b. Visitation: Estimated annual use is 2000-3000 floats per year.
- c. Primary Recreation Types (by order of use, highest first): floating, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, hunting
- d. Commercial Use: Guided and unguided float trips and fishing along the Little Susitna River

4 **Little Susitna Public Use Facility (LSPUF) would be significantly impacted.** (ADF&G: Division of Sportfish)

Owned by ADF&G, this facility is operated by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation through a cooperative agreement. For this reason we feel qualified to comment on impacts to this facility. The LSPUF lies within the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge. It provides the only developed public access to the Little Susitna River south of the Parks Highway (approximately 70 river miles). It is a very popular destination for fishers, hunters, and other recreationists. Connector 1 will flank the LSPUF's east boundary which will affect users arriving at the "front door" of the facility, and displace a north-south trail that is used by the public to access hunting areas in the refuge. The Willow Corridor would cross the river at approximately River Mile 33, only one-quarter mile from seven developed riverside campsites maintained as part of the LSPUF. This will have an impact on the recreational experience that these remote sites offer.

Additional information:

- a. Date of Establishment: 1989
- b. Acreage: 720 acres
- c. Visitation:

Visitation	FY2007	FY 2006	FY 2005	FY 2004
TOTAL	30,340	22,503	18,908	22,770

NOTE: This visitor data is not statistically valid, numbers are approximate and should only be used to identify trends over time, and not taken literally.

- d. Primary Recreation Types (by order of use, highest first): fishing, camping, boating, hunting access, winter trail use, hunting, general
- e. Commercial Use: Guided and unguided fishing along the Little Susitna River

Regional Trail Impacts

Both Nancy Lake and Willow Creek State Recreation Areas are linked by a myriad of winter trails (West Gateway trail system) that are an extremely important part of the region's attractiveness as a hub for winter recreation.

Between Red Shirt Lake and the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge are critical trail corridors, including the historic Iditarod Trail. These trails are used for routine recreation, competitive training and actual races. There are many sanctioned races on these trails, including dog mushing, snowmachining, and ski-joring. Additionally, these trails are critical winter transportational corridors to cabins, camps and lodges throughout the Susitna River Valley. Many of these corridor origination points are located in state park units.

No route completely eliminates trail impacts, but our preferred option keeps these impacts to a minimum. Since the area trail clubs will be providing specific comments regarding regional trail impacts, we will not elaborate further here other than impacts to Division of Parks programs.

State Trail Grooming Pool Program

Trails throughout the proposed rail corridor are also part of the Mat-Su trails SnowTRAC Grooming Pool, and receives state funding from snowmachine registration fees to maintain and groom snowmachine trails in the winter. This program has been very successful, and the Division of Parks now administers grooming grants for well over 100 miles of trails between Big Lake and Denali State Park far to the north. The program has grown every year, with an objective to develop winter trail corridors throughout Southcentral Alaska, possibly connecting to the Denali and the Fairbanks North Star Boroughs. Such a network has great potential to create new economic opportunities for small businesses during a traditionally quiet part of the year. Part of the mission for the Division of Parks is to promote recreation in Alaska, and support the tourism industry. Winter recreation tourism has become an important part of the greater Willow area economy and steps should be taken to foster this endeavor, not weaken it.

Historical/Cultural Impacts

Regional comments regarding cultural impacts were covered under a separate letter by the Division of Park's Office of History and Archaeology.

Barrier Issue

The Willow Rail Corridor would effectively create 15 miles of a fence-like barrier between Willow Creek and Nancy Lake that will make cross-country travel east and west far more restrictive. A few strategically placed trail crossings are not sufficient to adequately resolve the barrier issue – even if they were at-grade crossings with elevated rail. Sub-grade (culvert) crossings are problematic due to pooling water, lack of snow, and the innate reluctance of animals (dog teams, wildlife) to enter such structures. Note that there are likely many more minor, non-dedicated trails, that traverse this country than what is indicated on most maps.

Contiguous Public Land Block

The area comprised by the combination of Nancy Lake State Recreation Area, the Little Susitna Recreational River, and the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge comprises a total of over 342,000 acres of lands reserved for public use. The South Houston – Houston – Connector 3 – Mac East route will completely avoid significant impacts to this block.

Habitat Protection

The Willow Corridor poses inherent risks to sensitive habitat that is very important for Alaskans in terms of recreational pursuit and for subsistence purposes (hunting, fishing, etc.). Each anadromous stream crossing is a new point source of contamination in the event of accidental discharges of hazardous materials. Eliminating the additional crossings of Willow Creek and the Little Susitna Rivers should be a high priority for this project.

Conclusion

Rail development through the Willow Corridor would be a major detriment to recreational values in that area, and will adversely affect the quality of life for many area residents. During the 2004 *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* public survey, 98% of the respondents indicated that parks and outdoor recreation are important or very important to them. Once lost, these values will never be replaced – no matter what kind of mitigation ensues.

Respectfully,



Wayne Biessel, Mat-Su Area Park Superintendent

Cc: James King, DNR/DPOR Director
Michael Bethe, DNR - Habitat
Sam Means, DNR - Mining, Land and Water
Don Perrin, DNR – Permitting
Judy Bittner, DNR/SHPO
Dave Rutz, ADF&G
Mary Anderson, Mat-Su Area State Parks Citizens Advisory Board
Willow Area Community Organization
Dave Hanson, Mat-Su Borough

Patty Sullivan
Director of Public Affairs
Matanuska Susitna Borough
350 Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645

RE: Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project



Dear Ms. Patty Sullivan,

Speaking on behalf of the Iron Dog I would like to express our concerns for the Port MacKenzie Rail Project of Corridor 2 and 3. Of the three proposed routes Corridor 2 and 3 cross the Iron Dog trail easement. It is our understanding that the project proposes a bridge or tunnel would accommodate the easement of this trail.

We feel that Corridor 2 and 3 would impose the greatest safety risk as well as the greatest negative impact on recreation and wildlife in this area. Iron Dog, Inc. is involved with trail development and has worked with local groups such as; Willow Trail Committee, Lower Susitna Drainage Association and the Big Lake Chamber to help provide recreational access to these areas.

Corridor 2 and 3 will cross one of the most widely used recreational areas not only by local residents but thousands that live in other urban areas like Eagle River and Anchorage that come here to recreate. Bottle-necking all the user groups; hunters, skiers, snowmobile users, hikers, ATV riders, bicyclist, dog mushers, other outdoor enthusiast and wildlife into crossing under the railroad in a few tunnels will create a huge safety risk.

It is commonly known that the existing railroad kills hundreds of moose each year. Not only does these proposed corridors cross through a populated moose area but it also affects bears and other small animals that depend on the local streams that provide the fish for their survival.

Please consider other options that present a less risky investment not only to human welfare but also to the abundant wildlife. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laura Bedard
Executive Director
Tesoro Iron Dog

Willow Trail Committee
P.O.Box 845
Willow, AK 99688
ph. 495-6368

October 20, 2007

Patty Sullivan
Public Affairs Director
Matanuska Susitna Borough
350 E. Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645

RE: Official filing of the Willow Area Trail Plan for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project.

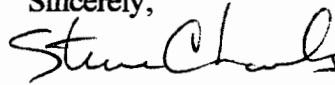
Dear Ms.Sullivan,

Enclose is the Willow Area Trail Plan that has been in the works for years. Please enter this document and letter as official comments for this project. The West Gateway Trail System is most valued from the standpoint of use, history, and economic impact to the Matanuska Susitna Valley. The Willow Trail Committee, since it's inception, has been working closely with the Matanuska Susitna Borough and the State of Alaska in acquiring easements and maintaining the West Gateway Trail System as well as other trail systems in the community.

The Willow Trail Committee was formed in 1996 as a special standing committee within the Willow Area Community Organization, it's mission is to provide safe, enjoyable and legal recreational trails for Willow residents and visitors. Recreational trails are strongly supported in the community by evidence of the 94-0 vote passage of the Willow Area Trail Plan.

On active weekends, the West Gateway Trail System supports thousands of trail users including snowmachiners, dog mushers, skiers and skijorers. It is also the venue for many local, state, national and international races, including the Iditarod, Junior Iditarod, Klondike and Don Bowers dog sled races and the Iron Dog, Klondike 400, Aurora 200 snowmachine races, plus many Willow Winter Carnival events.

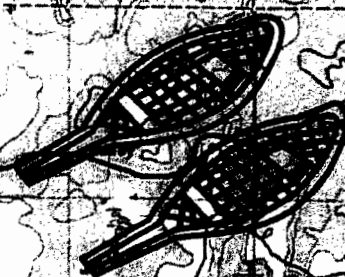
As the selection process continues for the Port MacKenzie Rail Extension, it is important for the decision makers to gather and analyze as much information as possible. The Willow Trail Committee strongly encourages the Willow Area Trail Plan be an important part of that decision making process.

Sincerely,

Steve Charles, chair
Willow Trail Committee

150°16.000' W 150°14.000' W 150°12.000' W 150°10.000' W 150°08.000' W 150°06.000' W WGS84 150°03.000' W

Willow Area Trail Plan

Adopted by the Willow Area Community Organization (WACO)
August 2006



June 2006

150°16.000' W 150°14.000' W 150°12.000' W 150°10.000' W 150°08.000' W 150°06.000' W WGS84 150°03.000' W
TN 71° / MN 71°
0.0 0.5 1.0 1.5 2.0 miles

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PREFACE

The purpose of the Willow Area Trail Plan is to promote the preservation and development of recreational trails within the Willow area.

As Willow grows, the importance of recreation and trails to our community needs to be conveyed. However, rapid population growth threatens existing trails for all users, and for the sports snow machining and dog mushing in particular.

This document is meant to guide:

Public agencies in making policy decisions,

Private companies in their investment decisions, and

Individuals in making their personal decisions.

Planning is a continuous process and this plan was written with information and opinions of Willow residents in 2006. As future developments and community needs change over time, this document should be revised to reflect those changes.

WILLOW- A Gateway Community for Outdoor Activities

The community of Willow is situated on the edge of the most developed area in Alaska and this population is steadily moving into the Willow area. A residential and recreational community of several thousand people, it is unincorporated and has a voice through its community organization, the Willow Area Community Organization (WACO). Growth in population and recreational activity during the last decade has been among the fastest in the state and will certainly continue. Quality of life is one of the main reasons families relocate to Willow where they can enjoy a rural lifestyle with its wildlife lakes, streams, rivers and mountains. Winter is a popular time of year with abundant snowfall providing opportunity to enjoy the outdoors. A winter weekend on the Parks Highway will see numerous vehicles loaded with snow machines, dog teams and skis heading for recreation in the Willow area.

Our trail systems not only enhance this quality of life, but they also support businesses and provide employment opportunities and economic benefits to the area, particularly important in this customary sluggish part of the year for merchants. Further, it has been well documented in the Anchorage area that trails, in and of themselves, actually increase the value of the properties having access to the trails as well as the overall community. Willow has well established trails that already are in use and it is the goal of this Willow Area Trail Plan that they be protected and enhanced.

Tourism, having become the second largest industry in Alaska, has brought an increased number of visitors to the community as well. Here, too, Willow's trail systems play a significant role.

The Willow Trail Committee (WTC) is a special standing committee of WACO. As a Mat-Su Borough Trail Crew Member, it recently received a *2005 Miles by 2005* award by the Mat-Su Borough. The Trail Committee has identified and mapped three trail systems in the area:

West Gateway Trail System
Haessler-Norris Trail System
Emil Stancec Trail System

Maps and trail routes of these systems are attached. The routes of all three systems are based on consistent historical use for mining, hunting, trapping, dog mushing, supply freighting, and recreational snowmachining. These systems have been submitted to the Mat-Su Borough Lands Division for inclusion as multi-use trail systems requiring cooperation among trail users. All are extensively used today.

Our goals are to:

- Identify historic and currently used trails.
- Obtain public easements for recreational trails and trailheads.
- Maintain trails for safe and enjoyable use.
- Provide information to the public on trail safety and trail etiquette.
- Provide a forum for trail conflicts.
- Recognize trails as an important natural resource that contributes to the economic well-being and the quality of life in Willow.

TRAILS

West Gateway Trail System

Located directly west of Willow between the Parks Highway and the Susitna River, the West Gateway Trail System is a recreational jewel. These trails connect Willow to Big Lake and Nancy Lake Recreation Area Trails to the south and access to the Big Su, and Deshka Rivers to the west. Willow's location makes it the most popular jumping off point for people traveling west to back country cabins and lodges.

The earliest trails within the West Gateway system, the Lucky Shot and Corral Hill Trails, were blazed nearly 100 years ago for freighting to the Hatcher Pass mines from the Susitna River. Homesteaders, hunters, trappers and dog mushers through the years have extended the trails.

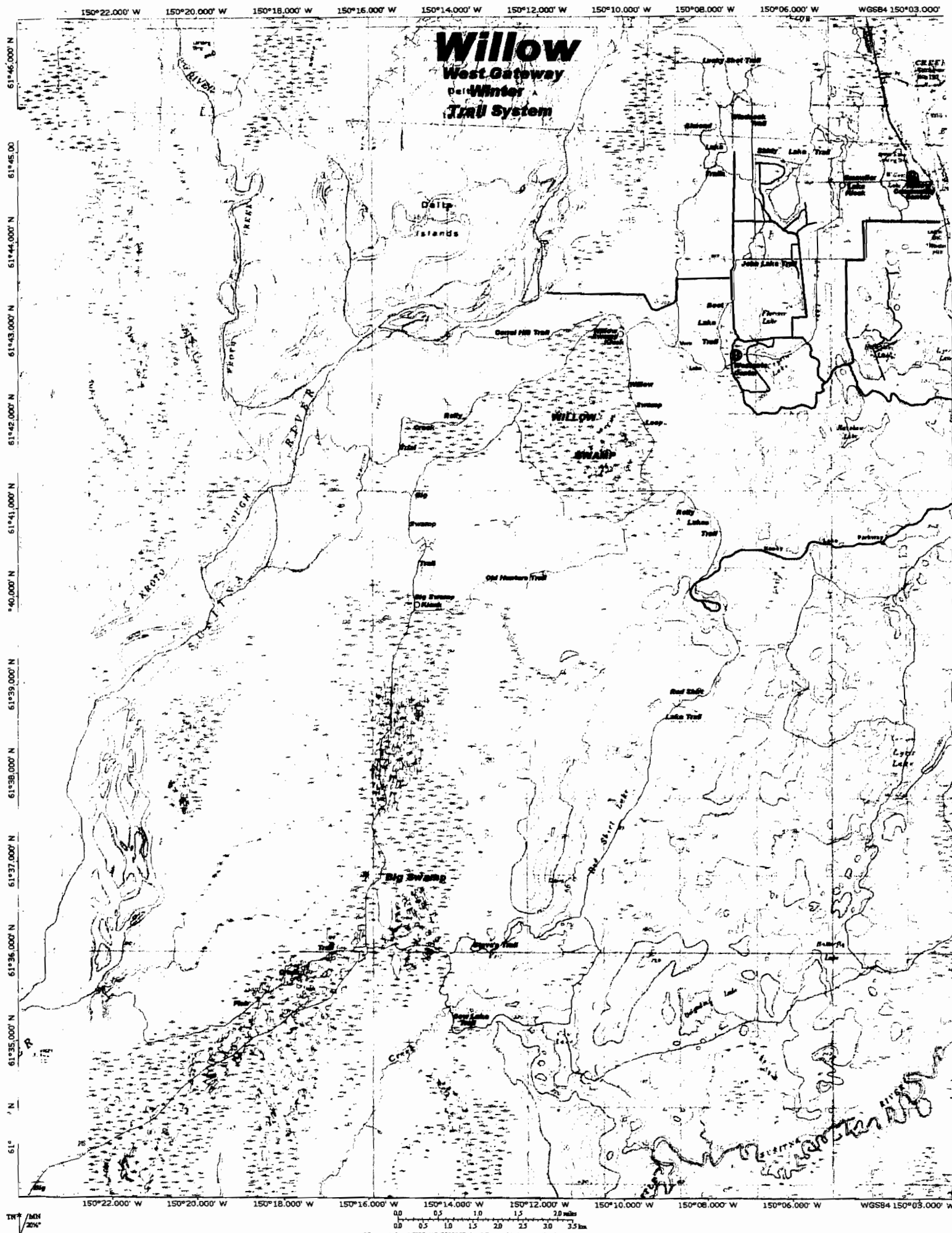
At present, the Willow Trail Committee, in conjunction with the Mat-Su Borough has acquired legal easements on all the West Gateway trails. They are also included in the Mat-Su Trails Plan as "regionally significant." As Mat-Su Borough Trail Crew Members, the WTC has been assigned maintenance of these trails. WTC volunteers brush and sign the trails year around and groom each week during the winter months. In addition, kiosks with maps, safety and educational information are maintained at all trailheads and strategic locations.

Because of its proximity to residential areas and trailheads, the West Gateway trails are very popular with recreational trail users of all varieties including snowmachiners, dog mushers and skiers. Willow is host to the Alaska State Winter Carnival each year and is dependent on these trails for the many snowmachine, dog mushing, skiing and skijoring events.

In addition, other events utilize these trails including the Klondike 400 and Aurora 200 snowmachine races, the Junior Iditarod, the Don Bowers 200/300 sled dog race, Klondike 300 sled dog race and the Earl Norris Open Sled Dog Race. The Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race often uses the West Gateway Trail System for its restart.

Future Plans and Goals for the West Gateway Trail System:

- Establish legal protection for the trails
- Improve safety for road crossings/plan for tunnels under roads
- Continue maintenance projects through grants and funding
- Replace signs to conform with State standards
- Plan and improve trail access
- Expand trail events and race capabilities
- Develop detailed maps of Trail Systems
- Incorporate the Willow Community Center as the hub



Haessler-Norris Trail System

The Haessler-Norris Trail System has its primary roots in freighting, trapping, dog mushing and mining. It lies east of the Parks Highway; its boundaries are the Little Su River to the south, Hatcher Pass Road to the north and Hatcher Pass Recreation Area to the east. All three trail systems in the area are connected to one another historically.

The southern portion of the Haessler-Norris System includes the Willow Creek Sled Trail, otherwise known as the Herning Trail. This trail was an original route from Knik to the gold fields in Hatcher Pass. Hatcher Pass Road to the north was formerly a trail also leading to the gold mines. Trapline trails following the Nancy Creek drainage past Windy Lake to Deception Creek were the origin of many other trails in the system.

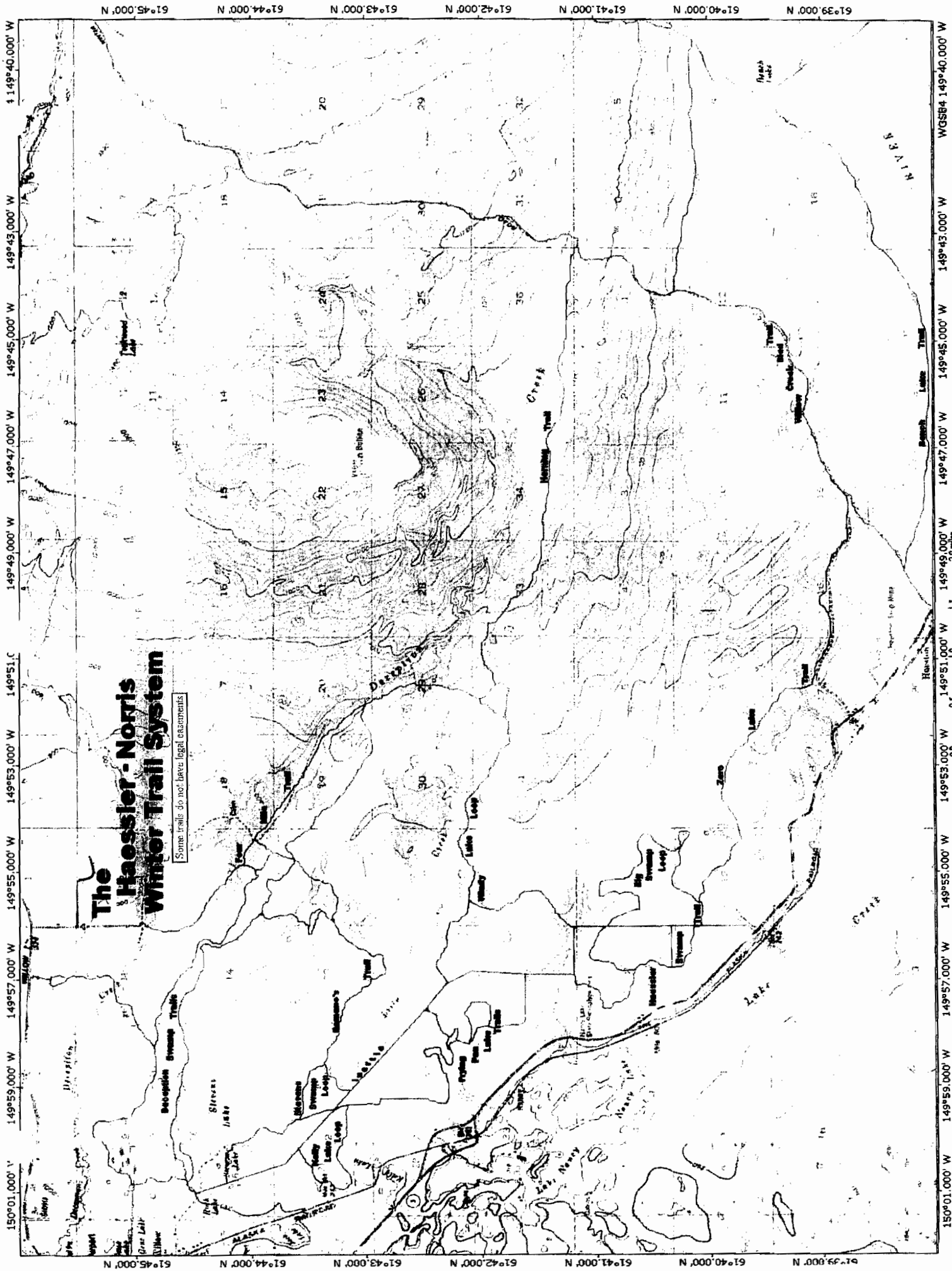
The Haessler-Norris Trail System was named for dog mushing pioneers in the area. Lloyd Haessler was a local trapper and musher who established "Lloyd's Trapline", one of the several trails documented in the Deception Creek Management Plan. Earl and Natalie Norris, sprint dog mushers who homesteaded in Anchorage in the 1940's, were instrumental in establishing sled dog racing in Anchorage. Earl was co-founder of the Fur Rondy Sled Dog Race in 1946. Due to development in Anchorage, they moved to Willow where they helped expand and improve the existing trails.

Primarily used by mushers today, this system provides an important training circuit for Iditarod, mid-distance, distance, sprint and recreational teams as well as excellent trails for the growing tourism business in the area.

However, the trail system is in danger of being compromised. Planned transfer of state land in the middle of this system to the University, the sale of public lands to the private sector, and the placement of subdivisions without trail consideration are causes of concern.

Future Plans and Goals for the Haessler-Norris Trail System:

- Establish legal protection for all trails in system
- GPS/Survey/Map trails
- Reconnect this system to the Emil Stancec System
- Expand system connecting trails to the north and east
- Install uniform signage
- Develop trail events and racing capabilities for system
- Protect, maintain and expand trail access



The Haessler-Norris Winter Trail System

Some trails do not have legal easements

Scale: 0 to 10 miles / 0 to 16 kilometers

Emil Stancec Trail System

Most of this system is located to the east of the Parks Highway. It runs from Hatcher Pass Road on the south to the Kashwitna River on the north and to the foothills of Hatcher Pass bearing east. A small part of this system is also located on the west side of the Parks Highway where it connects to the West Gateway Trail System.

This system presents a variety terrain. From the low-lying swampland to the higher elevations of the Talkeetna foothills, one can experience panoramic views of three mountain ranges.

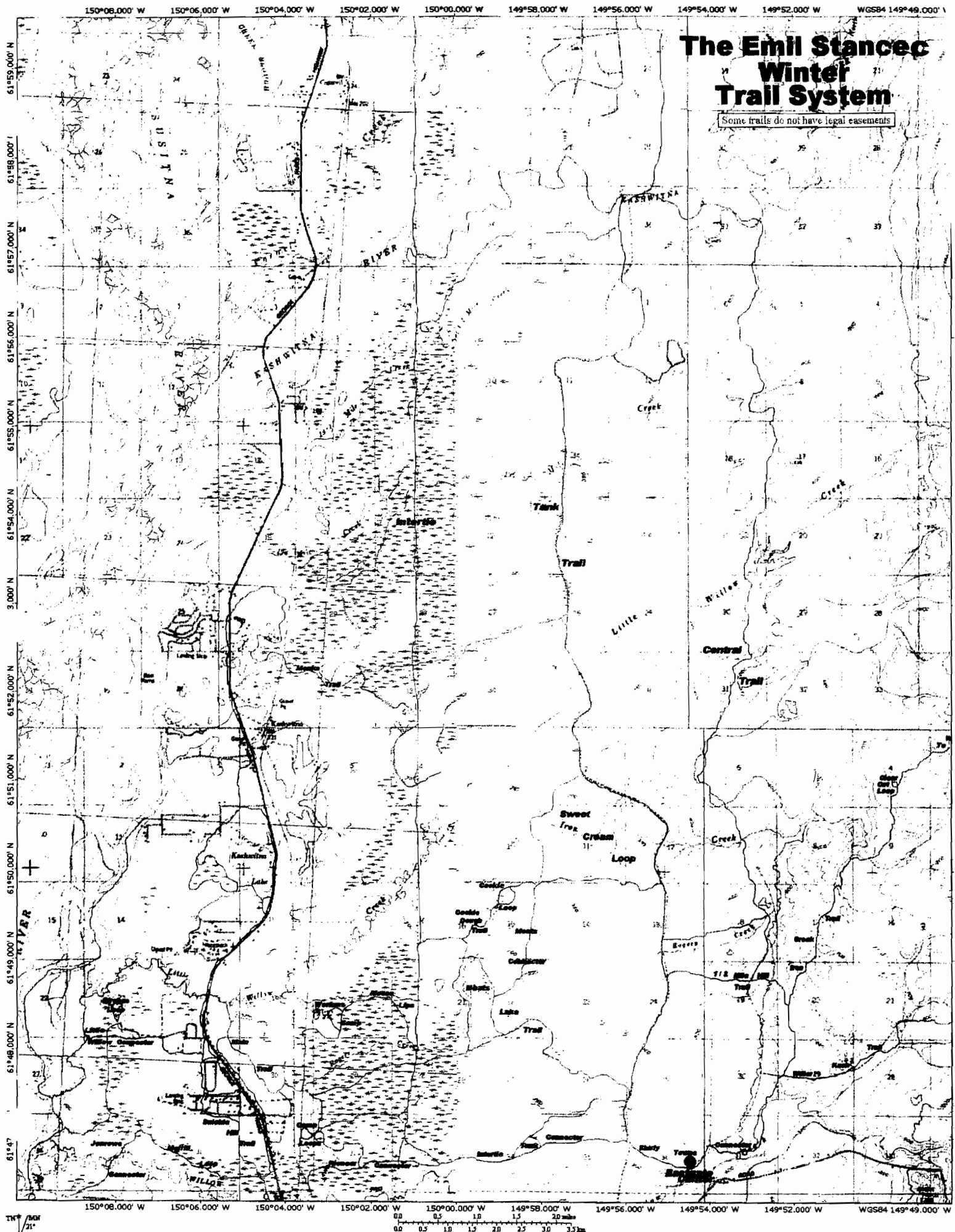
Emil Stancec worked for the Alaska Railroad and trapped for a living. His traplines provided many corridors that are now a part of the trail system; earlier development of these trails was done by the U.S. military conducting maneuvers.

The main trail in this system is the "Tank Trail", also known as the Talkeetna Mail Trail. Connecting from the north end of what is now 4-Mile Road, in the Haessler-Norris system, the Tank Trail continues north, originally crossed the Kashwitna River and proceeded to Montana Creek and Talkeetna. Although documented in the Kashwitna Management Plan and evidenced in the U.S.G.S. maps of the region, the continuity of the Tank Trail is now blocked by subdivision development. Proposed logging (wood-chips) in the Willer-Kash area further endangers the existence of the trails within this system.

Dog mushers, snowmachiners and hunters use this system extensively.

Future Plans and Goals for the Emil Stancec Trail System:

- Establish legal status of trails within system
- GPS/Survey/Map trails
- Improve Central Trail and connect it to Tank Trail
- Connect to trails east of the system
- Reconnect this system to the Haessler-Norris Trail System
- Develop trail events and racing capabilities within system
- Install uniform signage
- Maintain and improve trail access
- Incorporate the Willow Community Center as the hub



Trails Preservation

Aside from the Mat-Su Borough being the fastest developing area in the state, recent events (listed below) have highlighted the need for assistance from the Borough and State in preserving these trails.

- The transfer of state lands to the University of Alaska, an area in the heart of the Haessler-Norris Trail System, was legislated over the objections of the Community of Willow.
- The rapid transfer of Borough and State land to private ownership.
- Scheduled timber sales (wood-chips) in the Kashwitna Management Area will have a tremendous impact on the Emil Stancec Trail System.
- New subdivision developments that block trails and/or access to the above trails.

The Willow Area Trail Committee requests recognition and preservation of the trail systems documented in this Plan to facilitate protection and development of these trail systems,

We request that Willow's three trail systems be legally dedicated upon all public lands owned by the State of Alaska or the Mat-Su Borough,

We request that any future land transfers by the State of Alaska, the Mat-Su Borough or quasi-public entities such as the University of Alaska, or Mental Health Trust Lands be subject to these trail systems, and that title to transferred lands reserve out these trails for public use, as well as access to them,

We request recognition and preservation of Willow's trail systems during any platting process by the Mat-Su Borough. This applies particularly to the Haessler-Norris and Emil Stancec areas, since the legalization process for trail protection often takes years to accomplish, and

We request funding for surveying and documentation of trails within the Haessler-Norris and Emil Stancec areas to accelerate legal protection and inclusion in governmental trail plans, and

We request funding and assistance in relocating trails off of private property if necessary, since previous land transfers by the State and the Borough did not protect these trails.

VITAL MUSHING HABITAT

The Willow Trail Committee maintains that the wisest and best use of public lands within the *Emil Stancec and Haessler-Norris Trail Systems* is for recreation and dog mushing related activities. These two trail systems cover an area of 300 square miles.

The preservation of trails for dog mushing also translates into preservation of trails for other outdoor sports enthusiasts. It is by no means the intention of this document to suggest that this area be reserved exclusively for mushers or other winter sports advocates.

The Willow Trail Committee would like to point out however; the urgent need to set aside a geographically suitable area where sled dog kennels can legally operate. For this reason, the Willow Area Trail Plan wishes to address the establishment of what we have called an area of *Mushing Habitat*.

The Need

Dog mushing is the official sport of State of Alaska; Willow is considered, by many, the mushing capital of Alaska. The community is home to many professional kennels that support teams for the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, the Fur Rondy Sprint Race, the Open North American Sprint Race, the Yukon Quest International Race, Willow Carnival/Norris Cup Sprint Race and the Norman Vaughan Serum Run. In addition to these professional kennels, recreational sled dog teams and tourist oriented kennels make kennel owners an important contributor to the local economy.

Certain crucial things are necessary in order for a sled dog kennel to operate and properly train canine athletes:

- Looped trail systems that comprise enough miles for teams to train for the Iditarod and other distance races.
- Continued access to these trail systems from adjoining sled dog kennels.
- Trails that will not be compromised by future subdivisions.
- Legal protection from noise ordinances that would limit times of day and length of noise emanating from a kennel.

With abundant snowfall and large open spaces, Willow is the perfect “mushing habitat.” The Haessler-Norris and the Emil Stancec trail systems, in particular, provide the trails necessary for professional as well as recreational sled dog kennels to operate. This document has already addressed the importance of protecting the trail systems. 13

The protection of these trail systems, however, is not the only requisite for a sled dog kennel to exist. The concern of noise must also be addressed. It is no secret that dogs make noise; a kennel of sled dogs can bark and howl during any part of the day. Dogs get excited before eating and training; they bark when a moose or other visitor wanders into their area. A kennel of sled dogs cannot exist if a noise ordinance allows the animals to vocalize for only a certain length of time during a certain part of the day. That is why a solution to this concern is absolutely necessary for mushers and teams to flourish.

Failure to protect training trails and failure to amend noise ordinances, both Borough and State, will ultimately lead to the decline and elimination of sled dog kennels. Evidence of this is the loss of kennels and training trails in the Palmer and Meadow Lakes areas, and the rapid decline around Knik. One important factor in the Iditarod Restart being held in Willow in recent years is not only because of the lack of snowfall in the Wasilla area, but also because of the difficulty in providing trail access from Wasilla to Knik due to over 30 road crossings.

We do not want Willow to be the next community to loose its mushing heritage.

Mushing habitat preservation; once lost, it can never be regained

With these concerns in mind the Willow Trail Committee would like to make some proposals which we deem necessary if the sport of dog mushing is to continue to thrive in the area.

We call for public lands incorporating the Haessler-Norris and Emil Stancec Trail Systems be recognized as areas of *Vital Mushing Habitat* and be incorporated as such in the Deception Creek Management Plan, the Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan, the Kashwitna Management Plan and/or any other land use plan affecting these areas. These plans should be amended to recognize and protect these areas for public recreation, tourism and dog mushing.

We call for the State of Alaska, the MSB and the MSB Animal Care Advisory Board, with approval of the community in question, to modify or amend the noise nuisance or annoyance ordinances and the statutes to allow and encourage kennels to operate and train within the Haessler-Norris and Emil Stancec Trail areas.

We call for the State of Alaska to amend AS 09:45 to include "dog kennels, whether operated for profit or recreation" within the protection of AS 09:45:235.

The importance of dog mushing to the heritage of our great state is undeniable. The importance of dog mushing to tourism and the economy is also significant. But, as the state grows and Alaskan lifestyles change to resembling those outside of Alaska, we need to preserve our unique Alaskan qualities.

Establishing *Mushing Habitat* in the lands encompassing the Emil Stancec and Haessler-Norris Trail Systems will not only allow dog mushers and dog kennels to continue to live, operate and train on these trails, but it will also protect a true Alaskan heritage.

WACO

Willow Area Community Organization
Linda Oxley, Chair
chair@waco-ak.org

P.O. Box 1027 • Willow • AK 99688
(907) 495-6633
www.waco-ak.org

September 20, 2006

To who it may concern

At a regular meeting on August 7th, 2006, the Willow Area Community Organization passed a motion by the Willow Trail Committee to adopt the Willow Area Trail Plan. The plan was adopted by a unanimous vote, 94-0.

Discussion preceding the vote and the subsequent vote clearly shows the level of support in the community for trails and recreation. This document should be strongly considered when government agencies make policy decisions and businesses and individuals make investment choices.

Sincerely,

Linda Oxley / PM.

Linda Oxley, Chair

Willow Dog Mushers Association
Willow, Alaska

RESOLUTION NO. 07-06-01

A RESOLUTION SUPPORTING THE *WILLOW AREA TRAIL PLAN* AS PRESENTED BY THE *WILLOW AREA COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION (WACO) - WILLOW TRAILS COMMITTEE*.

WHEREAS: The Willow Dog Mushers Association is a State of Alaska recognized non-profit whose main mission is to protect and preserve the dog mushers' historical way of life for today, tomorrow and future generations, and

WHEREAS: The sport of dog mushing is the State of Alaska's Official Sport, and

WHEREAS: We, the members of the community of Willow and the Willow Dog Mushers Association utilize the West Gateway, Haessler-Norris, and Emil Stancec Trail System in order to enjoy and train our sleddogs, and

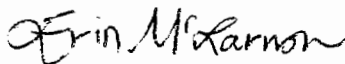
WHEREAS: The Willow Dog Mushers Association see the above mentioned trails as vital mushing habitat to our livelihood and will seek ways of protecting these trails and the rights of dog mushers.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Willow Dog Mushers Association supports the *Willow Area Trail Plan*, and authorizes the *Willow Area Community Organization (WACO) - Willow Trails Committee* to present it with our support in order to protect our way of life and to secure our uses of these areas for today, tomorrow and future generations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Willow Dog Mushers Association will address any necessary issues to bring this plan to fruition.

CERTIFICATION:

The foregoing resolution was passed and approved by a duly convened meeting of the Willow Dog Mushers Association, this 26th Day of July, 2006, by a unanimous vote of its voting membership.



Erin McLarnon
President


Justin Savidis
Secretary



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU

October 16, 2007

Stephanie Wheeler
Public Involvement Officer
Alaska Railroad Corporation
327 W. Ship Creek Ave.
Anchorage, AK 99502

Dear Ms Wheeler:

This letter on behalf of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau board of directors is intended to be included in the public comments regarding the proposed rail corridor connecting Port MacKenzie to the Alaska Railroad.

Tourism is the second leading industry in the state and the area being considered is a highly used recreational area. Fishing, rafting, snow machining, dog mushing, and wildlife viewing are common activities in the area. Two well-known and popular parks are also on the map and they include Nancy Lakes State Park and Willow Creek State Park.

The Mat-Su CVB board of directors opposes the rail corridor crossing any park land. We ask that you consider an alternative that least affects the recreation opportunities for residents and visitors.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Quill
Executive Director, Mat-Su CVB

**A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF PROTECTING ALASKA'S PARKS,
RECREATION AREAS, TRAILS, WILDLIFE AND TOURISM**

WHEREAS, the **Mat Su Convention and Visitors Bureau** is a non profit organization formed in 1986 to promote the Mat Su Visitor Industry; and *whereas*, the **Mat Su Convention and Visitors Bureau** membership grew to 299 members in 2007, with a retention rate of 91 percent, and

WHEREAS, the mission of the **Mat Su Convention and Visitors Bureau** is to market the Mat Su Valley as a visitor destination for the benefit of its members and promotes the development and advocacy of the local tourism industry by creating awareness of visitor attraction, services and facilities, and

WHEREAS, tourism is a valuable renewable resource and the second leading industry for the Mat Su Valley, and

WHEREAS, *official visitors to Nancy Lake State Park and Willow Creek State Recreation Area from FY 2000 to FY 2007 average between 75,000 to 150,000 visitors per year, and*

WHEREAS, *the Iditarod Sled Dog Race is Alaska's most important winter event which supports Mat Su CVB members and attracts thousands of fans from around the world, and whereas the Iditarod Sled Dog Race has started six of the past eight races in Willow utilizing the West Gateway Trail System, and whereas over 18,000 visitors attended the 2007 Iditarod ReStart at the Willow Community Center and thousands more watched the teams from locations along the Iditarod Trail heading out to Skwentna, and*

WHEREAS, the Port Mac Kenzie Rail Extension Project proposes a commercial Rail Corridor from Port Mac Kenzie to the Current Railroad line, and whereas Corridor 3-Willow is one of the proposed corridors or routes, and

WHEREAS, this proposed Corridor 3/Willow would disrupt existing trail systems-the **West Gateway Trail System**, would surround **Nancy Lakes SRA** with railroad activity on its east and west boundaries, divide **Willow Creek SRA**, cross **Willow Creek** and needlessly harm the peaceful character of a prime natural recreation area bounded by the Parks highway and the Susitna River, and

WHEREAS, the **Mat-Su Parks Advisory Board**, **The Tesoro Iron Dog Race**, the **Willow Area Community Organization**, the **Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race**, and the **Willow Dog Musers Association**, officially oppose Corridor 3/Willow due to its harmful impact on their missions, parks, trails, events and tourist potential and enjoyment, and

WHEREAS, the **Mat Su Convention and Visitors Bureau** Board of Directors in a letter of comment opposed proposed Rail lines crossing any Park Land, and

WHEREAS, *There are viable shorter proposed corridors that cross fewer trails, harm less wetlands, cross no State Parks, do not cross either the Little Su River or Willow Creek,*

encroach on wildlife and moose populations less, effect the membership of the Mat-Su CVB less and meet the needs of the Rail Extension Project,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Willow route/corridor 3 of the Port Mac Kenzie Rail Extension Project is incompatible with the mission of the Mat Su Convention and Visitors Bureau and its membership and we oppose its selection especially when there are viable alternatives available.

HEREBY, passed unanimously by the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau Membership this 9th day of November, 2007 as an advisory vote to the Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau Board of Directors at the annual meeting dated November 9, 2007.



The Anchorage Skijor Club

P.O. Box 240573
Anchorage, Alaska

November 2, 2007

Patty Sullivan
Director of Public Affairs
Matanuska Susitna Borough
350 Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645

RE: Comment to Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Project

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

I am representing the Anchorage Skijor Club and would like to comment on the proposed Port MacKenzie Rail Project. The Nancy Lake State Recreation Area and the West Gateway Trail System are frequently used by the members of the Anchorage Skijor Club. We feel that the Willow Corridor as described in the 2003 Rail Corridor Study will interfere significantly with our ability to use this area for our recreational activities. We hold day tours and weekend camping trips in the Nancy Lakes Recreation area. We stage a yearly race on the West Gateway Trail System. This race is one of our most popular races and has been used as a qualifying race for the Sled Dog Sports World Championship Races. Willow often has earlier snow than Anchorage and is heavily used in the early winter for training by Anchorage Dog Mushers, skijorers, and skiers. Later, when Anchorage has snow, the area is used heavily as a wilderness get-away not far from Anchorage.

Railroad tracks through and around this area would destroy the wilderness experience as it is now known. Grade separated crossings are often used as a way to get around conflicting user interests. This is extremely expensive and never satisfactory. We have found from past experience that these tunnels, bridges, overpasses are often promised at the beginning of a project, but when construction begins, somehow get left out because of the expense.

We would like to strongly encourage your consideration of a different area for this Railway Extension project to an area that would benefit from the project. The Willow corridor would be seriously compromised.

Sincerely,

Lulie Williams, President



Patty Sullivan, Public Affairs Director
Mat-Su Borough
350 E. Dahlia Ave
Palmer, AK 99645

Stephanie Wheeler, Public Involvement Officer
Alaska Railroad Corporation
327 W. Ship Creek Ave
Anchorage, Ak 99502

Re: Port Mac Kenzie Rail Extension Project

The Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA) represents over 1,100 member business from the tourism industry. Many of those members are in the greater Mat-Su Borough and they provide unparalleled outdoor experiences. Maintaining those great experiences is essential to efforts to bring tourists to Alaska and the Mat-Su area. Those visitors help build a strong economic engine for the Valley and all of Alaska.

Currently, comments are being received on the Port Mac Kenzie Rail Extension Project. The development of this rail extension north from Point Mac Kenzie into the Susitna valley includes several optional corridors. ATIA's concern is the integrity of state parks and access to recreational opportunities in the proposed corridors.

ATIA believes that care should be taken in the route selection to minimize conflicts with recreational use and to eliminate encroachment into public parklands.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "R. Peck".

Ron Peck, President & COO
Alaska Travel Industry Association
2600 Cordova Street, Suite 201
Anchorage, AK 99503

TOURISM BUILDS ALASKA'S ECONOMY

- Total visitor arrivals fall 2006-summer 2007 estimated 2 million
- Average in-state visitor expenditure: \$935
- Visitor spending in Alaska: \$1.87 billion
- Generates over \$152 million in state and local taxes and fees each year
- Every \$1 invested in Tourism marketing returns an estimated \$168

TOURISM PROVIDES JOBS

- Tourism is a leading industry in Southcentral, Southeast and Interior Alaska
- Provides one in seven private sector jobs
- Tourism is responsible for over 40,000 full-time equivalent jobs annually
- Travel industry accounts for more than 13.7 percent of all employment in Alaska
- 10 of Alaska's top 100 employers are directly involved in the travel industry

ATIA IS A MEMBERSHIP ORGANIZATION THAT REPRESENTS OVER 1,100 TOURISM INDUSTRY BUSINESSES IN ALASKA

OUR VISION:

The Alaska Travel Industry Association will be the leading industry organization promoting Alaska as a top visitor destination, communicating and promoting the Alaskan tourism industry as one of the state's major economic forces, and will be the respected voice of the industry for the growth of the industry, while remaining attentive to care for the environment, recognition of cultures and Alaska's unique quality of life.

OUR MISSION:

As we strive to attain our vision for the Alaska visitor industry, ATIA will undertake the following:

- Promote and facilitate travel to and throughout the state of Alaska.
- Provide a broad-based association of individuals and companies with an interest in the visitor industry in Alaska.
- Encourage the increase and improvement of quality visitor facilities, services and attractions throughout Alaska.
- Plan and execute a statewide marketing campaign promoting Alaska as a visitor destination.
- Increase awareness of the economic importance of the visitor industry.
- Develop and implement programs beneficial to the travel supplier and consumer, which no other single industry component or organization would be expected to carry out on its own.
- Initiate and cooperate with local, state and federal entities in developing and implementing programs, policies and legislation that are responsive to the needs of the industry and to intervene in those issues and initiatives that would directly affect the facilitation and promotion of travel to and within Alaska.
- Work cooperatively with the state on tourism development and long-range planning.



ATIA Convention 2006

October 10, 2007

Patty Sullivan
Public Affairs Director,
Matanuska-Susitna Borough
350 E. Dahlia Ave.
Palmer, Alaska 99645

Dear Ms. Sullivan,

My name is Bob Chlupach.

I live in Willow, Alaska.

Due to a long ago pre-arranged trip to visit my 80s plus Mother, who is still in good health, I will not be able to attend the forum on Oct. 24 in Willow regarding the Port Mackenzie Rail Extension. I am therefore submitting my concern, comments, questions and desired considerations to you at this time. To do this requires a framework of time line history to preface where my concerns lie and how they were arrived at. Presently, a concern I have is that this is not viewed as just another harangue by Joe Public and I will keep the tone of this message to avoid this demeanor. As well, I apologize for its length but too, there is a lot of information put together like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. I am also sending this letter to Stephenie Wheeler, Public Involvement Officer for the Alaska Railroad Corporation, Governor Sarah Palin, Willow Area Community Organization chair person Linda Oxley and Willow Dog Musers Association chairman Erin McLarnon.

When I was younger, my wife and I, settled near Mirror Lake before the 4-lane was constructed, working first in Anchorage and then Palmer. We had sled dogs and before sled dog people are lumped into a category and this letter filed, continue to bear with me, as the contents to follow are not just about sled dogs but as well family and the future of such. Ultimately, we chose a move to Willow and by the time the 4-lane was completed we had. Nothing against the 4-lane but it did force us to evaluate where we could best raise our daughter and still experience the quality of life we sought for the whole family, that being a more rural lifestyle still allowing us to continue as professional people.

Our first location in Willow was between Mile 65 and 66 along the Parks Highway. There, we were able to continue work as professional employees, our daughter got a quality public school education later becoming a Dietetics Program Manager at the Alaska Native Hospital in Anchorage and we were able to enter and complete the running of 10 Iditarod Sled Dog Races over a period of 4 decades. Moving to Willow at that time, the community was quite small. Taking advantage of no longer used trap line corridors and pure and simple lay of the land, for sled dog trails, I flagged and cut many, many miles of trail in addition to what was already existent which was not a lot. Today, the core of that trail network is the Haessler-Norris Trail System and is now extensively used

by Iditarod entrants, snow-mobile enthusiasts, cross country skiers, and many other types of recreation, to list just a few.

Some years later, as our daughter was growing and she at a point where she would choose a vocation we began looking for "Parks Highway frontage". There were two primary reasons; however, as you will see a third emerged. First, our daughter was thinking of becoming a veterinarian and with that we intended to build a corresponding facility for a practice and highway frontage would facilitate its success. Second, no matter what happened, highway frontage would serve as a future investment of which ultimately the value would be realized by our daughter in time as it was very apparent then as it is now, highway frontage is a valued entity of limited quantity. Third, with professional career still intact the ability to commute and be able to train sled dogs was also desired. Parks Highway frontage became a priority. We perused countless soil maps along the Parks Highway and discovered several parcels fitting the bill but none with soils that had an inherent drainage structure, that being sand base below topsoil, such as what we found in Mile 72 to 74. Good drainage soil is of concern to any livestock owner and the fact that we had sled dogs made the decision to pursue necessary. ALSO, we wanted to be sure and locate such that the inherent noise of a kennel of sled dogs at feeding time and while hooking them up for training would not be a nuisance to any neighbors. Much to our liking in this vein of privacy thinking, we sought parcels more isolated by geographical or physical location. Our investigations again yielded parcels in the area of Mile 72-74. This was not by any means a magical area but too provided close enough proximity for tolerable commuting distance. This area was further enhanced by adjacent large parcels that were not subdivided and had isolation to the east by the existence of the Alaska Railroad corridor. So, it was basically a no neighbor situation, what better place to have a kennel of sled dogs and still maintain an investment for the future. So it was, negotiated, and ultimately purchased property in the Mile 73 area.

With continued interest of running the Iditarod Sled Dog Race, I needed to establish another trail network. Another musher lived across the highway and at the time the trail system was relatively limited and confined. By using USGS maps and copious amounts of physical exploration, several potential trail corridors were located; some utilizing old trap lines, some utilizing military trails left over from World War II, and the majority derived from simple lay of the land. It was an effort that took several years and now the original trail network that I and others helped brush out or created is now the core of the extensive Emil Stancec Trail network.

Since the major effort to establish two trail systems, it is now evident just how important these systems are to all recreational users but perhaps most important to those folks with designs of either running sled dogs geared for the Iditarod, Quest or several of many local shorter events. How evident has this impact been? Many, many people have relocated their homes and dog teams to these respective trail systems. From the Willow area, drivers enter Iditarod and Quest each year and frankly the vast majority of them are extremely competitive. Names such as; Dee Jonrowe, Rayme Smyth, Vern Halter, Linnwood Fiedler to mention a few while on the speed angle; Egil Ellis a multiple time champion, Bill Kornmuller a regularly top 10 speed placer, JP Norris and myself

entering the World Championship Fur Rendezvous race in Anchorage, just to name a few in their respective events. This letter however is not about a whose who but at this point a piece of the puzzle which determines inherent value to a specific populous and the annual economic spin-off that has been going on for quite a few years now surrounding these two trail systems.

Not immune to the calamities of life I ventured briefly "outside" of Alaska a few years back. I explored several "very well known" dog mushing areas in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming looking for something to simulate the conditions of the Alaska home only with cheaper living expenses. What I found floored me. Food prices were cheaper but not so as expected, land prices in snow country were no different than Alaska and substantially more in the Rockies, same for acceptable rural homes, but "absolutely nowhere" could I duplicate or come remotely close to having the quality of trail system as the Emil Stancec Trail System. Returning to Alaska, I dissected the economic advantages and disadvantages of Tok, Fairbanks, Glennallen, Kenai Peninsula and still none of these were as competitive pricing wise in all areas and again, "nowhere" could I see a trail system that could compete with the Emil Stancec Trail System for everything that makes up quality of life.

So, I ended up reinvesting on some of my previously owned property, subsequently building a house knowing now the quality of life perceived greener elsewhere was pure mental flatulence.

When one tries to put a value on items that make up the quality of life how does one do this and define the very things that make up an inherent quality? The conundrum becomes even more so the older one gets, particularly if they are very active in the sled dog venue. One just doesn't relocate and go cutting trails again when they get aged and to find such potential and still have realized investment while one is still alive, such as owning property along the Parks Highway, is likely non-existent.

I've brought you this far and you may ask what the point of all this is? Why does it seem so personal? Simple, the Willow Corridor for the Port Mackenzie rail extension goes directly through the middle of our house and completely eliminates whatever land integrity and value we currently have, not to mention being displaced off a trail system I had been a primary conceiver and builder of and not to mention the investment in Parks Highway frontage property from a personal development standpoint and not to mention, this is "OUR HOME, OUR LIFESTYLE, OUR LIVELIHOOD".

The inherent value of property depends on your desires for particular aspects in regards to the quality of life. For instance, a dog musher's property where one can train from the doorstep is no different than a skier owning a condo at a ski resort, or a golfer living adjacent to a golf course, a lake dweller who has a penchant for water skiing, a snowmobile enthusiast who lives rural to avoid machine transport and the list can go on and on. Historically dog mushers are not viewed in this same light.

So, two questions come to mind. On a personal level, how does what you are promoting begin to compensate for what I've written about above and do you really think we would have reinvested in this property had we known there were plans for a railroad to run through our house and dissect this property?

One might say, "Bob aren't you putting the cart before the horse? A decision hasn't yet been made as to the corridor route".

That now leads us to a brief review of history of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough public process input. At no time was there ever a meeting in Willow to discuss a rail corridor PRIOR to the Borough being caught for improper disclosure to the public process. A meeting some years back was held at Houston and the Willow corridor decided thereafter. There were "NO" public notices in Willow of this meeting. A statement was made, there aren't enough people in Willow that it would affect, or something very similar to that effect. In the middle of last winter, over the holiday season, a public notice appeared in the Willow Post Office for public comment to a rail corridor originating in Willow, Railroad Corridor 3, to Point Mackenzie. The Borough however was brought to task for trying to get through the public process with minimal process under the people's radar screen. They then extended the comment period another 30 days and it became apparent something was amiss to them and now would have to tow the line via appropriate channels. The Borough in all likelihood would deny any of this and it comes as no surprise to anyone. As it is common knowledge, the bottom line is the Borough is seeking ways to justify Port Mackenzie. Of course we could talk till we are blue in the face over the various facets of the tax base and its burdens on property owners or for that matter the creation of an industrial complex such as Port Mackenzie.

In addition, the Borough has violated its own disclosure codes after the Houston meeting a few years back. Since then, I know of three pieces of property which have been sold and purchased in or near the Willow rail alignment corridor. Not one of these purchasers was ever informed prior to closure of sale that this process, a railroad corridor, was underway, nor were the sellers of said properties. This also is in violation of the Boroughs own codes. Do you think any one of these parties would have bought property had they known?

Since the location of any of the corridors serves to facilitate usage of Port Mackenzie, may we back up some and clarify where the money came from to build the Port? Clearly the cart has been before the horse for quite some time and questions such as this should be answered on the record by the Borough. It all has to do with trust, mutual public trust, and trust in our local government as taxpayers. As taxpayers, we might have bought something we never knew was happening and certainly with a multi-million dollar plan as we are now witnessing, all cards need to be on the table.

Attending a Borough Assembly meeting after my presentation of issues concerning the public process of the railroad corridor last spring, I was told the corridor was "just penciled in", yet it was the only corridor presented on any of the maps and the only one "discussed" at the time. Now of course, the whole process has changed with the Borough

saying we will revisit all other options to which we now witness a glossy polished presentation from the Borough and Alaska Railroad addressing the advantages and need for such a project. This while trying to garner support of the need for a rail connection to Pt. Mackenzie all the while deflecting attention away from the issue of the Willow corridor. The public can comment but obviously cannot produce a shined up version, even if it chose to do so as our comments and presentation cannot be done with taxpayer dollars. The op-out for the Borough then becomes the NEPA process; however, challenging the Borough's mass media builder approach is at best a real David versus Goliath.

I am normally not such a cynic but am forced to be when an entity is not forthright in conduct.

As a retired State of Alaska fishery biologist I personally object to the construction of this corridor. I know well what wetlands mean to surrounding salmon and trout streams. Too, as a sport fisher I know that Willow Creek supports a viable sport fishery on resident species of rainbow trout and Arctic Grayling. People from around the world fish this drainage, more times than not by guided rafting. In my current life, I am a sport fishing guide. In questioning other local guides, they found clients do not want to come to Willow Creek to see a railroad corridor while fishing. This is a major roadside salmon fishery BUT upstream from the confluence with the Susitna River this drainage at specific times can be a world class fishery for trout and grayling. To risk impairing the quality of this fishery and the annual revenue it creates is unconscionable.

I was the lead Fishery Biologist in setting forth a program from inception to fruition that supplied supplemental king salmon released as smolt to return the Willow Creek drainage as harvestable adults in an effort restore a depressed king salmon run at the time. The program coincided with the development of the Willow Creek State Recreational Site by State Parks Division. Currently, this supplemental king salmon release supports one of the most, if not the most popular east side Susitna River roadside fishery in upper Cook Inlet. Hundreds of people fish this annually. Farther upstream, two lodge facilities are nearly always jam packed with RVers, diners, guided fishing trips, and etc. during the summer salmon fishing season. "That" is their livelihood. With almost certainty, the projected number of coal trains would greatly impact the livelihood of these two private enterprises since the rail corridor would be just downstream. In addition, Willow Creek Recreation Area would be dissected by the corridor and as witnessed in other areas, chain link fences installed to prevent people from accessing areas on the other side of the tracks. There is no mitigation possible to come close to compensation to all the users of this area and if a train calamity were to occur in this area, what then? Therefore, I am not in favor of the corridor in this particular location in regards to impact on fishery resources.

Railroad corridors and moose do not get along and it is an undeniable fact during the winter moose gravitate towards railroad and highway corridors. Both the Willow Creek area and the ridge line along Red Shirt are significant wintering grounds for moose. A "new" corridor in core calving and wintering grounds would mean disaster for moose

numbers in the area. What's the railroad going to do for mitigation, say there will be an allowable mortality or fence the whole corridor to prevent movement of wildlife from one side of the tracks to the other? There is a similar circumstance along the highway between Anchorage and Eagle River in the Ft. Richardson area. Therefore, I am not in favor of the corridor in this particular location in regards to impact on wildlife resources, especially in a more remote section of south central compared to the highway along Ft. Richardson.

Farther down, where the corridor travels just west of Red Shirt Lake, undoubtedly this would affect one of the "crown jewels" of State Parks. Steeped in history and usage as a day and multi-day canoe trail system traversing numerous lakes, South Rolly Lake campground would be located right on the periphery of the railroad right-of-way. South Rolly Lake campground is always full of family campers during the summer months and the trail from there along the ridge line to Red Shirt Lake is one of the most intensively used hiking trails in south central Alaska.

Anthropologically, Denaina Athabasca peoples historically used this trail and along the ridge overlooking Willow Creek roughly where the rail corridor would be there is evidence a Denaina village site was present, obviously taking advantage of summer salmon returns.

The number of people utilizing the Nancy Lake Recreation Area and the Willow Creek Recreation Area means a great deal to the local economy. A disruption such as the endeavor by the Borough and Alaska Railroad would most assuredly impact numerous small businesses in the Willow Area.

Traversing wetlands always brings up pros and cons where ever one travels. Wetlands serve to purify water by the time it soaks into the water table. Wetlands are a dynamic living entity, not a stagnant piece of marshy land having no value. All one has to do is look at the Palmer Hay flats and it becomes apparent that the east side of the highway is far more moist than the west. The highway has essentially prevented broad spectrum water perking and dispersal along its corridor. This is merely an observation, not a statement in disfavor of the highway. However, an ecological lesson should be drawn in consideration of what this corridor will do to all the adjacent wetlands on the way to Pt. Mackenzie. A potential mitigation provision of culverts and other such passage devices is not mitigation to the functional soundness of the surrounding lands. That serves more to appeal to a human mental justification designed to feel gooder. There is really no provision that can be made to provide for unfettered water movement along a marshy surface while perking into wetland soils. The net result of an all natural free flowing system is a recharged purified water table. I am therefore against the existence of a railroad corridor in this area.

I am very much aware of the requirement of the Surface Transportation Board (STB) that construction of a new railroad line requires the Board's approval under 49 U.S.C. 10901. Also, I am aware of the requirement of an environmental review in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. 4321-4335

and the Board's Section of Environmental Analysis (SEA) to ensure that the STB complies with NEPA over related environmental statutes. Please do not say this is where all my concerns will be answered. I've presented enough questions outside the NEPA process for you to address.

In summary, my questions from the above concerns are as follows:

In relation to the alignment of the Willow corridor, due to the uniqueness of some property owners whose lives, home and livelihood are dependent on location, how will an independent evaluator appreciate these facets in determining value if they are not parlay to the situation themselves?

In determining value, in some cases, comparative land and home prices cannot be accurately accomplished by previous sales in a general location, then how will value be determined?

With the railroad corridor now on the table, no matter what the current status is, this process has effectively eliminated anyone of those directly affected families from selling their property. How do you propose to address this in instances such as; spouse has a change in job venue, a family emergency, or simply wanting to relocate?

Will property owners have a say in the determination of the value of their property?

Who determines what mitigation results are acceptable?

What happens if a rail corridor is determined and mitigation results are not acceptable?

Who determines where the rail corridor will go?

Who determines if there will be a rail corridor?

Will a specific corridor be selected for STB to consider or will a "shotgun" of potential corridors be presented to the STB to consider?

This project is designed in essence to support Port Mackenzie. I fully understand the overall "broader" goals but an unanswered question is, who funded and where did the funds come from for the initial construction of the Port?

And so ends, at this time, just one of the various pieces of an enormous puzzle.

Gratefully awaiting answers to my questions.

Please send "hard copy" answers to me at my mailing address which is:

Bob Chlupach
P.O. Box 931

Willow, Alaska 99688

Most Sincerely,

Robert S. Chlupach
Willow, Alaska

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CITY OF HOUSTON, ALASKA

MAC WEST-HOUSTON SOUTH –PREFERRED ROUTE



RESOLUTION 07-010

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF HOUSTON, ALASKA IN SUPPORT OF THE HOUSTON RAIL EXTENSION SOUTH.

WHEREAS, the Interior of Alaska has vast deposits of a multitude of minerals; and

WHEREAS, these minerals have been unprofitable to market due to the high cost of exportation; and

WHEREAS, a rail spur through Houston to Port McKenzie would make the exportation of minerals from the Interior of Alaska to the rest of the state and world feasible; and

WHEREAS, the rail spur may bring much needed economic, as well as residential development into Houston, along with more available jobs for Houston's residents; and

WHEREAS, the Houston Rail Extension South is part of Houston's Comprehensive Plan; and

WHEREAS, this route crosses fewer wetlands, has less developed land nearby, crosses fewer salmon-spawning streams and split fewer designated refuges and recreational areas than the other routes studied; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Council of the City of Houston hereby supports the Houston Rail Extension South.

PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED by a duly constituted quorum of the Houston City Council this 13th day of December, 2007.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steve Frost", is written over a horizontal line.

Steve Frost, Mayor

ATTEST: A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daleann Pond", is written over a horizontal line.

Daleann Pond, City Clerk

Port MacKenzie Rail Extension Criteria Matrix

PROPOSED ROUTES	CRITERION ^a										Total +/-	Cost Estimate ^c (millions)
	1 Poor or Highly Compressible Soils (million cubic yards)	2 New Road Crossings (#)	3 Land Availability ^b (acres/mile)	4 Developed Parcels (#)	5 Designated Land Use ^c (acres)	6 Train Energy Required (horsepower- hours)	7 Wetlands (acres)	8 Mapped anadromous fish streams (#)	9 High Potential for Archeological Sites ^d (acres)	10 Fragmentation of designated refuges and recreation areas (yes/no)		
Mac West - Willow	0	+	0	0	-	0	0	0	-	-	1/6/3 -2	\$320 -
Mac West - Houston North	-	+	0	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	4/1/5 -1	\$250 0
Mac West - Houston South	0	+	0	+	-	0	0	0	+	0	3/5/2 +1	\$220 +
Mac West - Big Lake	+	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	0	1/2/7 -6	\$290 0
Mac East - Willow	0	0	0	+	+	0	+	+	-	-	4/4/2 +2	\$330 -
Mac East - Houston North	-	0	0	+	+	+	0	0	+	-	4/4/2 +2	\$260 0
Mac East - Houston South	0	0	+	+	+	0	+	0	+	+	6/4/0 +6	\$230 +
Mac East - Big Lake	+	-	0	-	+	-	+	-	-	+	4/1/5 -1	\$285 0

a (+) Positive; (0) Neutral; (-) Negative. Criteria not weighted and routes are unranked.

b Large parcels of undeveloped land owned by the State of Alaska (land not specifically designated for parks or refuges),

Matanuska-Susitna Borough, University of Alaska, Mental Health Trust, and Alaska Native corporations.

c Lands that are designated for parks, refuges, or agricultural uses. d Routes impacting greater than 500 acres were given a minus and

routes impacting less than 300 acres were given a plus. e Costs do not include approximately \$10 million for loop track construction within the port (all alternatives)

Houston on board early with rail plan

Borough, railroad
in early stages of
proposed spur line

BY JOHN R. MOSES

Frontiersman

HOUSTON — A new rail line to Port MacKenzie is welcome in Houston, as long as it stops there and helps build industry. That's the message the Mat-Su Borough and railroad are receiving from some on Houston City Council. Others say trains should roll through even without a depot.

Borough and railroad officials said it's natural for a town or city to want new services. The problem with the Port MacKenzie spur line is it's so early in the planning process that no meaningful negotiations can happen. No one yet knows where the federally approved rail route will begin. The tracks will run a course between 25 and 40 miles long, depending on where the line starts, which could be in Big Lake, Willow or Houston.

"First, they've got to decide the route," Borough Economic Development Director Dave Hanson said.

It isn't unreasonable for a city like Houston to want transportation options like a railroad depot. Wherever the tracks

RAIL

Continued from Page A1

wind up going, project planners will work with the affected communities, Hanson said. There was no strong public opposition to the rail line at a recent Houston City Council meeting, but some want more than just new tracks and a fast-moving train.

Councilwoman Sandy McDonald said the council will likely revisit the issue when it meets again Nov. 15.

No council vote has been taken, but members have their own opinions. McDonald said she agrees with newly elected Councilman Roger Purcell that there should be a siding and/or a depot in Houston.

"If it comes through here we would like it to benefit the city," she said.

One obstacle to any deal-making is uncertainty facing even railroad planners. The final route plans will be decided in December and then submitted to federal authorities.

"At this point the railroad's not ready to bargain," McDon-

ald said.

Once a route is decided locally it still must be approved by the federal Surface Transportation Board, which is likely to OK the chosen route, she said. That federal board also investigates the proposed route through an environmental impact process that is open to the public and — if the route is approved — gives the railroad and Borough a list of contractors to choose from for construction.

Houston Councilwoman Carla Hendrix said she's in favor of having the new line go through the city, even if there is no guarantee of a depot or siding. "My initial reaction is, hey, bring it on."

Without a route, Hendrix understands why there can't be guarantees, and she thinks if Houston is chosen the city can work with the railroad.

And if the railroad refuses a depot or siding as part of the deal?

"There's always the future," Hendrix said.

The \$300 million rail project is scheduled for completion in 2012.

OPINION

MANAGING EDITOR: GREG JOHNSON PHONE: 352-2268 FAX: 352-2276 E-MAIL

FRONTIERSMAN EDITORIAL

Houston needs follow-through with rail desires

Plans to build a railroad spur to Point MacKenzie are chugging along, and it's time for interested communities to get aboard.

The rail route will be anywhere from 25 to 40 miles long, depending on whether it starts in Houston, Willow or Big Lake. While Willow representatives have spurned the spur with a lukewarm reception, some Houston city leaders are waving flags in the hope the train will stop in their community, complete with a depot.

While it is too early to put details to the new rail line plans, it isn't too early for an interested community like Houston to conceptualize how the railroad could benefit its community. City council members are already lobbying for the Borough and Alaska Railroad to seat the spur there and are eager for the advantages a rail line originating in Houston could bring.

Some businesses could benefit greatly from having rail access. More importantly, city officials believe rail could be just the ticket Houston needs to stoke its boilers as a viable place to locate new business and industry. They may be on the right track. We are certain the wheels are spinning among some leaders in Houston as they consider the potential.

What Houston needs now is to be more proactive in luring the rail spur. Don't stop at simply saying, "Hey, over here!" Develop a rail plan. If economic development is the key to Houston's success, invest in an economic development coordinator to help draft a plan that specifically spells out how Houston and the Mat-Su Borough could use rail access and a depot as a vehicle to chug more industry and wealth into Houston and the Valley.

Houston may want to be Alaska's version of "The Little Engine That Could," but will need more than an "I think I can" approach to make believers out of the Borough and railroad.

The council expects to examine the railroad issue again at its Nov. 15 meeting. Perhaps by that time, it will be ready to assign to committee or other body some of the preliminary work of pushing Houston's agenda in regard to the railroad. While final plans aren't expected until December, Houston can influence the process by putting initiative to its interest.

The same is true for residents of Big Lake or Willow (although meetings in Willow indicate that community would prefer the rail locate elsewhere). Perhaps by starting in Houston and running a route favorable to Big Lake, the railroad spur could aid both communities and still reach its destination in Point MacKenzie.

Houston wants rail guarantees

SPUR: Line to Port MacKenzie could bring industry with it.

By RINDI WHITE
rwhite@adn.com

HOUSTON — Houston residents would eagerly accept a branch of the Alaska Railroad through their city, but only if it brings jobs and industry to the struggling local economy, some said at a recent meeting.

Houston, with more than 1,500 residents, is growing in size. But city government struggles to pay for road maintenance and other services with the property tax and 2 percent sales tax it collects. The town needs industry, residents say.

Now, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough hopes by 2012 to extend a branch of the Alaska Railroad from the main line, which already divides Houston, to Port MacKenzie.

A branch line could attract industry to Houston, but only if trains stop long enough for goods or passengers to be loaded and unloaded. Some Houston residents want that guarantee before they give the project any support.

However, community support is but one factor in the decision. The federal Surface Transportation Board, and not the railroad nor the borough nor the city, would decide where a line should be built, if at all, said Alaska Railroad special projects manager Brian Lindamood. He said the railroad this week will present the concept for the first time to the Surface Transportation Board. The railroad expects a decision by mid-2009, Lindamood said.

Houston has its roots in rail. In 1917, it was a railroad siding named after congressman William C. Houston of Tennessee. Coal mines in the area fueled Anchorage stoves. But trains no longer stop in Houston and most people who live there commute to jobs elsewhere. Commerce in Houston amounts to some tourism, retail and services but little manufacturing.

"Houston grew up as a railroad town. I don't think we should give up our history just to let a railroad go through. But we need some guarantees to make it beneficial to all of us," said newly elected City

online

Comments about the plan to build a rail line to Port MacKenzie will be accepted until Nov. 2. Learn more about project at

www.portmacrail.com

Councilman Roger Purcell.

The City Council has taken no stance on the project. But Purcell said he wants promises of a railroad siding and loading dock in place before Houston agrees to the line.

Purcell isn't alone. Rick Dilley, owner of Alaska Cozy Coal and Furnace, said he'd like to get coal shipments by rail instead of trucking the coal from Healy himself.

MAT-SU FOCUS

Dilley is a Usibelli coal distributor for the Valley and Anchorage.

A former North Slope worker, Dilley three years ago started his coal-furnace and coal-supply business because he got sick of paying high fuel oil bills.

He sold 12 tons of coal the first year. This year, he sold 72 tons.

"I don't want to see the railroad come through Houston and just cycle right through. I want to see industrial development in Houston. I want Houston to be the next star. It's our turn," Dilley said.

Vaughn Nadeau, manager of Spenard Builders Supply's Big Lake truss manufacturing plant, said SBS might benefit from a local railroad siding as well.

The Big Lake plant, which is within Houston city limits, shipped about \$1.5 million worth of trusses to Fairbanks this year, Nadeau said, and more were shipped out of the Anchorage port to Bush communities.

Lindamood said it's far too early in the planning process to make promises to Houston, or to any other community.

"We're trying to figure out if the route goes to Willow, to Houston or to Big Lake," Lindamood said.

The Alaska Railroad and the borough are wrapping up an analysis of several routes from the main line to the borough-owned Port MacKenzie. A rail line is key to making the port profitable.

Find Daily News reporter Rindi White online at www.adn.com/contact/rwhite or call 1-907-352-6709.