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**APPENDIX F**

**Matanuska-Susitna Borough**

**Parks & Outdoor Recreation Division**



**Comprehensive Development Plan**

**TRAILS INVENTORY**

**September 1987**

## GLENN HIGHWAY REGION

### INTRODUCTION TO THE AREA.

This section discusses trails off of the Glenn Highway between Moose Creek and the Borough boundary to the east.

The area is described in an Anchorage Times, July 8, 1982 article entitled: "GLACIERS, MINES ARE VALLEY HIGHLIGHTS" "Great Getaways" by Janice Weiss.

"The rushing white waters of the Matanuska River flow through the Valley of the same name. Back on land, the Glenn Highway follows the meandering of the river. Both the river and highway offer access to a variety of things to do in the Matanuska River Valley--from walking on a glacier to watching riding in a river raft to exploring old coal mines.

All can be done in a day-trip from Anchorage; the area is just north of Palmer.

The headwater source of the river is the Matanuska Glacier, which gives the river its milky-white color. The glacier is visible from many points along the highway after passing Sutton, heading north, and there's a turnout with a good view at Mile 101.7. To get to the glacier, which is one of the few in the State on which one can walk, turn toward Glacier Park Resort at Mile 102 of the highway. The road leading to the glacier is private and a fee is charged to use it, \$3.50 for adults, \$1.75 for children 6 to 12. The road leads to a parking area and from there you can walk across the glacial deposits to reach the ice, a

distance of about 250 feet. The walk to the ice is becoming shorter--since 1979 the glacier has advanced about three to four inches a day. After you've walked on the glacier, you might like to take a ride down the river.

Nova River Runners of Alaska offers float trips down the Matanuska River. The four-hour day trips begin at 11:30 a.m. at Kings Mountain Lodge, Mile 76.5 of the highway. This trip goes through 15 miles of scenic canyons in the Chugach and Talkeetna Mountains. After lunch, riders are given a chance to try their hands at the oars. Bald eagles and moose are occasionally seen along the way. The Chickaloon River back-country trip also begins from King Mountain Lodge where a helicopter will take you to Chickaloon. After a night of camping at the foot of Castle Mountain, the guides will take you on a river run.

Also available is the horseback option. Rather than taking the helicopter, you can ride horseback to Chickaloon. For more information on any of these trips, call 694-3750. If good fishing is what you are looking for, you'll find many places to drop a line in the water in the Matanuska River Valley.

Long Lake at Mile 85.3 is in a narrow canyon below the highway. Spring through fall, grayling up to 18 inches can be caught there. Grayling and also small rainbow trout can be found in Lower Bonnie Lake at Mile 83.3

Closer to Anchorage, at Mile 54.5, Moose Creek offers trout and Dolly Varden in the summer.

This history buff will also find many items of interest in the river valley. The Glenn Highway crosses Hicks Creek at Mile 96.4 which was named by Captain Glenn in 1989 for H. H. Hicks, the guide of his expedition.

An old road by the Chickaloon River and canyon at Mile 77.7 leads to an abandoned oil well and a coal mine. Trails in this area lead into the big game country of the rugged Talkeetna Mountains, home of sheep, moose, caribou, black and grizzly bear. At Mile 61, the Jonesville road turnoff, paved for only about two miles, will lead to the old Jonesville Mine and the old Eska Coal mine area.

Sutton, established as a railroad siding in 1981, is at Mile 60.4. The town was once the heart of the flourishing coal industry and is now a small community of about 800 people.

At Mile 112.5 is Sheep Mountain, elevation 6,300 feet. The mountain is visible for about 11 miles on the highway and sheep are often seen on its higher slopes. By Caribou Creek and the bridge at Mile 107 are turnouts that offer good views of the Matanuska Glacier and Fortress Ridge, elevation 5,000 feet, that looms above the highway. Beginning at about Mile 80, Kings Mountain, elevation 5,809 feet, can be seen. And at about Mile 68, Pinnacle Mountain can be seen rising southeast of the highway. A hill at Mile 53 on the highway will give southbound travelers a view of the homes

and farms of the Matanuska Valley. Along the highway are several resorts and lodges that offer cold and hot drinks, food and spectacular views." (Reprinted with permission of the Anchorage Times.) Most of the trails connecting to the Glenn Highway are described in "Trails and Signs Plan of the Glenn Highway--Chickaloon to Glennallen" prepared by the State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF &G) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in 1964 to identify and mark trails off of the Glenn Highway. In the introduction to the report the author stated: It is intended that eventually all the public trails leading off the main highway net in Alaska will be researched and mapped to permit the data to be put into the hands of the general public in the form of brochures such as the ADF&G Fishing Guide or the BLM Gulkana Basin Guide. Trails should be posted with information, interpretative and identification data for the benefit of all concerned.

All trails will normally have the Federal S-12 or S-45 signs, as applicable, and the ADF&G Trail Marker signs posted. ... In due course, routed trail signs, giving the name of each trail, will be erected along the side of the highway. These plans were never realized. Shortly after 1964 the State apparently lost interest in the scenic and outdoor recreation potential of the Glenn Highway and did not pursue the signing of the trails. The Borough, in 1979, arrived at cost estimates for brushing trailheads and trails off of the Glenn Highway, usually at about \$8,000 per trail. Presumably the work would have been done with federally funded Comprehensive

Employees Training Act (CETA) employees, a program which has since been discontinued.

The State Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT/ PF) has identified the many pullouts and waysides, many at trailheads, which ought to be developed or enlarged. Presumably some of these projects will be included in the reconstruction and realignment of the Glenn Highway from Palmer to Eureka Lodge which is planned after completion of a route alignment reconnaissance and environmental study.

Many of the best known trails are segments of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail or connect with that trail from various trailheads along the Glenn Highway. This long trail, originally an Indian trail, was used in the 1890's by U. S. surveyors and prospectors.

The first part of the trail was also called the Matanuska Trail. It followed the north side of the Matanuska River to Sheep Mountain. The Glenn Highway follows much of this route today except at the eastern end where the old trail is in the river bottoms, and the road is at higher elevations. In the summer, supplies would be freighted up from Chickaloon along the Boulder Creek, Caribou Creek and Alfred Creek, and, in winter, the Matanuska Trail along the Matanuska River to Tahnetta Pass would be used.

From the 1900's to the early 1940's it was used as a freighting trail for mining camps in the Nelchina area and the gold fields of Alfred and Albert Creeks. After completion of the Glenn High-

way, portions of the trail between the Glenn Highway (Sheep Mountain) and the old Nelchina townsite to the north were used for freighting in mining equipment and supplies.

Although the trail from Knik to Nelchina was in existence from discovery of placer gold in the Nelchina area in the early 1900's, the great bulk of freighting was originally from the east from Valdez, up the Richardson Trail, westward along the north side of the Tazlina River (just south of the Glenn Highway) and then north to Nelchina.

The construction of an Alaska Railroad spur from Matanuska to the Chickaloon coal fields in 1929 now made it more economical to transport freight from the west--from railroad to up the Nelchina Trail to Nelchina. Traffic from the Richardson Trail dropped off sharply. Completion of the Glenn Highway in the early 1940's completed the shift of freighting from the east to the west. Gold mining was terminated in 1942 as a World War II measure and there was very little use of the old mining trails until the early 1970's when there was a renewed interest in placer gold exploration and mining in the Nelchina area.

Portions of the trail north of Sheep Mountain are once again used for freighting--this time by caterpillar tractors.

Although the trail originally began at Knik, the Chickaloon access point is used as a trailhead today. This reduces the trail length to about 60 miles. Eventually the Kings River Trail, Mile 66.7, a part of Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail, may

be extended across Kings River along the south slope of Castle Mountain to the Chickaloon River Trail, at Mile 77.6. The trail between Kings River and Chickaloon River is indistinct today. This area is good for hunting, fishing, backpacking, camping, horseback riding, photography, berry picking, off-road vehicle travel, snow machining and wildlife observation.

Little Nelchina River campsite, tables, firepits, toilet.  
M.P 137.5

#### RECREATION SITES.

Moose Creek State Recreation Site-eight campsites, drinking water, pit toilets and trails. M.P 54.7

Coyote Lake Recreation Area, 40-acre day-use site under Borough management. Picnic area, swimming, hiking trails, overlook of Matanuska Valley. Coal mining reclamation site, Mile 2 on Jonesville Road.

King Mountain State Recreation sites, 22 campsites, covered fireplace, picnic tables, water, toilets. M.P 76.1

Bonnie Lake State Recreation Site, 13 campsites, toilets. Reached by 6-mile dirt road, not recommended for large trailers or motorhomes. Mile 83.3

Long Lake State Recreation Site, picnic sites, camping, firepits, toilets, short trails. M.P 85.3

Matanuska Glacier State campground, 8 sites, picnic tables and outhouses. M.P 101.0

Most of the trails are excellent for horse back riding. The trails are:

**PREMIER MINE TRAIL** this trail takes off to the east at about Mile 3 of the Buffalo Mine Road. The Premier Mine is between the Buffalo Mine Road and

Moose Creek. The Premier Mine Trail goes approximately one and one-half miles from Premier Mine south by southeast to just south of Elks Lake and to the Elks Lake Trail. The Premier Mine Trail is a necessary leg of the Sutton Power Line Trail, since it is not possible to get across the Moose Creek Canyon at the point where the Matanuska Electric Association power line crosses Moose Creek.

**BUFFALO MINE TRAIL** is a 1.5 mile trail from the end of Buffalo Mine Road across Moose Creek to Elks Lake and to the Elks Lake Road. Once off Buffalo Mine Road, access is primarily by foot due to continually changing road and creek crossing conditions.

WISHBONE LAKE TRAIL is a one mile four-wheel drive trail from the mid-portion of the Buffalo Mine Trail to Wishbone Lake. The lake area provides recreational opportunities such as: fishing, hunting, wildlife observation, and picnicking; off-road driving (ORV) and snow machining. The lake is stocked with rainbow trout and receives moderate fishing activity from mid-May to September. There is unmaintained public access at the southwest corner of the lake.

BAXTER MINE TRAIL is a very rough trail along the east side of Moose Creek between the Premier Mine and the Buffalo Mine. Although the trail is quite close to Moose Creek, you cannot see Moose Creek from the trail. It is not suitable for four-wheel drive use.

ELKS LAKE TRAIL is a road to Elks Lake off of the Palmer Correction Facility road at Mile 58, Parks Highway, also known as 58 Mile Road threading north

by northwest to intersect with the Premier Mine Trail. The Elks have built a parking lot and a large barbecue pit at Elks Lake. Just north of Elks Lake the road divides and becomes a four-wheel drive and equestrian trail. A northwesterly spur, the Buffalo Mine Trail, heads north by northwest to the Buffalo Mine area at Moose Creek. At the fork, the Seventeen Mile Trail heads off in a northeasterly direction for two miles to Seventeen Mile Lake. (Usual access to Seventeen Mile Lake is from the east by way of Jonesville Road.)

**JONESVILLE MINE TRAIL**, Glenn Hwy., Mile 60 is a one mile trail from the Glenn Highway to the end of the State maintained road which forks left toward the end of Jonesville Road. It is a four-wheel drive, equestrian and hiking trail.

**SEVENTEEN MILE TRAIL** is a 3.5 mile road and trail from Mile 2.5 of the Jonesville Mine Road to Elks Lake. The easterly two miles is a road which can be driven in the summer to a public access site on the west end of Seventeen Mile Trail. The lake attracts a moderate number of grayling fishermen in mid and late May. There is heavy off-road vehicle and snow machine traffic in the area. The road from Seventeen Mile Lake to Elks Lake can only be driven by four-wheel drive vehicles.

**ESKA CREEK FALLS TRAIL** is a 3.5 mile continuation of the right fork of Jonesville Road approximately one and one-half miles north of Sutton. One fork of the Jonesville Road turns west, north of Slipper Lake to the airstrip and the

garbage dump, while the northeast fork heads to the old Eska Mine. The Eska Mine Trail heads northeast from Eska to Eska Creek Falls.

**KINGS RIVER TRAIL** is part of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail constructed in 1914 and 1915. It starts just north of the Kings River bridge. It is now a four wheel drive road that goes about five miles to the east along the north side of Kings River. The mouth of Kings River where the river joins the Matanuska River is a popular picnicking and walking area. There is parking on both sides of the Kings River bridge.

**CASTLE MOUNTAIN TRAIL**, is an approximate four mile four-wheel drive road over a ridge, along the west flank of Castle Mountain, and then down to the east bank of Kings River. There is a trail across Kings River along the west side of the River that goes north for another six miles. The road is used primarily by hunters. The road was built in the 1960's by Kaiser Gypsum to obtain access to various limestone claims. The road is sometimes called the "Perminenti Trail" after a subsidiary of Kaiser Industries. Castle Mountain is a dramatic peak consisting of almost pure limestone. It can be seen from the Glenn Highway. The road provides access into the Kings River Canyon area and fine views down the river toward the Matanuska River. It has high recreational potential, if upgraded.

**CHICKALOON RIVER TRAIL** starts at the end of the Chickaloon River Road at MP 77 Glenn Hwy. and goes up the left side of the Chickaloon River for

several miles. Part of the right of way is the old railbed for an Alaska Railroad line to a Chickaloon coal mine. One of the two railroad bridges is sitting intact just south of the first Chickaloon River bridge. The Chickaloon River Trail provides access to the State of Alaska Chickaloon Bench subdivision which is east of the river and about two miles north of the Glenn Highway.

It is possible to go all of the way to Talkeetna over glacier free river trails, although this is rarely done. Distance is estimated at 100 miles. Johnny Luster, a long-time guide in the area, outlined this route to Talkeetna. Go up Chickaloon River, sometimes walking banks, sometimes using gravel bars, to headwaters and Camel's Back Pass; down Talkeetna to Yellow Jacket Creek; up Yellow Jacket Creek and cross over into Iron Creek, using obvious passes; down Iron Creek to Rainbow Lake and cross into Sheep River to Talkeetna River; Talkeetna River to town of Talkeetna.

The Chickaloon River is a popular access to those running the Matanuska. Kayakers put in on the Chickaloon about two miles up the Chickaloon Road. The run from Chickaloon to the Matanuska is Class III white water. Kayakers can take out at the Glenn Highway bridge before entering the Matanuska, or continue to enter the Matanuska and float to Kings Mountain Campground or Kings Mountain Lodge. This run involves Class II white water. Rafters run the Chickaloon only one-fourth to one-half mile before they enter the Matanuska. Take-out points are the same as for kayaks.

CHICKALOON TRAIL, starts at Mile 1 of the Chickaloon Road about 50 yards south of the second Chickaloon River bridge, goes up the edge of a ridge south of the Chickaloon River, crosses Sawmill Creek and comes out in the middle of the Chickaloon Subdivision where a right of way is reserved for it. At about nine miles the trail forks. The Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail follows the foot of Anthracite Ridge two miles north of the Glenn Highway while the Boulder Creek Trail crosses Boulder Creek at Boulder Creek Flats to follow Boulder Creek on the north side. A trailhead sign would appropriately read: "Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina-Trail--Chickaloon Trailhead 9 miles." Trail will also have to be brushed out.

BOULDER CREEK TRAIL, M.P 77 Glenn Highway, starts at Mile 9 of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail. After 19.5 miles the trail forks with the barely existent 35.5 mile Oshetna River Trail to the north and the 18 mile Caribou Creek Trail along Caribou Creek to the east. It is a summertime horse trail.

BONNIE LAKE ROAD, M.P 83.2 Glenn Hwy. to Ravine Lake and Bonnie Lake and also to Sawmill Point approximately four miles. Access to Ravine Lake is by an .8 mile gravel road north of the Glenn Highway at Mile 83.3. Public access is at the west end of the lake. From there it is another .6 mile to the turn off to Lower Bonnie Lake, where there is a state wayside with campsites, pit toilets and boat launch. These are rainbow trout fishing lakes.

LONG LAKE TRAIL is on the south side of the Glenn Highway, M.P 85.3. There is a trail

on the south side of the lake and over the ridge for views of the Matanuska River 800 feet below.

**WEINER LAKE TRAIL.** The pullout for Weiner Lake lies just south of the Glenn Highway at MP 87.8. There is a picnic site at Weiner Lake. This trail takes off from the west end of Weiner Lake continuing up a canyon to the north. It was brushed out, cleared of rocks and posted with BLM and State Fish and Game signs in 1964. It is used mostly by hunters. The trail could be extended to Meadow Creek and the unnamed lake one mile to the north to accommodate fishermen.

**PURINTON CREEK TRAIL** is a 1.3 mile trail linking the Glenn Highway at MP 89 to the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail. The latter trail follows the foot of Anthracite Ridge. Caribou Creek Flats is 4 miles to the east. The road into a parking area is about two hundred feet east of Purinton Creek. It is marked "Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail--Purinton Creek entrance."

**MUDDY CREEK TRAIL,** Mile 94.6 Glenn Hwy., 200 yards west of Victory Bible Camp turnoff, follows Packsaddle Gulch south to Muddy Creek, crosses the Matanuska River and onto Tatondan Lake, 2-1/2 miles. The Matanuska River can only be forded in low water. Hip boots are needed.

**HICKS CREEK TRAIL** departs north from Glenn Highway at Mile 99.4 just east of the Pinochle Creek bridge and heads to the east side of Packsaddle Peak Ridge, off the side of the ridge into Hicks Creek

and then follows the creek northeast to Caribou Creek for approximately 20 to 25 miles. Hicks Creek Trail is a major spur of the Chickaloon-Nelchina Trail network. It was the southern route to the Nelchina gold camps at the turn of the century.

The key role of this trail can be seen in the 1899 U. S. Geological Survey Map--Maps and Descriptions of Routes of Exploration in Alaska and the 1907 U. S. Geological Survey Map in Geologic Reconnaissance Map of Matanuska and Susitna Region where the

Hicks Trail is shown as the easterly trail, and the Old Matanuska-Crooked Creek Trail turning northeast of Sheep Mountain (Gunsite Mountain) is shown as the westerly route. The Hicks Creek Route was the summer route, and the Old Matanuska Trail tended to be the winter route. In 1899 and in 1907 the U. S. Geological Survey parties did not make a right turn onto Caribou Creek (Chickaloon--Knik-Nelchina Trail), but rather continued on up Billy Creek, northward across Limestone Gap, down Bubb Creek to the Little Nelchina River. This is a feasible route today.

Today, the trail is used for recreation. It is unmarked and follows tractor, horse, and game trails. In autumn and winter the trail is used by hunters on foot or horseback looking for moose, caribou, and sheep in the Talkeetna Mountains. Hicks Creek Trail is used by backpackers in the summer. It is fairly easy hiking. There are no rivers to ford. It provides access to several major regional and historical trails in the area

and offers, combining trails, an uninterrupted trek of 43 miles.

**PINOCHLE CREEK TRAIL** at Mile 99.5 Glenn Highway heads northeast to Hicks Lake and up to Caribou Creek. The first mile and a half crosses private property, then into state land where the trail meets Pinochle Creek.

**MATANUSKA RIVER TRAIL** at Mile 101.1 Glenn Highway literally falls off the river bluff at the edge of Matanuska State Campground and crosses the river and climbs the bluff on the south side of the river to an old coal mine claim, 5 miles.

**GLACIER CREEK TRAIL**, at Mile 101.9 of the Glenn Highway drops down onto east fork of Matanuska River and up a glacial bar to a tram over Matanuska River and onto Glacier Creek, approximately four miles.

**LOWER DAN CREEK TRAIL**, at Mile 104.3 Glenn Hwy. takes off to the northeast just across the highway from a barrow pit. Although the trail is only 1.5 miles long before getting into open country, it is well used by sheep and moose hunters.

**CARIBOU CREEK TRAIL**, at Mile 107 Glenn Highway, is a foot trail to the north, just east of the Caribou bridge. It is used by hunters and hikers. It was brushed out during the winter of 63-64 by a BLM crew and is noted on the official records. The trail is about 16 miles long before joining Alfred Creek, another spur of the Chickaloon-Knik-Nelchina Trail. Alfred Creek is behind Sheep Mountain. The trail is rough and becomes indistinct well

before reaching Alfred Creek. Moose, brown bear and caribou are hunted along the north end of the trail. There are usually sheep on Sheep Mountain.

**JACKASS CANYON TRAIL** descends steeply into the Matanuska River from Mile 101 of the Glenn Hwy. along the west side of Jackass Canyon. It is one of the very few routes into this river. The first 500 yards were constructed by Bureau of Public Roads before construction of the Glenn Highway. This is a difficult one and one-half mile trail that descends to the Matanuska River and then ascends steeply on the south side of the river. The Matanuska River can be forded except at high water.

**LONG LAKE TRAIL**, is a five-mile hunting trail heading southeast of the Glenn Highway from Mile 114.

**CAMP CREEK TRAIL**. This was a major highway construction camp, with the road leading southerly from MP 117.1 through tall spruce timber to the steep canyon walls of the Matanuska. It is used heavily by moose hunters. The trail was brushed out and two S-45 signs are posted.

**GUNSHIGHT M.T.-SQUAW CREEK TRAIL**, Mile 117.6 Glenn Hwy., is in open country, requiring no brushing out. It was constructed prior to the Glenn Highway and affords excellent access to outstanding caribou, hunting area. Today the trail leaves a gravel pit opposite Powerline Pole No. 7151 and ascends to the north. A lower road has been cut out about one mile to circumvent a washed out creekbed. It then continues over the toe of Gunsight