

Date: 3/12/07

Time: 5:30pm – 7:00pm

Location: Cantwell Community Center, Cantwell, AK

Subject: Community Meeting, Parks Hwy Corridor Partnership Plan

Present:

Alaska State Parks Representatives:

Penny Bauder, Interpretive Planner

Annette Iverson, ACC Intern

Stakeholders:

Armeda A. Bulard

Eileen Holmes

Teresa Hall

Ruth Colianni

Patricia Goble

Vernon Carlson

Dave Talerico

Peggy Talerico

The meeting was called to order by Penny Bauder at approximately 5:35pm. Overall, this was a constructive meeting, with many comments, issues, and concerns arising that will be considered in the final plan.

There was a comment that 5:30 p.m. was too early in the evening to expect a good turnout and that 7:00 p.m. was a preferable time for the next meeting. It was decided that future project meetings will be held at 7:00 p.m.

Penny introduced herself as an interpretive planner with Alaska State Parks who was contracted to write the Parks Highway Corridor Partnership plan by DOT, then introduced Annette Iverson, also with State Parks.

Penny explained that her presentation would include background on the State Scenic Byway Program and the Parks Highway Scenic Byway Corridor Partnership Plan. She gave a project update since last month's meeting in Healy and shared that 19 Parks Highway stakeholders volunteered to be on the initial task force planning team.

The 19 volunteers are composed of:

Local business owners: 5

AHTNA Inc.: 2

Local residents: 5

NPS: 2

Denali Citizens Council: 1

Denali Borough assembly members: 4

The presentation included the following information:

The state Scenic Byway Program was begun in 1993; since then, 13 segments of highway have been designated as state Scenic Byways. 3 of these have since been nationally recognized, 2 of them as All-American Roads. The Alaska Scenic Byways program is multi-modal, and includes the Alaska Railroad and the Alaska Marine Highway.

With Scenic Byway designation, communities have funding opportunities for projects which are decided upon by communities. It was emphasized that the State Scenic Byway program holds no regulatory power, and that Corridor Partnership Plan contents are determined by stakeholders.

A Corridor Partnership Plan is a document which promotes recognition, not regulation. The plan is an expression of local desires. The main purpose of the plan is to identify what is special to stakeholders along the corridor and identify ways to enhance, promote and protect these special areas. Plans are currently underway for four more state Scenic Byways, including the Parks Hwy. The three state Scenic Byways which already have a plan written have received funding for all of the projects they have applied for thus far. There is approximately \$600,000 dollars in funding available annually for all the state Scenic Byways combined. Projects along the corridor cannot be funded unless they are in the plan.

Q: Where does the funding come from for the plan?

Penny: Projects are funded by DOT. (Follow-up clarification: project funding passes through DOT from the Federal Highway Administration.)

Q: Can the plan be amended in the future?

Penny: Yes, it can.

The task force participants can choose to apply for national Scenic Byway designation and All-American Road status in the future if interested. This opens up additional funding opportunities for the corridor. The Corridor Partnership Plan must be written first, however. The task force will provide guidance on the project's development. The implementation of the plan is up to stakeholders.

Q: Have any of the other state Scenic Byways attempted to gain national status yet?

Penny: Yes, the Glenn Hwy, the Alaska Marine Hwy and the Seward Hwy have all achieved national status.

Teresa Hall shared information from the website of the national Scenic Byway Program and her own prepared comments (her comments represent her own personal views and not those of the Denali Borough):

*“The public has to be willing to make some sort of contribution to the process, not just in words but in time and money as well. If there is indeed some strong support for this in the areas included in the Denali Borough how do we propose paying for these items we have deemed “worthy”? If we create a scenic pull out*

*with in the Denali Borough we will need the means to pay for maintenance. I do not believe the state will be willing to provide those services. It will be and possibly should be our responsibility. If we are going to have a successful Scenic Byway we should target the independent traveler who makes his own decisions. What can we provide for him that will make him want to be interactive in our communities? What are the already targeted stop areas and what can we do to enhance them? Are there areas we believe are worthy of a stop that have no means of interaction and do we think highly enough of those areas that we are willing to create something of interest there? We have a very long history but we are a very young state. One idea is to make our visitors aware how truly young our state is. Many people have no idea that the Parks Highway is a relatively young road. The Windy Corner bridge across the Nenana River was completed in the early 70's. Before that if someone in Healy wanted to go to Denali they had to drive all the way to Fairbanks around to the Richardson Highway and then use the Denali Highway to Cantwell and then back up to the park. Making what is now a 15 minute drive into an all day adventure lasting over 8 hours just to get to the park! What can we create to share with the independent traveler about the richness of this area? We know the summer visitor can see the beauty around them when they are here in the middle of July. What about winter? Why not share with them the beauty of our winter? Improvements on the pullouts used by the snow machine riders, including some restroom facilities, could include picture panels that show the excitement of our winter activities as well”.*

Armeda Bulard shared that she doesn't want to see anything built that future generations will have to pay for. She pointed out that there should not be additional restrooms built - there are already four rest areas on the highway that aren't maintained in the winter. She stated that the state has a responsibility to maintain at least two of these sites during the winter for Alaskans. But if it is decided that another restroom must be built, then it should be located between Cantwell and Nenana.

Q: Is there any possibility of some of the funding for this project to be available for the rest area maintenance in winter?

Penny: No. DOT will fund projects but won't be responsible for maintenance. I will do some follow up on this though for clarification. (Follow-up clarification: Boroughs and communities will be responsible for implemented project upkeep and maintenance (e.g. restroom maintenance); however, there could be special considerations (e.g. DOT may plow pullouts to interpretive and informational signs if pullouts are up to code.)

Penny reiterated that this is the community's plan. Main stakeholder priorities will go into the plan.

It was brought up that there is a blank sign board and a correlation was drawn that if this signboard isn't being maintained, then nothing else will be either.

Penny stated that we need to focus on projects that don't need maintenance, or if they do need maintenance, on those projects that could easily be maintained by stakeholders.

Vernon Carlson commented that DOT should work on improving it's communication with the public and that some people may not participate in this project because DOT has let them down in the past. He used the Fox water spring as an example, which was built and then shut down shortly thereafter due to lack of maintenance funds. He also stated that DOT has a history in the area of building pullouts, gravel pits, bathrooms, etc. and then closing them to the public. Because of these past occurrences, he stated that getting public involvement might be difficult. He suggested that there might be a more confidence in this project if DOT planners from both boroughs would attend future meetings. (Follow-up: At least one DOT representative will be present at all future Parks Highway Corridor Partnership meetings.)

After a brief discussion about the possibility of tension between the Mat-Su borough and the Denali borough, it was suggested that maybe the Byway will be the bridge between the two boroughs

Q: Is there potential to create a National Scenic Byway within, meaning a part of, the state Scenic Byway section? I can see the value of the National designation for the advertising but we're not sure about for the entire distance.

Penny: I am not sure, but will check on that for you. (Later clarification: Applications recommending National Scenic Byway designation for only part of a state byway will be considered, however, the designation must have local support and make sense in terms of encapsulating scenic, cultural, natural, recreational, historic, and archeological qualities.)

Next, a brainstorming session was conducted to identify some of the valued places, stories, and resources along the corridor. The session was conducted as a single group, and began with the introduction of this scenario:

*Imagine you are driving along the Parks Hwy with a family member or friend who had never visited the area before. What stories do you tell? What do you point out? Where do you stop?*

The comments generated were:

Stories we like to tell:

- Story about Windy bridge across Nenana River
- Mining history
- Trapping history
- Native and cultural history
- Alaska Railroad history, e.g. section houses

- WWII history, e.g. Summit airstrip

What do we value most about this place?

- Remoteness
- Hunting/subsistence/traditional values
- Self-sustainability
- Wildlife: moose, wolf, caribou, bears
- Tundra
- Seasonal changes
- Berry picking

Significant stops:

- Number 1 bridge, north of Cantwell
- North of number 1 bridge on west side of hwy: fault line (maybe interpretive trail link)
- Jack River (great interpretive area due to geologic qualities)
- Denali Highway (should be kept unpaved – maybe add interpretive signs at entrance)
- Dragonfly creek (might be a good place for interpretive panels on sheep, geology)
- Moody Lake
- Sugarloaf (good place to hike)
- Honolulu River Bridge

Potential projects:

- Incorporate a theme for the byway, not just look at sections individually
- Develop an interpretive plan
- Leave Igloo to Cantwell untouched, except for the blank sign

- Concentrate traffic in certain areas. Mark existing trails such as the BLM trails near the number 1 bridge and Carlo Creek.
- Update the pullout across from Igloo or 4<sup>th</sup> of July Creek and install traveler information
- Install bike trails
- Designate town centers
- Dispense practical information to travelers, e.g. weather

Penny thanked all for their comments and ideas and adjourned the meeting at 7:00pm.

Look for announcements for meetings in Trapper Creek and McKinley Village in the near future!