

Fairbanks North Star Borough  
Comprehensive Trail Plan

JURISDICTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND TRAIL INVENTORY

June 1984

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EVA CREEK  
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NOTE: Trails above with code letters are those included in the Fairbanks North Star Borough final draft, Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan.

KEY: P = publicly dedicated  
D = proposed for public dedication

M = multi-use (motorized)  
N = non-motorized

A = state or federal  
B = Fairbanks North Star Borough recreational trail network (proposed components)  
C = neighborhood trail networks

- = unspecified

Trails included in the final draft plan, not listed in the inventory are:

Murphy Dome Ski Trails (PNA)  
Cleary Summit - Gilmore Dome Trail (PMB)  
Eva Creek Trail (PNB)  
Sheep Creek Dredge Path Trail (PMB)  
Goldstream Valley Open Space/Skyline Ridge Loop (PNB)  
Cripple Creek Trail System (PNC)

ESTER DOME  
- ESTER TRAIL  
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## INTRODUCTION

This is the second working paper in a series which will provide background information for the Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Trail Plan. The first working paper involved a review of the initiation and background of the Borough's Trail Program. This second paper is intended to examine the present roles of various agencies with respect to trails and provide a more in-depth analysis of existing recreational trails within the Borough. This report should be considered a dynamic, on-going document which must be periodically updated to reflect the changing status of specific trails in the inventory.

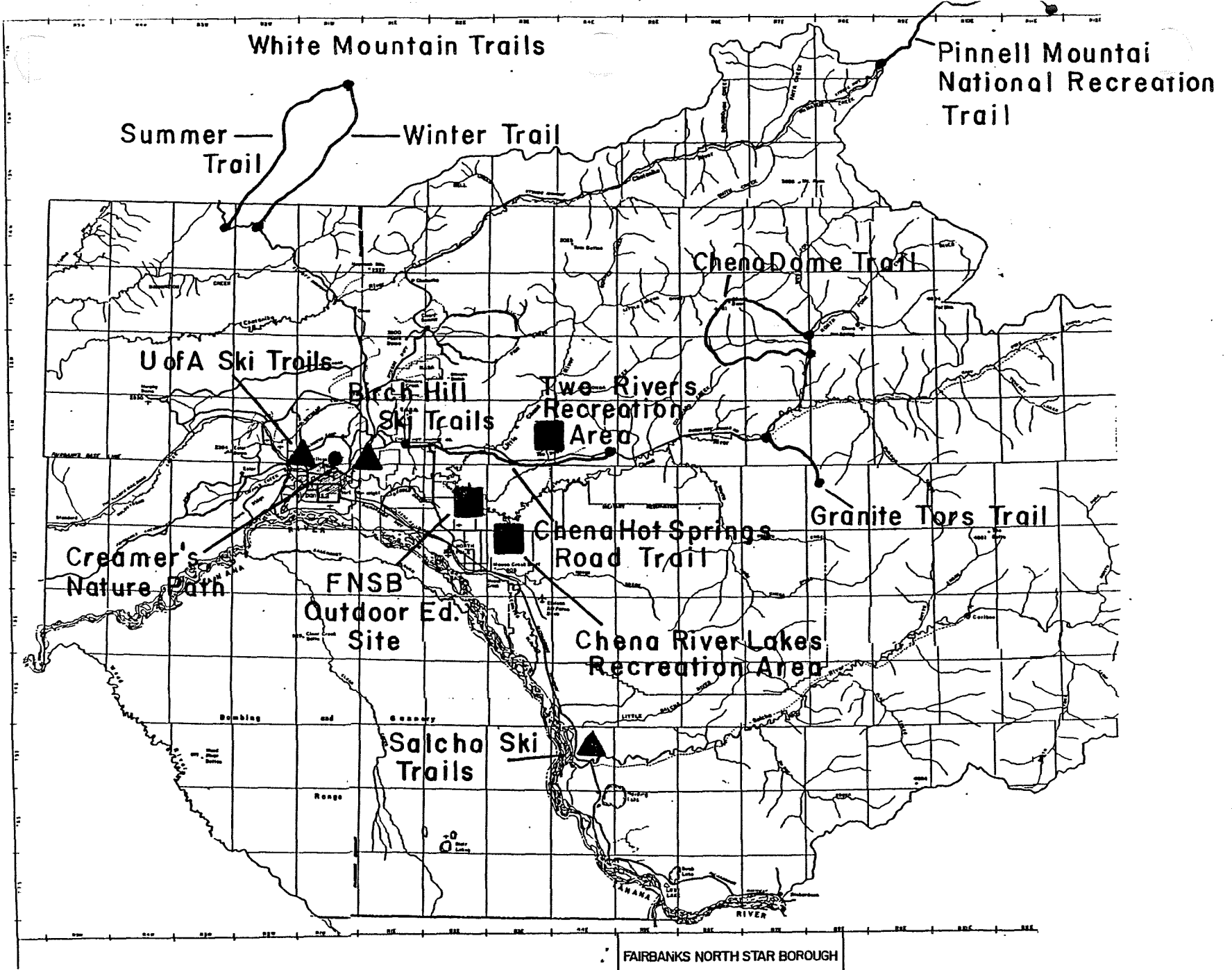
This paper is divided into two basic sections which include: 1) agency jurisdictional responsibilities; and 2) an inventory of recreational trails within the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Because trails presently used within the Borough have such wide differences in their extent of legal recognition; and, thus, their continued availability to the general public, it is necessary to further divide the inventory into two categories: existing and proposed public trail facilities, and existing, non-dedicated recreational trails. The public trail inventory is divided up according to the public agency responsible for planning or managing the trail.

The Majority of trails in the existing network have no clearly defined legal status (See Appendix A). Many trails are located on public land reducing the need for immediate designation of legal rights-of-way. At the same time public land disposal programs, in combination with increasing resource development pressure, create a need to identify and protect parts of this existing trail network before it is overtaken by other land uses.

The existing network of trails within the Borough includes trails used for a wide variety of purposes and which vary greatly in their physical condition. Uses of trails within the Borough range from commercial mining and remote cabin access routes or "trails" which are co-used for recreational purposes to routes within urban subdivisions specifically designated for non-motorized recreation only. The physical conditions of trails within the Borough form a continuous span which includes barely brushed out trap lines, carefully

manicured trail systems within public recreation areas and roughly bladed out bulldozer or "cat trails".

The following inventory provides a brief review of the present jurisdictional responsibilities of various agencies with regard to trails, a narrative description of various trails within the Borough and maps showing approximate locations and routes of the trails. These maps are not intended to imply that these trails are designated for public use or are covered by public rights-of-way. Please refer to the narrative descriptions on each trail for any presently known information on a particular trails' legal status. If there is any doubt about the legal standing of a trail, individual landowners should be contacted for their permission prior to using the trail. This paper should not be used as a trail guide. In order to identify what trails are present in a particular area, the reader should refer to Appendix B which catalogs non-dedicated trails by township and range. General locations of public trail facilities are shown on Map 1.



Existing Public Recreation Trails



## I. JURISDICTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

There are many different public agencies within the Borough which provide trail recreation opportunities. The degree of involvement of different agencies varies from minor association stemming from common use of public lands, to direct involvement with construction and maintenance of trails. In addition to public agencies, there are several private clubs and organizations which are also involved in trail recreation. Activities of these groups include competitive use of trails, maintenance of specified trails and promoting trail rights-of-way acquisition.

### A. Fairbanks North Star Borough

Both the Borough Administration and the School District are involved in providing recreational trails. Within the Administration, the Departments of Land Resources, Public Works, Community Services and the Borough Attorney's Office all have some responsibilities pertaining to trails.

#### 1. Department of Land Resources

At the time the Borough Trail Program was started, the Divisions of Land Management and Community Planning were separate. These two divisions and the Divisions of Technical Services and Rural Community are now all incorporated into the Department of Land Resources.

##### a. Division of Community Planning

The Borough Recreational Trail Program was initiated in 1979 when the Division of Community Planning prepared the original Five Year Trail Plan. That plan was adopted by the Assembly as a component of the Borough's Comprehensive Development Plan.

Since that time, Community Planning has had the major responsibility for planning and coordinating the recreational trail program within the Borough. The effectiveness of the Division of Community Planning in developing the trail program was greatly enhanced with the addition of the Trail Planner position in September 1981. This

position, which was originally funded by an historic trails grant from the State and is now funded through the Comprehensive Trail Plan project, has been an essential factor in enabling the Division of Community Planning to make progress in the trail program.

The Division of Community Planning has completed the "Long Range Bicycle Facilities Plan" and an update to the bike plan. These two studies were funded through Federal Highway Administration P.L. grants. In November 1983, the Borough Mayor and Assembly requested the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities to assume responsibility for requesting capital funds for construction of bike paths, removing that responsibility from the Division of Community Planning. With the passage of Ordinance No. 82-20-3G in May 1983, the Division of Community Planning was assigned the task of preparing a new Comprehensive Trail Plan. This document is a part of that planning process.

The Borough Recreational Trail Policy (Resolution 80-9) requires that the Division of Community Planning maintain the official trail records. This resolution also requires that the Planning Commission make recommendations to the Borough Assembly on priorities for trail easement acquisition.

A major responsibility of the Division of Community Planning has been to coordinate and assist the Borough Trails Advisory Commission. The Trails Advisory Commission was established in 1980 as an advisory body to the Planning Commission and Assembly.

Although the Division of Community Planning has assumed the responsibility for assisting the Trails Advisory Commission, Ordinance No. 80-27 which established the Commission, does not specifically provide for staff support. The only statement concerning staff indicates that the Borough Planning and Zoning Director and Parks and Recreation Director may attend meetings of the Commission.

Responsibilities and duties of the Trails Advisory Commission as defined by Ordinance No. 80-27 include:

- 1) Inventory and review the current trails within the Borough and make recommendations to the Planning Commission and Assembly on present and future needs;
- 2) Review all State and Borough land disposals and advise the Planning Commission and Assembly on trail needs and trail routing;
- 3) To provide a forum for citizen input;
- 4) To review and annually make recommendations to the Borough Assembly and Planning Commission on adjustments needed in the Five-Year Comprehensive Trail Plan; and
- 5) To encourage public and private subdividers to incorporate a trail system where needed on a voluntary basis.

While the Division of Community Planning has assumed the task of assisting the Trails Advisory Commission, prior to being funded for the Comprehensive Trail Plan they were never budgeted specifically for that purpose. Because of the lack of staff support, the Trails Advisory Commission has not been able to complete all of its mandated functions. Most notably, adjustment since the Five-Year Trail Plan and recommendations for revisions of the Borough Trail Policy have been lacking. Proposing changes in these ordinances or resolutions requires a major commitment of staff time to assist the Commission. The principal support the Division of Community Planning has provided the Trails Advisory Commission has been assistance in developing agendas for meetings, taking minutes and drafting resolutions.

The Division of Community Planning has helped coordinate between various agencies on trail issues and provide comment on land management plans or proposals which affect trails. The Division

provides input on trail needs for both State and Borough land disposals and helps provide recommendations to the Platting Board concerning trails.

Another major function of the Division of Community Planning and Trails Planner is to provide an easily accessed point of public contact on trail issues. When the issues reach beyond the concern of the Borough, persons can be directed to the best information source.

In addition, the Division of Community Planning has the major responsibility within the Borough for seeking funding for trail projects. When funding is received some projects are implemented by the Division of Community Planning while others may become the responsibility of the Department of Public Works in cooperation with other Departments. The Department of Land Resources maintains an interest in these projects to ensure they are completed regardless of which department receives the funding to implement the project.

b. Division of Land Management

The Division of Land Management has responsibility for acquiring and disposing of all interests in land for the Borough. A part of this responsibility includes acquiring or dedicating land for park and recreation purposes which often involves trails. The Division has responsibility for acquiring rights-of-way for trail projects which have been funded and approved by the Assembly. This includes acquiring rights-of-way from the State, federal government, private landowners and delineating trail rights-of-way across borough property. Land Management is responsible for processing all temporary use permits for borough land. The Division is required to reserve land necessary for public purposes in borough land disposals. This can involve establishing easements or dedications for trails prior to land disposals.

## 2. Department of Community Services, Division of Parks and Recreation

The Borough Parks and Recreation Division is involved in several aspects of trail recreation. Most obviously, the Division operates and maintains the Birch Hill Ski Trails. The Parks and Recreation Division also has cooperative agreements with both the Two Rivers Ski Club and Salcha Ski Club for management of the Two Rivers Recreation Area and Salcha Ski Trails, respectively.

The Division of Parks and Recreation is cooperating with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in developing the Chena River Lakes Recreation Area within the Corps' Chena Flood Control Project. Several short hiking and ski trails are being constructed as part of the recreation area facilities.

The Division of Parks and Recreation plays an active role in organizing competitive events such as cross-country ski races, running races and canoe races. The races are often conducted in conjunction with other organizations such as a ski club or runners club.

The Division of Parks and Recreation has recently completed a new draft Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan. This plan was prepared by the ORB Organization, a team of professional consultants based in Anchorage. The plan has not yet been adopted by the Borough Assembly but eventually it is intended to be a component of the Borough's Comprehensive Plan, as is the Trail Plan. The Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan includes several recommendations which, if implemented, will greatly affect trail recreation opportunities within the Borough.

A basic recommendation of the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan concerning trails is that master planning for the trail program be completed by the Division of Community Planning, but eventually the trail program should be transferred to the Division of Parks and Recreation. Consideration of this recommendation will be made at a later stage in the Comprehensive Trail Plan process. The Draft Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan also proposed a change in the Borough's subdivision ordinance to make dedication of park or public purpose land mandatory in

new subdivisions. The draft plan recommends using the ordinance mainly to reserve trails.

Other, major recommendations of the Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan which may affect future trail recreation opportunities include:

- a. The 100 Mile Loop Trail - A concept which would prioritize acquisition of rights-of-way for existing trails in the Borough in order to eventually form a major loop around the Fairbanks and North Pole areas. The trail is recommended for non-motorized use only.
- b. Equestrian Center - A recommendation to establish an equestrian center on a section of Borough land in the Badger Road area. A series of equestrian trails connecting the center, the Outdoor Education Site and the Chena Flood Control Project are proposed.
- c. Bike Paths - a recommendation to pursue establishing bike paths between schools and public recreation areas with connections to the existing bikeway network.
- d. Riverfront Park System - An idea which stresses incorporating existing public park areas along the Chena River and Noyes Slough to form an integrated Riverfront Park network. The concept promotes use of the waterways as canoe trails.
- e. Public Preserves - The draft plan proposes two major public preserves utilizing existing public lands. One of the proposed preserves encompasses the Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge and adjacent state and university lands to the west and north. The second preserve is recommended for the Chena lowland area between Chena Hot Springs Road and the Chena Flood Control Project.

A more detailed review of proposals in the Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan will be included in the trail inventory under "Planned or Proposed Fairbanks North Star Borough Trail Projects". Descriptions of existing trail facilities within the Division of Parks and Recreation will be included under "Existing Public Recreational Trail Facilities".

### 3. Public Works Department

The major function of the Borough Public Works Department, in regard to trails, is to carry out implementation of projects once funding has been appropriated. Completing these projects may involve work with other Departments to insure proper design or to obtain assistance in matters such as rights-of-way acquisition.

The Public Works Department has contracted out some studies involving trail proposals in the past. Most recently the Department contracted a feasibility study of Noyes Slough for development as a canoe trail.

The Public Works has an active role to play in developing the Borough's Capital Improvement Program. Developing priorities in this program can have a major effect on acquiring funding for trail projects. There has been concern expressed by the Department about accepting grants for projects from sources (such as Local Service Roads and Trails funds) which require maintenance commitments.

An additional responsibility of the Public Works Department is to insure that Borough construction projects do not adversely effect existing recreational trails. At times this can require close coordination with the Division of Community Planning and Trails Advisory Commission to identify the location and importance of specific trails.

### 4. Office of the Borough Attorney

The Borough Attorney's Office assists the Division of Community Planning and trail program by researching legal issues such as liability and interpreting rights-of-way laws. When any new ordinances or resolutions are prepared they are drafted or reviewed by the Attorney's Office. The Attorney's Office assists in implementation of projects by reviewing contract terms of grants and defining legal responsibilities in matters such as maintenance requirements. The Attorney's Office is currently assisting in preparing the Comprehensive Trail Plan by defining basic legal parameters such as the Borough's management authority over trail rights-of-way and the office will provide a major review of the "Legal Constraints" background paper.

## 5. Fairbanks North Star Borough School District

The Borough School District utilizes several borough recreation areas for cross-country skiing as part of the physical education program. These areas include: 1) Two Rivers Recreation Area; 2) Salcha Ski Trails; 3) Birch Hill and, 4) the University/Skarland Ski Trail Network. University Park Elementary School has a small, lighted cross-country ski trail and there has recently been funding approved to establish ski trails adjacent to North Pole Elementary. There is also a network of ski trails being established in the recently acquired Pearl Creek Recreation Area adjacent to the Pearl Creek Elementary School. In fact, several trails have already been cleared and maintained by local volunteer efforts in the Pearl Creek Park. The School District coordinates competitive events on these trails at times.

The Borough Trails Advisory Commission has passed a resolution encouraging provision of ski trail networks in construction of new elementary schools. Because of the demand for trails associated with new school sites, the Borough Division of Land Management issued a memorandum indicating the amount of land justified for school facility purposes. Under this criterion, ten acres are suitable for elementary school purposes, twenty for junior high and forty for high schools. This amount of land is not adequate for extensive cross-country ski trail networks. Large trail networks adjacent to schools have been dedicated based on community-wide need. Because of their proximity to schools they are also used for physical education purposes.

The School District recently received a lease from the Bureau of Land Management for 2,550 acres of land located at the end of Peede Road to be used as an Outdoor Education Site. This area now has two short trails, the Peede Pond Nature Path and the Enlighten Trail. This site also includes several previously existing trails used mainly for dog mushing and horseback riding.

The School District has had some involvement in establishing bicycle safety programs. Plans for the bicycle safety program have been coordinated with the Fairbanks Police Department and vary from year to year depending on the availability of staff and funding.



## B. City of Fairbanks

The main involvement of the City of Fairbanks in recreational trails is the construction and maintenance of the Chena River Bikeway. Bicycle paths located within the city limits of Fairbanks are closed to motorized vehicles the year round.

The Fairbanks Police Department has worked with the Borough School District to provide a bicycle safety program. The bike safety program has been established on a yearly basis and has fluctuated depending on availability of funding and staff both within the School District and the City Police Department.

## C. Alaska Department of Natural Resources

All the divisions within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) are concerned with trails to some extent. Some of the Divisions deal with trails more because of their use as access routes for resource development than because of their use as recreational corridors. Often, both access and recreational uses take place on the same trails. When trails are upgraded to road standards recreational use may be displaced.

The Department of Natural Resources is presently preparing a management plan for all state lands within the Tanana River Basin. The Tanana Basin Area Plan will help establish land use classifications and priorities for all state lands within the basin not presently covered by a management plan. The plan will play a major role in establishing future uses of trails on state lands within the Borough.

The Department of Natural Resources has management responsibilities for several canoe and boating trails within the Borough. Several other agencies including the Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game are also involved in the management of waterways. Access routes, camping facilities, and boat launching facilities are normally the responsibility of the Division of Parks. The river corridors, themselves, are principally the responsibility of the Division of Land and Water Management.

## 1. Division of Land and Water Management

With the recent incorporation of the Division of Research and Development into the Division of Land and Water Management, the Division of Lands is now the agency in charge of completing the Tanana Basin Area Plan.

The Division of Lands has completed the draft Little Chena Management Plan, the Delta-Salcha Management Plan and the Salcha River Management Plan, all of which deal with area within the Borough. Although the Little Chena Management Plan has not yet been signed by the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, all of these plans deal with recreational and access use of trails.

The Division of Lands is the branch of DNR which prepares the state land disposal program. As part of the land disposal program they are responsible for identifying and reserving lands for public purposes which includes trails. When state lands are more intensely developed, as within some state subdivisions, conflicts can arise between access use and recreational use of trails. Trade-offs must often be made between preserving trails for recreational use and upgrading trails for access roads.

Another responsibility of the Division of Land and Water Management is to delineate easements or right-of-way across state lands. When a request is made for establishment of a recreational right-of-way, the Division of Lands must take into account all the various resource access needs. At some times delineating particular trails for recreational use can conflict with mining or other resource development. Once recreational rights-of-way are established on state lands the Division of Lands is responsible for ensuring they are not blocked or rerouted unless management of the rights-of-way are specifically transferred to another agency. The Division of Lands share management responsibility for section line easements with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

When easements are established in land disposals they should include careful definitions of what uses are allowed. Failure to define uses can

lead to conflicts which can require considerable staff time to investigate. An example of the problem incurred in this situation is the Two Rivers Agricultural disposals.

## 2. Division of Parks

The Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation is the principal state agency in charge of recreational trails. Responsibilities of the division can be divided into planning functions and physical implementation of trail projects.

The majority of State Parks planning work is done out of the statewide office in Anchorage. A primary activity in the past few years has been to assist the state legislature in developing a bill to establish a statewide trail system. Division of Parks has also assisted in preparing a bill which would establish a funding source for outdoor recreational and historic preservation projects. Both of these bills could have a major impact on the future of trails both within the Fairbanks North Star Borough and the entire state. At the present time there is no funding for a statewide trail coordinator position within the Division of Parks and trail matters are dealt with on a time available basis.

Although it has not been clearly spelled out by specific legislation, the Division of Parks presently has the authority to coordinate a statewide trail network. Within this authority, State Parks can enter into cooperative agreements with local government bodies for planning and development of trails.

The State Parks Planning Office has been working as a team member for the recreation component of the Tanana Basin Area Plan. Although specific recommendations and policies for the plan have not been finalized, the recreation element may emphasize protection of recreational trails and waterways.

The Division of Parks recently contracted to have a study done on downhill ski potential in the Fairbanks area. The report compared several possible sites for downhill ski development and strongly

recommended inclusion of cross-country ski trails and other year-round recreation opportunities in the actual development of any of the site.

The State Parks office of History and Archeology maintains a listing of all historic sites within the state which includes historic trails. The Circle-Fairbanks Historic Gold Rush Trail is included on this list and may be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. State Parks is currently preparing the final nomination of the Circle-Fairbanks Trail to the National Register. Once a site is either on the National Register or determined eligible, the State Historic Preservation Officer is required to review any proposed federal undertaking which would affect the site. The National Register does not restrict the rights of private property owners of a site but does give possible benefits in the form of eligibility for grants to restore or rehabilitate the site.

The Interior District of Division of Parks deals with on the ground implementation of trail projects. The District has constructed and maintains the Chena Dome Loop Trail and the Granite Tors Trail within the Chena River State Recreation Area. Both of these trails are principally hiking trails. The Interior District has also helped to clear and maintain the Chena Hot Springs Winter Trail for sleddog races when personnel and funding constraints have allowed.

The District also coordinates the Alaska Conservation Corps, which has helped construct and maintain several trail projects. Alaska Conservation Corps crews have assisted the Borough School District in building nature trails within the Outdoor Education Site and may be available to assist in other trail projects in the future.

### 3. Division of Forestry

The State Division of Forestry deals with trails when they are in areas proposed for logging or firewood cutting or within the Tanana Valley State Forest. The action on a particular trail varies depending on the the circumstance but can range from delineating the trail and its surrounding corridor as a "no cutting area" to upgrading the trail as a wood cutting access route. Trails which were orginally built for