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DNR and CLT MEETING NOTES

DATE: August 26, 2025

WHERE: Videoconference

TIME BEGUN: 2:30 p.m.

PURPOSE: Discuss possible content and locations of interpretive signs along the MP 45-60 Sterling Highway New Alignment for the Sqilantnu Archeological District (SAD) Plan

PRESENT: Shawna Popovici, DNR, Sarana Schell, DNR, David Story, CLT, Janette Cadieux, CLT

DISCUSSION:

Introductions:

D. Story: Chair of CLT/Walkable Community, committee of CLCC, 501C3 non-profit, quasi-governmental body, liaison with KPB, Trails improves snow trails and brushes out summer pathways, etc., Walkable Community working to make a more walkable/bikeable community, primarily along existing Sterling Hwy but in neighborhoods and on new alignment

J Cadieux: Sec

S Schell: From Fairbanks, now lives ANC, property in Kasilof so travels through and recreates in Cooper Landing, Been with State Parks Interpretation & Education Unit (I&E) as a Natural Resource Specialist for nearly 2 years

Shawna Popovici: Interpretation and Education Manager, under Alaska State Park's Design and Construction Section, to create interpretive signage. The most recent signs in CL are two at boat launch done in partnership with KIT, KMTA NHA

Content:

Wanted to reach out in a smaller meeting for DS and JC to see the materials they have so far north to south direction of planned where they're putting signage in their plan.

SP:

Programmatic Agreement (PA) between DOT and Archeology (OHA/SHPO). Impacts SAD so are required to have interpretive signage. Initially DOT wanted three signs at Juneau Creek waterfall. The ask was a bit off kilter to an extent and I&E advised DOT to develop an interpretative plan. This was not required of them so they are going above and beyond.

Included the whole area acknowledging all Land Managers (KNWR, USFS/CNF, State Parks/KRSMA, ADF&G) and Kenaitze Indian Tribe (KIT) and seeking their input. State Historical Preservation Office, under Office of History and Archeology also providing input.

Due in 2028. Aiming for first draft late Spring 2026.

Should it go out to CLCC? Museum? CLT? CLAPC?

Why talking with CLT today: The walk/bike pathway along the new alignment of the MP 45-60 Project.

Pathway: a mode of alternative transportation for the new alignment

SCREEN SHARE of PLAN (Shawna P presenting)

Quartz Creek turnout: Start of pathway, no other south-bound waysides from the earlier pieces of the MP 45-60 Project so this is the best compromise location

Pillar of Welcome to Squilantnu AD at the Quartz Creek pullout. Pillar: Vertical, gathers attention, like a “welcome to town” sign. It won’t be the usual wide. It will be tall due to space constraints.

Signage will explain what an archeological district is and why this one is important

Kiosk with six panels

Will include bike fix-it station like the one in the middle of the Bird/Gird trail

Proposed a small 4-6 vehicle parking area so that folks can have a place to park if they want to ride the trail.

Will discuss motor vehicles and bikes simultaneously.

Sign for Kenai River and other waterways will be labeled also with native name sign. There may not yet be indigenous names for some of the waterways, but will label as many as they can.

There will be a pull-out for bikes but not motor vehicles at the typical overlook of the lake, interpret color of lake, etc. but include some cultural interpretation and connection with Coyote Notch trail.

Some of the recommended bike waysides are not required of DOT in the PA, so not all recommendations will be implemented by DOT.

At the start of the CL access point, the exchange of new and old Sterling Hwy alignments. Provide similar orientation.

Bike path goes uphill all the way to Juneau Creek. No waysides planned thus far but they were advised on Bird/Gird they occur one every half mile. They advise at least one on the uphill and one at the downhill (but recommending more).

Signage at the interchange will list opportunities like museum, etc. on the town road

Q: Will there be a message board or ways of updating things?

A: No, but recommending a blue sign before and after exchange, listing PO, museum, school, trails, campgrounds, etc. DOT is a bit resistant but she will push forward on that. DOT doesn’t want to maintain nor will they be maintained by DNR because they won’t be on DNR land.

Scenic byway program is now a dead program without funding though plans were created for them. With existing plans communities can come up with funding and create signage for interpretation.

NOTE: Quartz Creek not Lake (edited by Shawna)

Pull-out at Slaughter Gulch social trail: suggesting a park bike spot so bikers can hike that trail with access to underpass. They cannot create a motor vehicle pull-out without difficulty.

DS: Concerned about a bike rack visible and accessible from highway will create a target of any bikes or gear. May want to place that at Stetson Circle trailhead. (noted and edited by Shawna)

JC: If they cannot engineer a motor vehicle pullout for Slaughter Gulch/Juneau creek trail then folks are likely going to park along the highway. May not want to place a sign noting the underpass there.

SP: For safety, need to have notice of trail and where to access the trailhead.

NEAR MP 48 Wayside Stop, Kenai Lake overlook, with 1-2 panels for transportation history, places to rest/park bikes, etc.

ACCESSIBILITY: Color and visual assist, scopes at Kenai Lake overlook, CLT seeks infrastructure accessibility for alternative vehicles like wheelchairs but any signage ought to have braille, etc. Other disability accessibility is not always as easily accomplished. There will be more for the Juneau Creek waterfall overlook.

The only two stops are along existing meanders.

Skilak Glacier viewable from around MP 53 or near the disposal site or east of it. (noted and edited by Shawna)

JC: There are smaller glaciers visible from the new highway up Dry Creek on the Right Mtn massif as well as those around Kenai Lake elsewhere.

Parking available at Res Pass trailhead, and access to Bean Creek historical trail. BC is in the required signage, museum is providing history and wayfinding point, will have introduction to the bridge as the longest single-span bridge in AK (and USA?)

SP: Not going to plow the Res Pass trailhead in winter. Not planning a motor vehicle pullout on Bean Creek side in winter even though that was the targeted access point for snow trail access though there is going to be some kind of winter access east of the bridge that will be similar to the one south of the Seward Hwy in Turnagain Pass.

SS: Joshua James, Project Manager at DOT, not the one necessarily that CLCC would liaison with, proposing for parking off the Forest Service Rd at this point?

SP: Not sure.

First (and only) signage for motor vehicle visitors is at Juneau Falls trailhead (outside of the two welcome pullouts). Will have the most information. Two kiosks, eight total signs. Orientation and Safety and then cultural, roadway, mining, etc. history, will provide interpretation history just for the project itself as well. Invasive species boot brush and messaging.

It's going to be a full ADA stop for the Juneau Creek waterfall. National TAI: Trail Accessible Information.

Grade, roots, obstacles, what it takes to get to/from the waterfall.

E.g. half of the Bird/Gird trail is grade accessible

At the falls overlook there will be three signs but content has not been determined yet.

Q: Accessibility for developmental disability? Perhaps interactive signage?

A: Not sure what USFS allows especially because of difficulty maintaining. State of AK often has panels that don't get replaced for 30 years. USFS in same boat. Vandals are a problem as well. Cut-outs along edges might mimic the peaks in view. Figures may be raised on a panel so that visually impaired can learn how big a e.g. chickadee is. They've done an inexpensive way of demonstrating flow while asking folks to use their water bottle or if it's raining it mimics the flow of a water body nearby.

From JNU Creek Falls south/west there are three potential stopping points before the exchange and one north/east bound.

At USFS staging site/access to tracks, there's a wayside opportunity and forest and fire succession interpretation may be done.

Snow machiners are now accessing Res Pass on the USFS bench road, pioneer road west

Q: Are they going to provide interpretation for the major north/south wildlife linkage through the area of Juneau Creek to Russian River and Cooper Creek drainages? (noted and edits captured by Shawna)

A: There will be some near the overland wildlife crossing and discuss importance of bear safety as well the importance of wildlife passage in the middle of routes that people are using. DS to send them link to document on CLAPC website.

Pullout wayside east of MP 55, USFWS has wildlife information they want to share

AT exchange of old Town Road and new Sterling Hwy alignment there will be bike fix, orientation panel, biking through bear country, other interpretive panels, a smaller version of the Quartz Creek side.

The north-bound traffic will utilize the larger, 20-car wayside west of the interchange on the north/east bound side, to post the welcome to SAD pillar (though it is technically just before the boundary), understanding of what if you take the upper road or the town road.

They don't have an opportunity to do this on the south/west bound side.

They may have highlights to gaps existing in other areas along the route or Town Road.

If there's something missing on the Town Road they can make recommendations only.

Motor Vehicle:

Quartz Crk;

Juneau Falls trailhead;

20-car pull-out before the Town Road interchange

Pathway:

Much better signage and interpretation.

Pull-out for bikers at Coyote Notch underpass. Waypoint.

DS: Hopes to see represented the nature of the transportation corridor, “feet first”, K-beq means foot prints, how our valley was traversed by foot long before motor vehicles came. We would appreciate a nod to how transportation needs to meet all needs. (noted in stakeholder comments by Shawna)

KMTA: One known site was 8-10K years old, even before presence of salmon, people were hunting large animals even before the glaciers were melted out. Who knows what today’s archeology surveys will find and could be interpreted.

We tend to have a lot of info about mining but not so much about pre-contact history. Because of the SAD they will all-out these things. The natives are still here and still accessing these resources.

There is evidence of trade (e.g. beads) from before regular transit of the area so the routes were established.

DS: Did send link to Wildlife Linkages doc on CLAPC website and to the CLT website with more information that may be useful such as the Story Map.

ACTION ITEMS:

DS and **JC** are welcome to email **SS** and **SP** if we see gaps or think of critical pieces.

SP and **SS** still working on theme building and content. They’ve heard input from **DS** and **JC** today and will advise DOT as they are able.

Charette: DNR **SS** and **SP** invited for the walkable community project.

SP: Will send PDF when she finds it. (rcv’d) Will be reaching out to CLCC and would like a compiled comments list. She’s unable to go through a large number of community emails.

DS and **JC** can be a clearing-house for community input.

DS and **JC**: will try to share and gather input from others.

TIME ENDED: 4:26 p.m.