Kenai-Russian River Collaborative Public Process

October 2011

Second Round of Public Forums

Building on conversations held with the public in April 2011

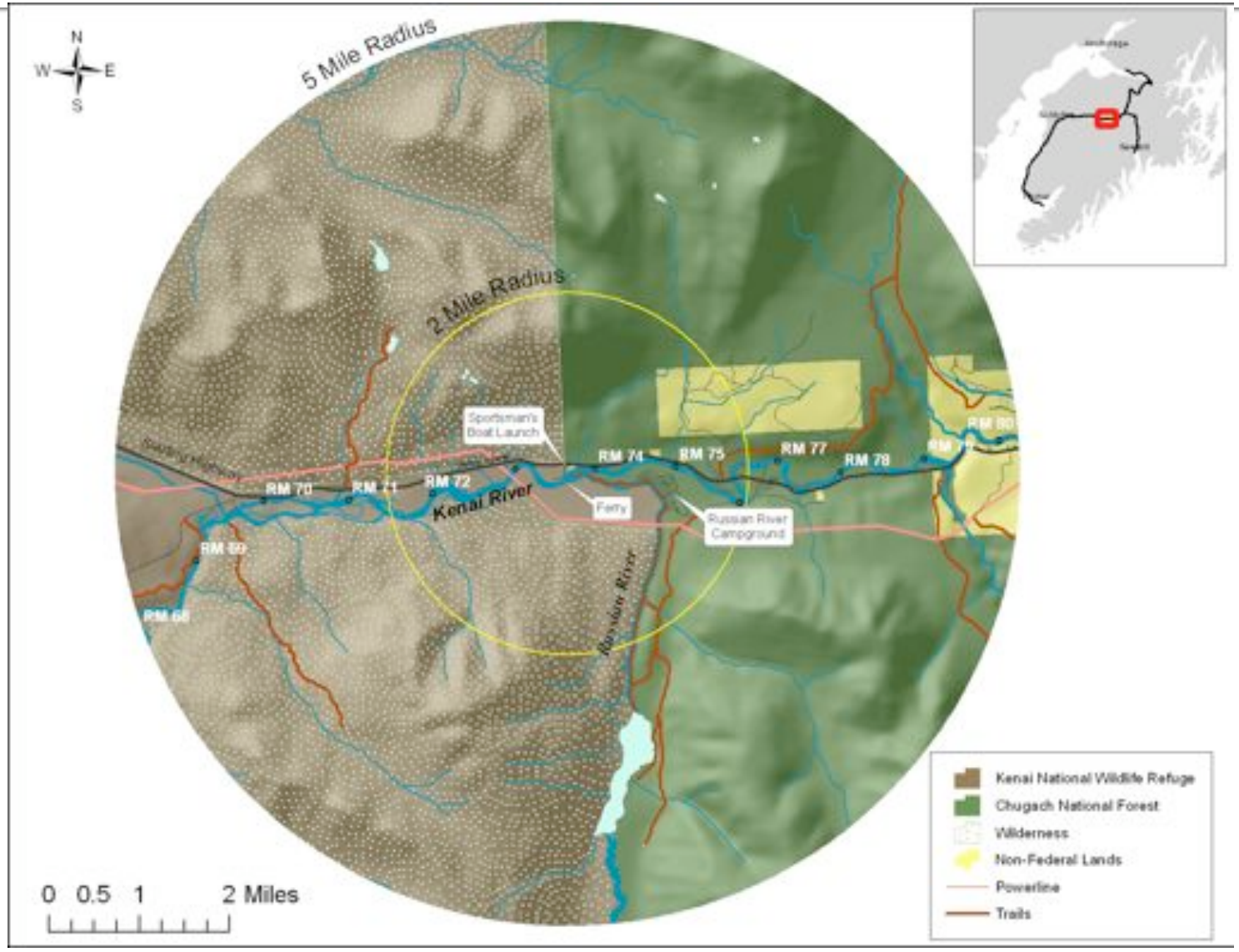
Seeking your assistance in developing effective management actions for reducing human-bear conflicts

The Kenai-Russian River Complex (KRRC) is an intensively used recreation area, valued by anglers and other visitors for easy access to the popular roadside sockeye salmon fishery and recreation site.

Conflicts between humans and bears have occurred in the past at the KRRC – and the potential for future conflicts raises management challenges.

Kenai-Russian River Complex (KRRC)

Focus of management attention – 5 Mile Radius from Confluence



Management Agencies Sponsoring the Collaborative Public Process

USDA Forest Service, Chugach National Forest – manages land for multiple use, campground, day use parking, trails and cabins, angler access

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Kenai National Wildlife Refuge – manages land (most designated Wilderness), ferry and angler access site

In collaboration with:

Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Divisions of Wildlife Conservation and Sport Fish – manage for sustainable sport fisheries and wildlife populations

… and other members of the Russian River Interagency Coordination Group

Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation – oversees management of Kenai River Special Management Area, which includes portion of the area

Kenaitze Indian Tribe – longstanding history and heritage in the area; operates cultural heritage site

Cook Inlet Region, Inc. – regional Alaska native corporation; owns land in the area

Objectives for the Collaborative Process

- Reduce human-bear conflicts and public/employee safety concerns
- Provide recreation opportunities and appropriately manage fish and wildlife resources
- Reduce availability of disposed fish carcasses, as well as other human-derived food sources obtained by bears
- Develop 5-year management action plan and monitoring strategy for the KRRC

Elements that define a human-bear conflict

- Bear exhibits a stress-related or curious behavior, causing a person to take extreme evasive action.
- Bear makes physical contact with a person or exhibited clear aggressive behavior.
- Bear intentionally harmed or killed (not including legal harvests) by a person.

History of human-bear conflicts at KRRC

- In 2003, an angler was seriously mauled on the Russian River
- In 2006, a camper was injured by a bear in Russian River campground
- In 2008, eight bears were killed in defense of life or property, up from a previous high of four bears in 2003
- In 2009-2011, there have been no human injuries and no bears killed
- Effective management is essential to further reduce the potential for human-bear conflicts

Development of Five-Year Action Plan – Collaborative Public Process

- April 2011 (first round of public meetings) – Public shared ideas about management actions they think would reduce human-bear conflicts
- Agencies have begun doing some research and evaluating ideas (they will share with you tonight)
- **October 2011 – Second round of public meetings to present the agencies' initial findings – Discuss further with public**
- Next steps – Agencies will work together to develop 5-year action plan, informed by this public discussion

April Public Forums – Ideas on Many Topics

Discuss tonight in large group format (6-8 pm)

- Fish waste management
- Temporal (time) & spatial (location) closures
- Management of bears at KRRC

Open house format (8-9 pm)

- Public education
- Regulations & Enforcement
- Infrastructure / Trails & Visibility

Fish Waste Management – page 4

- 2010-11 – Anglers asked to take fish out whole or gut/gill only – or stop/chop/throw at confluence or ferry.
- Fish waste still accumulates and is obtained by bears.

Fish Waste Management

- *Preliminary finding: Additional efforts are needed for fish waste management to reduce availability of disposed fish carcasses as a food source for bears. Leaning toward onsite disposal options, but also looking at offsite options.*
- Under any option – angler can always take fish out whole.

Fish Waste Management

- Need to manage about 114,000 lbs. of fish waste each season (avg. from harvest data, 1991-2010)
- Marine derived nutrients - Returning salmon of all species transport nutrients from marine to freshwater ecosystems and substantially contribute to productivity.
- Amount of MDN contributed by fish waste from sport and subsistence sockeye fishery is a minor component of the total MDN provided by all species of salmon in the watershed – and would not likely be a primary determinant in a decision regarding how to manage fish waste at KRRC.

Fish Waste Management

1. Onsite – Grinding & disposal into river (hydro-powered or electric grinder)
2. Onsite – Manual carcass removal
3. Offsite – Utilize waste to make a new product
4. Offsite – Dispose in solid waste facility
5. Offsite – Vendor (process fish, handle disposal)
6. Onsite processing facility for angler use

Key Questions

- Which fish waste management options most effective – considering both anglers and subsistence dip net fishery? Why?
- What location(s) would be best for the option(s) that you are recommending?
- Would you be willing to pay for these types of fish waste management services? If so, how much is reasonable to expect an angler to pay?

Temporal Closures (page 10)

- Considerable comment in April 2011 on nighttime closures to all access, as a way to reduce human-bear conflicts & potentially encourage bears to avoid rivers in daylight.
- *Preliminary finding – Need to evaluate further*.
- Gathering data on number of visitors affected.
- Would reduce exposure of humans to bears in low light conditions, which may avoid encounters.
- However – any effects on bear distribution, behavior, and time of activity on river are *very uncertain*. If instituted, do so under experimental conditions.
- May reduce some illegal behaviors – but that is unrelated to the objectives of this management effort.

Spatial Closures (page 13)

- Recent practice has been to institute in-season closures of discrete areas, as needed to reduce risk of negative human-bear encounters.
- 2010 & 2011 – closed area downstream of ferry terminal on Refuge land.
- *Preliminary finding – Continue practice of closing discrete areas only as needed in-season. Five-year action plan would detail procedure and criteria used to institute a closure*

Key Questions

Temporal

- Overall reaction to a possible a nighttime closure? Why?
- If you support the idea of a nighttime closure, what dates, hours & location(s)?

Spatial

- Overall reaction to closing discrete areas in-season as needed?

Bear Management (page 14)

Population (response to public questions in April)

- 1993 ADFG study – 250-300 brown bears on Kenai Peninsula; since that time, thought to be stable or increasing
- 2010 USFWS & USFS partnership to estimate population on Kenai Peninsula using DNA; analysis underway
- DNA study (2007-09) shows 39 different brown bears used KRRC in those years; possibly only two used area in multiple years

Bear Management (Behavior / Population)

Preliminary finding:

- *Address nuisance &/or dangerous bears at KRRC through coordinated agency action.*
- *Continue to count & identify bears that use KRRC.*
- *Track bear sightings and encounters – inform public and use for in-season adaptive management.*
- *Increase education about how to respond to bears, including appropriate deterrents (encourage deterrents other than firearms).*

Key Questions

- Overall reaction to preliminary findings about bear management approaches at KRRC?

Open House – Education (page 17)

- In April, we heard many ideas about education
- 2011 – 700 volunteer hours, contacted 3,000 visitors (many thanks to Stream Watch)
- *2011 – NEW* "One-Stop" Visitor Guide, AM radio message worked all season, additional flyers and signs
- Open House – we'd like to hear from you:

  Top three education approaches?
  How can we increase peer-to-peer education?

  Additional ideas we should consider?

Open House – Regulations & Enforcement (page 20-21)

- Need to complete action plan before determining what regulations may be needed
- Any new regulations would go through appropriate process (agency or Board consideration / adoption)
- Will work to improve agency coordination on enforcement, especially given resource limitations
- Open House – we'd like to hear any additional thoughts / ideas you have about regulations & enforcement at KRRC.

Open House - Infrastructure / Trails (page 22-24)

- Infrastructure – Bear-proof food and garbage containers have been installed at ferry; in all campsites in 2012.
- 2012 – USFS project to evaluate need for campground improvements.
- Will consider changes to campsite management to reduce bear attractants and potential for human-bear conflicts.
- Trails/Visibility – 2011 – Some vegetation clearing was done to improve visibility.
- Open House – Your ideas on additional infrastructure needs, campground improvements, and/or trail/ visibility improvements.

Next Steps & More Information

- Agencies will be developing a 5-year interagency management action plan and monitoring strategy.
- Written comment form available tonight.
- Email comments by November 7: comments-alaska-chugach-seward@fs.fed.us -- put “Kenai-Russian River comment” in subject line
- Go to: https://projects.ecr.gov/kenai-russianriver/
- Contact Jan Caulfield, janc@gci.net
907-523-4610 (in Juneau)