

Existing Conditions Map

Opportunities and Challenges - Conservation Easement

The Park offers a natural public space in a residential community with a link to the ocean and views of the mountains. Visitors are rewarded with spectacular views of the rugged peaks of the Chugach Mountains to the south, and the Talkeetna Mountains to the north, as well as views of the Knik Glacier.

This Plan seeks to define the balance between public access and resource protection, enhancement, and restoration. The challenge going forward is developing recreation infrastructure while honoring the commitment to preserve the natural setting and habitat value. The Conservation Easement dedicated across the Park clearly lists what type of land use and development are allowed.

Plan Overview: Purpose, Setting, Issues & Opportunities

Vision - A New Coastal Park



The Settlers Bay Coastal Park (Park) will develop into a nature-based recreational park in which people can play and picnic with family, friends and peers. It will include active recreation such as cycling, walking, and skiing.



Soils

The Park includes an abundance of cold, wet, highly erodible soils that support a diverse range of wetlands; upland riparian wetland corridors along Lucy Creek, kettle fens, and salt marsh. These delicate areas are highly susceptible to erosion and damage from over-use. Outside of the wet areas, the soil is predominately the Kichatna silt loam, which can reach depths of five feet. The developable soils are highly susceptible to water erosion – which should be actively mitigated by construction activities.

Background – Former Private Land



GREAT LAND TRUST
SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA

The Park includes 295 acres of attractive, accessible Matanuska Susitna Borough (Borough) owned land located near Settlers Bay Golf Course and the Knik Arm of Upper Cook Inlet, south of Knik Goose Bay Road. The nearby golf course opened in 1977 followed by steady residential development within the Knik-Fairview Community, the fastest growing community in the Borough. The Great Land Trust worked with the developer to set aside this 295-acre area as an undeveloped slice of nature. There are over 1,000 homes within one mile of the Park. The land was purchased by the Great Land Trust and donated to the Borough with development limitations and restrictions.



Existing Conditions – Facilities

The Park includes an old gravel pit used during construction of neighborhood roads; an overgrown gravel road leading south from the pit that parallels the bluff east to the estuary; and a trail bridge across Crocker Creek in the Wet Gulch Trail Easement.

Current facilities in the Park include:

- Access road and parking area. Access road for parking only and not through traffic.
- Three miles of existing trails. A mix of trails have developed over the years.
- Wet Gulch Trail Easement—developed into an ATV trail in the tidal flats along the base of the bluff including a bridge over Crocker Creek.

Topography

Wetlands, salt marsh, and estuarine habitat, as well as forested uplands provide viewing opportunities for wildlife, migratory birds, and marine animals, including the elusive Cook Inlet Beluga Whale.

The Park consists mostly of low angle uplands and tidally-influenced estuarine lowlands divided by a bluff. The uplands are generally undulating with small hills throughout. Two small creeks flow along the Park's eastern and western boundary, with small depressions and lowlands located along Lucy Creek and the eastern boundary. Local relief of the uplands tend to range between 50 to 90 feet. The southern portion of the Park is defined by the edge of a steep sloping bluff that drops to the estuary. The bluff consists of a vegetated upper slope with a muddy intertidal zone at the base, generally ranging between 25 and 60 feet in elevation. The bluff is highly erosive due partly to the composition of the soil and the erosive action of the Knik Arm tidal flow. The saltwater shoreline and grassy estuarine lowlands are generally flat except for the Crocker Creek channel along the Park's western boundary.

Plant Communities

The uplands are comprised of a mixed forest of primarily of paper birch and white spruce, with tall shrub communities of willow and alder, with some prickly rose, currant, and dogwood. Groundcover includes mosses, grasses, ferns, fireweed, Labrador tea, and horsetail. Large cottonwoods line Crocker Creek. The inland wetlands in the Park are comprised of dwarf birch, cotton grass, buckbean, and willow shrubs. Some areas include bluejoint reedgrass, bog rosemary as well as sedges, bulrush, and pondweed. The tidal flats are primarily vegetated only by algae. The area just below the bluff is covered primarily by patches of creeping alkali grass, seaside arrow-grass, as well as slender glasswort, spurry, sea blight, Ramenski sedge, and algae. Slightly elevated areas include beach rye, bluejoint, wild iris, squirrel-tail barley and beach lovage. Other important plants in these communities are goose tongue, Pacific silverweed and sea milkwort to name a few. (ADFG 2002).



Photos courtesy of: Dev Dharm Khalsa, GLT, Carl Johnson, and Bob Waldrop.



Settlers Bay Coastal Park : Recreation Development Plan

rev. 06/13/2018

Goals and Development Plan

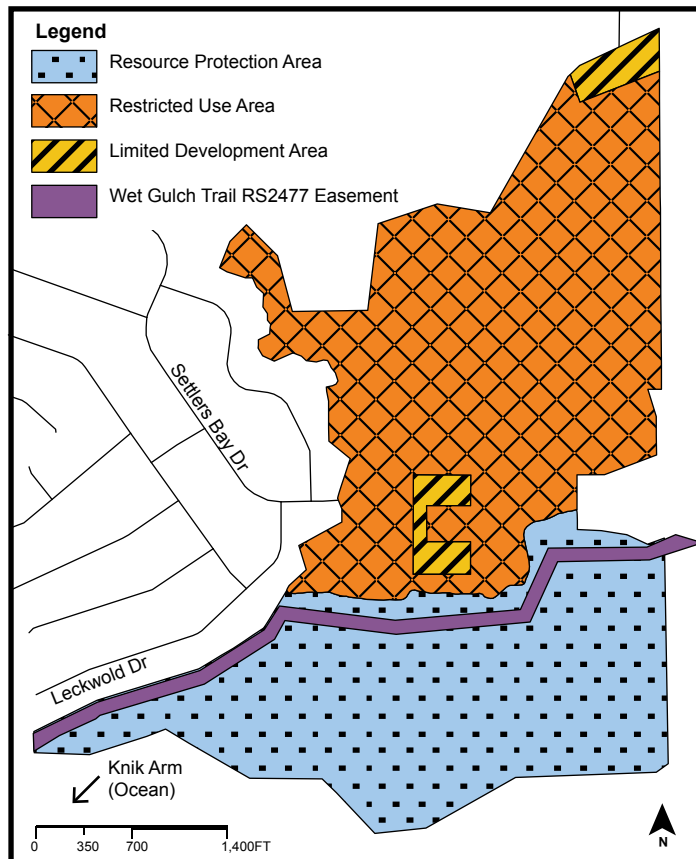
GOALS AND PARK IMPROVEMENTS - Goals for the Place and the Recreational Experience:

- Comply with the Conservation Easement (see summary below).
- Strive to meet the evolving recreational interests of a growing region, providing for a diverse range of healthy, non-motorized outdoor recreation activities, including skiing, biking, and walking.
- Maintain a strong sense of the site's natural setting.
- Discharge of firearms shall not be allowed.
- The forested character of the site is valued. Efforts are made to retain forest health, enhance vegetation to create a more natural experience, and provide wildlife habitat. At the same time, clearing is allowed for authorized trail expansion and development projects in certain areas as well as permitted forestry efforts (e.g. harvest of dead trees, firewise).
- Courtesy between users and an ethic of care and respect for the site is promoted through education and outreach, user sweat equity, trail watch efforts, and self-enforcement.

- Continue to improve facilities through active partnerships with user groups and other volunteers. Link approval of user group projects to responsibilities for ongoing maintenance.
- Ensure that appropriate facilities, including some trails and viewing areas are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act.
- Should any historical, cultural or other potential archeological resources be discovered within the sale area, all work shall cease in the immediate area and an area extending in a 100' radius from the discovered resources. The Borough shall be notified within two Borough business days. Operations may not resume within 100' of the discovery until the Borough has evaluated the discovery, appropriate mitigation or preservation measures are effected and a written authorization to resume is issued by the Borough.
- Develop trail connections beyond the boundaries of the park to allow for visitor access without having to drive a car. Make the park available as a starting point for non-motorized trail activities such as the Junior Iditarod and fat tire bike races.
- Support development of a pedestrian trail connection to the Settlers Bay Golf Course.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT- Summary of activities and development allowed within the Park:

The map below shows extent of the areas defined in the easement and the associated list of permitted activities. Locations shown represent generalized boundaries and the list of permitted activities is abbreviated and should not be used in place of the recorded easement. Review and approval by the Great Land Trust may be required for some activities in certain areas. The easement was recorded in the Palmer Recording District as document serial number 2018-006111.



Resource Protection Area (Salt Marsh/Tidal Estuary)

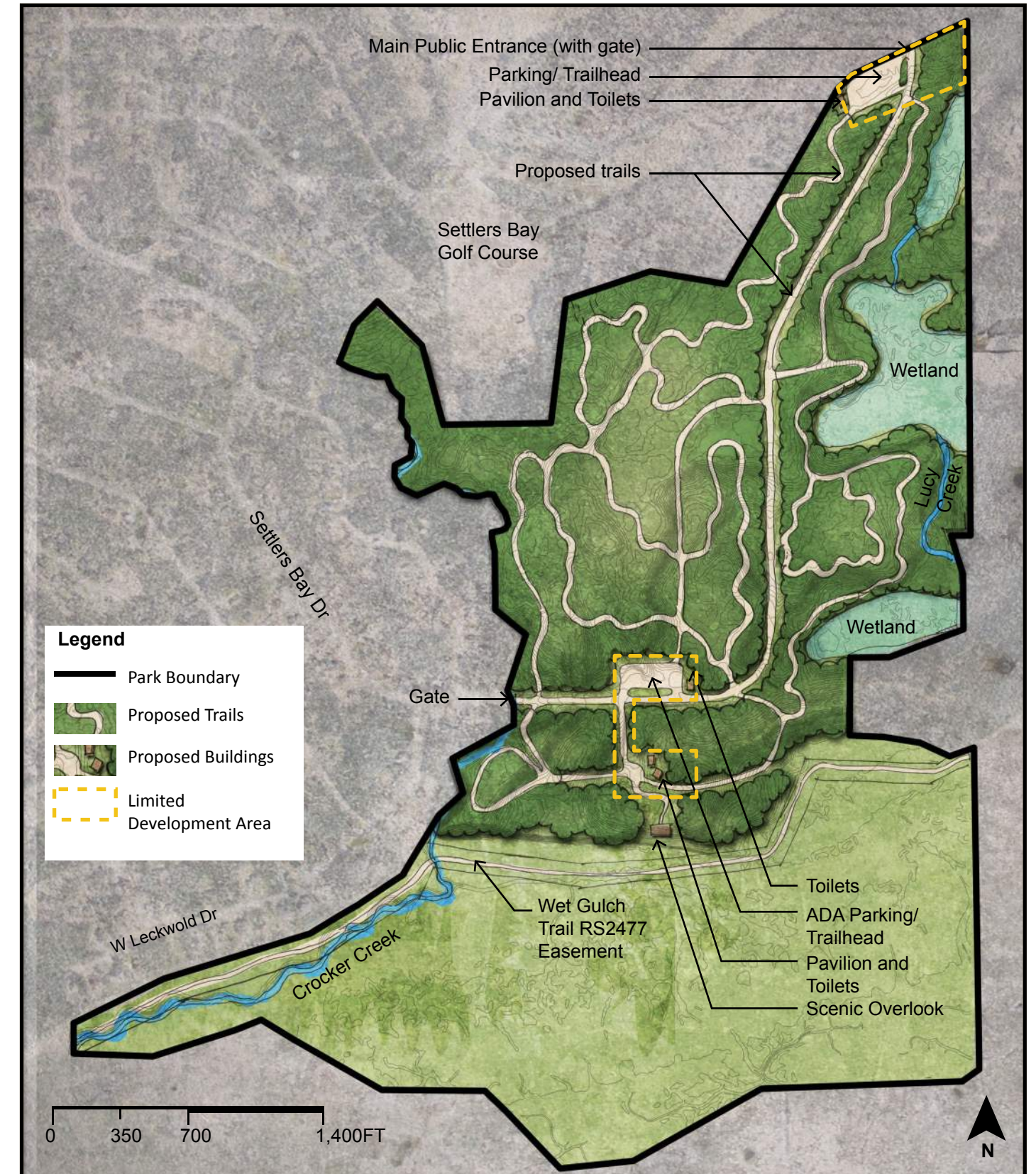
- Existing trails may be maintained for non-motorized use, and motorized use only if within the Wet Gulch Trail Easement
- Limited new non-motorized trails
- Regulatory signs, access control structures such as gates, boulders, and guard rail
- Habitat restoration projects

Restricted Use Area (Uplands)

- Existing trails may be maintained for non-motorized use
- New non-motorized trails
- Benches and scenic overlooks
- Public access, signs, and gates

Limited Development Area

- Existing trails may be maintained for non-motorized use
- New non-motorized, paved trails
- Parking lots, access roads, restrooms, kiosks, picnic tables, pavilions, playgrounds, disc golf courses, dog parks, a caretaker cabin, and other similar amenities
- Public access, signs, and gates



Park Development Plan Map

The map above shows existing and future conceptual locations for planned improvements in the Park, including trails, buildings and other new or improved facilities. Locations shown represent generalized intentions. Final siting and design of planned improvements will require more detailed on-site and user group review and more refined site planning.