



MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

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PRESS RELEASE

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Field work begins on ski area environmental study

Hatcher Pass – Contractors began field work this week for an environmental study for the proposed Hatcher Pass ski area. Assemblymembers also toured the site Monday, gaining an understanding of where Nordic trails could wind through dense birch and where Alpine lifts could place skiers and snowboarders in the Talkeetna Mountains.

On Aug. 19, Consultant Ron Swanson will give the Assembly the latest report on a ski project that is scaled back from previous proposals. This proposal will recommend that the Alpine and Nordic ski areas be developed over phases that respond to market demands. The \$22 million ski proposal begins modestly with phase 1 including two chair lifts, a day lodge, night lighting and snowmaking. The lodge would host the essentials: a snow sport school, snow sport equipment rentals, modest food and beverage service, ski patrol and immediate care medical facilities, along with necessary administrative and maintenance facilities. On the south side of the mountains, north of Edgerton Park Road, phase 1 for the Nordic ski area would include: 10-15 km of Nordic trails, both recreational and Olympic level, and an access road.

“The goal is that the combined ski areas pay for operations within two years or less,” said Swanson.

Some \$6 million was acquired in federal funds. Part of it will pay for the necessary environmental analysis work required by the federal government. The federal funding will also help build the access roads, parking and trails, reducing the overall project cost to about \$18 million. The Assembly legislation that accepts this funding is being introduced tonight, Aug. 5.

Monday, scientists moved through nearly treeless terrain on rainy mountain slopes collecting information before summer ends as part of the environmental analysis process. Wetlands, wildlife habitat, fish streams, soils, archaeology, and important bird nesting areas for eagles, among other species, are being examined this summer. This coming winter more geotechnical work will be conducted to identify soil conditions, and to analyze water quality and quantity.

The public will hear the results of these studies and be asked for comments and concerns in meetings slated for the fall. DOWL Engineering is under contract to do the study and will give a report to the Assembly. Swanson expects that an Environmental Impact Statement will be required. The environmental impact statement is expected to be completed in a 12-to-18-month timeframe.

For more information call Manager John Duffy at 745-9689 or email jduffy@matsugov.us

Photos: Scientists get out of the wet grass by standing on a parking pad for snowcat operations. The pad is not related to the project.

Mid-mountain would be accessible from proposed chair lift 2. The photo is taken looking toward Palmer.

Birch and spruce trees cover the typical Nordic skiing terrain on the south side of the mountains. Photos by Patty Sullivan/MSB.