



FNSB CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

2019 Project Nomination Form

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MAYOR'S OFFICE

Nominations will be accepted from **August 12 to October 11**. Please fill out the nomination form as completely as possible. If a section does not apply to the project you are nominating, please leave that section blank. Please attach additional relevant information to this nomination packet as appropriate. There is no limit to the number of projects that can be submitted.

Completed nomination forms can be submitted:

In person at:

Fairbanks North Star Borough
Attn: Mayor's Office
907 Terminal Street
Fairbanks, AK 99701

By mail to:

Fairbanks North Star Borough
Attn: Capital Improvement Program
PO Box 71267
Fairbanks, AK 99707

NOMINATOR'S NAME: <u>Cam Webb</u>	DATE: <u>2019-10-11</u>
ORGANIZATION (IF APPLICABLE): _____	
AFFECTED DEPARTMENT: <u>Parks & Recreation (plus Planning)</u>	
PHONE: (<u>907</u>) <u>385-8530</u>	EMAIL: <u>cam_webb@yahoo.com</u>

Name of Proposed Project: Heritage Forest Recreation Area

Project Scope/Description:

Please see attached proposal.

(Please note that this nomination refers to an area that is the same as that discussed in a proposal by Parks & Rec. entitled: Peede Road Open Space: Access and Trail Development)



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SAFETY AND CODE COMPLIANCE

1. Does the project reduce or eliminate a health or safety risk?

Yes No

Please explain:

The recreation area will include short, interesting, non-motorized trails that should encourage visitors to walk more.

2. In your opinion, what is the current condition of the facility?

Poor This is a new facility
 Fair
 Good
 Excellent

Please explain:

3. Does the project improve accessibility compliance? (For example: parking lot design, doorway design, counter height, floor access, restroom access, etc.)

Yes No

Please explain:

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FACILITY CONDITION

4. How old is the facility since original construction?

- 41+ years This is a new facility
 31 - 40 years
 21 - 30 years
 11 - 20 years
 0 - 10 years

5. Does the project replace an existing facility?

- Yes No

If yes, please identify the building it would replace and any other supporting information, including the condition of the existing facility (poor, fair, good, excellent):

PROJECT FUNDING

6. What is the status of project funding?

- Fully funded
 Partially funded
 No funding

Please identify the source and amount of any funding that is already secured in support of this project:

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7. Are there grant, foundation, sponsorship, or other alternative sources of funding available for this project?

Yes No

a. If yes, is there a match requirement?

Yes No

b. If a match is required, how much? Please choose the most applicable option.

- 1 - 10% match required
 11 - 20% match required
 21 - 30% match required
 31 - 40% match required
 +41% match required

Please identify the potential funding sources, how the project is eligible for such funds, any work done to commit such funds (i.e., application or proposal submitted and/or approved), and any additionally relevant information:

See Section 6 of proposal.

8. If applicable, does your organization plan on contributing any funds?

Yes No

If yes, please identify the amount and source of funds planned in contribution of this project:

I am ready to contribute volunteer time and labor. I anticipate that other people will too.

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ENVIRONMENTAL

9. Will the project clean up contamination (such as lead, asbestos, fuel contamination, etc.)?
 Yes No

Please explain:

10. Does the project improve air quality?
 Yes No

Please explain:

See Section 3 of proposal.

11. Will the project reduce storm water runoff?
 Yes No

Please explain:

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12. Will the project improve groundwater quality?

Yes No

Please explain:

13. Will the project improve energy efficiency?

Yes No

Please explain:

PUBLIC USE

14. Will the project improve the customer experience?

Yes No

Please explain:

The goal of the whole proposed project is to increase access to and safety at this site, to reduce user conflict, and to increase the number of users (customers).

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15. Is the project served by a fixed transit route?

Yes No

Please explain:

The trailhead of HFRA is about a half-hour walk from the nearest stop on the Green Line (MACS bus).

16. Will the project improve facility capacity?

Yes No

Please explain:

While there is currently no feeling that the site is over-crowded, the creation of HFRA would encourage a wider range of user groups, and thus increase the number of people who could simultaneously use the area.

ONGOING MAINTENANCE COST

17. Will the project reduce utility expenses on a cost per square foot (\$/SF)?

Yes No

Please explain:

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18. Will the project reduce maintenance expenses on a cost per square foot (\$/SF)?

Yes No

Please explain:

19. Will the project extend the life of an existing facility?

Yes No

Please explain:

PLANNING AND DESIGN

20. Does the project have complete designs?

Yes No

Please explain:

Please see Section 5 of the proposal for a discussion of the Planning needs and community engagement. Some future discussion of the exact trail routes and trailhead layout will also be needed.

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21. Have there been any project scope and/or engineering studies done?

Yes No

If yes, please explain all work that has been done on this project to date. Please attach and submit all relevant information as part of the project nomination packet.

BUDGET IMPACT

22. How will the project impact the operation budget for the affected department?

- Increase the operating budget
 Maintain the operating budget
 Decrease the operating budget

Please explain:

The addition of a new listed facility may increase the budget of P&R for monitoring and minimal maintenance. The HFRA is however a low-impact/low-complexity facility and the costs should not be great.

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POPULATION REACHED

23. What type of population will be served by the proposed project?

- Regional areawide users
- Single community
- Multiple neighborhoods
- Single neighborhood

Please describe the area, population served, and the need that will be met by this project:

Please see proposal.

SUPPORT

24. Please select all applicable form of support this project has:

- Resolutions of support (agencies, governments, etc.)
- Letters of support (groups, businesses, organizations, etc.)
- General public support or letters from residents

Please explain levels of support identified above and provide specific examples:

Please see Section 4 of proposal.

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25. Does this project meet any goals or objectives that are identified in any Borough plans (such as the Comprehensive Plan)?

Yes No

If yes, please identify which goals and objectives in specific plans that this project meets:

The proposed Heritage Forest Recreation Area directly meets the community need for accessible greenspace described in the new Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan and fulfills elements of Strategy #8 (Trails) of that Plan.

PROJECT COST

26. What is the estimated project cost? \$ \$34,000 to \$339,000 (depending on options)

Please explain why this cost is reasonable and should be allocated to this project:

Please see Section 6 of proposal.

Heritage Forest Recreation Area

Securing a public resource in North Pole

FNSB Capital Improvement Program Proposal

Submitted by C. Webb

Summary

I propose that the Borough designates a new Recreation Area in the Brock Road and Repp Road neighborhood of North Pole, which formalizes a long-existing recreation site. Actions needed would include: a period of community engagement and planning, re-zoning Borough land, and building some minimal infrastructure (car park, signage, restroom, and new trails); nature trail development might involve local schools. The new project could be named "Heritage Forest Recreation Area" to honor the School District outdoor education site to which it is adjacent. Many people already use this area for summer and winter recreation, both motorized and non-motorized, but many other people, especially new residents to North Pole, are likely unaware of the outdoor opportunities on their doorsteps. Creating a new recreation area would help residents meet their expressed need for accessible greenspace. Opportunities also exist for the Borough to collaborate with the State, which owns the land to the east, to expand the recreation area over time.

Sections

1. Background	2
2. Vision	4
3. Need	4
4. Support	5
5. Action plan	6
6. Budget	8
7. Map	10

1. Background

Geographical location

To the east of Brock Road and to the north of Repp Road there exists a nine-square-mile block of forest and wetland which stands out clearly on a satellite map of North Pole (this area is hereafter referred to as “Chena Annex”; Sections 14-16, 21-23, 26-28 T1S/R2E/FM; see overview map). Current ownership of the land is divided between the Borough (2.5 sq mi), Cook Inlet Regional Inc. (2.5 sq mi) and Alaska DNR (approx. 4 sq mi). The land proposed for the Heritage Forest Recreation Area (HFRA) is the rectangular, contiguous, 1.3-sq-mi area of Borough parcels in the northwest of the Chena Annex (S16 and S21[N1/2]; see map, below). This land is accessed from Peede Road on the west, and from Blalock Road (off Freeman Road) in the north. It is surrounded on the north, west and south by residential lots. A query of the FNSB GIS system (<https://gisportal.fnsb.us/>) shows that there 1,200 parcels within a half mile of the boundary of the larger Chena Annex, and 422 parcels within a half mile of the proposed HFRA, indicating that many people already live within walking distance of this land.

Natural features

The vegetation of the HFRA area is floodplain boreal forest, with several forest sub-types. On better-draining sites tall stands of white spruce develop, while poor drainage sites on permafrost are covered in black spruce swamps. Much of the area is classified as Federal wetland. Where the forest has recently been disturbed, by fire or river erosion, extensive pure stands of paper birch grow. Many sloughs run through the area, providing water features and sunny riverbanks where cranberries grow in abundance. Some of the older sloughs have silted up and have become grasslands. Overall, these different vegetation types are inter-mixed on a scale of 100 to 300 yards, making for a rich and varied visual experience when walking the trails.

Past Use

In the 1940s and 50s, the Chena Annex area was owned by the federal government and used by the Army. Remains of radar stations, bunkers and a large directional antenna array can still be found. The land then passed to the BLM and State. The Borough land discussed here for the HFRA was conveyed from the State to FNSB in 1980.

In 1976, as part of the bicentennial celebrations, the BLM leased a 4 sq. mi. area (Sections 14, 15, 22 and 23) to the FNSB School District for no cost, for use as an outdoor and environmental teaching resource. This area, known at the time as Heritage Park, was used by many North Pole and Fairbanks schools during the eighties and nineties; kids learned winter camping and survival, and did nature studies there, and a Dene Athabaskan fish camp was even planned for a site on the banks of the Chena (according to old News-Miner articles). The university installed a nature trail. The whole area was also used by hunters, as evidenced by “Attention Hunters” notices in

the newspaper in the 1980s. The well-paved dirt road known as Peede Road Extension has existed since the 1950s, and has provided year-round access for residents. Land beside the Peede Road Extension became a dumping ground for old vehicles until Borough actions to clean up the area (early 2000s?), when bollards were placed across the road at the Peede/Brock intersection. Sadly this also prevented access for school trips to the Heritage Park, perhaps contributing to the decline in use in the 2000s by the School District. In the late 90s, FNSB and the AK Department of Forestry set up a Heritage Forest Advisory Board and developed a Management Plan for the area. Plans included tree species trials, game management and habitat manipulation.

In 2017, the State Planning department opened a project (“Tundra Rose Subdivision”) to assess two sections of Chena Annex state land (S15 and S22) for housing development in advance of the Eielson F-35 expansion. The final report concluded that the land was “not the best match” and too full of wetlands, and the project was shelved (Colin Craven, pers. comm.).

The area currently owned by the Borough and proposed here for the HFRA is adjacent to (west of) the Heritage Forest management area, but the ecosystem type is the same and no natural boundaries divide the areas.

Recent Borough and community interest

The whole Chena Annex area is still heavily used, winter and summer, by FNSB residents. While most users are probably from North Pole and the Badger Road area, I know of users who travel farther. The area contains probably the largest network of motorized-vehicle trails in the greater Fairbanks area. Via my conversations on the trails, I also know that many Fort Wainwright residents use the area for ATV riding. The area has a high density of moose, and in the fall the area is a prime location for bowhunters. Off the trails, there is also evidence of old and active trap lines. Though non-motorized users are currently fewer than motorized user, I see cyclists and skiers regularly, and our family has found some great spots for blueberry and cranberry-picking. I personally hunt here for grouse and hare, and see other hunters.

In the spring of this year, three parcels of Borough land in the proposed HFRA were nominated for sale by Land Management. I helped organize a community response to the Borough, requesting that these parcels not be sold, at least not without more community input. Our group set up an informational website (<http://peedetrails4all.org/>), testified at Assembly meetings and collected 150 signatures for a (paper) petition. The Trails Advisory Commission wrote a letter asking that the land not be sold, and the team working on the Salcha-Badger Development Plan explicitly named the Chena Annex area as one needing a site-specific plan before development. In the end, the Assembly voted to retain the largest parcel (166 acres) and re-zone it as greenspace, while removing the two smaller (40-acre) parcels from the land sale. **This CIP proposal is the next step** in our group’s engagement with the Borough concerning maintaining public access to the land.

Competing land uses

During my engagement with the community this summer, I found unanimous agreement for preserving this area as a public resource. However based on the land sale nominations and my conversations with the Mayor, I am aware of the general need to raise revenues for the Borough and the anticipated need for growth in housing supply. The mayor shared an alternate vision for the land: well-planned, “cluster housing” developments that would preserve much greenspace. If there is indeed a persistent desire within the Borough to pursue this residential development option, with its necessary reduction in public land, a community engagement process will surely be needed, as recommended by the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan. Such a planning process is discussed below in Phase 1 of Section 5.

2. Vision

The Heritage Forest Recreation Area will:

- Preserve existing public access (motorized or non-motorized), while
- Encouraging more FNSB residents, from different demographics, to get outside close to their homes and explore Tanana Valley floodplain forest,
- Encourage more people to walk, ski and cycle, with associated health benefits,
- Reduce conflict among trail user groups (especially between mushers and ATV riders) via designating different trails for different uses,
- Provide easily accessible trails to forest, ponds and sloughs for school nature and biology studies,
- Offer safe parking and restroom facilities for all users,
- Eventually connect to the Chena Lakes Recreation Area with a multi-use trail, and
- Represent a significant reservoir of natural resources (game and non-timber forest products) close to the city for future subsistence use.

3. Need

Compared to Fairbanks, North Pole has few large, official, public green spaces. Chena Lakes Recreation Area is a vital community resource, but it is a long drive for most residents, and is closed to ATVs, side-by-sides, offroad trucks and snowmachines, which are the main means of outdoor recreation for many people in North Pole. The Chena Annex forest is already the primary local motorized-vehicle destination, mushing training area, and hunting resource for residents in the Badger Road area, but is largely unrecognized by the Borough due to a lack of official recreation status. The recently completed **Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan**, created to guide development in the larger North Pole region, listed **trails development as the number one** category

of land use change that the community said should be promoted. I suggest that the needs of existing trail users and the expressed needs of residents looking for more greenspace can be met by designating Borough land in the Chena Annex as an official Recreation Area. As North Pole grows over the years and decades, it is almost certain that the recreation value of the HFRA to the community will increase.

Of relevance is that much time and money has been spent by the Borough and the Interior Alaska Land Trust (IALT) on gaining trail easements and buying parcels in the Goldstream valley, because much of that land has been sold off over the years. An IALT member remarked to me that the situation in the Chena Annex is like that in the Goldstream valley several decades ago, with the opportunity to keep land public and so not have to acquire it back again for public use in the future.

Another community need met by the creation of the HFRA includes avoiding decreasing **air quality**. The current zoning of the parcels in HFRA is "GU-1". If this land were to be sold, it could be subdivided and developed as housing. The smoke from the additional wood stoves would contribute to the air quality problem in this part of the Borough. However, the new houses would be outside the EPA-determined Non-Attainment Area and therefore outside any of the upcoming air quality control measures. Residential development on land which is so close to the Non-Attainment Area would therefore undermine the Borough's efforts to improve air quality. Creating a recreation area on the other hand would safeguard against the area contributing to poor air quality.

Finally, maintaining forest and wetlands in the HFRA, and the larger Chena Annex, will maintain the natural **mitigation of flooding** in Chena River, which borders the Chena Annex to the north and the east. If future residential development in the Chena Annex were to lead to the blocking of sloughs and swamps, as has happened in much of the Peede Rd and Nordale Rd area, the ability of the floodplain zone to absorb storm surges would be reduced, leading to increased flooding downstream. Maintaining natural ecosystems along the Chena River by designating the land a recreation area could save the Borough millions of dollars in avoided flood damage to Fairbanks.

4. Support

This proposal represents a personal vision and action plan for a recreation area in the Chena Annex, but via my many communications with local and regional FNSB residents this summer, I am sure that the vision is widely shared by the community. One hundred and fifty people signed a (paper) petition against the sale of the three parcels, which included the declaration: "Keeping Borough land east of Brock Road and north of Repp Road in public ownership with full public access is important to me." Creating an official Recreation Area in this forest is probably the most effective means of protecting public access to the land in perpetuity.

Similarly, two Borough entities recently decided against the sale of land in the HFRA and for the maintenance of public access: the Borough Assembly and the Trails Advisory

Commission (TAC). Therefore, while the Assembly and TAC have not yet specifically endorsed this proposal, their previous decision is closely aligned with it.

The Trails Office of the Borough Parks and Recreation Department is submitting their own CIP proposal for a Recreation Area in the same site as the HFRA. After discussion with the Trails Coordinator, Bryant Wright, I decided to submit this proposal independently, but as far as I know the outline of these two proposals is similar. This indicates explicit support by another Borough department for a new recreation area at this site.

5. Action plan

Developing a new Recreation Area of some size has happened several times before in the Borough, and we can learn from these cases: the Goldstream Public Use Area, Tanana Lakes Recreation Area, South Davis Park, and the Isberg Recreation Area. The latter is probably the most similar case to the proposed Heritage Forest Recreation Area.

I have divided the steps needed to create a recreation area into four phases: Planning, Borough legal action, On the ground development, and Future collaboration with DNR.

Phase 1: Planning and community outreach

The Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan explicitly recommended that a site-specific plan should be made for the Chena Annex. Planning would especially be needed if there are competing development interests for the HFRA land, in which case determining community desires for the area would also be vital. Recent, successful engagement by the Planning Department with the Goldstream community over the fate of Borough parcels in the Goldstream valley might provide a template for community engagement (K. Spillman, pers. comm.). Such community engagement could involve mass sending of postcards, several community meetings and the opportunity for residents to offer written and electronic feedback. The costs associated with this planning, over and above Borough staff time, are included in the budget of the proposed work, and offer a chance to develop a site-specific plan for the whole Chena Annex area using CIP funds.

Phase 2: Re-zoning and designation of Recreation Area

After the completion of any planning and community engagement process, the Assembly will be asked to authorize the re-zoning of the land to OR (Outdoor Recreational), as was done with the Isberg Recreation Area. The land is currently GU-1.

If there are as yet undiscovered strong sentiments against the creation of a recreation area, these should emerge during Assembly hearings on rezoning the land for public use.

Phase 3: On-site work

The primary goals for work on the ground will be to encourage conflict-free use of the area by a range of users, and provide appropriate trailheads. The HFRA is already criss-crossed by trails, some used by ATVs, some by mushers and snow machines, some only by people on foot. The first task will be to do a full **trail inventory** of the land, identifying routes and existing uses. I have already developed maps of most of the trails (see map at <http://peedetrails4all.org>, and the map attached below), and would be excited to work with the Borough Trails Coordinator to complete this mapping. He and I already visited the land together on 30 September.

Next a trail usage strategy is needed. The major user conflict is between mushers, who need a rut-free trail surface in the winter, and ATV riders, who tend to create tire ruts that persist year-round. Designating appropriate uses on different trails can help to minimize this conflict, though enforcing this separation of uses is beyond the scope of this project. Most of the ATV usage is farther east along the Peede Road Extension, in State land, and so simply closing some trails to ATV use in HFRA would help maintain trail surfaces in HFRA for mushers and walkers.

Encouraging more walkers and skiers is a goal of establishing the new recreation area and developing trails closer to the trail head, with interesting views and features, will help attract walkers. From my experience of the area I have identified appropriate routes, both **new trails**, labeled A on map (1.2 mi), B (0.8 mi), and E (0.5 mi), as well as upgraded existing trails and routes: C (0.5 mi) and D (1.1 mi). The total length of trails, as well as the choice of surface (undeveloped vs. wood chip) will determine the total cost of the project, and several options for trail work are given in the budget below.

Signage will then be needed, to designate trail use, to indicate trail route where it may be unclear, and to educate and inform. At least one of the trails (probably A) could be developed as a nature trail, with appropriate signs describing natural features. I would volunteer to help develop the text for such signs.

One important possibility throughout the development of this project is to include **local schools** (Midnight Sun and Ticasuk Brown Elementary, North Pole Middle and High Schools) in trail layout, nature trail content, and signage.

Finally, some **trailhead** development will be needed. There already exists a large (900 sq yd), off-road parking space at the main Peede Road and Brock Road access point (T1 on map). This area could suffice with almost no additional road work, though widening the area slightly and indicating parking spaces would help. Many trail users arrive with their motorized vehicles on trailers, which can present a parking problem when busy. Different levels of trailhead road work area indicated in the budget. A restroom would be a useful addition to the trailhead infrastructure, but could initially be a portable unit. The single most important development at the trailhead would be trash cans and even a dumpster unit. For many years, residents have used the trailhead, the Peede Road Extension shoulders, and especially the DNR parcel to the northeast of the trailhead as dumping sites for cars, appliances and household trash. Reducing littering may take time, but making a dumpster available at the trailhead should help.

The HFRA can also be accessed from the north, at the end of Blalock Rd. This entrance might be designated a second trailhead (T2 on map), though no development beyond signage would initially be needed. Trail E leaves from this trailhead and visits a couple scenic ponds.

Phase 4: Collaboration with State DNR and connection to Chena Lakes

The State land to the east of HFRA is also much used for recreation and subsistence, and eventually joining that land with HFRA to form a single Borough/State recreation area would create a large and even more valuable public resource for the future. Various options exist for acquiring some of the State land, including a land exchange (as suggested by the Mayor; see http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/factsht/land_fs/land_exch.pdf), or a negotiated lease (http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/factsht/land_fs/land_exch.pdf). The State may also be open to developing a park on its land, which might be co-managed by the Borough.

One of the top recommendations in the Salcha-Badger Road Area Plan concerning trails was the need to connect existing trail networks. The most valuable trail connection from HFRA would be to Chena Lakes recreation Area, five mile to the southeast, as proposed in an earlier Borough plan for the Heritage Forest. This trail would cross what is currently State land, and some negotiation with the State would be required. The resulting long-distance trail would be of great value to all motorized users and mushers.

6. Budget

Three alternate scenarios have been budgeted below, from a minimal option to a comprehensive option. Appropriate per-unit costs were determined during conversation with Borough staff (K. Spillman for planning costs, B. Wright for trail and trailhead costs).

	<i>Minimal</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>Comprehensive</i>
1. Planning	1,000 postcards, three public meetings = \$2,000	1,000 postcards, three public meetings = \$2,000	1,000 postcards, three public meetings = \$2,000
2. Re-zoning	No project costs beyond ordinary Borough function costs		
3. On-site work: - Trails inventory	Volunteer and ordinary P&R staff time		
- Restroom	None	None	1 restroom at T1 = \$150,000

- Parking	Use existing space at T1	Grade and resurface (900 sq yd @ \$13) = \$11,700	Asphalt (1,000 sq yd @ \$45) = \$45,000
- Signage	20 signs (@ \$100) = \$2,000	35 signs (@ \$100) = \$3,500	40 signs (@ \$100) plus kiosk (@ \$15,000) at T1 = \$19,000
- Trails	Trail A+B, minimal trail work (2 mi @ \$15,000 per mi) = \$30,000	Trails A, B, C, D (3.6 mi @ \$30,000 per mi) = \$108,000	Trails A, B, C, D, E (4.1 mi @ \$30,000 per mi) = \$123,000
Total	\$34,000	\$123,200	\$339,000

Other funding sources

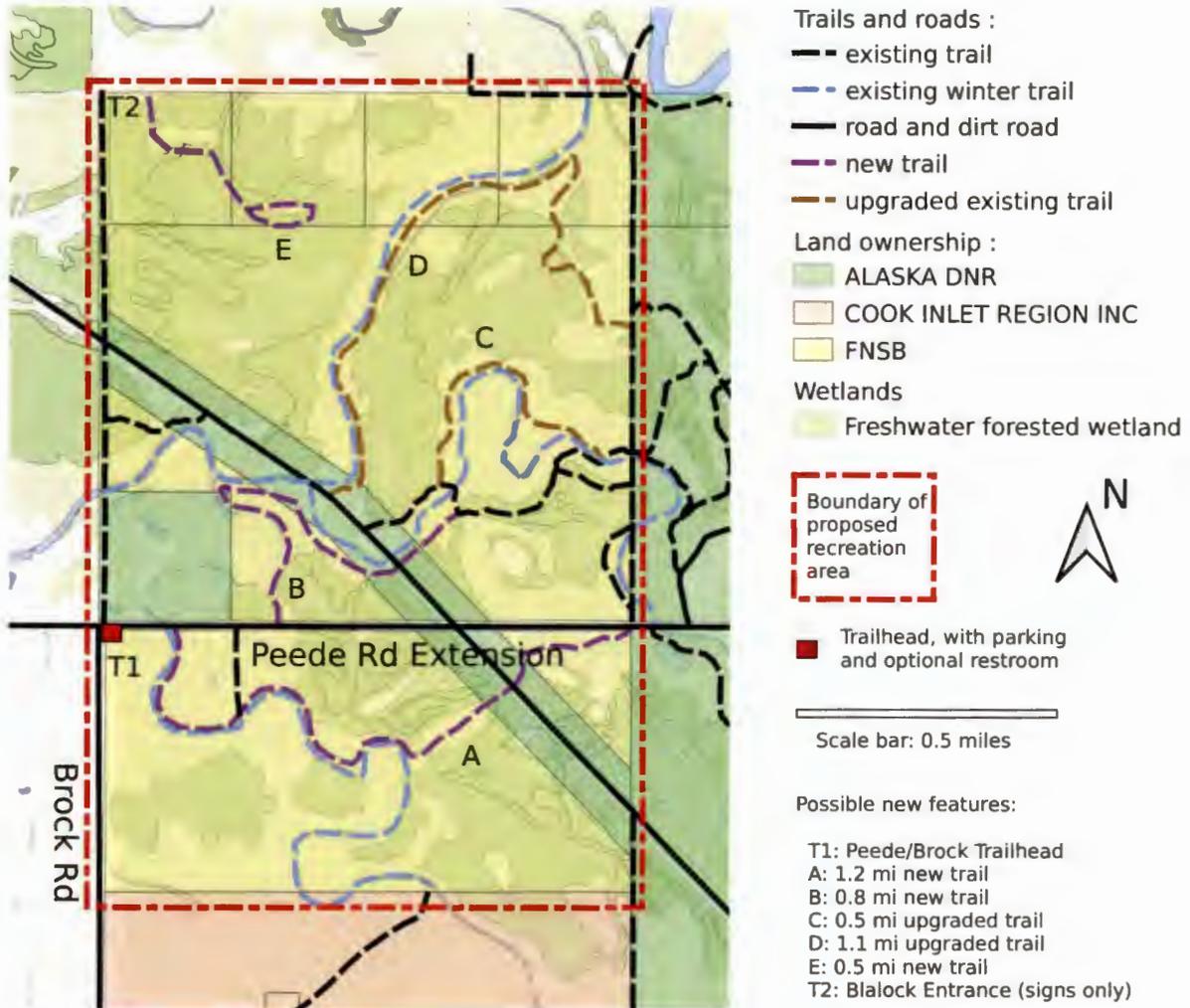
The wetland status of much of the land in the proposed NFRA means that we might be successful seeking federal grant funding via Ducks Unlimited and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. The Chena Flats Greenbelt Project in West Fairbanks, managed through the Interior Alaska Land Trust, has been successful in getting NAWCA funds. These grants appear to require some matching funds.

Another possibility is to seek a State Recreational Trails Grant (<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trails.htm>) which has in the past funded Tanana Lakes RA, and the Skyline Ridge trail. The 2019 proposal is due on November 22nd.

I also anticipate that with the right advertising and incentives substantial donations of volunteer labor can be expected.

7. Map

Proposed Heritage Forest Recreation Area



Locator map:

