New land management plan aims to improve public safety near Sutton

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SUTTON, Alaska (KTUU) As many Alaskans plan to enjoy the outdoors this summer at places like Sutton, some residents are saying there is a major safety problem in the community.

Photo by Patrick Enslow / KTUU

Last June, Sutton resident George Rauscher says locals began working on a land management plan to improve safety in the town's recreational areas.

"It's happening on top of each other, people are shooting over trails, people in four wheelers coming through camps a little too fast," Rauscher said. "We've had a kid get run over. We have had so many instances where the police had to come from Palmer."

In April, 30-year-old Adam Malaby was fatally shot near Sutton while taking photos of people shooting.

Rauscher says the trouble began in the Coal Hills near Slipper Lake after the State gave that area a facelift. According to Rauscher, the lake can see as many as 1,000 visitors in just one weekend.

"In that process somewhere this area became a recreation site," Rauscher said. "Fire pits were put in around the lake, and gave people a reason to go and camp around the lake."

The updates to Slipper Lake came as a result of funding from the Jonesville Mine under the Federal Surface Mining Reclamation Act. Alaska's Department of Natural Resources then added things like fire pits and a widened road. DNR says the changes were made only after public meetings were held with residents.

Rauscher says the community wants people to continue to use the area for recreational purposes, but hopes the community can adopt a land management plan that will make the area safer.

"As far as their recreation goes we would like to see it continue to recreate in the area because that's what the state did. But we would also like to see it happen safely," said Rauscher.

Residents in the area now working on a management plan through the Jonesville/Slipper Lake Action Committee. The end goal for the committee is to pass legislation making the state land around Slipper Lake a public use area.

"A public use area is a legislatively designated area similar to what we have done in the Knik, and that provides us with certain enforcement authority," said Marty Parsons with Alaska's Department of Natural Resources.

The Action Committee is now using the Knik as a blueprint for its legislation. Rauscher says the committee hopes to have bill in Juneau by next session.

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