

SCR

19



Alaska State Legislature


Senate Committee on State Affairs

Vic Fischer, Chair • Pouch V
Juneau, Alaska 99811
(907) 465-4954

Official Business

MEMORANDUM

TO: Rep. John Ringstad and Richard Shultz
Co-Chairs, House Resources Committee

FROM: Senator Vic Fischer 

DATE: February 28, 1984

RE: SCR 19

SCR 19, a resolution urging the Governor to establish a statewide trails system, is currently before the House Resources Committee.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could schedule the bill for hearing before the committee at your convenience.

Attached is back-up material for committee members. Please let me know if additional material is required.

Thanks.

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February 28, 1984

TO: Members, House Resources Committee
FROM: Senator Vic Fischer *Vic Fischer*
Re: SCR 19 - establishing a statewide trails system

In 1981, I introduced SB 189, legislation that would have created a statewide system of recreational and scenic trails. I reintroduced basically the same bill in 1983 in the form of SB 9.

Before the Senate Resources committee hearing on SB 9, I met with personal from the Division of Parks, DOTPF, and Senator Fahrenkamps' staff. Those meetings illustrated some major problems with the bill including:

- the state has no comprehensive policy towards trails, in fact, no one is responsible for planning and developing such a policy
- if trails are administered through the Division of Parks they are parks, with all the restrictions associated with parks that may not be applicable to trails
- the Division of Land and Water Management has, in the past, inadvertently included the rights of way for historical, and recreational trails in land disposals. While they are getting much better, lack of adequate surveying and funding to identify and preserve rights-of-way remains a problem
- most of Alaska's major trails cross a mixture of public and private land. How can we preserve and maintain a statewide trail that crosses federal, state, municipal, borough, native, and other privately owned land as an integral unit?
- many of Alaska's trails are used primarily for transportation with recreation use second. Historical trails particularly may be the only access to mining claims and homesteads
- DOTPF is responsible for planning and construction involving transportation corridors. But what about trailheads, recreational trails, water crossings and campsites associated with transportation corridors and recreational trails?
- who, therefore, is the most appropriate agency to administer and plan for trails. How can we assure coordination between agencies in developing and preserving trails?

It became apparent to me that SB 9 may have been premature in that the Governor should have the opportunity first to provide for interagency coordination in planning and managing statewide trails before such management is "cast in concrete" through legislation.

SCR 19 is an attempt to allow the Governor the freedom to pursue interagency coordination with guidelines set by the legislature as to what we believe a statewide trails system should encompass.

SCR 19 is modeled after SB 9. It asks the Governor to direct appropriate state agencies to develop a plan for a comprehensive statewide system of trails that will

- provide for standards, procedures, and management guidelines for designating trails within the system

- provide access to areas of historical, natural, or recreational interest

- protect and enhance the use and enjoyment of publicly owned land and resources by the public

- protect existing trails now in public ownership and access from loss to the public

- propose a state and local government capital improvement plan which includes inter-agency coordination and cooperation in the design, development and management of a statewide system of trails

Further, SCR 19 requests the Governor to make a report to the legislature on the development and implementation of a statewide trails system plan, including recommendations to the legislature for statutory changes.

This section of the resolution, page 2, lines 28 and 29, will have to be amended in the House as they call for the Governor to report to this session of the legislature. The section obviously reflects a bit of wishful thinking on my part, as I anticipated early passage of this resolution last year.

SCR 19 passed the Senate unanimously in the last weeks of the 1983 session. I hope it finds such favor in the House and I thank you for consideration of the resolution in committee.

/gb



Alaska State Legislature

Senate Committee on State Affairs

Vic Fischer, Chairman • 1024 W. 6th Ave., Suite 204 C,
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Official Business

November 15, 1983

Honorable William Sheffield
Governor, State of Alaska
Pouch A
Juneau, Alaska 99811

Dear Bill:

I am writing to urge your help in initiating efforts to establish a statewide system of trails, trail-heads, and waterways.

Alaska's vast statewide system of historical and recreational trails has been largely ignored by past administrations. In spite of this, the demand for trail oriented recreation experiences in Alaska has grown phenomenally. With tourism rapidly becoming Alaska's most vital industry short of oil development, it's unlikely this pressure will diminish.

Although the benefits of establishing a comprehensive trails system are obvious and compelling - tourism development, increased recreation opportunities, national and historical interest, expanding state transportation links, connecting existing parks and tourist facilities with local government recreation areas - the potential has never been realized. Alaska will need your direct help and intervention to assure that this resource lives up to it's full promise.

Currently Alaska has no policy or program to identify and catalog known trails, to coordinate efforts in managing and preserving them or, indeed, any overall strategy that recognizes the economic, historic, and recreation potential of trails or encourages their development.

Instead, the state has exacerbated the problem considerably in the last few years by inadvertently including trails in land disposals, failing to acquire rights-of-way, and developing settlements and transportation corridors in conflict with existing historical trails.

While the benefits are clear, we should also weigh the costs of doing nothing. The list of known state trails reads like the pages of Alaska's history book: Iditarod, Chilkoot, Resurrection Pass, Eagle Summit. Many of these will quickly become history lost without your intervention.

I have enclosed a copy of SCR19 - a resolution basically urging the same action I'm urging through this letter. SCR 19 passed the Senate unanimously last year and is currently in the House Resources Committee. While I anticipate no problems with it's final passage, I'd rather not pursue a legislative solution for what may require simple executive action.

Since first introducing legislation in 1981 to establish a trails system, I've had the opportunity to attend several public hearings/teleconferences where overwhelming support was voiced from constituents, recreation enthusiasts, Alaska's historical community, tourists, and citizens generally interested in parks and recreation issues.

While that statewide support and enthusiasm has not diminished, when it came to the "nuts and bolts" of drafting the bill, serious policy considerations and problems became apparent. These problems should be thoroughly considered by the Governor and pertinent state agencies in order to decide what subsequent action, if any, should be pursued. Among the issues that concern me are:

- The state has no policy towards trails and no state agency is responsible for planning and developing a policy. In this case, the buck hasn't stopped anywhere - it never got started in the first place.
- In the absence of a state policy, plan, or system for surveying, identifying and designating trails, we are continuously and forever losing patents, rights-of-ways and ownership/management authority of state owned trails.
- Which is the most appropriate agency to administer and plan for trails? How can we assure coordination between agencies in identifying, cataloging, developing and preserving trails, trail heads and associated waterways? Can we have joint management or at least a coordinated agreement between state agencies dealing with trails that could include joint management agreements with local governments?
- Many of Alaska's trails, particularly historical ones, were created and used primarily for transportation, specifically mining operations, with recreation as a "second" use. How can we administer trails as "parks" and still allow adequate access and use as transportation corridors?
- If trails are administered through the Division of Parks they are parks, with all the perhaps unwanted or inappropriate restrictions associated with parks that may not be applicable to trails. If trails are to be administered as "long, skinny parks," how can we dilute park restrictions without also diluting the Division's authority to protect established units?
- Finally, can an "in-house" coordinated effort adequately establish and preserve a comprehensive statewide trails system without creating a new agency or authority, reams of regulations and red tape, and subsequent increased budget demands? Can the administration at least assure that the most immediate and pressing problems - acquiring rights-of-way that are about to be lost and not disposing of or endangering existing state owned trails - are taken care of while it plans for longer term considerations?

Bill, I have faith that the new energy and direction of your administration can be applied here. You have the people, the brains, and the commitment to see that Alaska's history, long with our growing recreation and tourism industry, is enhanced and encouraged by a nationally recognized trails system stretching from Ketchikan to Barrow.

What we need here is a fresh look, a businessman's perspective, and a decision to do what to be needs done. I'll help in any way I can.

Best regards,

Senator Vic Fischer

cc: Dan Casey, Commissioner of DOTPF
Esther Wunnike, Commissioner DNR
Tom Hawkins, Division of Lands
Neil Johannsen, Division of Parks

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