

## Support for the Ballot Measure #9 Better Access to Chugach State Park

In April 2023, Anchorage citizens voted to create the **Chugach Access Service Area (CASA)**. Until then, there had been no viable financing mechanism to improve the roads, parking, and trails that provide access into the Park. In the absence of that funding, Park access infrastructure is frequently in poor condition, undersized or simply not there (*one example at right: the informal parking on the “Sunnyside” of Flattop dirt road*).

### **Request for Support**

In April, Anchorage voters will have their first ever chance to use a CASA bond measure to improve access to the Park. A group of people including representatives of Local Road Service Areas, businesses, and hiking, skiing, biking, park, and trail groups are working together to inform the public and build support to pass this Municipal bond. **We urge your organization and your members to support this bond measure.**

The Ballot Measure, #9, would authorize \$4 million to upgrade Canyon Road and associated parking. Canyon Road leads to heavily used but underdeveloped year-round trailheads on the south side of Flattop, including the upgraded “Sunnyside” Flattop trail and trails to Peak 3, Ptarmigan Tarn, and Rabbit Lake. The bond measure is a critical first step in improving access to the spectacular alpine terrain of Chugach State Park, benefiting all Anchorage residents, and helping to address our city’s continuing population decline and economic doldrums (*details below*).

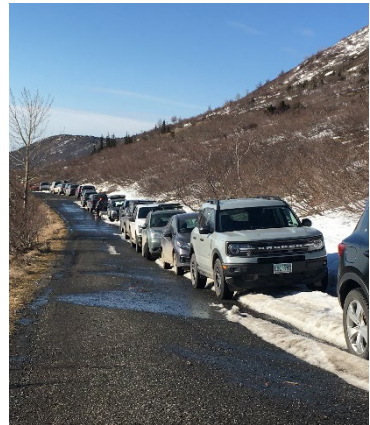
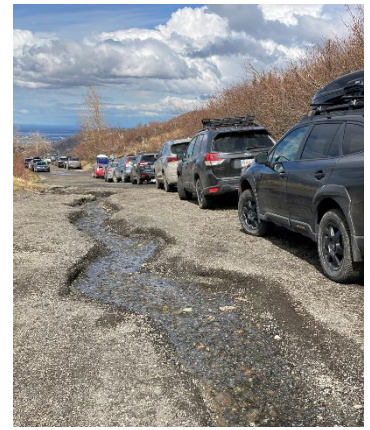
The Chugach Access Service Area is the Anchorage Bowl. Voters outside the Anchorage Bowl, such as in Eagle River, Chugiak, Girdwood, and Indian, will vote and be able to enjoy these improvements, but DO NOT PAY if it passes. For voters in the Anchorage Bowl, the bond will cost less than \$1.00 a year per \$100,000 in assessed value.

### **Context: Solving the “Funding Gap”**

Until the passage of CASA, there was no entity with the responsibility and capacity to fund and manage Park access. The State Division of Parks lacks authority outside of State Park lands and has a huge, unfunded statewide maintenance backlog. Neither the Municipal Parks and Recreation nor the Road Service Districts extend to the State Park boundary. Instead, the burden falls on a smattering of independent Local Road Service Areas (LRSA’s) or in some cases, locations with no road service area. Where LRSA’s exist, they provide only de-centralized management of snow removal, and light summer maintenance. Meanwhile, almost all the 1.5 million annual users traveling to Chugach Park come from outside these Local Road Service Areas. The LRSA’s simply lack the capacity to deal with this level of use. The result is failing roads, overloaded and unsafe parking, and missed opportunities.

### **Use Trends and Benefits to Anchorage**

The photos above, as well as the recently completed Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and a series of Anchorage Daily News articles<sup>1</sup> make clear the widening mismatch between growing demand and underdeveloped supply for use of Chugach State Park. The following page provides some relevant facts.



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<sup>1</sup> Anchorage Daily News: <https://www.adn.com/outdoors-adventure/2022/09/02/with-record-use-chugach-state-park-feels-new-pressures/> SCORP: <https://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/scorp.htm>

## Steadily Increasing Use

- Chugach State Park receives upwards of 1.5 million visitors each year – “These are the most used public lands in Alaska” says Ricky Gease, State Parks Director. Visits to Chugach State Park increased by 50% between 2019 and 2022.
- As the map shows, almost all this use is concentrated along the front range of the Anchorage Bowl.
- Anchorage residents make up 60-70% of the Chugach State Park users, with the remainder from other parts of Alaska and out-of-state visitors.
- While Anchorage users are the Park’s main users, out-of-state visitor use is growing, increasing from 24 to 35 percent from 2019 to 2021, despite almost no cruise traffic 2020 and 2021.



Extract from the “SCORP”, a use-intensity “heat map” relying on anonymized cell phone user data. Brighter colors = more use.

## Big Benefits & Real Needs<sup>2</sup>

“One of the key questions (for Anchorage’s future) is quality of life: Do people want to live there, raise families, invest in housing and the community, and make it their home?” “While a strong tourism year, increased oil field activity, and federal infrastructure and military projects will heat things up a bit in 2024, it will likely **take more than that to turn around Anchorage’s long-lingering stagnation.**”

- 2012-21 was the longest period of negative net migration in Alaska’s history. “The situation appears particularly stark in Anchorage, according to the Dept. of Labor’s forecast. Anchorage has lost residents since its population peaked at 302,167 in 2013 and now has about 19,000 fewer working-age adults than it did a decade ago, the forecast noted.”
- Outdoor recreation and tourism offer one of the few growing parts of Alaska’s and Anchorage’s economy, supporting \$5.6 billion in total statewide economic output last year, including \$3.9 billion in direct spending (<https://www.alaskatlia.org/resources/tourism-works-for-alaska>)
- Anchorage was visited by nearly half of the 2.7 million out of state visitors coming to Alaska between May 2022 and April 2023, plus large numbers of in-state travelers. If the average length of stay in Anchorage increased from 2 ½ to 3 ½ days, **the result would be over \$250 million in increased annual spending in our city.**

Proposition 9 offers a much needed, important step in improving opportunities for outdoor recreation in Anchorage, for residents and visitors. Enhanced access to Chugach State Park will make it easier and safer for all local residents to enjoy this spectacular asset in Anchorage’s backyard. The chance to hike, pick berries, and be outside with friends enhances our quality of life, which helps stem the steady outmigration of people from our city. These same improvements will also provide more reasons for visitors to spend time and money in our town, expanding the spending that supports local jobs, businesses, and fiscal health.



We hope your organization and your members will join us in actively supporting the passage of Prop 9. Thank you for your interest in this critical investment opportunity!

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<sup>2</sup> Quotes from newly published annual forecast from the Alaska Dept of Labor and Workforce Development, from an article by Yereth Rosen, Alaska Beacon, published in ADN, 1.5.24; <https://www.adn.com/business-economy/2024/01/05/alaska-job-growth-driven-by-big-projects-expected-to-put-employment-at-pre-covid-levels/> Other data from the SCORP and from Visit Anchorage and the Alaska Travel Industry Association.