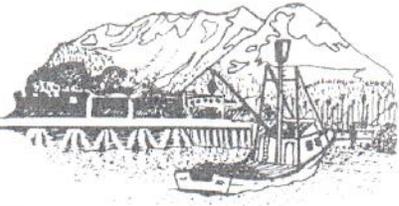


# CITY OF CORDOVA



**PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION**  
**Work Session; Nirvana Park Cemetery / Eyak Burial Ground.**  
**Tuesday July 30th, 2019**  
**6:00 PM / Mayor's Conference Room / Cordova Center**  
**AGENDA**

**Commission Chair**

Wendy Ranney

**Commission Members**

Karen Hallquist, Marvin VanDenBroek, Anne Schaefer, Dave Zastrow, Ryan Schuetzky, Kirsti Jurica

**Parks and Recreation Director**

Susie Herschleb

**Administrative Assistant**

vacant

*Cordova Parks and Recreation is essential for providing and fostering Parks, Programs and Facilities for all in pursuit of a healthy sustainable community.*

- A. **CALL TO ORDER**
- B. **ROLL CALL:** Wendy Ranney, Karen Hallquist, Marvin VanDenBroek, Anne Schaefer, Dave Zastrow, Ryan Schuetzky, Kirsti Jurica, Susie Herschleb,
- C. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**
- D. **VISITOR COMMUNICATIONS**  
Regarding Agenda Items
- E. **CONSENT CALENDAR**
  - 1. Notes from 4.30.19 work session
- F. **REPORTS**
  - 1. Director's note
- G. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**
  - 1. Master Plan Review of Nirvana Park Cemetery / Eyak Burial Ground.
- H. **NEW BUSINESS**
- I. **PENDING AGENDA**
- J. **COMMISSION COMMENTS**
- K. **ADJOURNMENT**

Date: 7.26.19  
To: City of Cordova Parks and Rec. Commissioners  
From: Susan Herschleb /City of Cordova Director of Parks and Recreation  
RE: Director's note: Work Session; Master Plan Review of Nirvana Park Cemetery / Eyak Burial Ground.

Dear Commissioners,

In your packet for this work session, you will find:

1. Work Session notes from 4.30.2019
2. 2013 Commission Review of Nirvana Park Cemetery / Eyak Burial Ground.
3. A Master Plan Review worksheet.
4. A map of the property \*\*a digital color copy attached to your e-mail as well
5. Historical documents to help educate new Commissioners on the timeline of events leading up to current land use status.

I have added a series of documents (#5) to the packet to assist me in leading a discussion with new Commissioners. These documents work as a timeline for me highlighting pertinent community conversations. I think it is important that all the commissioners thoroughly understand why the land use has changed, particularly to advise on future objectives and goals for the property.

## **Work Session – April 30, 2019**

### **Master Plan Review of Hollis Hendrichs Park**

**In attendance:** W. Ranney, D. Zastrow, K.Jurica, S. Herschleb, M. VanDenBroek.

#### **Priorities:**

1. Pavilion with roof
2. Sport fields and equipment – Volleyball and Soccer
3. Pond loop trail
4. Exterior light for flag pole
5. Beds around anchor
6. Picnic sites with grills
7. Active partner with CRWP

#### **Hot topics:**

1. Boardwalk maintenance – no railing
2. Talk to canneries regarding soccer goals, donations?
3. Horseshoe pits

#### **Left to review:**

- Fisherman's Memorial Park
- Cordova Municipal Park
  - Orca Inlet Pump Track / Skate Park
  - Noel Pallas Children's' Memorial Park
- Bob Korn Pool
- Bidarki Rec. Center
- Nirvana Park Burial Ground
  - Spit

## Nirvana Park:

### **Classification: Community Park / Natural Resource Area**

- **Re-create the original artistic essence of this park:** *The original look of Nirvana Park was by all accounts, breath taking. Over the years the park has been reasonably maintained but much of its unique atmosphere has been lost. The Commission would like to take an artist's approach to enhance its natural beauty again. Many ideas were discussed; how do we capture the parks original artistic essence? The Commission talked about selecting a single artist to create a new vision and others mentioned creating a sculpture garden, giving multiple artists an opportunity to create a piece for this park. All agreed that there should be special planning facilitated by the Parks and Recreation Commission and involving the Community to enhance this park via visual art.*
- **Bathroom facilities:** *The Commission feels it is vital to place bathroom at Nirvana Park. The spit at Nirvana Park is used for recreational swimming during the summer months; We see birthday parties, picnic's and educational programming happen here year round. The annual Easter egg hunt is also held at Nirvana Park, hosting close to 300 people. The Commission would like to see a bathroom facility that is hooked into the City water/sewer utilities, and placed in the west corner of the designated parking area just off Lake Avenue. If we are unable to fund this a port-a-potty will be placed to avoid health and safety risks to the community.*
- **Develop swim area:** *The spit at Nirvana Park has become a frequently used access point for recreation on the lake. It would be good to formally designate a portion of the spit as a swimming area. There has been conflict for many years at Skaters Cabin. The Skater's Cabin beach front is supposed to be used only by those renting the cabin. Often renters find themselves sharing the beach with others who are swimming at this site and have not rented the cabin. The Commission believes placing a swim platform seasonally at the spit (like the one we currently have at Skaters Cabin) would help to redirect local traffic from Skater's Cabin to the spit. It would further enhance the spit swimming area to use a more comfortable surface material to walk on while entering the water. Placing a picnic table and bench would provide seating which is currently not available. Water safety for the beach front should be addressed through signage placed near the swim area.*
- **Research possible new public access beach fronts on Lake Eyak**

MASTER PLAN WORKSHEET: \_\_\_\_\_

(name of property)

Your personal goals for the property: Take a moment to write down what you envision happening to this property over the next 10 years.

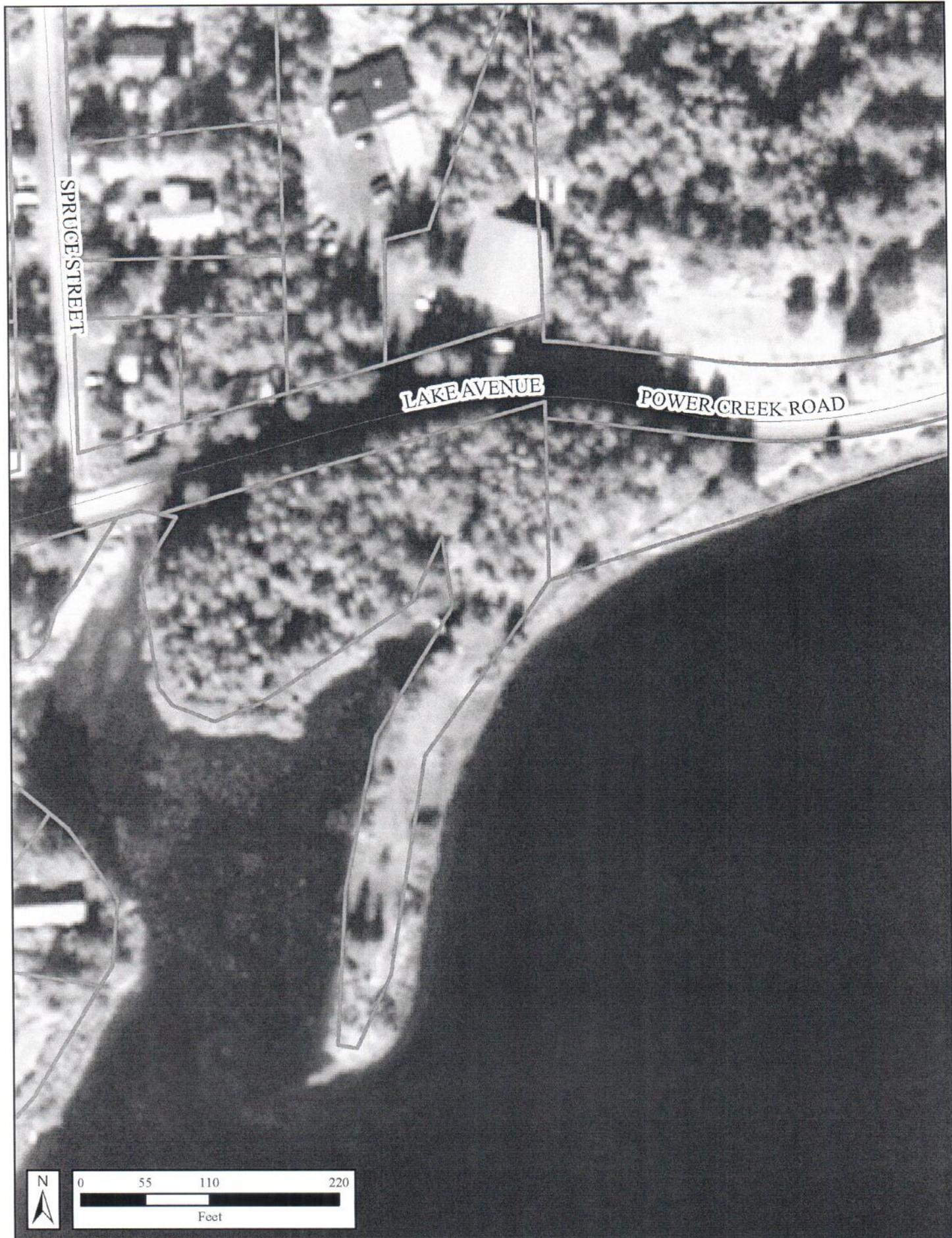
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Group discussion / combined goals listed in priority:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

HOT TOPICS: These are ideas or improvements that have developed from this review that could potentially be executed within the 2019 operating budget (\$1,000.00 or less).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.



## **A Community Conversation – Nirvana Park Cemetery, Eyak Burial Grounds**

**Tuesday, May 8th, 2018 Noon – 1:30 pm**

**Mayors Conference Room – Cordova Center**

### **Agenda**

**Roll Call:** Brooke Johnson, Darrel Olsen, Cathy Sherman, Bill Cobb, Jen Smith, Pam Smith, Wendy Ranney, Susie Herschleb, Tony Schinella.

#### **Agenda:**

- Discussion of 2019 Easter Egg Hunt Location
  - Dave Branshaw with the Sheridan Alpine Club has offered to host.
  - Respond with formal letter?
- Timeline and Discussion of Plan to complete goals
  - a. Design and placement of permanent restroom.
  - b. Design markers for the Eyak Burial Grounds.
  - c. Design interpretive sign for the Eyak Burial Grounds.
  - d. Design interpretive sign for Nirvana Park and Cemetery.
  - e. Purchase or supply funds to Parks & Rec for more benches within Nirvana Park and Cemetery paths.
  - f. Purchase or supply funds to Parks & Rec for gravel to line pathways within Nirvana Park and Cemetery paths.
  - g. Purchase or supply funds to Parks & Rec for a wooden arch or similar design as an entrance to the area.
  - h. For summer season: garbage containers.
  - i. For year-round: small sign with no motorized vehicle notice.
- Budget Draft
- Assignments and Deadlines

## A Community Conversation – Nirvana Park Cemetery, Eyak Burial Grounds – Summary of June 19, 2018 Meeting

The Core Committee met in the Education Room on Tuesday, June 19 from Noon until 12:30 pm to review the status of the project.

Present were: Pam Smith, Jen Smith, Darrel Olsen, Cathy Sherman, Bill Cobb, Susie Herschleb and Micah Renfeldt. Absent were: Brooke Johnson, Tony Schinella and Wendy Ranney.

The group reviewed the budget. The Parks and Rec's team have been doing an excellent job of spending the grant money! At the time of the meeting we have \$6,410 left to expend before June 30<sup>th</sup>. These funds are going toward the ADA Porta-John, the structure for the restroom; the fire-ring talking circle and the pathways.

Additional funds or grants will need to be identified for a new interpretive sign and the grave markers.

Sherman presented an update on the status of the LWCF 1985 grant. A letter has been submitted to the Grants Administrator for the State of Alaska DNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation documenting the Nirvana Park cemetery/Eyak Burial Grounds Rasmuson Grant. We believe the work we are accomplishing still fits within the realm of the original LWCF grant.

The group reviewed (one more time) the discussion of allowed uses for each area. The final decisions are as follows:

### **Eyak Burial Grounds**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Swimming	X	
Motorized Vehicle Access		X
Day Picnic		X
Open Campfire		X
Walking Path/Bench	X	
Wedding		X
Photo Session		X
Science Event		X
Birthday Party		X
Daycare Field Trips		X
Egg Hunt		X

**Nirvana Park Cemetery**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Swimming	X	
Motorized Vehicle Access		X
Day Picnic	X	
Open Campfire in Circle	X	X
Walking Path/Bench	X	
Wedding*	X	
Photo Session*	X	
Science Event**		X
Birthday Party		X
Daycare Field Trips**		X
Egg Hunt		X

**\*Wedding – Ceremony Only, Not Reception; Low impact Photo Sessions**

**\*\*With permission from Parks and Rec Department**

Sherman volunteered to create a brochure that would tell the history of the Cemeteries and the Park. The brochure would be used to inform folks about the uses allowed. It would ask people to be respectful when in the area and to stay on the designated pathways. Sherman hopes to finish this by July 1.

It was agreed that Sherman would work with the Eyak Burial Caucus on grave markers, and an interpretive sign.

Sherman noted she would review Municipal Code with the assistance of the Planning staff.

The meeting ended at 12:33 pm.  
Respectfully Submitted, Cathy Sherman

## A Community Conversation – Nirvana Park Cemetery, Eyak Burial Grounds

Jean Ayers  
Grants Administrator  
State of Alaska: DNR  
Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

June 14, 2018

Re: LWCF Project #02-00272

In July of 2016, the Cordova Historical Society was awarded a Rasmuson Foundation grant of \$25,000 for "Nirvana Park Improvements." The funds were given to the Cordova Historical Society, a non-profit. We formed a committee of invested partners:

- Parks & Rec Department (Director and Commission Chair)
- Native Village of Eyak (Council President and Cultural Center Director)
- Eyak Burial Caucus (Two members)
- Historical Society (Museum Director and Vice President)
- City of Cordova Harbormaster (Because of Float Plane Moorages)
- City of Cordova Public Works Director

At the time of the award of LWCF #02-00272, I am unsure if the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service were aware that both Nirvana Park and the area locally known as the 'Spit' were the original cemeteries in Cordova. I am attaching a few photos for you to add to your files. Over the years the area became both a beautiful park and a great place for Cordova kids to swim.

Times have changed however and in recent years the Spit was becoming used more and more as a jet ski off load and haul out spot with as many as a dozen vehicles covering the Spit. Impromptu campfires, parties and garbage became more and more of a problem. The Native community became concerned about the uses taking place in sacred burial grounds.

As we started the process of determining what to do with this grant, we held a series of public meetings. These meetings, which we called "Conversations" deteriorated into at times, shouting matches full of racial slurs and bigotry. It was deeply distressing and quite brutal. And then social media (Facebook or Face Gossip as I call it) came alive with even more hurtful comments and racially charged threats. Something I have never experienced in Cordova.

We took a few steps back. We completed one Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey in 2016. 8 burial sites were located on the Spit. The committee decided for 2016 to do the following:

- Eliminate motorized vehicles on the Spit and in Nirvana Park year round.
- Eliminate campfires.
- Eliminate fireworks, etc.
- Allow swimming.
- Place garbage receptacles and Port-a-Potty for summer.

## **A Community Conversation – Nirvana Park Cemetery, Eyak Burial Grounds**

After the summer of 2016, we reevaluated. Overall, it had gone well. Used for swimming, but not abused. The furor died down a little...

We conducted a second more extensive GPR survey in 2017. We identified 44 burials on the Spit alone, some even under the access road. The committee is now determined to restore the park area to being recognized as a cemetery and burial grounds with limited day-use recreational uses such as swimming, improved walking paths (guiding visitors 'around' actual graves), a campfire 'talking' circle, interpretive signage and grave markers.

We are also working toward a full flush restroom facility. One thing we are not planning is a shelter of any kind. Reasons being the shelter we had in place was becoming more of a drug hideout and rarely used as it was intended. We don't want to violate the LWCF Project agreement, but it's taken us a long time to come to agreement within the community about how the restoration of this area should take place.

With this background knowledge, is it possible we might amend the LWCF project agreement or ask for permission to continue our current path? Our committee does not feel an LWCF conversion is necessary as the area will still be open to accommodate passive public outdoor recreation uses in keeping with the original grant agreement (picnics, walks in a quiet green space).

The Committee feels we are not significantly changing the original grant intent. We are meeting the LWCF grant intent by installing an ADA restroom and campfire circle; while redirecting more boisterous activity (jet skis, fireworks, unregulated campfires) to other recreational sites in respect for the original use of the areas as a cemetery and burial ground.

We are hopeful the powers that be will recognize our intent as well and agree a conversion is not necessary.

Respectfully,

*Cathy R. Sherman*

Cathy R. Sherman  
Project Lead  
Museum/Library Director

## **A Community Conversation – Nirvana Park Cemetery, Eyak Burial Grounds**

### **Update on Status of LWCF Grant**

Not only has the Rasmuson grant been challenging for our committee; there is a back story of another grant.

A Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant in 1980. The original LWCF grant agreement scope of work included:

*“To rehabilitate the existing Nirvana Park by renovating existing trails, fences, bridges, landscaping, parking area and the swimming beach by construction of a picnic shelter, picnic tables, fire pit, restrooms with extension of water and sewer lines to that facility.”*

However, that original plan for a fully piped bathroom facility was not realized. An amendment to this grant in 1990 allowed for a composting toilet be installed versus the bathroom facility.

Nirvana Park, having received LWCF assistance, is subject to compliance provisions under the federal LWCF Act. Those provisions include maintaining the park, in a safe and inviting manner, in perpetuity for public outdoor recreation.

Susie and I teleconferenced with Jean Ayers, the State's LWCF Grants Administrator and explained the current grant and our path of restoration. We also shared the GPR reports with her.

She suggested we officially write a letter requesting 'no need for conversion' (a long, lengthy, governmental process.) Jean feels we are still in compliance with the original LWCF grant with our current plans. The letter follows:

## Susie Herschleb

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**From:** Ayers, Jean M (DNR) <jean.ayers@alaska.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, September 21, 2018 1:59 PM  
**To:** Susie Herschleb; Cathy Sherman  
**Subject:** Nirvana Concurrence

Happy Friday, Cordovans! Our folks with the National Park Service have concurred that neither a conversion nor significant change of use has occurred. Hence there are no issues which would negatively affect the LWCF protections or status of Nirvana Park.

Thank you for bringing the concerns to our attention. Please place this concurrence in your permanent file for Nirvana Park.

*Jean Ayers, Grants Administrator  
State of Alaska: Dept of Natural Resources  
Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation  
907-269-8694*

**From:** Ramsay, Heather <heather\_ramsay@nps.gov>  
**Sent:** Friday, September 21, 2018 12:49 PM  
**To:** Ayers, Jean M (DNR) <jean.ayers@alaska.gov>  
**Subject:** Re: [EXTERNAL] Nirvana

Thank you, Jean. And my apologies that it took me so long to respond. I pulled the original grant application just in case there was anything there to influence our thinking. What I see in the grant file tracks with your conclusion below - that motorized use was not envisioned and I agree that the current proposal sounds like a return to the type of uses originally proposed for the LWCF site. I note that we appeared to be aware of at least some presence of burials since the grant included fencing to separate them from park users. There is specific discussion in both the grant narrative and the review that the intent was to keep the burial area in boundary. It is not clear from the file why it was excluded on the final map.

In any case, I concur with your conclusion that the proposed uses at the park are consistent with the original intent of the grant and as such, require neither a conversion, nor a significant change in use request. Thank you for checking in.

Heather

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Funding and Protecting Parks Where you Live

Heather Ramsay, Program Officer  
National Park Service, State & Local Assistance Programs  
909 First Avenue, Seattle, WA 98104-1060  
206.220.4123 - [www.nps.gov/lwcf](http://www.nps.gov/lwcf) or /uprr

On Fri, Jul 13, 2018 at 4:10 PM Droge, Martha <[martha\\_j\\_droge@nps.gov](mailto:martha_j_droge@nps.gov)> wrote:

Hi Jean, Yes I remember this conversation.

I think the way you and the grant sponsor are approaching this makes sense. I understand that the NPS response is not time sensitive, but the grant sponsor wants to put it on our to do list.

Since Heather is taking over Alaska after my departure on July 20 she should be involved in crafting whatever response NPS makes. I'm cc'ing her here. The State of Alaska is in the best hands in the nation in terms of S.106 compliance with Heather, and I'm sure the NPS response will be appropriate and forthcoming.

Heather - Jean will be out of the office next week, but she looks forward to discussing this with you. She is aware that your heavy workload means there may be delays in addressing LWCF matters, particularly those not associated with new grants being put under contract this FY.

I will miss you both tremendously. Come see me in Philly.

Martha

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*Funding and Protecting Parks Where you Live*

Martha J. Droge AICP, ASLA, LEED AP  
Program Officer, State & Local Assistance Programs,  
National Park Service, 909 First Avenue, 5th Floor, Seattle, WA 98104-1060  
206.220.4122 (o)      206.220.4160 (fax)      [www.nps.gov/lwcf](http://www.nps.gov/lwcf)

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Ayers, Jean M (DNR)** <[jean.ayers@alaska.gov](mailto:jean.ayers@alaska.gov)>  
Date: Fri, Jul 13, 2018 at 3:09 PM  
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Nirvana  
To: "[Martha J Droge@nps.gov](mailto:Martha_J_Droge@nps.gov)" <[Martha\\_J\\_Droge@nps.gov](mailto:Martha_J_Droge@nps.gov)>

Hi Martha,

In June, we had discussed a situation with Nirvana Park in Cordova affecting LWCF grant # 02-00272. The situation is that ancestral burial grounds have been discovered within the LWCF boundary of this park. The LWCF grant, executed in 1980 and amended in 1990, was for "*...renovation of existing trails, fences, bridges, landscaping; and construction of a parking area, picnic shelter, picnic tables, fire pit, and composting toilet.*"

Since discovery of the burial sites concentrated on "the spit," the City of Cordova Parks & Rec and Public Works departments have worked with the Native Village of Eyak, Eyak Burial Caucus, the Cordova Historical Society, the Harbormaster, and the public to address appropriate public uses within this site. After intensive public meetings, in 2016 the stakeholders decided to ban motorized traffic within Nirvana Park and away from the spit, and re-direct more recent boisterous activity (jet-skis, fireworks, unregulated campfires) to another public recreation area a couple miles away.

Nirvana Park will continue to accommodate public outdoor recreation uses in keeping with the original LWCF grant agreement (picnics, contemplative walks or bike rides in a quiet green space, bird watching, swimming, etc.) The stakeholders also envision developing paths to guide visitors respectfully around the graves, install interpretive signs, grave markers, and a campfire "talking circle."

These proposed actions make the case that neither an LWCF conversion of Nirvana Park nor a "change of use" is necessary. I believe you may concur. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

## **A Community Conversation – Nirvana Park Cemetery, Eyak Burial Grounds**

**Tuesday, January 30th, 2018 Noon – 1:30 pm**

**Community Room A – Cordova Center**

### **Agenda**

**Roll Call:** Brooke Johnson, Darrel Olsen, Cathy Sherman, Bill Cobb, Jen Smith, Pam Smith, Wendy Ranney, Susie Herschleb, Tony Schinella.

#### **Agenda:**

- Status of 2017 GPR report
- Discussion of 2018 Easter Egg Hunt Location
- Timeline and Discussion of Plan to complete goals
  - a. Design markers for the Eyak Burial Grounds.
  - b. Design interpretive sign for the Eyak Burial Grounds.
  - c. Design interpretive sign for Nirvana Park and Cemetery.
  - d. Purchase or supply funds to Parks & Rec for more benches within Nirvana Park and Cemetery paths.
  - e. Purchase or supply funds to Parks & Rec for gravel to line pathways within Nirvana Park and Cemetery paths.
  - f. Purchase or supply funds to Parks & Rec for a wooden arch or similar design as an entrance to the area.
  - g. For summer season: replace porta potty, garbage containers.
  - h. For year-round: small sign with no motorized vehicle notice.

*\* Draft newspaper  
article December 2018*

## **Nirvana Park Cemetery and Eyak Burial Grounds Update**

The Nirvana Park Committee met this fall to review the findings from the additional Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey by the company Applied Archaeology International (AAI) and to review the summer season with the initial restrictions for the area in place.

Following a GPR survey in November 2016 along the Eyak Spit with the Eyak Lake, the team from AAI were invited to return to the site and carry out an additional investigation. The purpose was to deploy a new GPR unit owned and operated by BE Surveys and specialist Stuart Beckett. This unit provides more accuracy and higher resolution data than the unit used in 2016. This second survey involved more resulted in a more detailed survey of the Eyak Burial Grounds (Spit area) and identified 41 additional burial sites.

The Committee also discussed how the summer season went with the restrictions of no live fires or motorized traffic on the spit. While there were few issues overall, with the advent of snowfall, the committee discussed reiterating the importance of no vehicle traffic on the Eyak Burial Grounds (Spit area). In preparation for the winter season, and with the discovery of additional burial sites, the committee decided to make sure motorized access would be blocked.

Everyone in the committee and the Parks and Rec Department agreed while the large sign in place was not visually attractive, it did accomplish the goal of notification of the changes to this heritage area. In the future it will be replaced by a smaller sign along with interpretative signage sharing the history of the area.

During the summer season, Skater's Cabin was extremely busy and with the increased traffic, Parks and Rec Department plans to continue work to expand the beach area there.

The Committee consisting of representatives from the City of Cordova, the Native Village of Eyak, the Parks and Rec Department, the Historical Society and Eyak Ancestors unanimously agreed to continue work on re-establishing the area as a special heritage area that consists of past and active burial grounds. As a next step, the committee set up a special email for comments, concerns, questions and ideas for the Nirvana Park Cemetery and Eyak Burial Grounds Heritage Area. To send your comments use: [cordovanirvanapark@gmail.com](mailto:cordovanirvanapark@gmail.com)

The next Committee Meeting will be scheduled sometime in December at which time the group will review comments sent to the email address above. Updates will continue via the E-News, City website and the Cordova Times. Notice of meetings will be in the same places and an email distribution list will be created based on emails sent to the nirvana park gmail.

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