



TO: Deputy Mayor Smith & Assembly Committee of the Whole
FROM: George Schaaf, Parks & Recreation Director
CC: Robert Barr, Deputy City Manager
DATE: February 20, 2025
RE: Parks & Recreation Commercial Use Analysis and Recommendations

The Parks & Recreation Department recently completed a comprehensive review of commercial use guidelines and regulations. If approved by the Assembly, the outcomes of this process will shape the management of commercial activities in municipally owned parks and trails starting in 2025.

Background & Current Situation

The current commercial use guidelines were developed over 20 years ago when visitor numbers and activity types were significantly different. At that time, approximately 600,000 cruise ship passengers visited Juneau annually, and user conflicts were primarily concentrated on hiking trails. Today, with over 1.5 million annual visitors and a shift in commercial activity from trails to parks, a new management framework is necessary to protect resources, manage public spaces effectively, and mitigate potential conflicts.

Currently, tourism-related commercial use is permitted in 12 CBJ parks and trails. Most of this activity occurs at facilities developed specifically for tourism using Marine Passenger Fees, including Overstreet Park, Homestead Park, and the Rainforest Trail. Additionally, significant use occurs at the Brotherhood Bridge parking lot, which was transferred to CBJ from DOT&PF in 2019.

In 2024, 139,209 visitors accessed CBJ parks and trails under a commercial use permit. Of these, fewer than 5% (7,200) visited a hiking trail. The vast majority of this trail use (over 95%) was concentrated at the Rainforest Trail, with only 550 commercial guests using all other CBJ trails.

Public Process

To gather community input, Corvus Design and CBJ staff facilitated six public meetings throughout 2024. These meetings provided information on current commercial use levels and invited public feedback on updated management guidelines. Over 300 people participated, and staff responded to nearly 100 public comments, many of which were incorporated into the final recommendations. A full record of comments and responses is available on the project website: <https://bit.ly/CRUA24>.

While this review focused on commercial use in municipally owned parks and trails, many public comments highlighted concerns about tourism impacts in areas managed by other agencies,

departments, or empowered boards. Additionally, many participants expressed concerns about the increasing number of tourists using trails. However, this growth primarily reflects a rise in independent visitors rather than an increase in commercially guided groups operating under permits. The Parks & Recreation Department does not have the authority to restrict or manage this type of non-commercial use.

The Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) reviewed the plan and received public comments at their December 3, 2024 meeting. The PRAC unanimously recommended that the Assembly adopt the recommendations.

Recommendations

The proposed guidelines would prohibit commercial use in 56 CBJ parks and trails. Commercial activity would continue at 10 locations, while two existing sites (Perseverance Trail and Sunshine Cove) would be closed to commercial use. Additionally, three locations (Under Thunder Trail, Telephone Hill Park, and Evergreen Cemetery) would be newly designated for limited commercial use.

Like the 2004 plan, the updated guidelines establish site-specific regulations, including group sizes, site capacity, and operational hours. The plan also introduces restrictions on activity types based on usage intensity, allowing staff to assess new and emerging commercial activities based on their potential impacts.

Conclusion

The updated guidelines reflect current visitor trends, balance commercial use with resource protection, and incorporate extensive public input. By modernizing management strategies, CBJ Parks & Recreation aims to ensure that Juneau's parks and trails remain accessible, enjoyable, and well-maintained for both residents and visitors.

If approved by the Assembly, these guidelines will provide a clear framework for managing commercial activity in CBJ parks and trails beginning in 2025. The department remains committed to ongoing evaluation and adaptation as visitor needs and community priorities continue to evolve.