

**RECREATIONAL USE  
RESEARCH REPORT  
GLENNALLEN TO ANCHORAGE  
NATURAL GAS SPUR LINE  
  
ALASKA NATURAL GAS  
DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

**BEESC Project No. 25098**

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**Prepared for:**

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADFG	Alaska Department of Fish and Game
ADNR	Alaska Department of Natural Resources
ANGDA	Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority
BEESC	Bristol Environmental & Engineering Services Corporation
LNG	liquid natural gas
MSB	Matanuska-Susitna Borough

## **1.0 SPUR LINE PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

The project under consideration is a buried 143-mile-long, 24-inch-high-pressure natural gas pipeline constructed between Glennallen and Palmer. This “spur line” is being proposed as part of the All Alaska Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) Project. The LNG project is a proposed pipeline between the North Slope and Valdez. The spur line would tie into the North Slope gas line near Glennallen and the existing Enstar gas system in Palmer. Pre-construction activities are planned for 2006 with a construction start as early as 2007.

Near the Glennallen end, the pipeline is located within the Glenn Highway right-of-way for approximately 52 miles. The right-of-way departs the highway alignment in the vicinity of Squaw Creek, and then proceeds up the Caribou Creek Valley to Chitna Pass, and then back down the Boulder Creek Valley. From Rush Lake, the pipeline right-of-way roughly parallels the Glenn Highway, staying one or two miles north of the highway, past Sutton where it joins the Trunk Road right-of-way. From there, the right-of-way joins the Parks Highway and travels south for about two miles.

## **2.0 GOALS OF THE RECREATION USE RESEARCH PROJECT**

The Alaska Natural Gas Development Authority (ANGDA) recognizes that areas along the proposed right-of-way receive substantial recreation use and are recreation destinations for users that live outside the immediate project area.

The Recreational Use Research Project goal was design as an outreach process that would identify those recreational groups that use, or could potentially use, the spur line right-of-way and adjacent areas on State of Alaska public lands, and include these users in a discussion process having the following outcomes:

1. Description of existing and future or potential recreation use of the right-of-way;
2. Identification of recreation issues, spillover impacts, and benefits; and
3. Identification of other items to be considered in the conditional right-of-way lease application.

Another goal of the project was to try to focus the process on recreation organizations, having members that live in areas other than those directly adjacent to the proposed right-of-way.

The information gathered from the outreach would be compiled into a report that ANGDA could use as supplemental information to support its Right-of-Way Lease Application to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR).

The research project was not intended to solicit comment on the suitability of the route location, constructability and cost, or other broader issues related to the development of natural gas pipeline projects in Alaska.

### **3.0 PROJECT BENEFITS**

Benefits of the spur line project include: (1) stimulation of Alaska business, (2) training and employment of 400 to 500 new workers during spur line construction, (3) reduction of gas and power bills in the Cook Inlet area, and (4) provision of a long-term source of inexpensive propane along the LNG route.

Rural communities along the LNG route may have access to gas for electricity generation, which could supplement or even displace the current use of diesel for electricity generation. In addition, bottled propane for local use will be available.

### **4.0 OUTREACH PROCESS**

The outreach process was designed to be inclusive, focused, and well-managed. The process included the following tasks: (1) identification of potentially affected individuals and groups, (2) creation of a project mailing list and design of a project mailer to recreational organizations and local community groups, describing the proposed project and upcoming workshops, (3) two facilitated recreational user open discussion meetings, and (4) two presentations before local boards and commissions.

The major outreach tasks are discussed in greater detail in the sections that follow.

#### **4.1 IDENTIFICATION OF POTENTIALLY AFFECTED INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS**

Segments of the spur line right-of-way are located in a prime recreational area of the state. Much of the right-of-way is located within the Nelchina Public Use Area and the Matanuska Valley Moose Range. Many individuals and groups were identified as potentially interested in the recreational use of the right-of-way corridor during and after construction. Table 4-1 lists recreational groups, businesses, and special interest groups that were invited to participate in the open discussion meetings.

**Table 4.1 Recreation Groups Invitation List**

• Alaska State Snowmobile Association	• Friends of State Parks – Mat-Su
• Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG), Palmer	• Knik Canoers and Kayakers
• ADFG, Division of Sport Fish, Juneau and Anchorage	• Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB) Assembly Members
• ADFG, Division of Wildlife Conservation, Juneau and Anchorage	• MSB Land Use and Planning Department
• Alaska Bush Adventures	• MSB Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
• Alaska Center for the Environment	• MSB Planning Commission Members
• Alaska Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development, Division of Tourism	• Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau
• Alaska Experience (guides)	• Mat-Su Trails Council
• Alaska Explorers and Fisherman	• Mountaineering Club of Alaska
• Alaska Mountain Rescue Group	• Nordic Skiing Association of Alaska
• Alaska Mountaineering and Hiking	• North American Skijor and Pulk Association
• Alaska Mountaineering School	• Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ADNR)
• Alaska Powersports, Eagle River, and Anchorage	• Palmer Chamber of Commerce
• Alaska Snowmobile Alliance	• Recreational Equipment Incorporated (REI)
• Alaska Travel Industry Association	• Wasilla Chamber of Commerce
• Alaska Two-Wheel Tours	
• Alaska Wilderness and Recreation Association	
• Arctic Bicycle Club	
• Aurora Dog Musers	

#### **4.2 PREPARATION OF MAILING LIST AND INFORMATIONAL FLYERS AND POSTERS**

A mailing list was prepared from the list of potentially affected individuals and groups. The mailing list formed the basis for mailing an information flyer and poster, as notice of the meeting(s), and for follow-up discussion of findings.

An informational flyer was developed to notify the recreation users of the two discussion meetings and to invite them to participate. The flyer was designed to be easy to read and to accurately describe the project and purpose of the meetings. Flyers were prepared and distributed to the mailing list along with a compact disc that included a poster for posting on group websites. Each invited group was provided with a number of posters and flyers that they could forward on to their membership.

Appendix A contains the mailing list, the meeting notification letter, and the informational poster and flyer that were distributed.

### **4.3 RECREATIONAL USER OPEN DISCUSSION MEETINGS**

Two workshop-style meetings were scheduled. The first meeting was held in Palmer at the Old Alaska Railroad Depot on March 5, 2005, from 10 a.m. until noon. The second meeting was held in Anchorage at the Spenard Community Recreation Center, on March 8, 2005, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

#### **4.3.1 Design of the Recreational User Open Discussion Meetings**

Bristol Environmental & Engineering Services Corporation (BEESC) team members, Elizabeth Benson and Tom Arminski, worked with Dick LaFever of Crossroads Leadership Institute, to design two open discussion meetings and identify the best approach for obtaining the required information from the participants. Maps and other technical, environmental, and background information regarding the spur line right-of-way were available for participants to view. Interested individuals and groups were provided two opportunities to participate; workshops were offered in Palmer and in Anchorage.

Mr. LaFever, a professional facilitator, managed the meetings. Ground rules for the meetings were developed and explained to the participants. Participants worked in small breakout groups. The results of the breakout groups were discussed and comments were kept for the record.

The meetings were designed to be user-friendly and informal. The settings did not convey the perception that these were formal hearings, where testimony would be taken. Participants were asked to sign-in. The sign-in sheets are included in Appendix B.

It was clearly communicated that the scope of the discussion would be limited to recreational use and opportunities within the project corridor. Project economics, engineering components, environmental features, and alternative projects or routes were not discussed. Understanding, however, that concerns would be raised about areas other than recreation, general comment forms to provide written comments were made available. These written comments were transmitted to ANGDA for response.

Attendance was expected to be in the range of 30 to 40 participants at each meeting. There were 27 participants at the Palmer meeting and seven at the Anchorage meeting.

#### **4.3.2 Meeting Description**

The meetings began with a presentation of the short history of ANGDA and some background about the overall project. Next, the meeting focus, meeting guidelines, and rules for conduct were presented. Participants were divided into small discussion groups of five to six people. Each group was tasked with developing ideas, regarding recreational uses for the proposed pipeline area, based upon the following framing questions:

1. How can the spur line corridor meet the need for recreational use on state-owned lands in the project corridor and/or area? What opportunities exist for recreational use?
2. What are concerns about recreational use on or adjacent to the right-of-way?

Each group had a designated recorder of comments, and a spokesperson to report results of the discussion. The recorder kept a list of the opportunities and concerns, and other general comments on an acetate sheet. The group's three to five main points were then reported to the larger group. The acetate sheets have been retained for the record.

Large maps were also provided so that participants would have an opportunity to locate, on the map(s), where recreation use is currently occurring, and to identify areas having potential for future recreation use.

The participants were asked to discuss how the area is currently accessed and how, or if, existing access can be improved by the project. Participants were also asked to help identify spillover impacts and benefits from improved recreational use and access, and to describe ways to potentially mitigate impacts so that these measures could be considered in the right-of-way application process.

#### **4.3.3 Meeting Results**

Information about the potential opportunities and concerns raised during the meetings were listed as "opportunities and concerns" on acetate sheets developed by each small discussion group, and presented to the larger group. Not all of the comments presented to the larger group were confined to recreational use.

The results from the "Opportunities" and "Concerns" Sheets are tabulated and presented in Graphs 5.1 and 5.2, respectively. In some cases, concerns were listed on the Opportunities sheets; these concerns were included in Graph 5.2, Concerns. The following appendices include meeting results and comments:

Appendix C: "Opportunities" Sheets From the meetings,

Appendix D: "Concerns" Sheets From the meetings,

Appendix E: General Comments Received After the March Meetings.

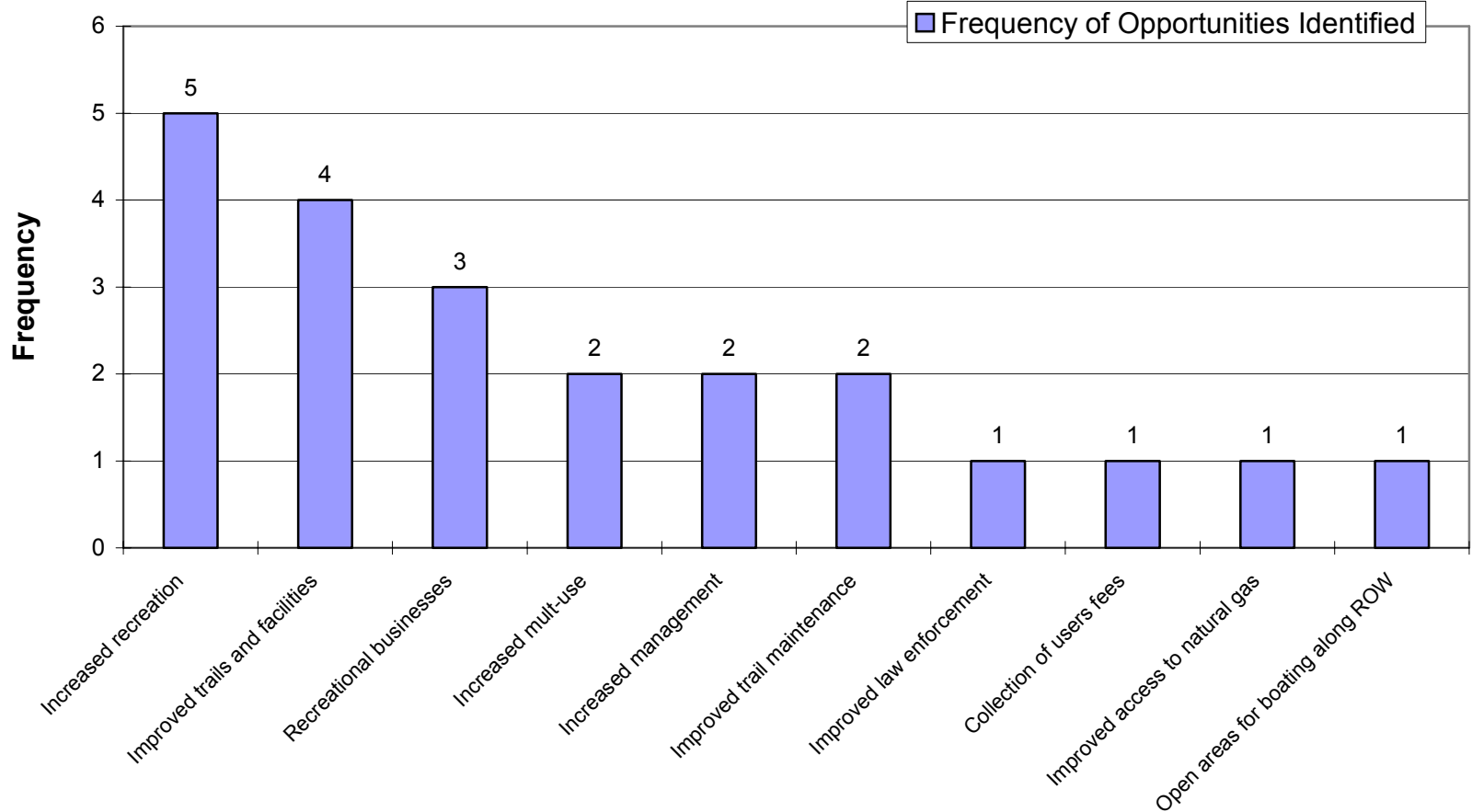
#### **4.3.4 General Comment Themes**

General comment forms were made available to participants at the two open discussion meetings. There were several common themes represented in the written general comments. The themes were:

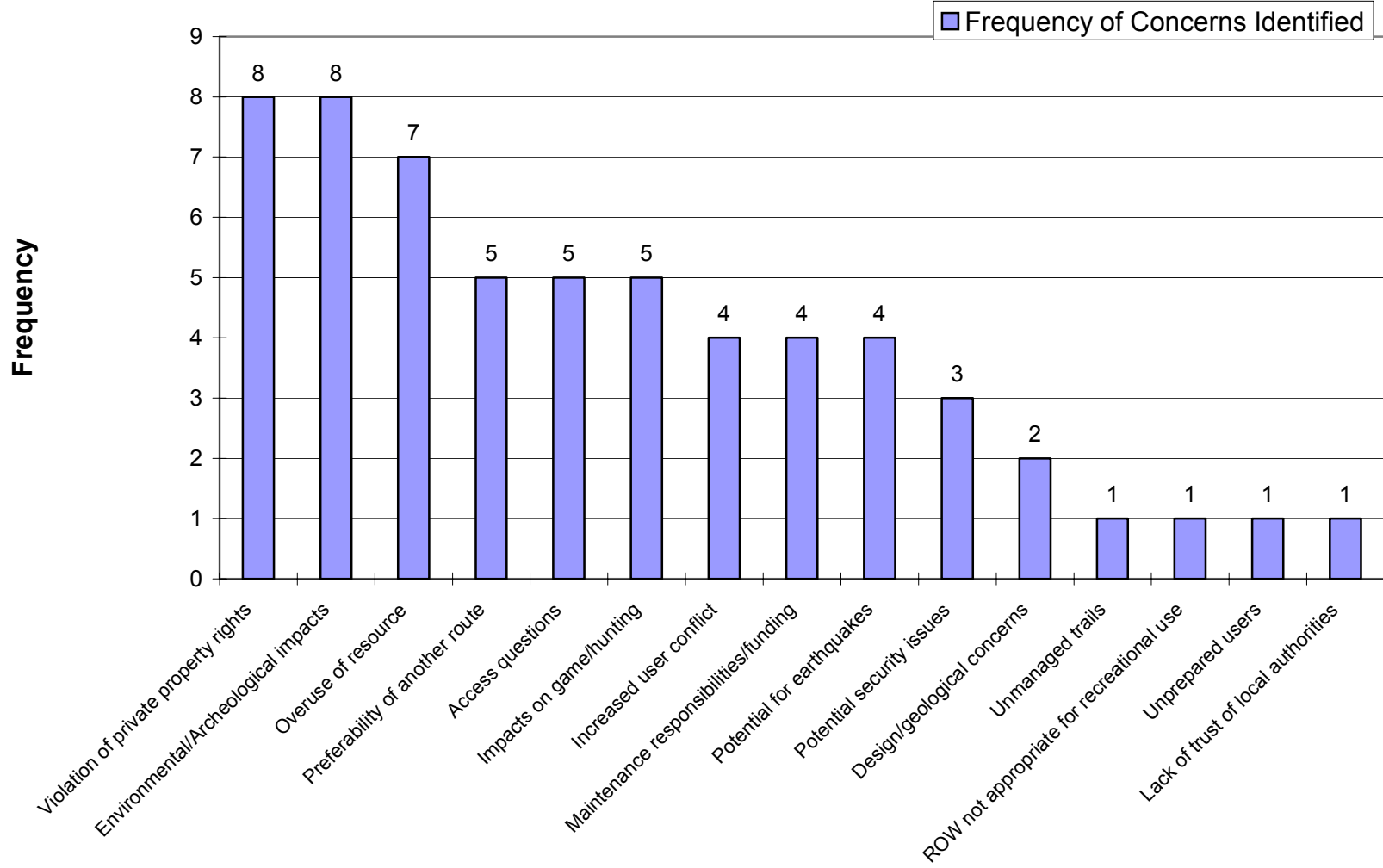
- Concerns about the potential for damage to the spur line, due to earthquakes;
- Problems associated with the increased use of trails brought on by easy access;
- Concerns about the proposed pipeline route not being optimal; and
- Concerns about increased risks to the environment and public safety.



### Graph 5.1 Opportunities Identified at Meetings



### Graph 5.2 Concerns Identified at Meetings



General comments have been separated, depending upon whether they pertain to recreational use of the right-of-way or to non-recreational issues. The results are presented in Graphs 5.3 and 5.4, respectively.

#### **4.4 ADDITIONAL OUTREACH EFFORTS**

##### **4.4.1 Presentations to Local Groups**

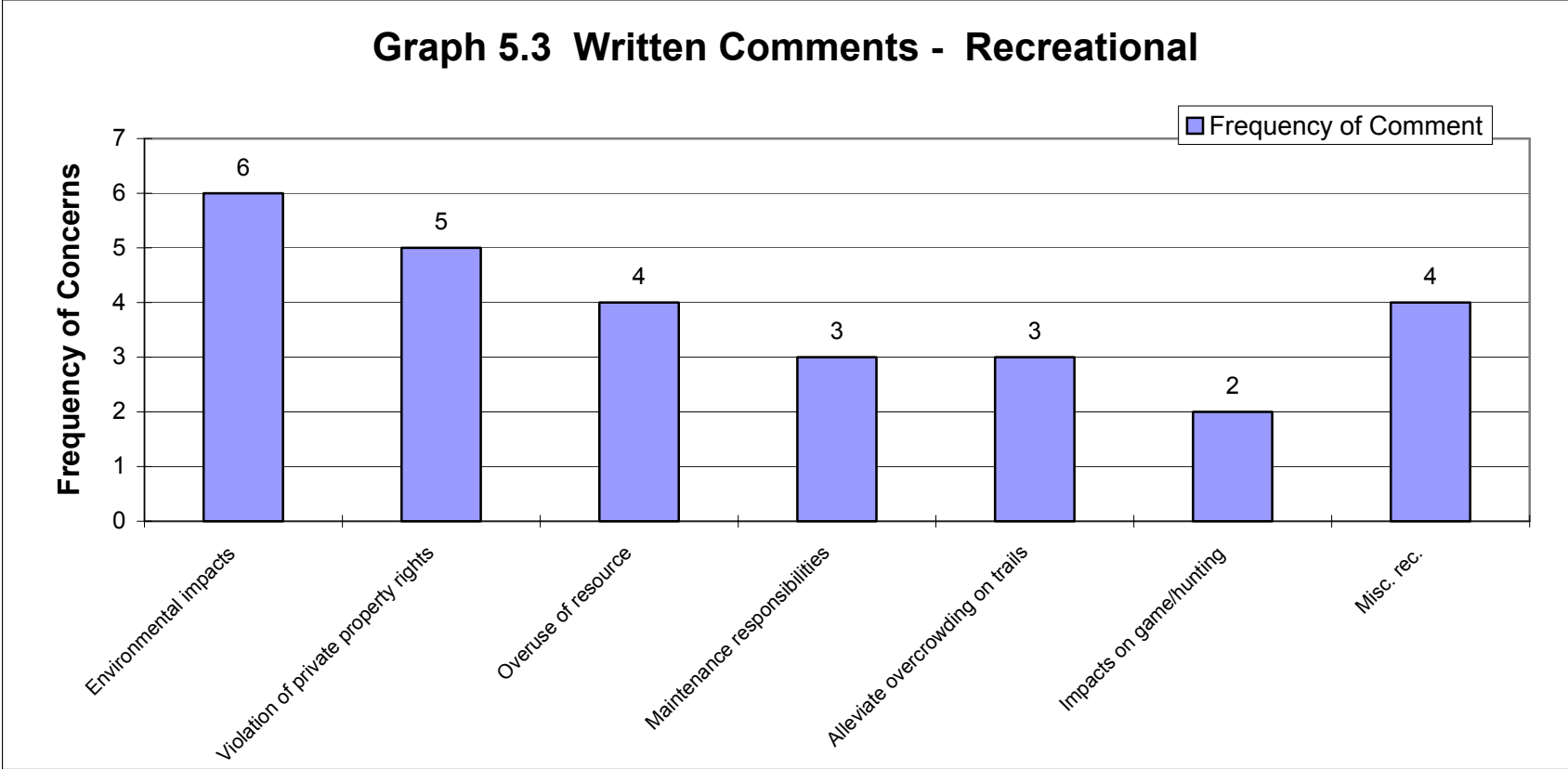
Following the March open discussion meetings, BEESC presented the proposed project to two additional groups. The purpose of these additional presentations was to continue to gather additional information, from the recreation user's viewpoint, about how the pipeline corridor created can meet the increasing, and sometimes competing, demands for recreational access on state-owned lands in the project corridor area.

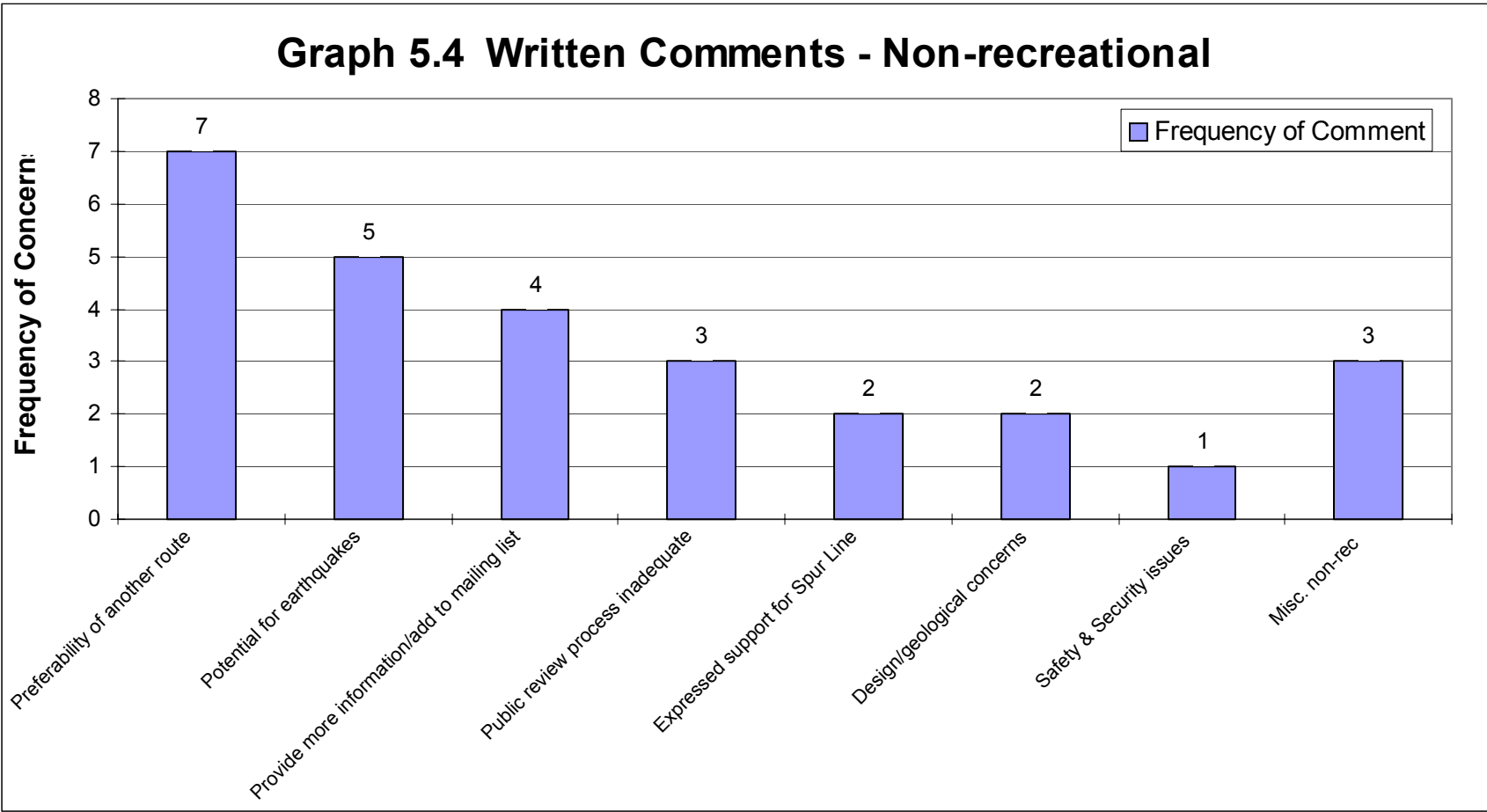
On June 27, 2005, Tom Arminski and Elizabeth Benson presented the proposed project to the MSB Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. On August 17, 2005, Ms. Benson presented the proposed project to the Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers Group, a recently formed group that uses the project area for mountain biking and hiking. Comments received from discussions at these two additional meetings are included in Appendix E.

##### **4.4.2 Discussions with Other Interested Individuals**

Further outreach efforts by BEESC included conducting key informant interviews with MSB officials and staff, and interested individuals associated with non-governmental recreation user groups. BEESC discussed the proposed spur line project with Mr. Ron Swanson, Director, Ms. Pat Owen, MSB Land Management Department, a staff member of the MSB Land Management Department, and Mr. Scott Lapiene, Mat-Su Trails Council. Mr. Swanson is staff to the MSB Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. He invited BEESC to present the project to the members. No formal comments were received from the Board.

Ms. Owen is a member of the Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers Association; she invited BEESC to present the project to members. Comments from Ms. Owen, not as an MSB official, but on behalf of the group, and Mr. Pat Murphy, an individual member of the group, are included in Appendix E. Mr. Lapiene is president of the Mat-Su Trails Council and was personally very supportive of holding a workshop with the group, however, the group declined.





## **5.0 SUMMARY OF OUTREACH RESULTS**

The results of the outreach effort are summarized below.

### **5.1 RECREATION USE AREAS**

A number of areas used heavily for recreation were identified during the outreach effort. These locations of concern include those areas identified as:

- Squaw Creek
- Caribou Creek
- Boulder Creek

In order to determine potential impacts resulting from the project on the recreation use of the area, the pipeline route and right-of-way width (pre- and post- construction), the location, size, and type of construction access roads needed for the project, must be more accurately described. Once this information is available, recreation users will be able to more accurately pinpoint trailhead locations, potential trail use impacts, and appropriate mitigation measures.

### **5.2 CONSTRUCTION ACCESS ROADS**

Comments received indicated a concern that the creation of construction access roads may open up backcountry to increased use, which could potentially denude vegetation, and negatively impact the overall recreational experience of the area.

Suggestions were to design construction access roads so the road can subsequently be converted into a trail(s). These “roads-to-trails” could then be hardened paths (no wider than a one-lane road) with appropriate grade and drainage for multiple uses.

During construction of the access roads, it was suggested that pullouts be constructed that can potentially double as truck turnouts. This would allow for safer passage of traffic. Specific areas identified for turnouts include: Boulder Creek/Purinton Creek trailhead, Hicks Creek/Pinochle Creek trailhead, and Squaw Creek/Belanger Pass trailhead.

### **5.3 TRAIL SYSTEM**

#### **5.3.1 Access**

Comments indicated that access to trail system(s) during and after construction of the project is necessary. There are a number of historic access routes that are heavily used year-round, especially in the Matanuska Valley Moose Range and Nelchina Public Use Area.

#### **5.3.2 Improvements**

Comments suggested that the project account for existing trails and included trailhead improvements. Trail improvements could include trail markings, drainage, and hardening of

trail surfaces. Trailhead improvements could include: incorporating sanitary facilities, and trail markings.

### **5.3.3 Trail Management**

Comments suggested that a management plan be developed that describes, in detail, how the public may or may not use the post-construction pipeline right-of-way, and construction access road rights-of-way. The plan should include a description of management authority and funding for implementation, and a plan for on-the-ground management and maintenance of trailhead facilities and trails.

In addition, the comments suggested that an opportunity to accurately document use of the project area during and after construction be provided. This information could be very important for future recreation planning activities.

## **5.4 POST-CONSTRUCTION RECLAMATION**

Comments on post-construction reclamation included:

- Build construction access roads that can be easily closed/vacated, revegetated, and reclaimed, and
- Where appropriate and practical, use existing trails for construction access. Once the project is complete, reclaim the trails to a higher standard than pre-construction.

## **5.5 SPUR LINE PROJECT LOCATION**

Many comments received, stated a preference for the spur line route to be located along the Denali Highway corridor or Parks Highway corridor, and not between Glennallen and Palmer. Some suggested that if it is to come from Glennallen, that it follows the Glenn Highway right-of-way. If along proposed route, it should be taxed and funds should be used to build and manage the backcountry trail system for year-round use. Monies can be used to fund design, construction, rangers and management.

## **6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Work with user groups to determine a suitable approach for the use of existing trails, during construction in order to minimize adverse impacts, and avoid blocking trail access – winter 2006.
2. Work with ADNR, MSB, and interested groups to develop a post-construction management approach – winter 2006.
3. Prepare and present an approach for reclamation of pipeline right-of-way, and construction access road rights-of-way, in an open discussion meeting with recreation user groups – spring 2006.
4. Invite participants to help determine trailhead locations, design, amenities, and management approach – spring 2006.