

TESTIMONY/COMMENTS AT COH PC/PARCAC

Devony Lehner – I've lived in Homer since 1987—in Fritz Creek, Kachemak City, and now between Rogers Loop and Highland.

I urge the Planning Commission and PARCAC to commit HART funds and other city resources to support planning and improvements in the city's Diamond Creek Recreation Area—DCRA for short. I also urge the city to highlight the DCRA in the current comp plan update by including it as an “area plan” in the rewrite. This will support for years future efforts to fund improvements in the DCRA.

Here's a quick review of how the DCRA fits into other areas along the Sterling Highway. First there's the 360-ac state-owned Homer Demonstration Forest. Most of you know that area as the Baycrest ski trails, but the demo forest also provides areas for education, recreation, exploration, wildlife corridors, school projects, research, and lots of other uses. On Rogers Loop, there's a trailhead into the forest. The original plan for the forest was adopted in 1992 and updated in 2006.

The city's DCRA was created in 2007 just west of the demo forest. That's when Kachemak Heritage Land Trust transferred 275 acres to the city to protect it from unsuitable development. That land included Diamond Creek wetlands, other ecosystems, recreational trails, and wildlife habitats behind the Homer Landfill and extending west. DCRA was purchased with federal Forest Legacy funds and other funds from groups such as Kachemak Bay Rotary Club, The Conservation Fund, Rasmuson Foundation, Kachemak Bay Conservation Society, Kachemak Nordic Ski Club, and other groups, along with hundreds of local donors. Those 275 acres really matter to people living in and around Homer. The DCRA abuts both the Homer Demo Forest and the Sterling Highway. In 2013, the city approved a multi use plan for the DCRA.

Finally, just $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile up the Sterling Highway from DCRA and across the highway is a recreational area bought with Exxon Valdez Oil Spill money and now known as Diamond Creek State Recreation Site. A trail down Diamond Gulch lets hikers walk from the Sterling Highway down to the beach.

Clearly, DCRA provides critical linkages between the Homer Demo Forest on one side of the Sterling Highway and Diamond Gulch trails on the other. Right now we have a fantastic opportunity to support connections between these trails, ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and open spaces. And timing for improvements will NEVER be better because Alaska DOT has finally started a multi million dollar, multi-year project to improve the highway from milepost 157 to 169 (Anchor Point to Baycrest Hill); that project passes right by DCRA. DOT is also looking to improve the Diamond Creek culvert to create an underpass allowing walkers and wildlife to cross the highway.

It's critical now and for the future that the city shows its commitment to improving access into and through DCRA and connecting it to other lands. DOT and KPB will be much more responsive to requests for help if they see that the city has made really meaningful commitments to these kinds of improvements in the DCRA.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.