

## Ketchikan Beaches Association

8302 South Tongass Hwy

Ketchikan, AK 99901

*Press Release— January 27, 2007*

**For more information, contact Carrie Dolwick**

(907) 247-5847

[cdolwick@gmail.com](mailto:cdolwick@gmail.com)

*Ketchikan, AK*

*January 25, 2007*

### **Community Beach Recreation Opportunities Are Limited**

The salted offshore breeze rustles through the dark cedar stands, as local elementary students inquisitively comb the beach looking for wildlife at local Coast Guard Beach (CGB). Slightly south of CGB a light rain spills down from above as a blanket of fog slips along the beach often called South Point Higgins Beach (SPH) (aka Driftwood Beach). Meeting places for children and adults, for dog walking and picnicking, these beaches are few of the remaining areas for beach access and recreation in Ketchikan.

Ketchikan is an island community, yet shoreline areas suitable for recreation and public use are limited and in danger of declining. Research shows that nine percent of shoreline accessible by the road system on Revilla Island is under public management and available for recreation and general public use. The remaining 91% of the 38 miles of shoreline is private, subdivided, commercial, industrial, steep and unsuitable for recreation, or for boat harbor use.

The shoreline research was done by Eric Muench, a forest engineer, using data from the Ketchikan Gateway Borough Planning Department. Muench assessed saltwater shoreline areas accessible within a quarter to half mile from the Ketchikan road system which included 200,000 feet of shoreline (38 miles) from the Settlers Cove Park on the north to the Beaver Falls Cannery property to the south.

Finding a community beach with public access may be getting even harder as the owner of local Coast Guard Beach, the Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT) has stated its intent to rezone and subdivide the waterfront property. These beaches and other AMHT lands, South Point Higgins Beach, Surprise Beach, and Mountain Point Beach, boat launch and harbor are 1/3 of the nine percent of available recreation land.

AMHT lands are managed by the Trust Land Office (TLO). The TLO is mandated to generate maximum revenue from their lands to benefit recipients of mental health services throughout Alaska. These properties could be sold to private stakeholders to meet this mandate with AMHT decides.

Formal designation of Coast Guard Beach as a park has been a community priority since the Borough's 1976 Comprehensive Plan. Also, in 1985 the Borough passed resolution 607 that stated "The Assembly supports the establishment, expansion and maintenance of State Park facilities at Coast Guard Beach located at Point Higgins for the citizens of the Ketchikan region as one of the area's prime waterfront recreation sites."

The limited shoreline set aside for public use in Ketchikan is a concern to community residents and causing some to take direct action. Ketchikan Beaches Association (KBA), a group of dedicated residents, has organized to raise awareness and develop alternatives to the development of these two beach properties. Primarily KBA is focused on raising the funding needed to acquire these two properties so that they will be publicly accessible in perpetuity. The acquisition of these two beaches out of private hands and into public management will preserve current useable beach areas held by AMHT.

"Recreation areas and open space makes Ketchikan an attractive place to live and work." Carrie Dolwick, KBA's coordinator said. "They also increase the value of neighboring residential property."

Community members first learned of the potential rezone and subdivision during the process to find funding to complete the trail from Point Higgins Elementary School to CGB. The Ketchikan Gateway Borough was applying for an Alaska State Parks grant to complete the upgrade of the trail. The grant stalled when the TLO would not allow the pursuit of permits necessary for the grant award. They stated, "...Authorized use of the trail by the general public and trail construction, reconstruction or maintenance is not authorized until such time as rezone and subdivision of Trust land, USS 3762, also locally known as Coast Guard Beach, is complete..."

Ardath Piston, co-chair of the KBA said, "I and many others frequent Coast Guard and So. Point Higgins Beaches often, finding them perfect for walking dogs, hiking, camping, and beach combing. Not only are these two beaches undeveloped, but they offer unobstructed views of the surrounding area and are free of tourists. The Beaches are one of the draws of living in Ketchikan and in my neighborhood".

"The KBA is working with AMHT to finalize a purchase and sales agreement and are pursuing fundraising opportunities," Dolwick said, "(in) the mean time we are also pursuing alternatives through the Borough assembly and state agencies."

#### **Contacts:**

**Carrie Dolwick, Lands Coordinator, KBA Coordinator (907) 247-5847**

**Eric Muench, Forest Engineer (907) 225-5372**

**Ardath Piston, Co-chair of KBA (907) 247-6553**

**Doug Campbell, Alaska Mental Health Trust (907) 269-8688**