

Alaska Mountain and Wilderness Huts Association

DRAFT Operating Plan for Manitoba 12/9/08

Overview. Both the Manitoba Cabin and Manitoba Outpost (yurt) are expected to operate year round. The yurt(s) would remain up all winter. The Cabin would serve as a base of operations, and the yurt would be managed from the Cabin.

Management. The sites would be managed by a cooperative of outdoor organizations led by Alaska Huts and including organization such as the Seward Nordic Ski Club, Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage, and others (American Alpine Club?, Mountaineering Club of Alaska?, university outing clubs?, etc.). A likely management scenario is that the cooperating groups each would contribute a person to a hut operating group (HOG), which would be charged with ensuring there was adequate presence at the Cabin site and checks on the Outpost site, that maintenance parties were organized a few times per year, that professional maintenance was hired as needed, and that any grooming of ski trails and maintenance of any summer trail was accomplished.

Hut Keepers. The Cabin site would have hut keepers' quarters which would be staffed in various ways to ensure a presence most of the popular times hut users would be on site. These hut keepers' main duties would be only to act as a security presence and answer basic questions about hut operations. Hut operations would start by using long-term volunteers, similar to Volunteers in the Parks program, to attract retirees, students, teachers on summer break, and others to spend time at the hut in return for a stipend and free hut nights at other times. As hut use grows, paid hut keepers could be phased in and the duties expanded. At this time, the assumption is that a single position would be funded, whether at a stipend or 'staff' level, and this position would be supplemented by HOG volunteers (volunteers from the cooperative of outdoor organizations organized by the HOG), who would receive free lodging. Some periods may allow use of the hut by a resident writer/artist as an artist's retreat, in return for sharing some of their work or expertise with more itinerant hut users and keeping an eye on the facilities. At lower use periods, no paid/stipend hut keepers would be on site; only HOG volunteers. At the lowest use periods, HOG volunteers would be responsible only to check on the Cabin and Outpost on an established schedule but not necessarily stay on site. A possible reasonable annual breakdown might be as follows:

March-April (65 days):	Stipend volunteer or resident artist on site.
May 1-30 (30 days):	Vacant, with frequent checks by HOG volunteers.
June 1-Aug 30 (90 days):	Stipend volunteer on site supplemented with HOG volunteers.
Sept 1-30 (30 days):	HOG volunteer on site.
Oct 1-Nov 30 (60 days):	Vacant, with checks by HOG volunteers. Special week with more volunteer effort at Thanksgiving.
Dec 1-Feb 28 (90 days):	Vacant midweek, with checks by HOG volunteers; HOG volunteers on site on weekends. Special weeks with more volunteer effort at Christmas and New Year.

On-site HOG volunteer needed approximately 65 days of the year under this scenario, plus many days of checking the sites. Stipend volunteers needed approximately 155 days.

Food at the Cabin. Food at the Manitoba Cabin site would be handled as follows:

- The basic cabin cost for a bunk would include non-perishable basic breakfast items stocked at the hut. People would be welcome to bring whatever food they wished in addition, unless the hut was operating with “cooler service” or was fully staffed during special periods (see below).
- At the time of inquiry or reservation, hut users would be informed of menu options/menu planning. With this information, they could cook from foods stocked on site. It would be possible to visit the hut and bring no food at all and render a limited by adequate variety of breakfast, lunch, and dinner foods for several days without repeating a dinner menu. The stocked pantry at the Cabin would carry a basic list of ingredients that would be restocked as necessary. Hut users would be given tips about what fresh foods (particularly vegetables and meat) they could bring with them to complement the meals available at the huts.
- At certain pre-arranged times, a special service level would be provided. This would be partially-catered “cooler service,” in which simple but well-crafted meals with fresh vegetables, fresh dairy products, possibly fresh meats, and fresh desserts would be stocked in large coolers at the hut, possibly accompanied by beer or wine. The cooler contents could be prepared by one or more well-known restaurants. Some ingredients may be grocery items purchased and stocked by office staff. Similar to Grand Canyon cooler-packed foods, ‘cooler service’ would be well-laid-out with clear instructions for hut users to create a good meal by reheating the meals or making only simple preparations (boiling pasta and reheating a restaurant sauce). Coolers could be expected to last for two weeks or more. These special periods, even more than the basic service times, would encourage (possibly require) all hut users to share one meal. The coolers would need to be delivered to huts by staff or volunteers. With the higher level meal and the need for preparation, the user cost would be higher.
- Alaska Huts would maintain a list of willing, fun, knowledgeable on-call hut keepers with competent cooking skills for the highest level of food service. These people would be provided upon request on an “as-available” basis (well in advance) by hut users who wanted this service or could be available at specific times scheduled for this service. These hut keepers would use the “cooler service,” as described above, but would fully prepare the meals and clean up for the hut users. Depending on the skills and desires of the individual hut keeper, the coolers could be packed with more raw ingredients for preparation on site.
- Under basic service or cooler service (see first three bullets, above, hut users would be asked to take out empty cans and bags from food they used to recycle or dispose of as necessary. Under service by hut keeper cooks (“coolest service?”), the hut keeper would remove trash and recyclables.
- During low popularity shoulder seasons, likely to include a long fall season from mid-Sept or early October through the holidays, it is likely no food would be stocked at the hut at all. During holiday weeks of Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Years, the hut would be auctioned off to groups, likely with “cooler service.”

Food at the Outpost. Hut users would be able to pack anything available at the Cabin site up to the Outpost if they were staying there. In late winter, when ski popularity would be high, snowmobile access would be available “door to door,” and bear attraction was at a minimum, basic non-perishable foods would be stocked at the yurt. This model could be used in summer as well, with use of a solar electric fence to keep bears at bay. Food would need to be stocked in a

mouse-proof locker. Cooler service would not be available at the Outpost, although cooler items could be packed from the Cabin to the Outpost.

Administrative Access. Alaska Huts would seek authorization from the state and Forest Service for limited administrative use of vehicles:

- Street vehicles to the footbridge and ford site.
- 4WD vehicles to the Cabin site and up the existing trail/road to the access point for the side trail to the Outpost.
- Snowmobile (possibly also snow cat) access via the road/trails in winter to the Cabin and Outpost sites.
- Snowmobile (possibly snow cat) access for grooming ski touring trails along the flatter lowlands east of Canyon Creek and north of the Cabin.

Trail grooming is meant to be authorized in permits but not necessarily to be a common occurrence. At opening, it is assumed trail grooming would be completely dependent upon the goodwill of volunteers who owned snowmobiles and/or cooperative outdoor organizations with grooming expertise. A trail drag/simple track setter may “live” at the Cabin site for use by HOG volunteers who may bring in a snowmobile with tow capability. Snow cat use seems unlikely. Ownership of a snowmobile that stays on site seems unlikely in the near term but is a possibility in the future.

Education Groups. Alaska Huts would work with established non-profit education groups such as Alaska Geographic Institutes, APU and UAA Environmental and Outdoor Studies programs, school districts, camps, Elderhostel, and conservation organizations to provide service for groups at any food level desired. Commercial ecotourism organizations or others with a demonstrated education component also could book the system.

Railroad Packages. To retain the link between the Manitoba area and the planned future Whistle Stop hut-to-hut, Alaska Huts would work with the Alaska Railroad and possibly with Class V Whitewater/Chugach Adventure Guides to provide an experience that included both (1) overnight excursion at the Manitoba hut/yurt and (2) day or overnight float, hiking, or ski trips associated with the Whistle Stop project. These could be independent day hiking trips to Spencer Glacier and Grandview, for example, or accompanied trips using hut volunteers of partner guiding services.

Communication/Emergency Preparedness. The Cabin and Outpost sites each would be equipped with simple two-way radios for communication between the two sites, principally by HOG volunteers. Pending definitive research on cell phone coverage at the Cabin site, it is possible a hut mobile phone would be established for hut keeper use. At this time, no satellite phone, satellite email, or complex radio system is anticipated. In an emergency in winter, it is assumed someone can be sent on foot to the highway (ca. ½ mile) for assistance. If a snowmobile and sled eventually were to become a permanent part of the Cabin site, they would enhance ability to respond to winter emergencies. Good first aid equipment will be available at both the Cabin and Outpost sites. At all times, self-reliance would be an emphasis of hut reservations, brochures, literature, web site, etc.