

GROWING JORDAN LAKE PARK

By Larry A. McKinstry, Director, Big Lake Community Council/Co-Chair, Jordan Lake Park Development Committee

In November of 2024, a small committee was formed by the Big Lake Community Council, which undertook the task of raising funds, and planning the development of improvements to Jordan Lake Park in central Big Lake, Alaska. This action was initiated in response to the Jolly Creek Diversion Project which was being undertaken by the Matsu Borough beginning in 2025. The initial plan for the project was to divert the Spring runoff from Jolly Creek through a culvert along Hollywood Road terminating in the Southeast corner of Jordan Lake Park. The estimated runoff flow to be diverted was up to 100,000 gallons per hour! No plans were being made to direct the runoff after it was dumped into the park.

At the time the Jolly Creek Diversion Project was being designed, the area of Jordan Lake Park where the runoff was to be released was a former dump site full of mosquito ponds, gravel piles and wild growth of brush and saplings which had sprung up after the 1996 Miller's Reach fire. Jordan Lake Park (Also identified as the "Jordan Lake Nature Area") is a 44 acre parcel located in central Big Lake, Alaska. In 2002, a comprehensive plan for the park site was developed and adopted by the Matsu Borough. Significant work on the plan was done by a professional planning company, community leaders, Borough staff and numerous members of the community. In furtherance of this plan, the Big Lake Library and a small park area with a picnic pavilion, a small lake overlook platform and a short trail with signage to explain the effects of the Miller Reach fire was constructed. The park has remained in this state for the past 20 plus years, and has seen minimal use by the public.

Faced with the potential impact of the Jolly Creek Diversion Project, the Big Lake Community Council took the opportunity to once again focus effort on developing Jordan Lake Park in accordance with the 2002 site plan adopted by the Matsu Borough. The Committee began fundraising and collaborating with the Borough Department of Community Development to design and develop the park. During the past year, the Committee has raised over \$150,000 in donations and grant funds to support the park development. In addition to over 50 individual donations, the Committee was successful in

obtaining \$26,000 from the Borough and \$64,000 in grant funding from local entities and foundations.

During 2025, the Committee, collaborating with staff from the Borough and with the help of a number of local contractors, was able to clear, level and hydroseed approximately four and a half acres of the Southeast corner of the Jordan Lake Park site. The companies who contracted to do the work also provided over \$13,700 in “in-kind” services in completing the work. Another local business donated over 320 cubic yards of topsoil for the project. Utilizing volunteers and grant funding from Home Depot, the Committee planted over 40 flowering trees along the fence line running down the frontage to Big Lake Road. The cedar rail fencing along the road was funded by a \$10,000 grant from the Matsu Valley Community Credit Union. A local resident and pickleball enthusiast donated \$38,000 to fund the construction of two pickleball courts. Another resident and local contractor has donated the cost of installation of a well that will provide water to the park.

All of the results that have been accomplished this past year have been the result of our community banding together to make it happen! It has truly been a collaboration between Matsu Borough and Big Lake community leaders, residents, businesses and non-profit foundations. We are building a park everyone will be able to enjoy for years to come and can point to with pride.

As the Committee moves into 2026, we are engaged in planning and fundraising to complete a number of projects to enhance the park. This coming year we plan to construct a well house to complete the well installation, and have electric power brought into the park to supply the well and future electrical needs. The trail construction crew from the Matsu Borough will be constructing a 1,600 foot perimeter gravel trail to be used for walking, jogging, bicycle riding and cross-country skiing in winter. The estimated cost of the trail is \$40,000, and will be provided by the Borough. An 8-10 station “fitness course” is planned to be constructed adjacent to the perimeter trail that will run around the leveled site. The “fitness course” will be funded, in part, by a \$25,000 grant from the Matsu Health Foundation. A brick entry gate and driveway will be constructed entering off the existing parking lot to the park. Donor plaques will be placed upon the walls of the entry recognizing individuals and entities who have provided funding for the project and the park. A permanent kiosk/sign will acknowledge donors who

helped “jump start” the park development efforts in 2025. Additionally, the soccer field and pickleball courts will be completed and ready for use.

We are only getting started! Planning is on-going for 2027 and beyond. In 2027, we hope to construct a 225-seat outdoor amphitheater and stage for use for community events. We also intend to build two picnic pavilions, a full-sized basketball court, two bocce’ ball courts and install additional benches, picnic tables and other amenities. Planning for the development and construction of a 2.5 mile nature trail to provide access to Jordan Lake and the surrounding wetlands will be undertaken.

As the Jordan Lake Park Development Project moves forward to grow our park, you can help! Join the effort to create an accessible, inviting and safe space for the community to gather and enjoy. You can help by: giving a tax-free donation (cash or “in-kind”), volunteering your time and efforts on park projects, providing input, suggestions and written support for the park and by participating in the Jordan Lake Park Development Committee monthly meetings.

For further information please access the Big Lake Community Council Website and/or contact Jordan Lake Development Committee Co-Chairs, Jim Faiks (907) 354-8482 or Larry A. McKinstry (541) 218-6871.