

Bear Valley's Last Tee Time May Be This Summer

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

Because of federal budget concerns, two military amenities in Alaska that are also widely enjoyed by civilians are facing an uncertain future. Both are golf courses — the one at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, and Bear Valley here in Kodiak.

The courses will open this summer, but unless something changes, it will be their last season of operation. But members of the Kodiak Golfers Association are hoping that they can effect some change before the gates are locked for good. Al Shaw is the association's president:

"They generate most of their funds now under the congress passed years ago that (they) have to operate under profits that they generate. They don't get a whole lot of money any more. It used to be deep pockets from the government — used to be just 'here, let the troops have some fun,' Shaw said. "It does cost a lot of money to operate both golf courses. The governments really aren't set up to run the golf courses as a business, so it does tend to lose funds."

Shaw, who is a retired Army soldier and Coast Guard civilian employee, has been using the course since it was built in the 1980s.

"I think it's a very, very important function out there that does share with the Kodiak community and the Coast Guard. It keeps us close ties and everything else. But you know we've got a slate of options how we can run it," he said. "I haven't had a meeting yet with MWR people yet how we can keep the golf course open, and our Representative Alan Austerman suggested we set it as a concession to the Coast Guard, where we set up a board and the community will run the operation for the Coast Guard."

Steve O'Brien is an avid golfer and was the first course marshal at Bear Valley when he was the athletic director for the Coast Guard back in the 80s. He says the loss of the course would be widely felt through the community.

"Just living on this Emerald Island, the quality of life is high, but that golf course provides things that are unique that couldn't be replaced if it was lost," O'Brien said. "Hopefully we have enough time to make an effort so that somehow whether with parks and rec or some entity in Kodiak can help support this effort and lease the area from the Coast Guard — how that all falls out is yet to be decided, but hopefully that can happen."

O'Brien said carving the Bear Valley Golf Course out of the wilderness on Antone Larson Bay Road was a huge effort:

"At the time, Special Services — now MWR, was the big push there, and the public works department, which is now contracted out it was different. So years ago it was different who came out and worked on it. But there was a huge effort to go out and make that thing happen," he said. "It's just a beautiful course. Because of its location, it's fairly narrow maybe compared to other courses. We always used to say that if you sliced the ball bring your deer tags, because you're definitely out in the woods. The people out there have done an incredible job to get the greens that we have now."

Shaw says the Kodiak Golfers Association will be meeting throughout the summer to try and come up with a way to save the course, and invites all interested parties to contact him:

"It's a great place for our community, and it's a good bond between the Coast Guard and the Kodiak people. And I think it's very important that we try to put this together," Shaw said. "Like I said, don't put our heads between our legs and run around, scream, holler and blame people. I think we just need to find a solution and make it work."

Al Shaw's phone number is 486-5066. He said he welcomes calls from others interested in keeping Bear Valley open.

Calls this week to Coast Guard's MWR director's office have gone unreturned, but we'll bring you an update when we can.