



# ALASKA RECREATIONAL TRAILS PLAN

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Department of Natural Resources

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# ALASKA RECREATIONAL TRAILS PLAN

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Alaska's first statewide trails plan was written by the Alaska Division of Parks in 1974. Much has happened in 25 years to necessitate this fresh look at the state of Alaska's trails. Many Alaska cities and boroughs now have trail organizations and trail plans for improving and promoting trails in their communities. Nationally, organizations like American Trails, American Hiking Society, Rails to Trails Conservancy, and many others, have organized or refocused their attention toward improving the nation's trails. In 1996 Governor Tony Knowles, through Administrative Order 161, established the Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) program, and with it, the first statewide citizens advisory board (TRAAK Board) to deal specifically with trail issues in Alaska.

Snowmobile technology has advanced dramatically in the last quarter century and has changed the way many more Alaskans enjoy winter recreation. Urban populations have mushroomed, foreclosing many close-to-home trail opportunities while creating new demands for more trails. Changes in land ownership and land management have affected access and use of traditional trails. The burden of maintaining access to Alaska's vast recreational wonderland is falling more and more upon volunteers and trail advocacy organizations.

This plan was developed out of a need to provide volunteers and trail advocacy organizations some assistance in working with land owners and land managers to save, secure and improve existing trails, develop new trails, deal with conflicts among diverse trail users vying for limited space and dollars, and to improve trailhead parking, sanitation and information.

This document should be used as a trail map to guide users and trail managers to existing trail funding sources; technical assistance on all aspects of trail acquisition, development maintenance, and safe and enjoyable trail use; nominating trails into the Alaska Trails System; and getting in touch with other trail users and managers to cooperate in improving and promoting Alaska's trails.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION



This document is intended to help trail supporters around Alaska meet the challenges of maintaining and improving Alaska's trails for use and enjoyment throughout the twenty-first century. Recreational trails are perhaps the most important piece of public infrastructure necessary for the enjoyment of the Last Frontier, and perhaps the most taken for granted infrastructure. Residents and visitors frequently use recreational trails for everything from daily exercise to the "trip-of-a-lifetime," but many do not recognize the time and effort necessary to maintain trails infrastructure. Fortunately, many communities now have recreational trails programs supported by trails advocacy groups, advisory committees or commissions, local government, and occasionally, paid staff.

## Public Involvement

This plan reflects a collaborative effort of professionals and users to analyze the current state of Alaska's recreational trail issues and trail needs, develop a strategy to secure and enhance an extensive network of existing recreational trails, and provide for future trails.

In 1996, the Governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) Citizen Advisory Board called for an Alaska trails plan or trails system. A Land and Water Conservation Fund grant from the National Park Service allowed Alaska State Park planners to begin updating the 1974 [Alaska Recreation Trails Plan](#). The first step was to enlist the help of the Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program staff of the National Park Service, and Alaska Division of Land (Department of Natural Resources) planners to map out a strategy. The following is the sequence of public involvement and planning steps:

- Alaska Department of Natural Resources and National Park Service steering group formed to map out a strategy for soliciting public input into the planning effort.
- Alaska State Parks mailed several hundred questionnaires to trail enthusiasts and professionals statewide, soliciting interest and involvement in writing a recreational trails plan.
- A 33-member "core group" was selected from 146 responses to the mail-out.
- A statewide mailing list of 800 trail professionals and enthusiasts was prepared by Alaska State Parks.
- The "core group" met twice, November 20, 1996, and January 27, 1997. Seven subcommittees were formed to discuss recreational trail development and funding issues that should be addressed in a statewide recreational trails plan.

- The Governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) Citizens Advisory Board formed a subcommittee to assist professional staff in developing the plan. They continue to provide input.
- A Trail User Survey was mailed to everyone on the statewide mailing list to identify trail issues. Comments were requested by December 15, 1997.
- The first draft outline was prepared by the agency steering committee in February 1999, incorporating issues identified by the core group, steering committee, TRAAK Board, and responses to the statewide survey.
- The agency review draft plan was prepared in July 1999, and circulated to the steering committee, TRAAK Board subcommittee and a select group of representative trail professionals for comment prior to preparing the public review draft. Comments were due August 25, 1999.
- Comments were incorporated and the public review draft prepared in September 1999.
- On October 9, 1999, a postcard notice of the availability of the public review draft was sent to about 800 names on the mailing list and noticed in the media; copies of the draft were placed in public libraries and public information centers and on the Internet; 100 copies were initially mailed to reviewers, and 20 were requested from the postcard notice; the public review period ran from October 15-November 15, 1999.
- Fourteen sets of comments were received from individuals, organizations, and agencies, and were reviewed and incorporated by staff. Final changes to format, including adding graphics and charts, were also done.

## **Vision Statement**

To instill pride and responsibility in residents and visitors for Alaska's trails through a partnership approach with government for improvement, maintenance, and dedication of trail systems.

## **Purposes of the Plan**

This plan provides information on how to sustain user's favorite trails, along with a number of broad aims:

- Enhancing the quality of life of Alaska's residents and the quality of the experience of Alaska's visitors by promoting the protection and development of Alaska's trails.



- Promoting a common understanding of statewide, regional, and local issues and potential solutions affecting all trail interests.
- Providing a framework for strengthening the roles of trail advocates, managers, and elected officials to be more effective in sustaining Alaska's trail heritage.
- Building a large, connected, effective constituency for trails in Alaska.
- Establishing and promoting a framework for research, education, and action.
- Recommending initiatives to improve and maintain Alaska's trails.

## **New Funding Stirs Trail Activity**

Spurred by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) in 1991, development and maintenance of trails nationwide received a significant boost. One immediate benefit of ISTEA was the creation of the Symms National Recreation Trails Act, directing \$180 million to a six-year program to develop and maintain recreational trails. In addition, projects became eligible for a variety of other new funding programs under ISTEA, including Transportation Enhancements. In 1998, ISTEA was reauthorized by Congress for another six years, and renamed the Transportation Equity Act for the Twenty-First Century (TEA21). Symms is now called the Recreational Trails Program. This trails program, with a requirement for matching funds, is generating significant economic activity statewide.

Long neglected, trails are now receiving attention. Communities have begun retrofitting their neighborhoods with facilities for bicycles and pedestrians and meeting the demands for other types of trails. There is statewide enthusiasm and activity for planning new trails for recreation, transportation, and for maintaining and marking existing trails. Several national organizations have responded to this new trails initiative by promoting long-distance trails and integrating trails into transportation systems. A national goal is to bring trails within 15 minutes of every American.



## What Is a Trail?

Definitions for the word *trail* are as varied as the uses of trails in Alaska. For this document, think of a trail as an important piece of public infrastructure, like a school, road, or gymnasium. A recreational trail is a route that is:

- ✓ *important* or significant (for current uses or future needs)
- ✓ *identified* in an adopted public plan
- ✓ *legally established*
- ✓ *designated* (for uses for which the trail was designed and/or withstands)
- ✓ *improved* (brushed, erosion control, bridges, etc.)
- ✓ *managed* (a public land manager or other entity, such as a nonprofit organization, has taken responsibility for the trail, possibly including maintenance, liability, and enforcement)
- ✓ *maintained* (not necessarily by the manager)
- ✓ *adopted* (some or all maintenance duties taken over by a trail group under agreement with the trail manager)
- ✓ *signed* (directional, safety, and/or regulatory signage)
- ✓ *mapped and advertised* (trail has been mapped and trail information is widely available to the public)
- ✓ *public trailhead* (an identifiable entry point to the trail).

A trail does not have to have all these elements. In fact, many popular trails around Alaska have few of them. However, these trails are the ones that may not survive the twenty-first century, because these elements are not provided for. If they are provided for, the trail has a good chance of surviving. At minimum, the trail will need to be *important, identified, legally established*, and have a *public trailhead*.

## Value of Trails to Alaskans

Trails provide a means of transportation to Alaska's special places. Trails provide users a means to improve mental and physical health, are a source of community pride and cohesion, provide a venue for a variety of community, regional, and statewide activities and athletic events, and contribute significantly to Alaska's economic diversity and overall economy.

Trails are often unrecognized as an important part of every community's basic infrastructure, along with schools, roads, utilities, and public safety. Trails contribute significantly to the vitality and economic viability of Alaska's communities. In 1995, the Anchorage Economic Development Corporation conducted a winter tourism study and found that winter trail-dependent retail sales in Anchorage were an estimated \$51 million.

Assuming that summer sales are equivalent to winter, Anchorage, representing half the state's population, generates an estimated \$100 million annually from trail-dependent retail sales. If the other half of the state does the same, that would account for an estimated \$200 million in annual trail dependent retail. This doesn't take into account the amount people spend on travel or the multiplier effects of their expenditures on trail-related activities in Alaska. The economic benefits to Alaska likely far exceed the estimated \$200 million figure.

Trails also:

- Encourage physical fitness and healthy lifestyles. "Take Heart Alaska, The Cardio Vascular Plan for Alaska" published in October 1998 by the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, addresses the need for trails as a way to promote physical activity. The October 1999 Journal of the American Medical Association reports that 20.7% of Alaskans are classified as "obese" (the national average is 17.9%).
- Create new opportunities for outdoor recreation and transportation.
- Provide for relatively low-cost or no-cost access and recreation.
- Improve a community's self image and quality of life. These attributes attract new businesses looking for desirable places for employees to live.
- Provide venues for world-class sporting events and training of athletes. Each year, the Iditarod Trail attracts new media, participants, and spectators from around the world for the "The Last Great Race" and other trail sporting events, such as Iditasport events, and international and world cup nordic skiing races in Anchorage and Fairbanks.
- Provide vital connections within and between communities.
- Preserve culturally and historically valuable areas.
- Provide opportunities for alternative forms of transportation.
- Create jobs in trail construction, maintenance, and landscaping.

## Surveys

Alaskans' support for trails is reflected in several surveys conducted in recent years.

**1997 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Survey:** According to a fall 1997 statewide telephone recreation survey of 400 households, a scientific poll conducted for the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Alaska residents place high importance on trail-related recreation. The results from this survey are in Chapter 2.

**Municipality of Anchorage 1993 Survey:** The Municipality of Anchorage polled 409 households in 1993 to determine public preferences and concerns regarding trails.

- The findings show 78% of the households surveyed had at least one member who used trails in 1992.
- Most trips were for recreation and fitness, but 12% had at least one member who had traveled to work on trails. Other findings:
- Participation by household in summer:

Walking for pleasure	78.7%
Biking on paved trails	76.2%
Hiking	40.0%
Biking on unpaved trails	39.1%
Jogging or running	30.8%
- Participation by household in winter:

Cross-country skiing	43.0%
Walking for pleasure	38.9%
Jogging or running	13.3%
Dog walking	11.7%
Snowmobiles or ATVs	9.5%
- Thirty-four percent said they had experienced conflicts with other trails users, including bikers, rollerbladers, or unleashed dogs. There were many complaints about conflicts between motorized and non-motorized users.
- There was a slight preference for improving trails over expanding the trail system in Anchorage. Twenty-seven percent thought the trails should be expanded or connected to be closer to their homes or to enable them to make longer commuting trips around town.
- Sixty-seven percent of Anchorage households indicated they were willing to pay more taxes to expand the trail system.

**Municipality of Anchorage, 1999 Craciun Survey of Anchorage Trail System:** 612 Anchorage residents responded to telephone interviews by Craciun Research Group, Inc., from April 9 through May 3, 1999. Sampling error was 3.9%. Some results are listed below.

- 77% of Anchorage residents have used Anchorage's trail system.
- 85% of Anchorage trail users use the trail system for enjoyment and recreation.
- 49% of Anchorage trail users use the trail system for fitness or health.
- 18% of Anchorage trail users use the trail system to get somewhere.
- 51% of all Anchorage residents use Anchorage trails at least once a week in summer, and 15% at least once a week in winter.
- In summer, 68% of people walk on trails, while 64% ride a bicycle or push a stroller. 13% jog, run or speed walk.
- In winter, 52% cross-country ski in tracks, while 46% walk, hike, or snowshoe.
- For 6 in 10 trail users, peace and quiet and being away from cars and roads are very important reasons for choosing a particular trail.
- Preferred trails are Tony Knowles Coastal Trail(78%), unpaved trails in city parks(61%), Campbell Creek Trail(52%), and Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail(48%).
- 85% of all households have at least one trail user.
- 64% of all residents think the trail system contributes a great deal to the quality of life in Anchorage.
- 50% of people who have never set foot on a trail think trails add a great deal to the quality of life in Anchorage.
- The trail system is a primary contributor to the quality of life for 35% of the population and a secondary contributor for another 38%.

**Matanuska-Susitna Borough 1997 Survey:** In 1997, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough mailed 600 questionnaires to randomly selected property owners; about 150 responded. This survey, considered non-scientifically valid, reported the following results:

- 67% do not consider the use of roads an acceptable substitute for trails.
- 51% travel 1-5 miles per trail trip.
- 50% said expanding the trail system was most important.
- 32% said maintaining existing trails was most important.
- The most common trail recreation activities are walking/dog walking (68 trips per year), jogging or running (23 trips), snowmobiling (19 trips), off-road motorized vehicles (16 trips), road biking (15 trips), mountain biking (15 trips), day hiking (10 trips), cross-country skiing (8 trips), and dog mushing (5 trips).
- Scenery and convenient location to home or work were the two most important reasons for choosing which trail to use.

**Fairbanks North Star Borough 1990 Telephone Survey:** The Fairbanks North Star Borough conducted a telephone survey of 300 of its residents in 1990 to determine general recreation preferences. The survey included some trail information. Among adults, the survey found:

- Approximately 75% cross-country skied, 56% bicycled, 38% hiked, and 35% snowmobiled.
- The most popular adult recreational activity was fishing (about 88%).
- Among children under 18, bicycling was the most participated-in trail activity, with approximately 32% participation, followed by cross-country skiing at 25%, and snowmobiling at 19%.

**Alaska State Parks Statewide Trail User Survey, 1997:** There were 652 responses to a mail-back questionnaire that was advertised statewide and mailed to everyone requesting a survey. This survey was not scientific. Margin of error is unknown.

Question: What kind of assistance is most needed for the trails you use? Percent of respondents ranking as the most needed.

Trail maintenance - 29%  
Help to resolve trespass/access problems - 28%  
Trail grants – 16%  
Help to resolve conflicts between users – 13%  
Trail design – 6%

Question: How do you use trails in the summer?

Walk/hike – 48%  
Biking/mountain bike – 19%  
4 wheeler/ATV/Trailbike – 17%  
Other (water, etc.) – 4%  
Horseback – 3%  
Backpacking – 3%

Question: How do you use trails in the winter?

Snowmobiling/ATV – 34%  
XC ski – 32%  
Walk/hike – 14%

Other – 7%  
Dogsled – 5%  
Skijoring – 4%  
Biking/mountain bike – 2%  
Jog/run – 2%  
Horseback – 1%

Would you prefer close-to-home trails or long distance trails?

Both – 51%  
Close-to-home – 31%  
Long distance – 11%  
None – 6%

What discourages development and use of trails in your area?

No legal access – 23%  
Lack of funding – 19%  
Safety conflicts between trail use – 15%  
Lack of trail maintenance – 10%  
Land development – 8%  
Lack of trail support facilities – 7%  
Other (conflicts) – 5%  
Bureaucracy/red tape – 5%  
Liability – 3%  
Congestion among users – 3%  
Noise conflicts – 2%  
Lack of interconnections/connections – 1%

Question: What system of trails do you use? Respondents listed 188 different trails. The top 22 most frequently mentioned trails are listed below, with the number of times mentioned.

White Mountains Recreation Area – 72  
Caribou Hills – 64  
All trails – 51  
Chugach State Park – 50  
Chena River Recreation area – 44  
Hatcher Pass Trail – 32  
Summit Lake – 31  
Resurrection Pass – 30

Goldstream Valley Recreation Area – 27  
Tony Knowles Coastal Trail – 25  
Big Lake - 24  
Eureka – 22  
Kincaid Park – 21  
Chatanika Valley – 20  
Chena Hot Springs – 20  
Lost Lake – 20  
Petersville – 20  
Nancy Lake State Recreation Area – 19  
Birch Hill – 19  
Denali State Park – 18  
Iditarod Trail - 17  
Cantwell - 17  
Additional trails listed 10 or more times – 9.

**Sitka Trails Survey 1999:** Sitka Trail Works, Inc., as part of the Sitka Comprehensive Trail Plan (under development in 1999), learned from 230 returned surveys that people hike several days a month on average and prefer coastal and alpine locations for future trails. Respondents encouraged the development of new bike lanes and mountain bike trails. Details can be obtained from Sitka Trail Works, 801 Halibut Pt. Rd., Sitka, Alaska 99835.

**Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) :** On February 14, 1996, Governor Tony Knowles signed Administrative Order #161, referred to as the Governor’s “TRAAK initiative.” This order established the TRAAK program and a citizen advisory board to promote and advise on statewide planning, policy, and funding for Alaska’s trails.

The TRAAK initiative has been a catalyst for statewide cooperation. It has helped state agencies, specifically the departments of Natural Resources, Transportation and Public Facilities, Fish and Game, and Community and Economic Development, improve their coordination with each other, with local governments, with federal agencies like the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management, and with the public, in planning, funding, and promoting trails and associated facilities statewide. TRAAK also brings together trail users and private recreation providers to work with government agencies to plan, fund, construct, mark, maintain, operate, and promote trail projects and programs.

## Formal Trails Versus Informal Trails

A new trail hierarchy is established in this plan to differentiate between Alaska's most important public trails, referred to as formal trails, and all others, referred to as informal trails. The purpose is to identify trails that will make up the Alaska Trails System, a concept discussed in detail in chapter 6. This differentiation of trails is intended to help develop funding strategies and management priorities for development, maintenance, and protection of those trails that are, or have the potential to become, Alaska's most important trails.

Formal trails are protected by easements or otherwise dedicated to public use. They assure continued use and a high quality experience. They are usually constructed or improved, signed, mapped, maintained, and managed by an identified entity for public use. They are usually advertised to the public and may have support facilities like trailheads, parking, shelters, and toilets.

Informal trails usually lack the attributes or protections of formal trails and are threatened by many factors. Many of the trails enjoyed by Alaskans and visitors are informal trails.

Both formal trails and informal trails may be found within and outside of dedicated public road rights-of-way. They may be on land, snow, water, paved and non-paved, game trails, or routes across the tundra. Chapter 3 and the appendix contain specific examples.

Identifying and understanding a trail's purpose and the type and level of use it will receive is important. Understanding the trail's purpose will affect its design, maintenance and management needs, funding priority, type of trail amenities that will be needed, future adjacent land uses, and its suitability as a tourist attraction.

The checklist below was developed by the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service and can be used by trail planners and users as a tool for identifying, developing, and protecting trails for long term use. Note that the checklist uses the same elements contained in the definition of a trail used earlier in this chapter.



Trial Name: Beginning & end points: Summer/Writer or Both	Importance	Identified	Dedicated	Designated	Improved	Managed	Maintained	Adopted	Signed	Mapped & Advertised	Public Trailhead

### Guidance for completing the trails checklist

*Which trails to include:* Any that merit borough attention and/or have community of regionwide significance.

*Marking inventory:* Yes=Y, No=N, Don't Know=?, or Partial (as in trail is partially dedicated or improved or etc.)=P.

1. *Important?* Should be based on either significant historic use, current need, or future need.
2. *Identified?* In an adopted local, borough, state, or federal plan.
3. *Dedicated?* Legal public access established?
4. *Designated?* For specified trail uses.
5. *Improved?* Any or all or other improvements including design or redesign, brushing, treadway improvements, bridges, drainage structures, etc. beyond use.
6. *Managed?* A public land manager or other entity (possibly non-profit) has taken responsibility for the trail, possibly including maintenance, liability, and enforcement.
7. *Maintained?* Similar to management, with an entity actively overseeing and undertaking maintenance.
8. *Adopted?* Some or all maintenance duties taken over by a trail group under agreement from the trail manager.
9. *Signed?* Refers to directional, safety, and/or regulatory signs.
10. *Mapped and advertised?* Has the trail been mapped and are maps and other trail information widely and easily available to the public?
11. *Public Trailhead?* Is there a developed, publicly accessible trailhead or trailheads?

# CHAPTER 2. TRAIL TRENDS

## Statewide Perspective

### History of Trails in Alaska

Alaska has a great trail heritage created by thriving communities, inter-village travel along winter trails and on frozen rivers, subsistence activities, prospecting, hunting, sled dog and snowmobile racing, outdoor recreation, and exploring. Some of Alaska's famous trails include the Iditarod, Chilkoot, Resurrection Pass, Perseverance, 40 Mile River, Gulkana River, Yukon River, Kuskokwim 300 and Yukon Quest winter trails, and Anchorage's Tony Knowles Coastal Trail. Alaska is recognized nationally as one of America's premier trail states.

### The Alaska Trail Model

A great irony exists in that while other states are expending considerable resources to reestablish and reconnect important recreational and transportation trails lost to development pressures, Alaska is allowing many of its existing trails to be lost to these same pressures. To buy back and otherwise reestablish these trails at a later date will be at far greater expense than the cost of protecting them now. It makes far more sense to plan Alaska's trail future now rather than follow the model of other states and have to buy back trail rights-of-way in the future.

It is important to recognize an emerging trail model for Alaska. While large federal tracts of National Parks and Preserves, National Forests, and public lands contain many of Alaska's important public trails, significant efforts are necessary or under way to maintain and reestablish access from nearby communities and transportation corridors, to protect local trails and link existing trails. Another trend nationwide and in Alaska is to establish and secure rights-of-way for long distance trails and to connect trails with neighboring countries.

### Public Preferences

Trails are important to Alaskans. In 1997, Ivan Moore Research conducted a statewide, statistically valid opinion survey for Alaska State Parks as part of Alaska's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan update. Some trail-related responses are:

Trail needs:

- 76% approve of developing more trailheads along roads.
- 74% approve of more trails where no motorized vehicles are allowed.

- 72% consider a statewide system of interconnected, marked, and maintained trails important.
- 56% approve of more trails for the legal use of off-road vehicles.

#### Equipment ownership:

- 90% of households own a backpack.
- 85% of households own a bicycle.
- 39% of households own a canoe or raft.
- 31% of households own a snowmobile.
- 30% of households own an off-road vehicle or all-terrain vehicle.
- 4% of households own a dog team.

#### Trail support:

- 87% approve of allocating a portion of RV registration fees to parks and outdoor recreation programs.
- 85% approve of allocating a portion of annual ATV and snowmobile registration fees to parks and outdoor recreation programs.
- 81% are willing to pay a user fee for public parks and recreation facilities to help cover maintenance and management costs.
- 69% would purchase a \$10 pin if the revenue from sales would fund park and outdoor recreation programs.
- 65% would vote for a statewide bond issue to fund parks and outdoor recreation programs.
- 49% approve a 1-penny-per-gallon gas tax to be allocated for parks and outdoor recreation programs.
- 43% approve of a small tax on purchase of outdoor gear.

### **Statewide Pressures Affecting Trails**

While there is support for development and maintenance of trails statewide, there are conflicting pressures to develop natural resources, accommodate a growing population, convey public lands to private ownership, and extend the road, rail, and marine transportation systems. Additionally, there is a need to balance priorities and allocate scarce resources to accommodate all these competing demands.

**Budgets and Public Priorities:** The survey results above show that Alaskans support trails and are willing to pay for development and maintenance. It's also clear that the current trend is toward reducing the cost of government. Trail advocates, local government agencies, benefiting businesses and organizations, and state and federal agencies will have to become more competi-

tive and assertive in advancing trail programs that the population evidently supports.

The burden of advancing successful funding and trail support initiatives will be borne by those who support and use trails and associated trail programs. An encouraging funding initiative before Congress is the Conservation and Reinvestment Act of 1999. If passed, Alaska could receive annual funding for trails and other outdoor recreation projects. Revenue to support the various programs under the Act would come from offshore oil and gas development revenues.

**Oil, Gas, Minerals, and Timber Extraction:** Exploration and extraction of Alaska's abundant natural resources has the potential to either enhance and accommodate trails, or destroy them. Those exploring, assessing, accessing, and extracting natural resources must be educated that trails are an Alaska priority. Existing trails, many developed by Alaska Natives, prospectors, and miners, and possibilities for new trails must be made part of the vocabulary. Some examples of demonstration projects are:

- Seismic lines can be future trails.
- Logging and haul roads can be converted to future trails.
- Displaced trails can be relocated.
- Staging areas can become future trailheads.
- Buffers can be preserved along important existing trails and incorporated into the design of new or relocated trails to protect the safety, enjoyment, and utility of trails.

The key is for land managers, trail users, resource developers, landowners, and lawmakers to be made aware of the public benefits and desire to balance these sometimes-competing priorities. One need not be sacrificed to accommodate the other.

**Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act:** With the 1971 passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), 40 million acres of public land were conveyed to Native corporations in Alaska. Congress intended that the public should have certain access rights across these lands to public lands and waters. Thousands of public access easements, called 17(b) easements, were reserved through this process.

For a more detailed discussion of ANCSA 17(b) easements, see chapter 4.

**Disposal and Settlement of Public Lands:** Transfers of public lands to private ownership and their subsequent subdivision and development pose significant potential threats to existing and future trails. Important trails on public lands should be identified and protected prior before,

to guarantee public access and use. Public landowners and managers must have appropriate plans, protections (for example, borough subdivision ordinances), and procedures in place to integrate trails with settlement and changing land use.

**Private Land Settlement:** Undeveloped private land, including large tracts of ANCSA lands, contains many of Alaska's important trails. Many of these trails have no protection or provisions for public access and use. Sometimes owners:

- Are unaware of the existence of these trails.
- Consider existing trails a liability.
- Fear that trails might restrict their options for land sale or development.
- Fear they might be sued if an injury occurs on their land.

Trail managers in the public sector must work with landowners to help them identify essential trails, make provisions to reroute some trails to accommodate public use and land development, and relieve some of the potential liability burdens to the landowners. A strong effort is needed to inform private property owners of the passage of SB 45, Alaska's Landowner Liability Act, in 1999, which protects them from liability if they grant a trail easement across their property.



**Highways, Railways, and Harbors:** Expansion of highways, railways, and harbors can either accommodate trails and trailheads, destroy them, or create obstacles to their safe, convenient, and enjoyable use. Transportation planners and designers must be familiar with trail issues, needs, policies, and plans. Local communities and other public land managers must be sure that trail plans are in place. The successful and logical integration of all surface transportation modes must be coordinated so that one mode does not dominate at the expense of another, and so that trail integrity is maintained.

## Regional Perspective

At the regional and local levels, loss of trails or inadequate planning for trails is taking its toll on trails. At the local level, non-profits, businesses, and municipal governments are doing most of the work to plan, construct, maintain, and manage trails. Many communities have recognized the importance of trails for economic development, physical and mental health, safety, and livability, as well as the importance of trails as part of their transportation systems. At least 20 cities and boroughs have adopted trail plans, and others are working on them.

Regionally, trail needs differ. An attempt to highlight the most significant regional differences is made below. Local governments and local trail users usually understand local and regional needs and issues the best. That is why local and regional planning and implementation of local

and regional trail plans is most effective. The one thing each region has in common is that trail use is skyrocketing, especially in and around urban centers.

**Southeast:** In Southeast, most established and maintained trails are on public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, or Alaska State Parks. Because of the preponderance of public land and water, public access is more available with fewer conflicts than in other parts of the state. While there are many good local trails interfacing with public lands, it is in the urban areas and at this interface where the potential is great for losing trail access.

There are few long-distance trails in Southeast because of frequent topographic interruptions: water, wet soils, precipitous mountains, and dense forests. Extensive water bodies and mild climate create excellent opportunities for long-distance water trails.

Motorized overland trail recreation is quite limited in Southeast. Unpredictable snow cover and difficult terrain make it difficult to develop winter trails. Difficult terrain and soils complicate the development of summer trails for off-road motorized recreation. This circumstance has minimized conflicts between motorized and non-motorized trail users to the same degree as is being experienced in more populated urban areas in Southcentral and Interior Alaska.

**Southcentral:** Well over half the state's population, concentrated between Anchorage and Willow, lives in Southcentral Alaska. Most of the state's established and maintained trails are within Southcentral. Many are located on the Kenai Peninsula south of Anchorage. Most formal recreational trails in Southcentral are within conservation or recreation units managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Alaska State Parks, or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There are fewer formal trails maintained and managed north of Anchorage.

Most motorized recreation occurs north of Anchorage on general use public lands. Heaviest use is occurring along the Glenn, Parks, and Richardson Highways. Summer and winter motorized trail use is steadily increasing in this area. Trail users, private property owners, and land managers are beginning to sense the need to work together to find ways to accommodate the increasing and sometimes competing demands.



There is a need for more active trail management, especially for motorized trails, on the Kenai Peninsula and north of Anchorage. Inappropriate or heavy use of trails, and trails in the wrong location, are combining to increase environmental harm, impacts to wildlife, and conflicts among users and between users and property owners. Many of these issues can be solved through a greater emphasis on planning and management without a loss in trail use opportunities.

Trail fragmentation is a major problem in the Matanuska-Susitna Valley. It is worse in urban areas and along the urban fringe where public access is in increasing demand. Public trail opportunities here are in danger of being lost because of rapid urbanization and insufficient attention to reserving existing and potential trails and access to them for future use. There is a great potential for establishing long-distance trails in Southcentral.

**Interior and Northern:** In Interior and Northern Alaska, long, cold winters with dry snow conditions and plentiful rivers, lakes, and tundra create favorable conditions for winter travel by snowmobile, four wheeler, and dog sled, and summer travel by boat, four wheeler, horse, and by foot. On the Seward Peninsula, there are many old mining trails linking different areas, connected to the 300 miles of three main road systems outside of Nome. These comprise historical trails to and from villages and active mining areas on the Seward Peninsula.

Local planning is likely to be most effective in identifying local and regional trail needs due to their familiarity of conditions.

Low and scattered populations and large land area help to mitigate potential conflicts among users on many Interior and Northern Alaska trails. There is growing loss of access opportunities and increasing conflicts among users in the Fairbanks area because of the concentration of people and consequent greater demand for use of limited trails by different users. This is similar to the circumstances in other urban areas of the state where the lack of effort to plan and reserve traditional and potential trails is leading to increasing user and landowner conflicts.



## CHAPTER 3. TRAIL PROVIDERS

Landowners, land managers, trail users, businesses, and organizations are all necessary partners and providers of critical components of Alaska's recreational trails.

### Federal Lands and Programs

The U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Land Management have public trail development and maintenance projects on lands they manage. In addition, each is willing to participate in trail projects through "partnerships," which combine agency resources with donations to develop and maintain trails and associated facilities. Most federal agencies also offer some level of technical assistance to help others with development and maintenance of public trails.



### Formal Trails

In chapter I, the concept of formal and informal trails was introduced. Formal trails are usually constructed or improved, signed, mapped, maintained, and managed by an identified entity for public use. Most of the formal trails in Alaska are under federal management on federally designated lands, such as national parks and preserves, national forests, or lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. See the appendices for a partial list of formal trails in Alaska.

Twelve formal trails in Alaska have been placed on the Register of National Recreation Trails by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service:

- Crane Lake Trail, Petersburg
- Deer Mountain-John Mountain Trail, Ketchikan
- Mendenhall Glacier Trail, Juneau
- Mt. Edgecumbe Trail, Sitka
- Naha River Trail, Ketchikan
- Petersburg Lake Trail, Petersburg
- Pinnell Mountain Trail, north of Fairbanks
- Resurrection Pass Trail, Kenai Peninsula
- Swan Lake Canoe Route, Sterling
- Swanson River Canoe Route, Sterling
- Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, Anchorage
- Williwaw Nature Trail, Portage Valley





Two trails in Alaska are nationally designated as Millennium Trails: the Iditarod is a “national” millennium trail; the Chilkoot is a millennium “legacy” trail. Designated by the White House Millennium Council, Millennium Trails symbolize the importance of the American landscape, providing connections between people, land, history, and culture. They “honor the past and imagine the future” as part of America’s legacy. The council is accepting nominations for Community Trails 2000 as of the printing of this plan.

### **Informal Trails**

While formal trails might be thought of as arteries, informal trails are veins and capillaries. The majority of trails on federal land are trails of lesser significance. They are the everyday trails and routes over water, land, and snow used by many people. They provide important recreational access, serve the needs of local users, and provide other valuable connections. Many of these less famous trails may someday become formal trails as use increases and requires trail managers to bring trails up to higher standards.

### **Boards and Commissions**

Unlike state and local governments that make use of advisory boards and commissions, the federal government establishes very few. Those it does, usually called advisory councils, are usually established in law for a specific purpose, for a specified period of time (usually two years), and with strict guidelines for the mission and for what interests are represented. The Federal Advisory Councils Act (FACA) establishes broad guidelines for how agencies may and may not use advisory councils.

The Bureau of Land Management, which manages 87 million acres of federal land in Alaska, has a Resource Advisory Council established by law to advise Alaska’s state director of the Bureau of Land Management. The Resource Advisory Council has offered advice on 17(b) easements and has the authority to advise on other trail issues if it chooses.

There are 20 trails in the United States designated as National Historic or National Scenic Trails. When a National Historic or Scenic Trail is designated, an advisory council is authorized for that trail for 10 years. The Iditarod National Historic Trail is Alaska’s only trail in this category.

The Iditarod National Historic Trail Advisory Council, a statewide advisory council, was established when the Iditarod Trail was designated a National Historic Trail. The council ended in 1998 through a “sunset” provision in the law that created it. A non-profit organization, called Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc., was incorporated in November 1998 to continue oversight



of trail management. The business of the non-profit is directed by a board of directors. More information about the non-profit can be obtained from Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc., P.O. Box 2323, Seward, Alaska 99664.

None of the other federal resource agencies in Alaska has advisory councils to weigh in on trail issues.

### **Recreation Authority**

Federal resource agencies in Alaska providing trail support are the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Bureau of Land Management (all under the Department of Interior), and U.S. Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service, which provides technical assistance (both are under the Department of Agriculture).

### **Land Conveyance Authority**

When the Bureau of Land Management completes land conveyance to the state and Alaska Native corporations, it will still manage approximately 70 million acres for public purposes. BLM is also responsible for management and possible conveyance of trails established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

With the exception of the closure of the military installations at Adak and Delta, the military does not routinely dispose of land. It is possible that additional military properties in Alaska could be declared surplus and closed in the future. In that event, new possibilities could open up for reservations of important public trails.

No other federal agency in Alaska is charged with disposal of public lands.

### **Current Funding**

Most federal funding programs for trails in Alaska are passed through to state agencies to administer and are discussed below under “state lands and programs.” The largest source of federal funds is the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA21). Of the following 12 categories (called transportation enhancements), several are for trails and sidewalks, and related facility development and maintenance. The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities administers most of these federal funds for Alaska (also see the Transportation Enhancement Program section later in this chapter). The 12 categories are:

1. Provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles.
2. Provision of safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists.
3. Acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites.

4. Scenic or historic highway programs (including the provision of tourist and welcome center facilities).
5. Landscaping and other scenic beautification.
6. Historic preservation.
7. Rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures, or facilities (including historic railroad facilities and canals).
8. Preservation of abandoned railway corridors (including conversion and use thereof for pedestrian and bicycle trails).
9. Control and removal of outdoor advertising.
10. Archaeological planning and research.
11. Environmental mitigation to address water pollution due to highway runoff or reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality while maintaining habitat connectivity.
12. Establishment of transportation museums.

## **Potential Funding**

Congress is considering different initiatives to permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) from outer continental shelf oil revenues. Funding initiatives would provide new money for recreational trails.

The Clinton Administration is calling its proposal the “Lands Legacy Initiative.” Congress has several proposals pending, including the “Conservation and Reinvestment Act,” “Permanent Protection for America’s Resources 2000,” “Conservation and Recreation Improvement Act,” and “Teaming with Wildlife.” Depending on the final version that becomes law, as much as \$16 million annually could be available to Alaska for a variety of outdoor recreation programs, including trail construction and maintenance. The fund would likely be administered by the Alaska departments of Natural Resources, and Fish and Game.

## **State Lands and Programs**

The Alaska departments of Natural Resources, Transportation and Public Facilities, and Fish and Game manage approximately 106 million acres of state land and resources. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources has responsibility for the bulk of these lands and resources. Management is prescribed in various plans. A list of existing trail plans, state land plans, and easement atlases is in the appendix. State agencies also participate in partnerships to accomplish projects.

## **Formal Trails**

Most formal trails on state lands are within the 3.1 million acres state park system, and are managed by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Alaska State Parks).

There is not yet a state designation equivalent to National Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails. However, the governor has expressed an interest in elevating Alaska's best trails to a distinguished category. A goal of the Alaska Trails System (see chapter 6) is to elevate the best of Alaska's trails to a status equivalent to National Scenic, Historic, and Recreation Trails by improving the quality and management of trails with formal potential.

## **Informal Trails**

Most of the public trails that users worry most about losing, and some private landowners and lessees worry about being there, are the many informal trails or "ways" across state and private lands. Some are developed and some not. Many cross private lands at some point. Because these informal trails are often near populated and growing areas, they need immediate attention.

An immediate need is for the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water, to formalize procedures statewide for securing trail easements or rights-of-way, and recording them on state status plats. Obtaining the necessary staff and funding is a critical first and necessary step. At the least, the state should make it as easy and inexpensive as possible for trails to be identified and protected. Then local governments, trail users, and organizations can proceed with identifying, prioritizing, surveying, and submitting trail nominations for recording.

## **Boards and Commissions**

State agencies support several boards and commissions that have trail responsibilities. The one with the most direct link and influence over trails statewide is the Governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska Citizens Advisory Board, or TRAAK Board. Members are appointed by the governor and represent diverse trail interests from many parts of the state (for more information about the TRAAK Board, see the Definitions section in the appendix).

The Snowmobile Trails Advisory Committee (SnoTRAC), is a nine-member committee appointed by the director of the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Alaska State Parks). SnoTRAC advises the director on statewide snowmobile policies, programs, and facilities.



There are 13 Alaska State Parks citizen advisory boards from all areas where State Parks has management presence and responsibilities. These boards provide recommendations concerning Alaska State Park policies, procedures, and projects for the parks within their jurisdictions. The advisory boards are supported by Alaska State Park Superintendents or their designees.

## Recreation Authority

Three state agencies that have substantial authority and responsibility to influence recreational trails in Alaska are the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, and the Department of Fish and Game. The University of Alaska also has trail authority.

**The Alaska Department of Natural Resources** manages the bulk of all state land, or approximately 103 million acres. Recreational trails criss-cross these lands, some receiving some level of maintenance or formal recognition, while most are informal or seasonal with little acknowledgment of their existence.

**Mental Health Lands:** Congress established the Alaska Mental Health Trust in 1956. The law included a grant of one-million acres of land to be used to generate revenues to meet the expenses of mental health programs in Alaska. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, whose responsibility is to ensure the creation of a comprehensive integrated mental health program for Alaska, manages the trust. A separate unit within the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the Trust Land Office, manages trust land according to these Trust Management Principles: be loyal and accountable to the beneficiaries; maximize trust land revenues over the long term; protect and enhance the value of Trust land; and encourage a diversity of revenue-producing uses of trust land. The Trust Land Office considers trails in three categories: valid existing trails, existing unauthorized trails, and new trails. Any modification, improvement, relocation, or change to a valid existing trail across trust land requires Trust Land Office approval. Requests for authorization of unauthorized trails, or new trails will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis following Trust Management Principles. If a project is in the best interest of the trust, authorization will be coordinated through the Trust Land Office.

**The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities** has a major responsibility for funding and constructing trails and trailheads within road rights-of-way, and funds village trail staking, primarily for winter trails. Trails under their authority generally have a strong transportation purpose, but also serve recreational needs. It is within these rights-of-way where many trails begin, or where access is gained to recreational trails that leave rights-of-way.

**The Alaska Department of Fish and Game** manages 31 state refuges, state critical habitat areas and state sanctuaries to protect outstanding natural habitat and associated fish and wildlife resources. Recreational uses may be permitted as deemed appropriate under the authority granted to the Department of Fish and Game. The department encourages development of interpretive and educational signs and materials, trails, and other facilities that enhance public access to observe and learn about wildlife regardless of where it might occur. It holds rights-of-way for recreational trails.

Fish and Game also is responsible for boating and fishing access programs that include recreational trails. Title 38.05.874 of Alaska Statutes, titled “Public access fund created,” establishes a public access fund to develop recreational access, including the purchase and lease of land, easements, and rights-of-way to enhance public access to recreational areas. This fund is administered by the Alaska Department of Revenue in concurrence with the Department of Fish and Game.

**The University of Alaska** owns 185,000 acres of land in Alaska granted by Congress for educational and investment purposes. The university may allow temporary and traditional trail uses provided that the university is indemnified, the value or utility of the land is not diminished, and a permit fee is paid. Under certain circumstances this fee is waived. The university may also grant permanent and semi-permanent trail easements so long as the trail easements do not interfere with the university’s ability to use, develop, or sell its land; the university is indemnified; and fair market value is paid for the easement.

### **Land Conveyance Authority**

The State of Alaska conveys land to local governments under the Municipal Entitlement Act, and to private parties through a state land disposal program. The state also leases state land for agriculture, mining, recreation, and other purposes. The state may reserve public trail easements before it conveys interest in land.

### **Current Funding**

Though trail funding mechanisms exist, they often are not used, due to limited money being allocated. Funding provisions for trails and related facilities have existed in Alaska statutes since 1969. However, little funding has been made available through any of these provisions. These programs include:

**Local Service Roads and Trails:** Title 19.30.111-251 of Alaska Statutes provides for the “acquisition, construction, and maintenance of local service roads and trails that are not included in the approved federal-aid primary highway systems eligible for federal-state matching funds.” The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities is the responsible agency for implementing this statute.

A trail is defined under this statute as a footpath or way on land or water that is open to public use, particularly for dog sleds and mechanized snow vehicles.

**Public Access Fund :** Title 38.05.874 of Alaska Statutes establishes a public access fund administered by the Department of Natural Resources to develop recreational access, including the purchase and lease of land, easements, and rights-of-way to enhance public access to recreational areas. It grants the legislature authority to make appropriations to the fund.

**Trails, Footpaths, and Campsites:** Title 41.21.850 – .872 of Alaska Statutes assigns the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities broad responsibilities for planning, funding, and marking a system of wilderness trails and campsites. This law has been in place since 1969 with minor revisions.

Title 41.21.868 of Alaska Statutes requires the annual appropriation of three-eighths of one percent to one percent of the total yearly state and federal matching sum combined, under the federal-aid highways program, for grants to the state, cities and boroughs for trails, footpaths, and shelter construction and maintenance.

This law also assigns the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities responsibility for establishing, marking, and maintaining footpaths, bridle paths, bicycle paths, ski trails, dog sled trails, motorized vehicle trails, and other paths and trails along certain designated highways.

**Trail Staking and Shelter Construction and Maintenance:** Title 43.40.010 of Alaska Statutes establishes a special non-public highway use account funded by a motor fuel tax. Quoting from this section:

(a) There is levied a tax of eight cents a gallon on all motor fuel sold or otherwise transferred within the state. . .

(j) The proceeds from the tax on motor fuel used in snow vehicles and, unless a tax refund is applied for under AS 43.40.050(a), other internal combustion engines not used in or in conjunction with a motor vehicle licensed to be operated on public ways shall be deposited in a special non-public highway use account in the general fund. The legislature may appropriate from this account to the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities for trail staking and shelter construction and maintenance.

## **Other Funding Sources**

**Snowmobile Registration:** Snowmobiles in Alaska must be registered at the point of sale and a registration fee paid to the Division of Motor Vehicles. These fees go into the state's general fund. In 1999, Alaska State Parks requested and received \$120,000 in a capital appropriation to be used for snowmobile programs and projects. These funds should continue to be appropriated for use in furthering the development of snowmobile facilities and the development of snowmobile safety and education programs statewide.

**Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA21):** Several trail funding programs exist under TEA 21, including the Recreational Trails Program (administered by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources), Surface Transportation Program, Enhancement Program, Bridge Program, and Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program. A large amount of the money in TEA21 applies to pedestrian facilities in road corridors, rather than to trails in Alaska wildlands.

**Recreational Trails Program:** Alaska will receive approximately \$600,000 per year through 2003 from the Recreational Trails Program (formerly called the Symms National Recreational Trails Grant Program). This program is administered by the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Alaska State Parks). Grants of up to \$30,000 are available to non-profit organizations and agencies of federal, state, and local governments for trail development and maintenance for motorized and non-motorized trails and for educational programs. Grantees must provide a 20% match. Grants are reimbursable, which means the grantee must accomplish work on the project and submit documentation of expenditures to receive reimbursement.

**Transportation Enhancement Program:** TEA21 holds special provisions for trail projects that are linked to transportation in this program. The 12 categories of projects that qualify for transportation enhancement funding are listed under Current Funding, earlier in this chapter. Categories for trail projects include bicycle and pedestrian trails, converting rails to trails, and rehabilitation of historic transportation facilities.



The Municipality of Anchorage administers funds for transportation enhancement projects within the municipality. Outside the municipality, projects must have a sponsor who nominates the project; projects are scored and ranked competitively on a statewide basis by the Alaska Department of transportation and Public Facilities.

**Surface Transportation Program:** In Alaska, surface transportation programs, including the National Highway System, State Highway System, and Community Transportation Program include provisions for bicycle and pedestrian travel. It is state policy to include these provisions in all surface transportation projects, wherever feasible. These might include sidewalks and crosswalks, bicycle and pedestrian signals, bicycle parking, traffic calming, and other safety improvement projects. Planning and design costs for these facilities are also eligible for surface transportation funding.

**Bridge Program:** The Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program enables states to replace or rehabilitate highway bridges when those bridges are unsafe. If bicyclists/pedestrians are permitted to operate at each end of a bridge, and their safe accommodation can be provided at reasonable cost, bridge replacement or rehabilitation shall include accommodations for bicyclists/pedestrians.

**Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality Program:** This program ensures a dedicated funding source for transportation planning and projects that demonstrate potential for improving air quality and mitigating traffic congestion in areas that do not meet goals and requirements of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990. Examples of eligible activities are bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transit system capital expansion and improvements, and traffic flow improvements. These funds currently are available only to parts of Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau.

**Wallop-Breaux Aquatic Resources Trust Fund:** Under the Wallop-Breaux Aquatic Resources Trust Fund, administered by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Sport Fish Division, funds are available for trail projects oriented toward sport fishing access. Interested applicants should contact the Area Sport Fish Management Biologist.

## Potential Funding Sources

**Conservation and Reinvestment Act:** Congress is debating a new funding source called the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA). As proposed, CARA would provide a permanent funding source to states to fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund grant program. If passed, CARA could provide annual funding for trails and other outdoor recreation facilities in Alaska.

**Alaska Trails Assistance Program:** The success of a program to develop and maintain Alaska's trails and to develop the Alaska Trails System, as discussed in detail in chapter 6, depends on a stable, dependable, and adequate funding source for trail managers. A new funding source, to be called the Alaska Trails Assistance Program, should be established under the auspices of an Alaska Trails System Act or other mechanism.

## Boroughs and Cities

### Formal Trails

Several cities and boroughs have recreational trails plans. Examples are the Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan, Juneau Non-motorized Transportation Plan, Anchorage Areawide Trails Plan, Kenai Peninsula Borough Trail Plan, Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreational Trails Plan, and Ketchikan Trails Plan. All have similar goals to identify their most significant trails and dedicate them for permanent public use.

### Informal Trails

Informal trails usually show up in local trail plans and inventories. They are just as important as formal trails because they often connect neighborhoods, villages, or cities to the formal trails or link formal trails.

Informal trails may be the "natural trails" defined in the Anchorage Areawide Trails Plan as unpaved, unlighted, ungroomed, non-motorized, relatively lightly used trails in a natural setting. They may be "neighborhood trails" defined in the Fairbanks Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan as not at the present time of community or statewide significance. Or they may be "locally significant trails," which the Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreational Trails Plan recognizes, but does not list in its plan until their nomination as "regionally significant" has been received and approved by the borough. The Kenai Peninsula Borough Trail Plan also identifies trails that are most vulnerable and in the greatest need of protection for public use, because they are usually not fully protected by trail easements or rights-of-way.

## **Boards and Commissions**

Boards and commissions are created by local governments to provide a mechanism for citizens to influence local land use and spending issues. Trail users are included and can use these boards and commissions to affect trail issues. Some cities and boroughs have established trail boards or commissions through their park, recreation, or planning powers. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and the Kenai Peninsula Borough are the three boroughs in Alaska with legally established trails commissions. The commissions are supported with borough staff. The Municipality of Anchorage recently established a trails oversight committee.

An appointed park board, park commission, or road commission may provide input in many other cities and towns without a trails commission or trails advisory board or committee.

## **Recreation Authority**

Local governments may receive planning, recreation, and other local powers at the time of their incorporation or at a later date. These powers determine the level of the local government's involvement in developing, funding, maintaining, and otherwise supporting local recreational trails.

## **Land Conveyance Authority**

Local governments have the authority to sell or otherwise dispose of their land. Most land owned by local governments was conveyed to them by the state. State land in turn was conveyed by the federal government. If either the federal or state government conveyed land to the local government subject to any trail easements or other public reservations, the land remains subject to those easements and reservations.

## **Sources of Funding and Other Resources**

Local governments may provide funding for recreational trail improvements through local bonding authority, through capital appropriation requests to the state legislature, through local government appropriations for specific trail projects, and through existing operating budgets.

Recreational Trails Program and snowmobile trail grants are available for recreational trail development and related projects at the municipal and borough level. Contact the director, Alaska State Parks, for more information.

User fees should be considered as a source of funding for specific trail projects. Users are more amenable to paying to use a facility if they know their money is being spent for maintenance.

Adopt-a-trail programs generate resources essential to the maintenance of trails. These programs are becoming popular ways to enlist businesses, organizations, and individuals to help take care of public recreational trails. The Municipality of Anchorage has an adopt-a-trail program. Other local governments might be willing to sponsor and support adopt-a-trail programs if they are asked. There should be some level of support for the adopters. Civic groups or businesses, if they are recognized publicly for their time, effort, or money, often can be encouraged to adopt trails. Recognition may include signs along the trail, certificates of appreciation, and comments of appreciation by public officials and agency spokespersons.

Federal cost share programs provide matching grants for trail projects. The U.S. Forest Service, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service are agencies to contact for more information.

Some local governments have adopted trail dedication ordinances requiring the dedication, and sometimes the development, of trails during subdivision platting and development. Trail dedication ordinances consider trails as part of the basic infrastructure of subdivisions, the same as streets and utilities. Rather than putting the burden of acquiring and developing public trails on the local government, the sub-divider is asked to absorb these costs as one of the conditions of gaining approval for increasing property value through the subdivision process.

Some local governments own public land and maintain revenue accounts from the sale, lease, or rental of those properties. The funds may be earmarked for making public improvements. Trails are public improvements that can benefit from these accounts.

When public lands are disposed of, existing and planned public trails can be retained by local governments.

Community service groups, local chapters of national organizations, trail advocacy organizations, and independent volunteers are important sources of construction and maintenance labor, professional services, equipment, and materials. They are often just waiting to be asked.

## Private Property Ownership

Few trails are on public easements or rights-of-way where the public's continued use is protected. Some trails have enjoyed traditional and continuous use for a long time on private property, sometimes without the property owner's knowledge and sometimes without the owner's objection. It is often difficult for trail users to know if the trail they are on is public or not. Some trails used and enjoyed by the public may be lost or have to be rerouted if the property owner decides to prohibit public access.

Utility easements across private property are frequently used by the public for recreational access. However, an easement for a utility such as a powerline or pipeline doesn't mean public access exists. Public access across private property, unless on a section line or other public right of way, requires the property owner's permission, usually in the form of an easement that specifically grants public access.

## Trail Groups, Volunteers, and Supporting Organizations

A partial list of trail organizations and supporting tourism organizations is in the appendix. These organizations and others provide a wide variety of services from trail construction and maintenance to education to coordinating or speaking on behalf of their members or member organizations. Some are organized as non-profits. They can and do support trail efforts by helping bring attention to and awareness of trail issues. For example, the Alaska Visitors Association has supported a resolution to develop a statewide snowmobile trail system, and has a Winter Tourism Committee that is looking at winter trails.

Many individuals have come together under a less formal structure to promote safety or education, or for other purposes. Many trail committees are appointed to advise agencies, municipalities, or parent organizations. Local ad-hoc trail committees could benefit from partnerships with agencies or other organizations or businesses, to accomplish projects that are too big for just one entity to deal with.



# CHAPTER 4. ISSUES

## Leadership

There is no primary point of contact for trails information, advocacy, and financial and technical assistance in Alaska. Leadership is needed to coalesce the efforts of all the individuals, organizations, agencies, and businesses interested in establishing, protecting, and maintaining recreational trails. Without this leadership, each locality and each organization currently “reinvents” practices, procedures, and standards for identification, documentation, acquisition, funding, design, development, and maintenance of recreational trails and associated facilities.

There is no single “trails authority” in Alaska to establish, improve, and maintain trails, or to even serve as a clearinghouse for ideas or to provide guidance for trail design, development, and maintenance. Such an authority could assume a leadership role across jurisdictions and develop partnerships among various landowners, managers, and trail organizations to secure trail rights-of-way and assist managers in establishing an interconnected system of public trails throughout Alaska.

## Statewide Leadership

The Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Alaska State Parks) administers the federal Recreational Trails Program for Alaska and Alaska Snowmobile Trail Grant Program. State Parks has established a relationship with most of the state’s communities and organizations interested in establishing and maintaining recreational trails throughout Alaska. It would, therefore, be an option for State Parks to assume the leadership role for trails statewide. This would be a coordinating role, relying on the authority of respective landowners (private, local, state, and federal) to actually implement projects.

Leadership could also include establishment of a self-supporting, statewide private organization. The advantages of a private organization include independence from state budgeting, administrative constraints and uncertainty, and politics. Public process and agency information would have to be included. To ensure a coordinated statewide perspective, State Parks could establish a trails council of borough trails commissions and the leadership from trail organizations.



## Regional Leadership

Alaska is divided either formally or informally into regions. Examples of the regional concept are:

- The U.S. Forest Service responsibilities are divided between the Tongass National Forest in Southeastern Alaska and the Chugach National Forest in Southcentral Alaska.
- The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities divides itself into three regions: Northern, Southcentral, and Southeast.
- The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water divides itself similarly into Southeast, Southcentral, and Northern.
- General references to different parts of the state as Southeastern or “panhandle,” Southcentral, Interior, Bush or Rural, Western, and the Aleutians, are established.

Residents of different regions identify with their region and consider themselves and their needs unique to their region. Regional differences provide a need for some regional autonomy and leadership that can respond to these unique differences.

By recognizing regional differences, leadership structures need to allow people, organizations, businesses, and agencies within a region to work toward accomplishing common goals. Regions should have access to a central statewide leadership point of contact, but would provide coordination among their own regional interests.

Regional trail centers or steering groups could be established by agencies or trail commissions partnering in a formal structure, such as a cooperative agreement, or informally by agreeing that designees from various trail interests would meet on a schedule to tackle trail needs and issues of that region.

## Local Leadership

At the local level, trail users are most likely to be aware of existing and future trail needs. These local “experts” should identify trails that serve existing needs, anticipate and identify future trail needs, and take action to document these needs in an adopted local plan. To the extent possible, the local jurisdiction should act on these plans by acquiring trail easements or agreements to protect existing trails and options to secure rights-of-way for future trails to meet future needs.

Several trail-specific organizations have been established in Alaska to represent the interests of diverse trail users in a local area. Some examples are:





- Anchorage Trails and Greenways Coalition
- Trail Mix in Juneau
- Sitka Trail Works
- Valdez Trails Association
- Mat-Su Trails Council
- Ketchikan Outdoor and Trails Coalition

Some local governments have organized committees or commissions, such as:

- Kenai Peninsula Borough Trails Commission
- Fairbanks North Star Borough Trails Commission
- Sitka Comprehensive Trail Plan Committee

## Trail Planning Concepts

Trail planning is best done at the local and regional levels where planners are the most knowledgeable about the trails, politics, preferences and needs. Local trail planners will need some assistance, guidance, and support from state and federal agencies who can provide valuable statewide, national, and international perspectives and share knowledge about products, materials, and other resources.

### Winter and Summer Trails

When planning for winter trails, it is necessary to consider summer uses and associated opportunities and impacts. The reverse is also true. Winter and summer trails cannot always share the same space, but often they can share the same facilities, such as shelters, rest stops, and trailheads. Winter and summer destinations, experiences, and routes may be the same.

It is important to identify summer and winter trail corridors that consider competing demands for a limited land base, cost, and the experience the trail user seeks.

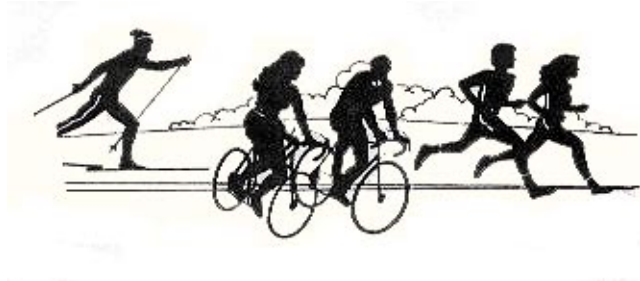
A summer trail may not be usable for periods during the winter if it is located where it conflicts with other land uses or purposes. For example, a summer trail too close to a roadway may not be usable in the winter if it is covered with debris and hard-packed snow pushed off the roadway. Wetlands or waterways that provide access for winter use when frozen often are not



appropriate or suitable for summer use. Hiking trails negotiable in the summer may be too steep, winding, narrow, or have too much low hanging vegetation for winter uses like skiing, snowmobiling, or dog mushing.

## Local Trail Systems

Trails within communities and long distance trails make a significant contribution to tourism in Alaska, help diversify the economy, provide a focus for winter activities, and provide all-important recreation and access.



It is important to look at both community and long distance trails as “systems” that share facilities, connect communities, and connect people with destinations and activities. Transportation systems work only to the degree that they get people conveniently to where they want to go. Recreational trails work the same way. If trails are not continuous and do not get people conveniently and enjoyably to where they want to go, or if trails do not provide the experience or satisfaction users seek, then users and communities will not be well served by these trails.

Urbanization is profoundly affecting existing local trails. As more people move into urban areas, there is an accompanying disruption and loss of traditional trails and opportunities for new trails. At the same time, increasing urban populations are demanding more trails for fitness, health, sport, transportation, nature study and appreciation, and outdoor recreation. There is a steadily increasing number of trail user organizations forming, especially in urban areas, to promote local planning, policies, and budgets to provide more and better trail opportunities to meet needs and maintain and improve the quality and livability of communities.

There is also a growing interest in long distance trails to connect urban areas, to provide opportunities for long distance trail travel, and to provide trail access to important destinations from urban areas or from trailheads along transportation routes. Examples of well-known and important long distance trails in Alaska are the Iditarod Trail, the Chilkoot Trail, the Yukon Quest Trail, the Kuskokwim 300 Trail, the Circle to Fairbanks Trail, and the Resurrection Pass Trail. Less-known long distance trails include water trails following rivers and marine shorelines; winter trails connecting villages and towns in rural Alaska supporting seasonal snowmobile and dog races; and many others that are more “routes” than trails.

Trail planning will help ensure that important trail linkages are established and maintained, and that areas important to trails users are preserved for public use. Trails must be planned within communities, to link communities with other communities and other destinations, and to link trails into “systems” to facilitate long distance travel.

## Winter Trail Staking

In western Alaska very few villages are connected by road. Most villages are located on or near the coast or large rivers, but many of these villages are hundreds of miles apart by water. In winter, however, when snow and ice cover the tundra, the same villages may only be 10 or 20 miles apart. For virtually half of the year, residents can travel these shorter overland distances between villages, and to the hunting grounds. Under an overarching program called TRAAK, Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska, Alaska is using the Transportation Enhancements program to install permanent markings along trails between villages in remote parts of Alaska to improve surface transportation in the Alaska Bush.



## Technical Assistance and Design Guidelines

Lack of good trail design usually leads to high maintenance costs, environmental impacts, and use conflicts. Standard trail designs are published and available for most types of trails in most situations. A reference list of technical assistance and information is in the appendix.

Two excellent providers of information on trail design, construction, and maintenance are the U.S. Forest Service and the Appalachian Trail Conference. The Forest Service Technology and Development Program in Missoula, Montana, is constantly conducting trail research and publishing new guidance to assist trail designers.

Several public agencies in Alaska are willing and able to offer technical assistance to work through the process of acquiring trail rights-of-way and designing trails, bridges, and trailhead facilities (the list of providers of trail design technical assistance is in the appendix). Good technical assistance will help save time, money, and frustration. Prospective trail builders should ask for assistance before beginning the sometimes tedious process of finding out who owns the land, how to secure a trail right-of-way, and how to design a trail to accommodate planned uses.

In general, the agency to contact for technical assistance is the agency with management authority over the land where the trail is located. Not all agencies or jurisdictions have procedures for establishing trail rights-of-way; some are so complicated that it is difficult to accomplish trail objectives without considerable financial resources and patience. One of the best starting places to seek technical assistance is the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

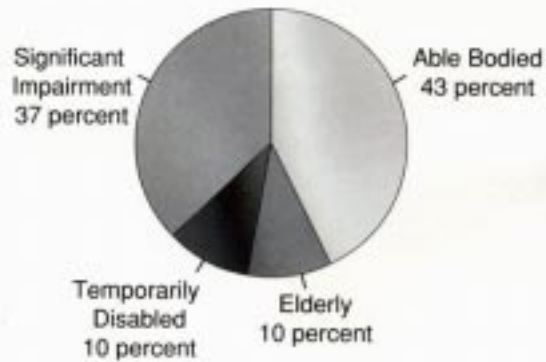
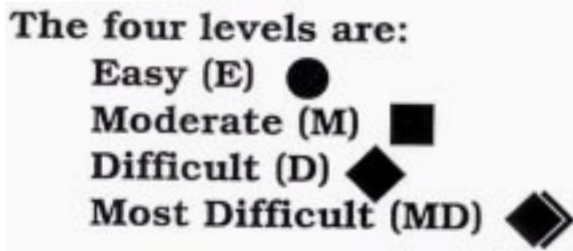


Figure 3—Segments of U.S. population benefiting from accessible programs, services and facilities.



## Access for People with Disabilities

Agencies and private organizations who use federal funds are obligated by the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to address accessibility. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) sets standards for facility accessibility by persons with physical disabilities for federal and federally funded facilities. Guidelines are still being developed for trails and associated facilities. Until guidelines are adopted, those with trail responsibilities must consider people with physical disabilities when planning, designing, constructing, and maintaining any and all trails.

Both the Americans with Disabilities Standards and the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards provide specific information on dimensions, materials, and details for new construction and alterations.

In July 1999, the Federal Highway Administration released the first draft of “A Best Practices Guidebook, Part I of II for Designing Sidewalks and Trails for Access” (Office of Planning and Environment, 400 7<sup>th</sup> Street, SW, HEPH-30, Washington, DC 20590). It contains standards and guidelines for developing trails that accommodate people with physical impairments.

## Funding

Public funds to plan, acquire, develop, mark, and maintain recreational trails and trail facilities, such as trailheads and trail shelters, are extremely limited. Recreational trail users and providers must compete with other public needs for those limited funds. Among trail users there is keen competition to fund a particular project. Allocation of the limited funds should be based on need and in accordance with priorities established by local jurisdictions and trail user groups working together, with oversight and assistance provided by a regional or statewide trail authority.

The Recreational Trails Program provides more than \$500,000 per year through reimbursable matching grants to trail organizations and agencies on a competitive basis for trail construction and maintenance, trail corridor acquisition, and for trail education programs each year through the year 2003.

A statewide Snowmobile Trails Grant Program began in 1999 with a grant from the Alaska legislature to the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation. State Parks established a nine-member, statewide Snowmobile Trail Advisory Committee

(SnoTRAC) to oversee the grant program and advise State Parks on other snowmobile programs, policies and issues. The amount of money in the grant program depends on the amount of snowmobile registrations taken in by the state each year and the legislature's appropriating that money out of the state's general fund for the grant program. In 1999, the legislature appropriated \$120,000 to the program.

Funds for recreational trail planning in Alaska come almost exclusively from local government and agency budgets, if at all. The availability of these funds depends on the priority the local government or agency puts on trails, amount of perceived local need, and the amount of local or internal pressure to plan for trails.

All federal trail funding programs administered by the State of Alaska are under the umbrella of the TRAAK program. All projects funded under the TRAAK program are referred to as TRAAK projects and are overseen by the statewide TRAAK Citizens Advisory Board, staffed jointly by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Division of Statewide Planning, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (Alaska State Parks).

## **Allocation Methods and Procedures**

The most important part of allocating limited resources for trails is to first let potential recipients know what's available, who has it, and how to get it. There is a need for a central clearing house in Alaska where all this information is available.

## **Grants**

Developing grant programs is one way to fund trail projects. Grants must be efficient to administer, well publicized, and procedures carefully developed to ensure that funds are used appropriately. Recipients should be qualified and capable of expending grant funds responsibly, in accordance with established policies and principles of good trail planning, design, development, and maintenance.

Trail grants are available from foundations, organizations, businesses, and public agencies. Currently, the burden is on users to find these grants. A trails assistance clearing house could simplify the search for trail grant funds.



## Operating Budgets

Many public agencies have some funds earmarked for uses associated with planning, developing recreational trails, or have some for trail needs and priorities. Budget priorities are a reflection of public interest and legislative body needs and priorities.

## Trail Crews

Any new funding source should be directed toward assembling and training trail crews. The make up of these crews should include youth organizations like the Student Conservation Association, Southeast Alaska Guidance Association, Alaska Conservation Corps, Sitka Trail Works, and others. The Air or Army National Guard, fire fighting crews, and prison labor should also be considered.

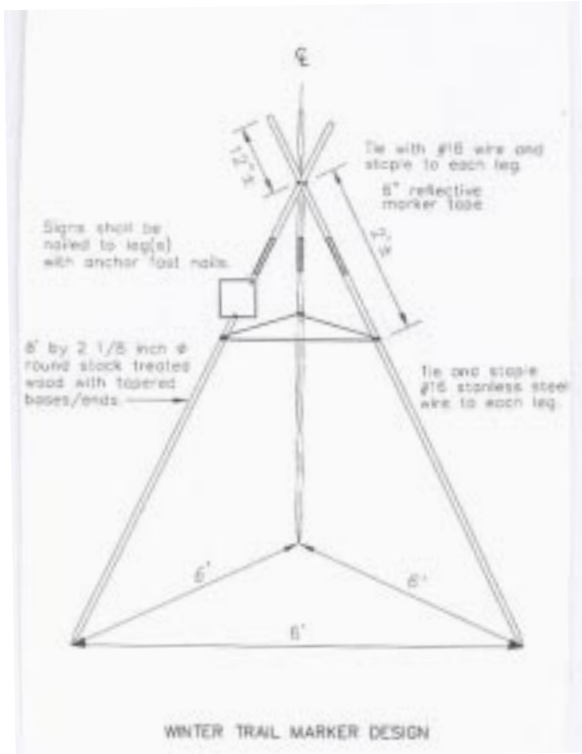
## Legal Access and Trail Protection

Most trails thought of as public in Alaska are, in fact, subject to being lost because legal access has not been secured. The public's continued use of traditional recreation trails and areas may one day abruptly stop if a landowner decides that a trail is an unwanted encumbrance. This may also happen on public lands if a perceived higher use comes along.

## Trail Corridor Identification

Public agencies should identify existing and future trails that are important for existing and future public use. The Alaska Department of Natural Resources has completed several area plans and easement atlases for different parts of the state that cover substantial state land acreage. These plans and atlases identify existing trails. Some boroughs and municipalities have done the same. See the appendix for a list of state land use plans and easement atlases.

Inventorying existing trails and establishing priorities for trail protection is important. However, during this process, it is equally important to ask the questions: Are these trails in the right location? Have future trail needs been identified and mapped? Inventory efforts should not be limited to existing trails, and should include a more thoughtful look at future needs and future land-ownership probabilities as well.



## **Trail Corridor Protection**

It is important to consider not only existing and future trail uses, but potential adjacent land uses that might occur. This is necessary so that adequate corridor widths are secured to protect the long-term experience and goals trail users are seeking, as well as the rights of enjoyment and use of adjacent lands by their owners.

Existing trails and future trail opportunities are most frequently threatened or lost when land is disposed by the federal, state, or local governments, and during subdivision of land by property owners. Existing and proposed trails should be identified, documented, and dedicated, or otherwise reserved for public use before these lands are disposed of. See the appendix for model language for establishing trail easements. Management of the trail should be determined and assigned at that time, if possible, to ensure continuity of management after the land is transferred or disposed of.

The following trail protection mechanisms are available to accomplish trail protection (to varying degrees):

### **Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) 17(b) Easements**

The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) required the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to convey large blocks of land to the many Native corporations and to reserve public easements across those lands. Numerous trail and site easements were reserved on those private lands to provide access to public lands and waters. The easements have specific dimensions and certain allowable uses that are stated in the conveyance document. Any other uses are prohibited.

The regulations pertaining to the 17(b) easements establish termination dates for easements that have not been used for the purposes for which they were originally reserved. The date is as specified in the conveyance document, or December 18, 2001, whichever comes first. However, BLM may terminate an easement at any time conditions are such that its retention is no longer needed for public use or governmental function. Trails do not have to be constructed on the easements. Public easements will not be terminated without proper notice and an opportunity for submission of written comments. A hearing may be held if BLM deems it necessary.

If there is public interest in retaining a particular easement, the local BLM office should be contacted for the procedure to follow. There are three BLM field offices in Alaska that can provide assistance:

Anchorage Field Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
6881 Abbott Loop Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99507  
Telephone: (907) 267-1203

Northern Field Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
1150 University Avenue  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99709  
Telephone: (907) 474-2251

Glennallen Field Office  
Bureau of Land Management  
P.O. Box 147  
Glennallen, Alaska 99588  
Telephone: (907) 822-3217

Access easements are often 25 feet wide and are generally for access only. Public users of 17(b) easements may not use an easement for any purpose not specifically allowed in the conveyance document and should respect the rights of the property owner on which the easement has been established.

For additional information about 17(b) easements, the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 43 CFR 2650.4-7 should be consulted.

### **Section Line Easements**

Section line easements were originally part of the 1866 Mining Law that offered free rights-of-way, 66 feet wide, over “unreserved” public land along all section lines. Section line easements on territorial land were patented after 1923 through the Territorial Legislature (Chapter 19) and were retained for the development of public roadways. This law was repealed in 1949, but was reinstated in 1951 in a similar law for section line easements 100 feet wide, then amended in 1953 to reduce the width to 66 feet. Current state statute now sets the public right-of-way width

on section lines at 100 feet. The section line is the center of the dedicated right-of-way. If the section lines qualify under law and if they have not been vacated, publicly owned section line easements exist every mile going north/south and east/west. It is the policy of the state not to vacate easements that lead to public water bodies. Research with the federal Bureau of Land Management and the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water is necessary to establish the status of individual section lines.

### **RS 2477 Rights-of-Way**

Revised Statute 2477 is found in Section 8 of the Mining Law of 1866. The statute granted Alaska and other states and territories rights-of-way for construction of highways over public lands not reserved for public uses.

The word “highway” was historically used to reference foot trails, pack trails, sled dog trails, crudely built wagon roads, and other corridors for transportation. The definition of a highway under Alaska Statute 19.45.001(9) “...includes a highway, road, street, trail, walk, bridge, tunnel, drainage structure and other similar or related structure or facility, and right-of-way thereof....”

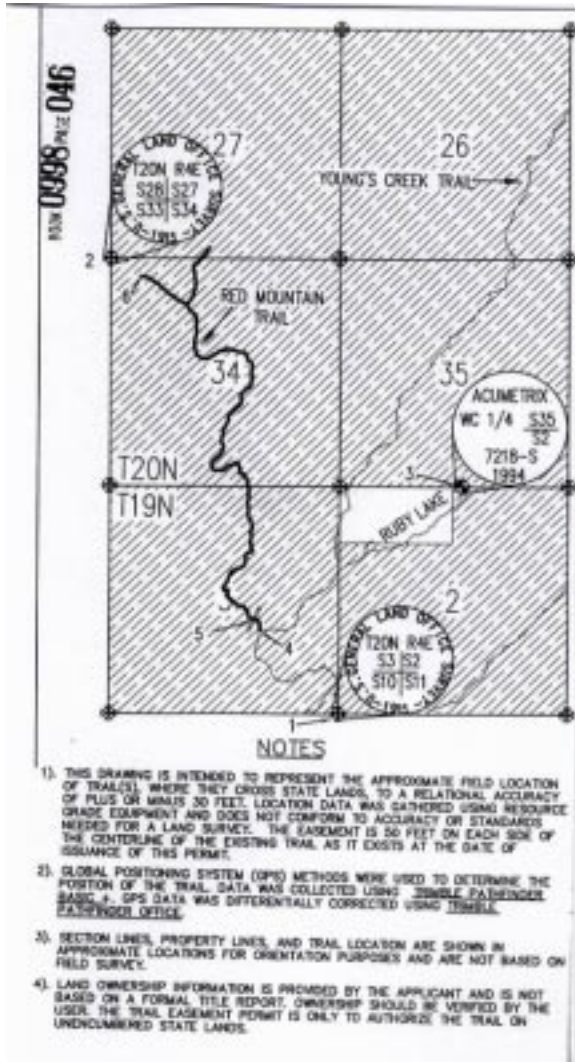
The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water has documented 647 historic routes that may qualify for RS 2477 right-of-way status. An RS 2477 atlas, which identifies these routes on map inserts, is available from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Surface transportation between Alaska’s hundreds of rural communities and other destinations still relies heavily on cross-country trails, primarily used in winter by snowmobiles, dog teams, and three- and four-wheel all-terrain vehicles.

While the legal status of most RS 2477 rights-of-way has not been settled by the courts, they are another important mechanism in place that could possibly protect public recreational trail access.

### **Easements and Rights-of-Way**

Trail easements and rights-of-way are the most common and most understood ways to protect trails. Model language for a trail easement can be found in the appendix. They are also one of the most equitable ways because they are mutually agreed to by the owner of the underlying land and the easement owner. They are property rights purchased from or granted by a property owner and guarantee permanent public access for the stated purposes. Easements and rights-of-way also specify the owner and manager, thus resolving one of the most important trail issues: who will manage the trail.





## Liability Protection for Landowners

Property owners in Alaska who grant a recreational trail easement across their property can obtain immunity from tort liability. A copy of Alaska's landowner liability law and model easement document are in the appendix.

## Letters of Permission

A letter of permission may be issued by a property owner to allow a specific use to occur for a specified period of time under specific conditions. The permitted activity is revocable at the discretion of the property owner, or as specified in the letter. A letter of permission is usually easy to obtain and there is usually no cost to acquire the permission. A disadvantage is that it is temporary and does not protect the landowner from liability. If the goal is to establish a permanent trail corridor, this tool might be useful while a long-term agreement is being worked out.

## Trail Dedication

Trail dedication is the establishment of a permanent reservation for a trail. It provides a higher level of protection than does an easement or right-of-way. Dedications are usually made by government agencies or municipalities by a vote of the citizens, by an act of the legislative body, or by the public manager of the underlying property. While an easement or right-of-way can be relinquished by mutual agreement of the easement owner and the underlying property owner, a dedicated trail usually requires public notice and a public process to undedicate it. In the case of a local government, it might take a vote of the electorate to undedicate a dedicated trail.

## Prescriptive Easement

Trails may be acquired through legal action if the public has enjoyed the long and continuous use of a trail.

## Needs Assessment

Trail needs and priorities must be determined at the local level by trail users, in cooperation with local land managers and property owners. Leadership for this effort can come from private organizations, public trail groups appointed by the local government, individual trail proponents, or public land managing agencies. Next, consent must be established at the local level so funds can be solicited and directed toward accomplishing identified needs in some logical order of priority. Assistance can be provided at the regional or state level, but the work often will be done by trail advocates at the local level.

Needs assessment is also part of the Surface Transportation funding program (TRAAK program).

## Trail Management



Trail management is about establishing uses that are compatible with each other, compatible with existing uses, and compatible with the natural resources and land environment. It often requires dedication to conflict resolution. Trail management requires establishment and management of recreational trails to ensure that recreational access continues as land ownership, land use, and land managers change. Land managers may not always be aware of the importance, or even the existence, of recreational trails across lands they manage.

Trail users often are unaware of the problems land managers face in dealing with limited budgets and balancing the competing demands. Trail users expect land managers to resolve conflicts resulting from competing demands with other land uses.

Trail management requires land managers and trail users to understand the needs of different trail users and the possible adverse impacts they may have on the environment, the trail, adjacent land uses, and other trail users.

Conflicts can arise from several sources. Landowners might not want or see a need for a recreational trail crossing their land. Trails can be a financial burden and can cause other “down the road” problems. Trail users may be in conflict with each other, especially when their uses differ for the same shared trail. Other conflicts arise when trail access is interrupted or lost.

### Integrating Trails and Trail Users

Key to a successful recreational trails program is integrating trails and trail users into the complex environment of competing land uses.

### User Expectations

Trail users are diverse in their needs, experience, and expectations.

Because trail travelers’ modes and motives for using trails differ, conflicts can arise as competition increases for trail space. Some trail conflicts occur because of different expectations.



A recreational trail user embarks on a trip with certain expectations about an anticipated experience. Hikers' expectations are probably not being met if, expecting a quiet and peaceful outing they instead encounter a motorized vehicle on the trail, or a competitive bicyclist on a training ride, have a close call with a galloping horse, or find the trail blocked. Their options are to try to change the condition that made their trip unsatisfactory, take a different trail next time, or change their expectations.

### **Landowner Expectations**

Landowners have expectations as to how they use their own land and what other uses they might be willing to accommodate. Some of the things landowners legitimately fear are loss of control over allowed trail uses; liability; loss of privacy; vandalism and other crimes; and sanitation and litter problems. If a recreational trail creates a perceived or real problem for a property owner, the owner may consider relocating the trail, prohibiting public access altogether, allowing only selected uses, or specifying when public use can occur.

Landowners are leery of possible lawsuits that might arise if someone gets injured on their property. Alaska's recently amended liability statute protects landowners from liability for injury occurring on developed trails for which the owner has given a public easement. Landowners are also protected from liability for injuries that might occur off the trail, but in conjunction with permitted trail uses.

Sometimes landowners may expect to be compensated for an easement. Recreational trail easements or rights-of-way can be acquired from a willing property owner, thereby fixing the location and use of a trail. The owner can proceed with development or use of the land with certainty as to where the trail is, what uses can occur on it, and that the trail is compatible with future plans for the rest of the land.

### **Jurisdictional Authority**

Federal, state, and local land managers have different management guidelines and policies they must follow. As trails pass from one jurisdiction to another, management practices may change. In national parks and forests, trail management is determined by congressional guidelines. In state parks and state wildlife refuges, the enabling legislation might give direction on how trails will be managed. Local governing bodies establish management guidelines for uses on public lands within their jurisdiction.

Cooperative agreements can be established to allow consistent trail management across jurisdictional boundaries. Through cooperative agreements, public agencies can share knowledge, information, and resources for the benefit of the public and land managers.

### **Trail Management by Dispersing or Concentrating Trail Users**

This is the traditional concept of managing recreation to lessen user impacts on natural resources by concentrating use on a few well-developed trails, versus spreading out or dispersing use to lessen user impacts on any one trail or area. How much use an area or trail will experience now or in the future is determined by the sensitivity of the area in terms of soils, vegetation, terrain, and habitat, and the compatibility of users. If use is light and other factors are equal, dispersion may be preferred. If use is heavy and everything is equal, concentrating uses may work best.

### **Trail Management by Separating or Mixing Disparate Uses**

When trail travel modes and expectations of trail users are similar, and the volume of use is low, there are usually few problems. However, when modes of travel differ, speeds differ, purposes and expectations of trail users differ, and volumes are such that the experience of users is diminished, managers have two options. They can consider building different trails to separate different uses, or they can try education and control.

The notion of compatibility of trail uses is sometimes subjective or perceived, and based on tolerance by one user for another. Tolerances differ. Tolerance can sometimes be enhanced through education. Gaining an understanding, appreciation, and respect for other trail users and their needs is an important step in building tolerance among users. This method should always be given a chance.

Sometimes differences in speed, performance, and expectations of users are irreconcilable. When education and control are not the answer to achieve compatibility on the same trail at the same time, uses may have to be separated. If safety is the reason uses are not compatible, managers must look at separating uses by time or by putting incompatible uses on different trails. Incompatibility should never be used as a reason to prohibit certain uses without providing an acceptable trail alternative. Prohibiting one use results in labeling one user as the incompatible or “bad” user. The preferred approach is to find ways to accommodate as many different trail users as have need to use a trail. Enforcement may also be necessary.



## **Commercial and Non-commercial Uses**

Many trails offer such a desirable experience that users are willing to pay a commercial guide or operator to use them. A guide can increase an individual's enjoyment of a trail experience, provides an added safety margin or level of comfort, and can ensure better behavior and lessen impacts. As use increases, crowding and trail impacts may become an issue. Commercial activities are regulated to provide environmental safeguards, and to balance commercial with non-commercial access and use. Trail managers face the dilemma of apportioning commercial and non-commercial use to preserve the experience and allow fair access.

Complicating the issue, commercial operations often provide the funds needed by trail managers to maintain, protect, and manage trails and trail facilities. Since commercial operators have a financial stake in the trail condition, associated facilities, and in their clients' experience, they are often the most responsible users.

## **Environment, Maintenance, and Safety**

Managers must closely track the amount and type of use a trail is receiving and anticipate the possible need to control or limit access. Maintaining a fair balance to ensure that the general public continues to have access should be one of the trail manager's goals.

## **Environmental Restoration and Protection**

If properly designed, used, managed, and maintained, recreational trails can lay lightly on the land with minimal adverse impact to their surroundings. However, undesirable impacts are occurring on many of Alaska's informal trails, especially near urban areas where use is heavy or unregulated, and the trails are not necessarily designed or managed for the use they are getting. Such impacts include soil erosion, water pollution, vegetation damage, wildlife disturbance, trespass, interference with other uses in the area, and litter.

Environmental laws and good practices require that trails be designed and constructed in compliance with current environmental standards. The same agencies that provide technical assistance for trail design can provide information or refer designers to current environmental requirements and best practices for development of new trails or restoration of existing trails.



## Maintenance

Trails should always be designed with maintenance well in mind. Who will be responsible for maintaining the trail after it is finished? Will there be adequate resources available when the trail needs to be maintained or repaired?

Construction money is often easier to find than maintenance money. A trail should be designed carefully, using routes, materials, and construction techniques that will endure, and are relatively easy and cost effective to maintain or replace. Picking the best route with the above in mind is the best hedge against difficult and costly repairs.

## Conflicts and Safety

Trail conflicts and safety concerns can be addressed by both trail design and trail management. Trail designers must anticipate potential conflicts among future users of the trail, between trail users and other uses on the adjacent land, and between trail users and wildlife. Trail location and design also must consider natural hazards, such as avalanches, unstable slopes, water, overflow, and thin ice on winter trails, and potential problems so they can be avoided or mitigated.

The ability to actively manage a trail will influence how trail conflicts and safety might be mitigated. If a trail manager has the resources to open and close trails or otherwise actively manage trail use, trails can be located in less than ideal locations and simply closed during certain times to avoid conflicts or safety concerns. If a trail manager has the capability to monitor and control access to a trail, there is an opportunity to educate users about trail safety and etiquette, control the number and type of users, and control the season or time when different trail uses are permitted.

## Information and Education

Often taking a back seat to more conspicuous trail issues is the need for trail user information and education. Coupled with good trail design, construction, and management, good education programs help users plan a successful and rewarding trip. Through education, users are more likely to have an enjoyable and safe experience, respect the trail environment, respect the needs of other trail users, and understand and appreciate the concerns of adjacent property owners.

## Trail Signs

Much literature exists on appropriate and inappropriate trail signing. Some of that literature is listed in the technical assistance references in the appendix. Trail signs let people know their location, alert users to hazards, control speed, alert users to potential conflicts, intersections, or points of confusion, and identify points of interest. Mileage markers and directional signs allow users to define the time and route needed for their trip.

The size, appearance, and location of trail signs should be appropriate for the trail, the users, and the speed of trail users. Trail signs generally should not be the same size or have the same specifications as highway signs.

Selecting sign and post materials and selecting a method of mounting signs are also contextual matters that must be carefully considered. Other considerations include desired durability of the sign and message on the sign, frequency of placement or distance between signs, number of signs needed, cost to purchase, install, and replace signs, and ability to mount signs in tundra, swamp, ice and snow, forest and alpine terrain, and other conditions.

Color, numbering, lettering, and naming are different conventions used to identify trails or direction of travel along trails. However, because people frequently travel to other areas to use trails, standardization is important. When considering the various signing conventions for trails, selection of a system that is easily understood, and preferably one that has been successfully used elsewhere is recommended.

Trailheads and intersections are where trail users are most likely to get confused. There should be a map at the most common starting points, such as parking lots, of sufficient scale and detail, and appropriately oriented to the direction of initial travel to show map readers where they are. It should also give basic information about the length and location of the trail. Intersections where trails cross or branch should be clearly marked to avoid any confusion about which way to go.





## **Trail Information Before, During, and After the Trip**

Trail maps containing route, safety, ownership, trail highlights, uses, management, and ownership, plus some tips on trail etiquette, are valuable to users and managers alike. Maps help trail users begin their trip informed, enjoy the trip more, be responsible users, and provide a contact for users to give feedback after the trip.

Trail information can also be disseminated at the trailhead on a bulletin board or trailhead sign, and electronically by putting trail information on a web page and advertising its availability. The advantage to a trail map or web page that can be downloaded on paper is that it can be carried on the trip to be referenced at any time.

## **Trail Etiquette**

Trail etiquette is the “rules of the road” to maximize the enjoyment of all users. Trail etiquette requires all users to know and practice appropriate behavior. All users must have an understanding and appreciation for the mode of travel of those they might expect to meet on the trail. Expectations for a quality experience begin with tolerance for different modes of travel.

## **Private Sector Support**

While control and management of most of Alaska’s lands is in public hands, the private sector outfits users, provides maps and information, and provides transportation and guide services to recreational trail users. Organizations contribute to trail maintenance, signing, and grooming, and provide safety education and training. Landowners provide trail easements. It is important that the public sector land managers provide support when possible, enabling the private sector to continue providing important services to the public.

## **Encourage Non-profit and Private Sector Development of Trails**

Public sector land managers depend on private sector trail businesses and organizations to provide responsible development, use, and management of trails, and to provide education and information to trail users. Any encouragement the public sector can provide will be welcomed and beneficial to the entire recreational trail effort.



## **Promotion of Trails as Contributors to the Economy, Physical and Mental Health, and the Environment**

Recreational trails are seldom portrayed as providing anything but fun and recreation. There is an opportunity and a need to publicize and promote the benefits of trails as contributors to the economies of communities. Tourism is the second largest industry in Alaska next to oil, and trails play a part in Alaska's tourism industry. The private sector, especially the medical community, can help promote the fact that trail-based recreation improves mental and physical health. There is strong medical evidence to document the health benefits derived from physical exercise, and using trails is a good way to gain that exercise.

Recreational trails are often the most effective way to introduce people to areas with environmental sensitivities so they can enjoy and learn about a variety of natural environments unobtrusively. The key to achieving these gains is to design trails carefully, build them compatibly, and manage uses or times of use to achieve desired results. The private sector can promote trails as a way to introduce people to Alaska's natural environment, gaining the knowledge necessary to protect the values that ultimately benefit all.

### **Publicity for Trail Opportunities**

Since trails make significant and beneficial contributions to the economy, to personal health, and to the environment, it is appropriate to commit the energy and resources needed to publicize trails and their appropriate use. It would also be appropriate for the private sector to take the lead in offering educational and training programs to encourage appropriate trail use, gain support for recreational trails, and tout the benefits of recreational trails.

# CHAPTER 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Agencies and organizations listed below should assume responsibility for implementing the following recommended programs and actions, depending on available staff, time, and funding. Each recommendation requires close communication between and among all identified partners.

## Leadership

### Hold an Alaska Trails Summit

Within the first year after adoption of this plan, Alaska should hold a multi-day, statewide trails conference to bring all trail managers, professionals, and users together for training, education, implementing the ideas presented in this plan, and to establish the framework for implementing trail programs.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water; and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Supporting partners: Alaska Recreation and Parks Association; all state and federal agencies with trail interests and responsibilities; local governments; and trail user organizations.

### Evaluate the Need for a Statewide Trail-specific Citizen Advisory Group

This could be a group of representatives from existing non-profit trail organizations. Unlike the governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska Citizens Advisory Board (TRAAK Board), this group would not be affiliated with any public agencies and would not be appointed by the governor. Its purpose would be to establish a statewide association of locally based trail non-profits and clubs to share information and support each other in projects of mutual interest.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service; and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities Office of Statewide Planning.

Supporting partner: governor's TRAAK Board.

## **Create and Produce an Internet Web Site and a Regular Newsletter for Trails**

Create a web site and identify a web master, funded to maintain the site with current, comprehensive, and useful trail information. Distribute a regularly scheduled newsletter to provide necessary information to users who do not have access to the internet information. Newsletter information should be duplicated from the web site to minimize production time and expense. A minimum of two editions should be produced each year. A quarterly newsletter would be desirable if sufficient resources are available.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service; Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Supporting partners: all other state and federal agencies with trail interests, all local governments.

## **Develop an Interagency Trail Management Council**

The council will comprise representatives of public agencies and local governments with trail expertise and responsibilities. The council will meet regularly to share information about trail policies, practices, issues, and initiatives. The council will obtain information relevant to trail issues and disseminate it to agencies and the public. Members of the council, either as a council or as individual representatives of their own agency, will provide technical assistance as requested.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water.

Supporting partners: all other state and federal agencies with trail interests and expertise; all local governments with similar interests and responsibilities; and trail user organizations.

## **Conduct Trail Training**

Both specialized and general trail training, workshops, and conferences should be held on a continuing basis to keep trail professionals, providers, and users informed about current practices, and provide input and support for trail projects and initiatives. Conferences might focus

on a single timely issue, scheduled as needs arise, and limited in attendance to a select group. Others might be annual gatherings to provide ongoing education and training to a specific or general audience. Alaska should consider hosting a national trails conference.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks.

Supporting partners: all other local, state, and federal agencies with trail interests and expertise, trail user organizations, and businesses.

### **Determine if There Exists or Is a Need to Establish an Authority or Mechanism to Acquire Trail Easements**

All existing and possible authority for acquiring trails should be examined. Evaluate costs of establishing and administering existing or new programs and the benefits of institutionalizing new procedures or mechanisms. A cost/benefit analysis should be part of the evaluation procedure.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water.

Supporting partners: all other state and federal agencies and local governments with trail and land interests and responsibilities, trail user organizations and related businesses.

### **Establish Trails Acquisition Mechanisms or Authority**

Depending on the outcome of the determination of need recommended in above it might be necessary/desirable to propose a new authority or mechanisms to acquire or otherwise establish public trail easements.

Lead partner: Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

Supporting partners: all other related agencies, local governments, land trust organizations, and trail user groups.

## **Establish and Fund Full-time Positions for a Statewide Trails Administrator, a Non-motorized Trails Coordinator, a Motorized Trails Coordinator, and Other Support Staff as Necessary**

The success of recreational trail planning, development and maintenance in Alaska depends on a public commitment to support trails with necessary professional staff.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water.

Supporting partners: Alaska Department of Fish and Game; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; trail user organizations and related businesses.

## **Investigate a Strategy for Establishing the Alaska Trails System**

Chapter VI discusses and recommends creating the Alaska Trails System. Possible vehicles for creating the system include administrative and legislative initiatives. Once the Alaska Trails System is established, leadership must continue to develop criteria and application procedures for Alaska Trails System trails, establish protocol for evaluating candidate trails, accepting qualified trails into the system, and instituting a program to support the Alaska Trails System.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Governor's Office; and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Supporting partners: all other agencies, local governments, and trail user groups.

## **Establish and Develop a Trail Funding Clearinghouse**

Establish a recreational trails funding clearinghouse, where all available sources of recreational trails funds would be identified and disbursed to eligible recipients. The clearinghouse would include a web page and offer assistance to potential applicants statewide in applying for trail funds. Colorado State Parks is a good source for setting up such a program, since it is a national leader in trail funding programs.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks.

Supporting partners: Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water; Alaska Department of Fish and Game; Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; Alaska Division of Tourism; and the River, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

### **Encourage Regional Coordination**

Because of Alaska's size and regional diversity, the ability to respond to regional or local trail needs would improve if there were regional contacts to provide technical assistance. This would also improve communication between levels of government and local trail organizations and interests. To further strengthen regional trail coordination the following should be adopted:

### **Increase Borough Trails Support**

Build planning, improvement, and management capability with technical assistance and funding.

Lead partners: Kenai Peninsula Borough, and the City and Borough of Juneau.

Supporting partners: All other organized boroughs wanting to participate.

### **Establish Regional Trail Assistance Centers**

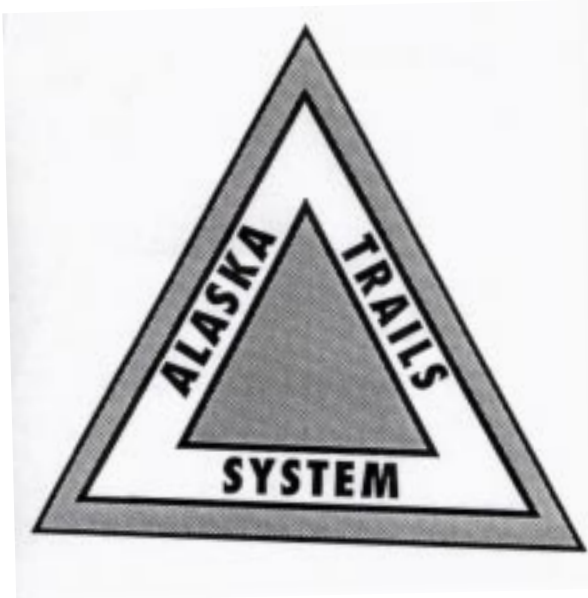
Regional trail assistance centers would make use of existing facilities and staff to distribute information on how to reserve, improve, and maintain trails.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water.

Supporting partners: National Park Service; Bureau of Land Management; U.S. Forest Service; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and boroughs.

### **Streamline the Permitting and Platting Processes for Public Trail Rights-of-Way**

Localities and organizations do trail planning, inventorying, and general mapping on USGS topographic maps. They identify existing trails and desired connections or new trails. However, legally establishing trails on the ground and on plat maps can be complicated, expensive, and discouraging. Each local government or public agency may have different procedures.



The Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water, in cooperation with the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service, has developed a model process for recording recreational trail easements on state land. Local governments should develop a similar process for recording recreational trail easements on their lands

Lead partners: Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service; and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Supporting partners: all other agencies and local governments.

### **Legal Access and Protection**

Many existing trail segments are being lost and future trail options being foreclosed because of lack of legal access. To secure a future for public recreational trails, property owners must be protected and legal access must be established.

### **Landowner Liability Protection**

In May 1999, Alaska became the last state to pass a landowner liability law which indemnifies private property owners who allow a public trail easement across their property. The challenge is to get the word out to agencies, public land managers, and the general public that the new law exists.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water.

Supporting partners: local governments, Native corporations, and user organizations.

### **Evaluate the 17(b) Easement Situation**

Establishment of 17(b) trail easements under the 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act was a way to preserve public access across Alaska Native-owned lands to public lands. Some of these easements have been marked and maintained by federal land managers and their continued need established. Others will be relinquished by the Bureau of Land Management if there is lack of demonstrated public need.

Lead partners: all federal agencies with responsibilities for 17(b) easement management.

Supporting partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water, Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

## **Increase the Number of Trail Rights-of-Way and Easement Dedications**

An aggressive effort is necessary to secure the most critical trails immediately, before more trails are lost and more options foreclosed. Acquired trail easements should be platted and recorded by the agency on whose land the trail crosses.

State and local governments should establish and adopt procedures to protect trails. They should make the process of identifying, surveying, and recording trail easements as easy as possible.

All land acquisition mechanisms available should be employed, including donations, fee purchase, easement and right-of-way acquisition, dedication through the platting process, and retention by public agencies at the time of sale, lease, development, resource extraction, or other disposal of public interests or changes in land use.

Lead Partner: Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water; Alaska State Parks; and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough.

Supporting partners: all public agencies with trail interests and responsibilities, all local governments, trail user organizations.

## **Funding**

This is perhaps the most difficult task facing those charged with implementing some of the recommendations in the Alaska Recreational Trails Plan. Below are some ideas for raising and disbursing trail funds.

Funding priorities and needs differ regionally and locally based on differing needs and the availability of resources. Statewide, the highest funding priorities should be on:

- Maintaining existing recreational trails.
- Resolving trespass.
- Preventing loss of important access.



- Developing Trailheads
- Developing and maintaining winter trails.
- Completing trail connections.
- Developing trails in rural areas where trails play an important transportation role.

## **Identify Existing and Potential New Resources Necessary to Support Trails**

Consider private sector initiatives like endowments and trusts, as well as public sector initiatives. There are many little-known and seldom-solicited federal programs and sources of funding for recreational trails. These programs and sources should be identified, researched, and sought through either the responsible agency or through the offices of Alaska's congressional delegation.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Division of Mining, Land and Water; Governor's Office; and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Supporting partners: Alaska State Legislature; local governments; trail users; and trail support organizations.

## **Disburse Funds**

Coordinate and consolidate as much as possible the administration and distribution of recreational trails funds in the form of grants. The goal is to minimize administration, including technical support, and maximize the amount of funds that can be distributed to acquire, build, and maintain trails, and provide trail safety and education programs.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks.

Supporting partners: all other agencies with trail responsibilities; local governments; trail organizations; and the TRAAK Board.

## **Trail Design**

Good trail design follows good trail planning. Good trail planning requires knowledge of the types of uses the trail is likely to receive and the desires and requirements of users. Bad trail design often results in conflicts among users, unsafe conditions, unacceptable harm or potential harm to the natural environment and wildlife, and conflicts between trail users and adjacent land

uses. Poorly designed trails that do not anticipate these potential conflicts often result in over signing, restricting or prohibiting certain uses, or increasing maintenance, management, and law enforcement.

Trail design is an art and a science requiring trained trail designers who are also trail users. Training, education, and technical assistance for trail planners and designers are available from the technical assistance sources identified in the appendix.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Supporting partners: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; organizations representing different types of trail use.

## **Conflict Management**

By following established standards and practices in planning, designing, marking, and maintaining trails, land managers can reduce many trail conflicts. Good education and management practices are also necessary to avoid and manage conflicts. Public agencies need to make sure that their public involvement processes fully involve all stakeholders and interests, and that they employ a balanced public review process.

### **Uniform Trail Marking**

Uniform trail marking requires adoption of a few standard conventions and sign designs that can be adapted to different situations.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service; and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Supporting partners: all other trail managing agencies, local governments with trail responsibilities, trail user organizations.

### **Trail User Education**

Since many trails will receive different uses, user education is very important. An example of an education opportunity is to conduct on-trail events.

On-trail events can introduce trail users to another mode of travel they might encounter. For example, if snowmobiles and dog mushers share a trail, both groups could have a joint outing to become familiar with each travel mode. Snowmobilers would drive dog teams; mushers would ride snowmobiles. Both groups would gain better understanding and appreciation of each other's needs. Other examples might be hikers and mountain bikers, and equestrians and all-terrain vehicles.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks.

Supporting partners: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, all other trail managing agencies, local governments with trail responsibilities, and trail user organizations.

## **Construction, Improvements, and Maintenance**

Organizing and mobilizing people to develop, improve, and maintain trails requires leadership, identification and consolidation of existing funding resources, and identification of potential or new resources to support specific trail efforts.

### **Evaluate Establishing Regional Trail Rehabilitation Teams**

Teams' primary purpose would be to lay out, construct, and maintain trails using hand and small mechanized tools, possibly including small-scale trail building machines, such as trail dozers, Bobcats, and mini-backhoes. An example is Southeast Alaska Guidance Association (SAGA), headquartered in Juneau. This organization is a model for establishing regional teams of professional trail builders. While SAGA responds statewide, regional organizations familiar with regional differences might be more economical and efficient.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service; and the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Supporting partners: Southeast Alaska Guidance Association, all agencies involved in trail development, local governments, and trail user organizations.

### **Establish Regional Trail Rehabilitation Teams**

If, after evaluating the viability of forming regional trail teams, and if there is interest, leadership, support, and commitment sufficient to sustain one or more of these teams, the actual organizing should be undertaken. Operating procedures should be established and recruitment of team members and work should begin.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Supporting partners: Southeast Alaska Guidance Association; all agencies involved in trail development; local governments; and trail user organizations.

### **Evaluate the Feasibility of Using the Alaska Air and Army National Guard, Coast Guard, Military Organizations, and Fire Fighting Crews for Trail Improvement Projects**

It is important to make contact and stay in contact with their leadership and continue to enlist their support for projects appropriate for their capability.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks and the Alaska Air and Army National Guard.

Supporting partners: public agencies with potential trail projects willing to work with the Guard, U.S. Coast Guard, firefighting crews, and local governments.

### **Increase Trail Maintenance by Establishing Trail Adoption Groups and Programs**

Adopt-a-trail programs should be established by more communities. Procedures should be established and incentives offered to participating groups, agencies, businesses, or individuals.

Light maintenance, such as litter removal, citizen patrols, brush removal, grooming, and light repair are appropriate and usual functions of adopt-a-trail programs. However, the level of work that an adopt-a-trail group could perform depends on the procedures established by the local authority and the capability of the group. Existing programs should be made available (coordinated by Alaska State Parks) as models.

Lead partners: trail organizations and Alaska State Parks.

Supporting partners: local governments and agencies.

## **Public Safety and Education**

Safety is an important goal for recreational trails. This section focuses on improving user education through trail signing and establishing trail information centers.

### **Trail Signing**

While standard trail signs and signing protocol exist, they are not applied consistently. Solutions are to make signing standards readily available and have signs or funds available to organizations and local governments to acquire signs.

Lead partner: Alaska State Parks.

Supporting partners: other public agencies with trail responsibilities, local governments, trail user organizations, and sign manufacturing companies.

### **Trail Information Centers**

Easy access to good and usable information would help trail managers and users. Trail maps and other useful trail information can be generated and maintained in an electronic format, and made available at public trail information centers and on the Internet.

Through trail information centers, agencies responsible for trail management could provide updated information about trail routes and conditions, trail closures, permit and fee requirements, scheduled events, possible conflicts, safety messages, work parties, funding opportunities, etiquette reminders, and a host of other information for the benefit of users and managers.

Examples were created by The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy and The Conservation Fund by establishing a Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse and providing technical assistance and information.

Lead partner: Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Supporting partners: Department of Natural Resources Public Information Centers; Alaska Public Lands Information Centers; local governments, and trail user organizations.

## **Private Sector Initiatives**

Recreational trail users will assume more, rather than less, responsibility for the public facilities they need and use.

### **Evaluate Establishing Regional or Statewide Non-profit Recreational Trails Organizations**

The intent is that regional organizations or a statewide organization would supplement, rather than replace, the work of local organizations and interests. The intent is to pool financial resources and talent, to provide support and resources to local user groups, and enhance fund raising beneficial to all recreational trail groups.

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Supporting partners: existing trail user, business, and promotional organizations, public agencies, local governments.

### **Incorporate a New Statewide Non-profit Trail Group, and Possibly Regional Non-profits**

Lead partners: Alaska State Parks; and the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service.

Supporting partners: existing trail user, business, and promotional organizations.



# CHAPTER 6. THE ALASKA TRAILS SYSTEM

The Alaska Recreational Trails Plan provides guidance applicable to all trails and trail efforts in Alaska. Some trails are of such importance that they merit broader recognition and support. This class of trail generally attracts users from outside the local area or serves a wide range or large number of users. This group of trails will belong to an elite system in Alaska to be known as the Alaska Trails System.

## Vision Statement for the Alaska Trails System

The Alaska Trails System will exist to create a statewide network of trails of such outstanding value as to receive special recognition and funding as Alaska's finest trails. The Alaska Trails System will connect population centers, natural areas, and the people of Alaska for the benefit of all Alaskans and travelers.

## Purpose of the Alaska Trails System

The purpose of the Alaska Trails System is to create a way to identify, recognize, fund, and promote trails and related facilities statewide that are especially important for transportation and recreation and that have greater than local significance. If new funding programs emerge, such as the Alaska Trails Assistance Program proposed in this plan, a new source of funding will be available for maintenance of Alaska Trails System trails. Alaska Trails System trails will be mapped, marked, signed, maintained, and promoted as Alaska's premier trails. The Alaska Trails System will be an effective vehicle for coordinating and delivering trail funding and technical assistance for the establishment, maintenance, and operation of Alaska's trails.

## Goals and Objectives of the Alaska Trails System

The goals and objectives of the Alaska Trails System are to:

- Ensure that existing and future trails are protected by being legally established.
- Ensure quality, diversity, and accessibility of trail experiences for all trail users.



- Facilitate long-term sustainable funding.
- Provide a mechanism for developing an integrated, community-based, statewide system.
- Showcase examples of trails meeting accepted standards of design, construction, signing, and maintenance.
- Provide trail users with a high quality experience.
- Establish criteria for trails to be included in the Alaska Trails System.
- Establish procedures for nominating trails into the Alaska Trails System.
- Improve Alaska's economic diversity and tourism through creation of the Alaska Trails System.

## **Benefits of the Alaska Trails System**

Creating a statewide system of designated Alaska Trails would have these benefits:

- Encouraging the development of an interconnected network of trails.
- Providing for consistent identification of trails that cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- Assuring that segments of the statewide system are developed to consistent standards.
- Assuring trail users that any trail with the Alaska Trails System designation is maintained, easy to find, and offers a high quality recreational experience.
- Facilitating clear understanding of the network concept in the minds of the public. The Alaska Trails System designation would give the public a clear focus and would highlight the concept of an integrated network.
- Giving agencies, managers, and user organizations incentives to develop high quality trails that meet Alaska Trails System standards. Alaska Trails System designation would provide recognition and enable publicizing of the trails in statewide brochures and maps, enable



funding through the proposed Alaska Trails Assistance Program, draw new users, encourage respect for trail environments, and generate new revenue for the communities along the trails.

- Offering technical assistance to Alaska Trails System trail owners, managers, and users through a program established as a product of the Alaska Trails System.
- Providing educational opportunities for visitors and residents of all ages to elevate people's sense of responsibility for and understanding of natural systems.
- Encouraging mental and physical well-being.

## **Establishment of the Alaska Trails System**

Amendments to Title 41.21.850-.872 of Alaska Statutes or new legislation may be required to establish the Alaska Trails System. The act would set out the need and purpose for the Alaska Trails System and identify the need for funding to support construction and maintenance of trails.

### **Eligibility for Inclusion of a Trail in the Alaska Trails System**

An Alaska Trails System trail candidate should be nominated, evaluated, and recommended by the governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) Citizens Advisory Board to become part of the Alaska Trails System. Criteria that a trail must meet to become part of the Alaska Trails System include:

- The nominated trail must be included in an accepted plan of the agency, organization, community, village, borough, or municipality having jurisdiction for the area where the trail lies.
- The trail must be protected and the public assured access by a trail easement, dedication, or other written assurance.
- There must be a designated sponsor. This can be an agency, a consortium of agencies, or a group of partners committed through a letter of agreement to maintain and manage the trail.

- If the trail is required to meet standards required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, it is compliant.
- Liability has been addressed and is assumed by an identified agency or entity.
- The trail fits one or more of the “eligible” primary categories: primitive trail, natural trail, trail route, ATV trail, mountain bike trail, snowmobile trail, dog mushing trail, water trail, hiking trail, walking trail, equestrian trail, cross country ski trail, or skijoring trail.
- Provisions have been made to accommodate potentially conflicting uses on or adjacent to the trail.
- The trail is described in sufficient detail to determine if it meets design guidelines for the intended uses.
- A candidate trail is a “local,” “regional,” or “long distance trail” of greater than local significance.

### **Oversight and Administration of the Alaska Trails System by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources**

Through the TRAAK Board, bring about the designation of Alaska Trails System Trails and Alaska Trails System Connectors.

- Define, and update as necessary, criteria, and procedures for designation.
- Work with manager(s) of each potential Alaska Trails System trail to determine steps necessary to meet designation criteria.
- Evaluate each trail proposed for Alaska Trails System designation and prepare a report to the TRAAK Board recommending for or against designation.
- Arrange and conduct a public hearing to gather public opinion on each proposed Alaska Trails System trail designation.
- Monitor all designated Alaska Trails System trails to ensure that designation criteria continue to be met.

## **Administer the Alaska Trails Assistance Program**

- Identify an annual and reliable source of income.
- Establish, and update as necessary, criteria and procedures for determining uses of money in the fund for specific purposes and projects.
- Determine uses of money in the fund for specific purposes and projects.
- Disburse money in the fund for specific purposes and projects and monitor the spending of money in the fund.
- By December 1 of each year, prepare a report to the Alaska Legislature and/or governor on the use of money in the fund.

## **Characteristics of an Alaska Trails System Trail**

- Will have more than local significance due to its importance, aesthetic qualities, uniqueness, or other attributes.
- Will be constructed and maintained appropriately for the intended uses and have quality and character consistent and compatible with the environment.
- Will have infrequent at-grade intersections with streets, roads, and driveways.
- If required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, will meet official state and federal accessibility and barrier-free standards for use by people with disabilities.
- Will offer adequate support facilities for the public, including parking, sanitary facilities, and emergency telephones that are accessible to people with disabilities, located at trailheads and campgrounds, and when possible, with reasonable frequency along the trail way.
- Will be maintained and patrolled in a manner that ensures public safety and enjoyment.
- Will be available for designated recreation by compatible uses on a non-discriminatory basis.

- Will not be directly attached to a roadway. However, trails on public streets and roads that meet standards for safe trail design and use, and connect directly to an Alaska Trails System trail, may be designated and signed as “Alaska Trails System Connectors.”

## **Obligations and Rewards of Alaska Trails System Status**

### **Obligations**

Bestowing the Alaska Trails System designation on a trail carries with it certain obligations and responsibilities for the trail manager. These include a commitment to maintenance of the trail and trail signs, assurance that environmental damage resulting from the trail is mitigated, and existence of a plan for maintaining trail etiquette and responding to emergencies. Responsibility for law enforcement on the trail will have to be identified. The sponsor will be responsible for maintaining access to the trail and installing the official Alaska Trails System logo at the trailhead.

### **Incentives and Rewards**

Many incentives and rewards await Alaska Trails System designation for a sponsor’s trail. These include:

- Access to funds in the Alaska Trails Assistance Program.
- A certificate from the governor, and the governor’s (or a governor’s representative) presence for the opening/ribbon cutting.
- A place on the Alaska Trails System web site.
- Addition to the Alaska Trails System map, which will be distributed statewide and beyond.
- Inclusion in state promotional materials.
- The right to receive and display the Alaska Trails System logo on the trail.
- Availability of technical assistance.

- Liability indemnification by the state for property owners who have provided an easement for the trail.

## **Nomination and Acceptance of Trails into the Alaska Trails System**

### **Pre-application**

A pre-application conference is recommended to ensure that a prospective sponsor understands the requirements and responsibilities. Threshold criteria should be discussed to make sure a prospective sponsor understands the eligibility requirements and responsibilities of managing an Alaska Trails System trail. Threshold criteria should include:

- Support for the trail's candidacy by underlying property owners and by the agency or agencies that will manage the trail.
- Legal public access exists or there is a plan to attain it. See the appendix for model trail easement language.
- Sponsor is committed to and capable of ongoing trail maintenance and operation.
- Sponsor is willing to have trail included on maps, brochures, etc., promoting the Alaska Trails System.
- Trail has greater than local significance.

### **Application**

An application form should be prepared to guide an applicant in providing all the required information necessary for an evaluation committee to determine the trail's eligibility. At a minimum, the information needed should include:

- Name of trail.
- Agency or organization responsible for submitting application.
- Agency or organization responsible for operation and maintenance of trail.

- Location of trail. Submit maps of an appropriate scale showing the route and location of the trail.
- Include a resolution of support or other indication of formal approval from the local government, if within municipal boundaries, or community council or other representative group if outside of any municipal boundary.
- Documentation of legal public access.
- Proof that the trail is in an adopted plan.
- Description of the trail.
- Indicate whether the trail is a single segment or a portion of a larger trail system or network of trails.
- Give length of trail to be designated.
- Describe the trail and related features, including such items as vegetation, terrain, recreation facilities, significant natural and cultural features, environmental intrusions, and include any unique features distinguishing this trail and recreation location.
- Describe ownership of the trail right-of-way. If under lease, give tenure and any special terms of the lease. Include a copy of property title, lease, or easement agreement when appropriate.
- Briefly describe the design and construction standards of the trail (width of the right-of-way, tread width and surface, safety features, etc.).
- Describe the proximity of the trail to the closest populated area(s) and the mode of transportation necessary to access the trailhead, i.e., car, boat, plane or other.
- Uses of the trail.
- Discuss the types of recreational and non-recreational uses along the trail route and any anticipated possible future changes in use. Include summer and winter uses.

- Estimate the current and future number of different users and methodology used to derive such estimates.
- Administration and Management
  - Indicate if a trail user fee is to be charged, and if so, state the amount of the fee and how it is to be collected. Note: In order to receive protection under the Alaska Landowner Liability Act, landowners may not charge a fee for trail use.
  - Describe the management scheme for the trail (maintenance, fire protection, police surveillance, rules and regulations, safety, etc.).
  - Discuss existing or potential problems, including probable solutions.
- Other
  - Include a sampling of photographs depicting the trail and its use.

The completed application is submitted to the reviewing agency, which determines if the trail meets the threshold criteria and if all the information requested has been supplied in sufficient detail to enable evaluation.

A nominating committee or designated individual will evaluate applications and forward recommendations to the TRAAK Board. A nominated trail could either be rejected, accepted into “candidate status” (requiring certain improvements or additional information), or accepted as an Alaska Trails System trail.

The sponsor will be notified of the determination. If the nominated trail is determined to be eligible, the trail will be added to the list of Alaska Trails System trails, a certificate issued to the sponsor, and a sign(s) provided with the Alaska Trails System logo and the name of the trail for posting at the trailhead(s).

## **Funding Programs**

Under existing trail funding programs established by Alaska laws, cited in chapter 3, the intended recipients of trail funds are state or local governments. None of these programs would provide funds to non-profit corporations or user organizations unless the agency receiving the funds were to pass the money along to eligible recipients in the form of pass-through grants.

Since there is no formal state trail acquisition, construction or maintenance program, there has been little incentive or pressure to fund trails. Existing trail programs established in law have seldom been funded and should not be looked upon as reliable sources of funding for trail development in the future. However, if funding were made available, these could be the mechanisms. A successor funding mechanism is necessary to ensure that funds will be available to develop and maintain trails sponsored by user groups and agencies statewide. A new funding source should be predictable and reliable.

The National Recreational Trails Program reauthorized under TEA21 federal legislation has been the first successful program for predictably and reliably funding trail construction, and more importantly trail maintenance, for Alaska. This program has provided more than a million dollars for Alaska's trails since its inception in 1993. Since then, Department of Natural Resources grant administrators evaluated over 300 applications for trail grants from all parts of Alaska.

### **Proposed Alaska Trails Assistance Program**

Unfortunately, the National Recreational Trails Program is a federal grant program that cannot be relied on for continuing funding. Since this program has been so successful in coalescing trail interests in the public and private sectors to develop and maintain public trail projects, an Alaska version of the program, to be called the Alaska Trails Assistance Program, is being proposed.

This concept has been adopted in other states, has been discussed by the governor's TRAAK Board, and has been recommended by citizens and public officials at several different times during this planning process. A subcommittee of the TRAAK Board met with a private attorney familiar with such funding mechanisms, was encouraged by the concept, and recommended its inclusion in this plan.

It is intended that the Alaska Trails Assistance Program will provide a reliable source of ongoing funding for the acquisition, development, and maintenance of trails and for safety and education programs for rural and urban areas of Alaska. It should include funding for motorized and non-



motorized recreational trails for use in summer and winter and on ice, snow, land, and water. Funding would be available through the Alaska Trails Assistance Program to all recreational trails and related trail facilities. However, the funding formula should give preference to funding trail projects associated with trails that have been designated part of the Alaska Trails System.

Alaska Trails Assistance Program funds would be available for new construction and rehabilitation of trails outside federal and state designated park or conservation areas and for routine maintenance and grooming of existing trails. Alaska Trails Assistance Program funds are not intended for use by agencies to replace other agency trail funds.

The Alaska Trails Assistance Program could take any one or a combination of the following forms:

- A quasi-public corporation like the Alaska Railroad Corporation.
- A private foundation, trust, or similar non-profit organization.
- A funding source established in Alaska statutes with an identified lead agency.

While the structure of the Alaska Trails Assistance Program fund has not been finalized, there are several potential sources of funding, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund (plus variations under debate in Congress), user or entry fees (could negate state's liability protection for landowners and easement holders), off-highway vehicle recreational fuel taxes, vehicle registration fees, an excise tax on the sale of trail related apparel and equipment, voluntary contributions, games of chance revenue, legislative capital appropriations, agency operating budgets, and voter-approved general obligation bonds.

Establishment and administration of the Alaska Trails Assistance Program should be formalized by the State through administrative procedure or law. Alaska State Parks has an established outdoor recreation grant administration function and would be the logical place to establish and administer the fund. Alaska State Parks currently administers the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the National Recreational Trails Program grant program, and the Alaska Snowmobile Trails grant program. State Parks also produces the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, is charged with developing the Alaska Trails System and the Alaska Trails Assistance Program, and along with the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, provides staff for the governor's Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) Citizens Advisory Board.

Another arm of trails assistance, in addition to funding, is technical assistance for trail planning, construction, signing, maintenance, operation, and education programs. See the appendices for agencies and organizations that offer technical assistance to trail proponents.

### **Access to Trail Funds**

Funds from the Alaska Trails Assistance Program are recommended for trail planning, development and maintenance, trail right-of-way acquisitions, trail support facilities, and trail safety and education programs as follows:

- Alaska Trails System trails: 40%
- Alaska Trails System “candidate” trails: 25%
- Local and Other Trails: 25%
- Safety/Education: 10%.

# APPENDICES

## DEFINITIONS

**ADA.** Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

**Alaska Trail.** Each trail admitted into the Alaska Trails System is individually referred to as an “Alaska Trail.”

**Alaska Trails Assistance Program (ATAP).** A perpetual funding source for trail construction, maintenance and education programs.

**Alaska Trails System (ATS).** The aggregate of all the trails in Alaska that have been nominated, evaluated and accepted into the Alaska Trails System by the TRAAK Board.

**ATV.** All terrain vehicle. A motorized vehicle designed for travel over rough, unmaintained terrain.

**Connector Trail.** Relatively short sections of trail that may not meet the standards for admission into the Alaska Trails System, but which are critical links.

**Candidate Trail.** A trail submitted for designation as an Alaska Trails System Trail, but does not meet the minimum requirements. Candidate Trails usually meet most qualifications and will be admitted once the deficiencies are corrected. Candidate Trails are eligible for funding from the Alaska Trails Assistance Program.

**DNR.** Alaska Department of Natural Resources. State Parks is a Division within DNR.

**DPOR.** Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

**EA.** Environmental Assessment. The type of environmental document used on federal aid projects when the extent of environmental impact is uncertain. The assessment results in either a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or a decision to develop an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

**Long distance trail.** Any trail requiring more than one day to traverse by the intended means.

**LWCF.** Land and Water Conservation Fund. A matching federal grant program using federal funds and administered by Alaska State Parks.

**MPO.** Metropolitan Planning Organization. The forum for cooperative transportation decision making for an urbanized area. In Alaska, Anchorage is the only MPO. AMATS (Anchorage Metropolitan Area Transportation Study) is the Anchorage MPO.

**Needs List.** *Transportation Needs and Priorities in Alaska.* A document of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities that lists all transportation and facilities needs in the state, including highways, ferries, trails, transit, airports, harbors and buildings.

**NEPA.** National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 as amended.

**Non-ATS Trail.** Any trail that is not likely to meet the minimum requirements for admission into the Alaska Trails System. These trails are of local significance, or the sponsor may not wish the trail to be included in the Alaska Trails System. These trails are eligible for funding from the Alaska Trails Assistance Program.

**Recreational trail.** A thoroughfare or track across land, water or snow, used for recreational purposes such as pedestrian activities including wheelchair use; skating or skateboarding; equestrian activities; skiing; bicycling or use of other human-powered vehicles; aquatic or water activities; motorized vehicular activities, including all-terrain vehicle riding, motorcycling, snowmobiling, use of off-road light trucks, or use of other off-road motorized vehicles.

**RTF.** Recreational Trails Fund (formerly referred to as Symms Act).

**RTP.** Recreational Trails Program. Formerly known as the Symms National Recreational Trails Program, the RTP provides federal funds to states based on the number of off highway recreational vehicles in the state and on the amount of off highway recreational fuel tax collected. The RTP in Alaska is administered by State Parks with advice from the TRAAK Board. Alaska receives over \$600,000 annually and uses the money to provide grants up to \$30,000 for trail improvement projects, land acquisitions, and safety and education projects relating to recreational trail use.

**SCORP.** Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The current plan is called “Alaska’s Outdoor Legacy” and covers the period 1997 through 2002. It takes a broad look at Alaskans’ outdoor recreation preferences, use trends and issues. The SCORP gives direction and priorities necessary to implement outdoor recreation programs applicable to all levels of government and the private sector. The plan is required for continued state eligibility to receive matching federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. The plan is prepared every five years by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

**SnoTrac.** Snowmobile Trails Advisory Committee. A statewide citizens’ advisory committee appointed by the Director of the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation (DPOR) to oversee the snowmobile trails grant program for Alaska and to advise DPOR on snowmobile issues.

**Snowmobile.** A motorized vehicle designed for travel over snow.

**STIP.** State Transportation Improvement Program. A staged, multi-year, statewide, intermodal program of surface transportation projects which is governed by surface transportation regulations and funded primarily with surface transportation program funds.

**TEA 21.** Transportation Equity Act for the Twenty-First Century. An act of Congress passed in May of 1998 which provides a continuation of funding from ISTEA. Provides funding authorizations for highways, safety, mass transportation, and discretionary spending for a six-year period for federal fiscal years 1998 through 2003.

**TRAAK.** Trails and Recreational Access for Alaska (TRAAK) was established by Administrative Order No. 161 on February 14, 1996 to 1) improve trails and recreational access for Alaskans, 2) cooperate with federal agencies to develop new and

better opportunities for trails and recreational access on public land, and 3) to help Alaska build and maintain its role as a world class visitor destination. TRAAK combines the federal aid highway funding that is available for trails with other outdoor recreation funding sources under one program.

**TRAAK Board.** Administrative Order No. 161 also established the TRAAK Board, whose members are appointed by the governor. The TRAAK Board is composed of at least eleven (11) members, with at least nine (9) members from the public with statewide trail user representation. Specific trail user interests represented by board members include people with disabilities, motorized trail users, and non-motorized trail users. One representative from the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and one representative from the Department of Natural Resources serve as ex officio non-voting members and provide staff. The duties of the TRAAK Board are to review, evaluate, and prioritize eligible outdoor recreation projects for financing under the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Recreational Trails Program; to meet four times a year, and to nominate, review, and comment on TRAAK projects during the public processes of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and other agencies.

**Trail.** (see definition of recreational trail)

**Trail easement.** An interest in land, of specified dimensions, owned by another that entitles its holder to a specific limited use and enjoyment.

**Trail user fee.** Monetary compensation paid by a trail user to a trail manager or trail owner for the privilege of using the trail and trail facilities.

**Trails with a capital “T”, or Formal Trails.** Formal trails are protected by easements or otherwise dedicated to public use. They assure continued use and a high quality experience. They are usually constructed or improved, signed, mapped, maintained, and managed by an identified entity for public use. They are usually advertised to the public and may have support facilities like trailheads, parking, shelters, and toilets.

**Trails with a small “t” or Informal Trails.** Informal trails usually lack the attributes or protections of formal trails and are threatened by many factors. Most of the trails enjoyed by Alaskans and visitors statewide are informal trails.

**Transportation Enhancements.** A term used in Title 23 U.S. Code as amended by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA21), May 22, 1998, to describe categories of projects that are eligible for surface transportation funds. Categories include: provision of facilities for pedestrians and bicycles; provision of safety and educational activities for pedestrians and bicyclists; acquisition of scenic easements and scenic or historic sites; scenic or historic highway programs, including historic railroad facilities and canals; preservation of abandoned railway corridors, including the conversion and use thereof for pedestrian or bicycle trails; control and removal of outdoor advertising; archaeological planning and research; environmental mitigation to address water pollution due to highway runoff or to reduce vehicle-caused wildlife mortality while maintaining habitat connectivity; and establishment of transportation museums.

## PARTIAL LIST OF FORMAL TRAILS

Bald Eagle Preserve Trail – Haines  
Bird Point to Girdwood Trail – Seward Highway near Girdwood  
Caines Head Trail – Seward  
Canyon Creek/Sixmile Trail – Seward Highway near Hope  
Chena Dome Trail – Fairbanks  
Chena Hot Springs Trail - Fairbanks  
Chilkoot Trail – Skagway  
Cross Admiralty Island Trail – Southeast Alaska, Admiralty Island  
Crow Pass Trail – Girdwood/Eagle River  
Eklutna Lake Trail – Anchorage  
Forty Mile River Water Trail - Northeastern Alaska  
Ft. Abercrombie Trail – Kodiak  
Granite Tors Trail - Fairbanks  
Gulf of Alaska Trail – Yakutat  
Gulkana River Water Trail – near Gulkana  
Harbor Mountain /Gavan Hill Trail - Sitka  
Heney Ridge Trail – Cordova  
Homer Spit Trail - Homer  
Iditarod Trail  
Indian River Trail - Sitka  
Innoko River Water Trail – Western Alaska  
Johnson Pass Trail – Seward Highway South of Turnagain Pass  
Kachemak Bay State Park Trail System – Homer area  
Kaxdigoowu Heen (Mendenhall River) Trail - Juneau  
Kisugi Ridge Trail – Susitna Valley near Talkeetna  
Lost Lake/Primrose Trail – Kenai Peninsula  
Lower Beaver Creek Water Trail - Northeastern Alaska  
Lower Sheenjek River Water Trail - Northeastern Alaska  
Mt. Edgcumbe Trail – Sitka  
Mt. Verstovia Trail - Sitka  
Naha River Trail – Ketchikan area  
Nancy Lake Canoe Trail – Susitna Valley near Willow  
Nowitna River Water Trail – Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge  
Perserverance Trail - Juneau



Photo Point Trail - Juneau  
Power Creek/Crater Lake Trail – Cordova  
Prospect Heights Trail – Anchorage  
Resurrection Pass Trail – Kenai Peninsula  
Resurrection River Trail - Kenai Peninsula  
Russian Lakes Trail – Kenai Peninsula  
Selawik River Water Trail – Northwest Arctic Borough  
Shuyak Island Trail – Kodiak area  
Sitka Cross Trail – Sitka  
South Tongass Pathway - Ketchikan  
Starrigavan/Mosquito Cove Trail System - Sitka  
Swanson River/Lakes Canoe Trail – Kenai Peninsula  
Thimbleberry/Hart Lake Trail - Sitka  
Tony Knowles Coastal Trail – Anchorage  
Totem Bight Trail - Ketchikan  
Totem Trail (Sitka National Historic Park) - Sitka  
Trail of Time – Juneau  
Verstovia Trail - Sitka  
White Mountains Trail – Fairbanks area  
Wood River – Tikchik River water trails – near Dillingham  
Yukon-Charley Rivers Water Trail – Northeastern Alaska  
Yukon River Water Trail – Interior Alaska

# EXISTING LOCAL AND STATE TRAIL PLANS, EASEMENT ATLASES, AND RS2477 DOCUMENTS

## LOCAL TRAIL PLANS:

Anchorage Areawide Trails Plan. Adopted January 1996.

Comprehensive Trail & Sidewalk Plan for the Homer Area. January 1985.

Fairbanks North Star Borough Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan. Adopted June 1985. Revised August 1995.

Juneau Non-motorized Transportation Plan. Adopted September 1997.

Juneau Trails Plan. Finished January 1993. Not formally adopted.

Kenai Peninsula Borough Trail Plan. Adopted December 1998. On their web site at [www.borough.kenai.ak.us](http://www.borough.kenai.ak.us).

Ketchikan Trails Plan. Adopted January 1995.

Matanuska-Susitna Borough Recreational Trails Plan. Latest draft June 1999. Not adopted.

Sitka Comprehensive Trail Plan (under development in 1999).

## STATE AREA PLANS (available from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources):

Bristol Bay Area Plan  
Copper River Plan  
Juneau State Land Plan  
Kodiak  
Kuskokwim Area Plan  
Northwest Area Plan

Prince of Wales area Plan  
Prince William Sound Area Plan  
Southwest Prince of Wales Area Plan  
Susitna Area Plan  
Tanana Basin Area Plan  
Yakataga Area Plan  
Willow Sub-Basin Area Plan

(In addition, many management plans, subsets of the area plans, are available).

**STATE EASEMENT ATLASES (available from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources):**

Bristol Bay Easement Atlas  
Copper River Easement Atlas  
Kenai Easement Atlas  
Northwest, Kotzebue Area Easement Atlas  
Northwest, Nome Easement Atlas

**STATE RS2477 DOCUMENTS (available from the Alaska Department of Natural Resources):**

Historic Trails Database 7 Map Atlas Book  
Profiles of Historic Trails (with statewide map) - August 1995

# PARTIAL LIST OF ALASKA TRAIL ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

## Trail Organizations:

Access Alaska, PO Box 113141, Anchorage, AK 99511

Alaska Citizens Transportation Coalition

Alaska Sled Dog & Racing Association

Alaska Snowmobile Representatives Alliance, 4800 Spenard Rd., Anchorage, AK 99507

Alaska State Horsemen, Inc., 406 W. Fireweed, #1, Anchorage, AK 99503

Alaska State Snowmobile Association, Box 324, Delta Junction, AK 99737

[www.aksnow.org](http://www.aksnow.org)

Anchorage Trails & Greenways Coalition, 1553 H Street, Anchorage, AK 99501

Arctic Bicycle Club, Box 140269, Anchorage, AK 99514

Fairbanks North Star Borough Trails Commission, Box 71267, Fairbanks, AK 99707

Iditarod National Historic Trail, Inc., PO Box 2323, Seward, AK 99664

Iditarod Trail Committee, Box 870800, Wasilla, AK 99654

Kenai Peninsula Borough Trails Commission, 144 N. Binkley, Soldotna, AK 99669

Ketchikan Outdoor and Trails Coalition

Knik Canoers & Kayakers, Box 242861, Anchorage, AK 99524

Mat-Su Borough Trails Committee, 350 E. Dahlia, Palmer, AK 99645

Mat-Su Trails Council, PO Box 2356, Palmer, AK, 99645. email:

[studefan1@email.com](mailto:studefan1@email.com).

Municipality of Anchorage, Trails Oversight Committee, Box 196650, Anchorage, AK 99519

Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage, 203 W. 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501

North American Skijor & Pulk Association, Box 670933, Chugiak, AK 99567

Seward Trails Committee, Box 24, Seward, AK 99664

Sitka Comprehensive Trail Plan Committee

Sitka Trail Works, 801 Halibut Point Road, Sitka, AK 99835; email:

[trails@ptialaska.net](mailto:trails@ptialaska.net)

Southeast Alaska Guidance Association (SAGA), Serve Alaska Youth Corps, Box 33037, Juneau, AK 99801; email: [ramonda@alaska.com](mailto:ramonda@alaska.com)

Trail Mix, Inc. [www.alaska.net/~trailmix/MRS\\_home.html](http://www.alaska.net/~trailmix/MRS_home.html) email: [trailmix@alaska.net](mailto:trailmix@alaska.net)

Valdez Trails Association, Box 1361, Valdez, AK 99686

**Support Organizations:**

Alaska Division of Tourism, Box 110801, Juneau, AK 99811;

[GoNorth@dced.state.ak.us](mailto:GoNorth@dced.state.ak.us)

Alaska Travel Industry Association, Box 143361, Anchorage, AK 99514

Alaska Visitors Association (and Winter Tourism Committee), 2525 C. Street, #400,  
Anchorage, AK 99503

Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association, Box 22827, Juneau, AK  
99802; email: [awrta@alaska.net](mailto:awrta@alaska.net)

Convention and Visitors Bureaus (various)

Destination Marketing Organizations (various)

## TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND INFORMATION REFERENCES

(references for acquisition, planning and zoning, design, construction, marking/trail signs, and maintenance)

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

[www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/FISH.GAME/adfghome.htm](http://www.state.ak.us/local/akpages/FISH.GAME/adfghome.htm)

*Alaska Region Trails Construction and Maintenance Guide*, October 1991. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Alaska Region, R10-MB-158.

Alaska Department of Natural Resources (Divisions of Parks, Mining, Land and Water, Public Information)

[www.dnr.state.ak.us](http://www.dnr.state.ak.us)

[www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/trailprograms](http://www.dnr.state.ak.us/parks/trailprograms)

Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; [www.dot.state.ak.us](http://www.dot.state.ak.us)

Alaska Public Lands Information Center; [www.nps.gov/aplic/center](http://www.nps.gov/aplic/center)

Alaska State Snowmobile Association, P.O. Box 210427, Anchorage, AK 99521.

[www.ak.snow.org](http://www.ak.snow.org)

American Trails; [www.outdoorlink.com/amtrails/](http://www.outdoorlink.com/amtrails/)

Appalachian Trails Conference; [www.atcont.org](http://www.atcont.org)

Bureau of Land Management; [www.ak.blm.gov/](http://www.ak.blm.gov/)

Bureau of Land Management National Training Center; [www.ntc.blm.gov](http://www.ntc.blm.gov)

Challenge Alaska, Box 110065, Anchorage, AK 99511; [www.challenge.ak.org](http://www.challenge.ak.org)

Colorado State Parks, 1313 Sherman Street, #618, Denver, CO 80203;  
[www.dnr.state.co.us/parks](http://www.dnr.state.co.us/parks)

International Mountain Bicycling Association; [www.IMBA.com](http://www.IMBA.com)

Kenai Peninsula Borough Trail Atlas; [www.borough.kenai.ak.us/planningdept/Trail%20Commission/Topics/TrailTopic2\\_Legal.htm](http://www.borough.kenai.ak.us/planningdept/Trail%20Commission/Topics/TrailTopic2_Legal.htm)

Millennium trails [www.millenniumtrails.org](http://www.millenniumtrails.org)

National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. Jack Mosby, Alaska Program Manager, 2525 Gambell Street, Rm #107, Anchorage, AK 99503; (907) 271-1713 email: [jack\\_mosby@nps.gov](mailto:jack_mosby@nps.gov)

Rails to Trails Conservancy; [www.railtrails.org](http://www.railtrails.org)

*Tools of the Trail.* A bibliography on planning, advocating, designing, building, maintaining and managing trails throughout America. American Hiking Society, P.O. Box 20160, Washington, DC 20041-2160. (703) 255-9304

*Trail Access Information.* U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Region, 333 S.W. First Avenue, P.O. Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208

*Trail Construction and Maintenance Notebook.* October 1996. 4E42A25-Trail Notebook. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Technology & Development Center, Building 1, Fort Missoula, Missoula, MT 59804-7294. (406)329-3900; email: [s=b.vachowski/ou1=r01a@mhs-fswa.attmail.com](mailto:s=b.vachowski/ou1=r01a@mhs-fswa.attmail.com).

*Trail Design, Construction, and Maintenance.* 1981. Appalachian Trail Conference, P.O. Box 236, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425

Trailworks (Division of Sitka Trail Works, Inc.), 801 Halibut Point Rd., Sitka, AK 99835; email: [trails@ptialaska.net](mailto:trails@ptialaska.net) or [horan@ptialaska.net](mailto:horan@ptialaska.net)

Trails and Greenways Clearinghouse; [www.test-site.com/TrailsAndGreenways](http://www.test-site.com/TrailsAndGreenways)

Trails Illustrated; [www.trailsillustrated.com/index.cfm](http://www.trailsillustrated.com/index.cfm)

Transportation Enhancements Clearinghouse. For free documents relating to Transportation Enhancements: [www.enhancements.org](http://www.enhancements.org) email: [ntec@transact.org](mailto:ntec@transact.org)

U.S. Forest Service Technology and Development Program, Missoula, MT

U.S. Forest Service Manual 2350 and Forest Service Handbook 2309.18. Contains directions for design, construction, and maintenance of trails.

U.S. Forest Service publication EM-7720-102 and -103. Standard Specifications for Construction and Maintenance of Trails.



## LANDOWNER LIABILITY LAW

In June 1999, Alaska enacted a landowner liability law that extended liability protection to landowners who establish trail easements across their property for recreation purposes. The act also extended protection to the public holders of those easements. The act as passed appears below:

**Alaska Statutes Section 34.17.055. Tort immunity from personal injuries or death arising out of the use of land subject to a conservation easement.**

(a) In addition to the immunity provided by AS 09.65.200, an owner of land, a portion of which is subject to a conservation easement that is 50 feet or less in width, that has been granted to and accepted by the state or a municipality, and that provides public access for recreational purposes on the land subject to the conservation easement is not liable in tort, except for an act or omission that constitutes gross negligence or reckless or intentional misconduct, for damages to a person who uses the easement to enter onto or remain on the land if

(1) the person had no responsibility to compensate the owner for the person's use of the easement or the land; and

(2) the damages arise out of the person's use of the easement for recreational purposes on the land.

(b) The immunity under (a) of this section extends to the grantee of the conservation easement providing public access to the land for recreational purposes.

On the following page is an example of easement language that could be used to establish a recreational trail easement based on AS 34.17.055. It can be used as guidance for property owners and public agencies anticipating establishing a public recreational trail easement under AS 34.17.055.

# MODEL TRAIL EASEMENT LANGUAGE

**THIS IS A DRAFT INSTRUMENT SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AND MODIFICATION AS TO FORM AND SUBSTANCE BY THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LAW AND ACCEPTANCE BY THE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**

## TRAIL EASEMENT

THIS TRAIL EASEMENT (“Trail Easement”) is made this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2\_\_\_\_, by \_\_\_\_\_, whose address is \_\_\_\_\_, (“Grantor”), and the **State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources**, (“Grantee”), **[or grantee may be a municipality]**, its successors and assigns, whose address is Department of Natural Resources, 550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1050A, AK 99501-3579, as grantee, under the authority of AS 34.17.010 - AS 34.17.060.

WHEREAS, Grantor is the owner in fee simple of the surface estate of the property that is the subject of this Trail Easement;

NOW THEREFORE, pursuant to the laws of Alaska and in particular Alaska Statute 34.17.010 - 34.17.060, and for good and valuable consideration, Grantor does hereby grant and convey to the Grantee, its successors and assigns, forever, with warranties of title, subject to conditions, restrictions and limitations of record, a Trail Easement of [insert width but not greater than 50] feet in width, in perpetuity, for the purpose of access by the public for recreational use, along, over, and across the surface estate of lands owned by Grantor, which lands are more particularly described as follows:

*[insert legal description of the property subject to the Easement — must be approved by the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Law or the municipality receiving title]*

Said Trail Easement is more particularly described as follows:

**[insert legal description of the trail — must be approved by the Department of Natural Resources and Department of Law or the municipality receiving title]**

SUBJECT, however, to valid existing rights, including but not limited to, easements, rights and reservations, if any, of record.

**1. USE OF THE TRAIL EASEMENT:**

The Trail Easement is solely for the purpose of access for recreational purposes by the public. Recreational purposes include **[insert permitted uses and any limitations on use]**.

**2. COVENANT:**

Grantor hereby covenants to and with the Grantee and its assigns, that Grantor is lawfully seized of the surface estate in fee simple of the above-described property, have good and lawful right and power to sell and convey the Trail Easement, that the same is free and clear of encumbrances, except as shown above, and that Grantor will forever warrant and defend this Trail Easement against the lawful claims and demands of all persons.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD unto the Grantee, its successors and assigns forever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF Grantor and Grantee have set their hands on the day and year first above written.

**GRANTOR**

\_\_\_\_\_

***ACKNOWLEDGMENT***

STATE OF ALASKA )  
 ) ss.  
\_\_\_\_\_JUDICIAL DISTRICT )

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2\_\_\_\_, before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public in and for the State of Alaska, duly commissioned and sworn, personally appeared \_\_\_\_\_, to me known and known to be the person who

executed the above and foregoing TRAIL EASEMENT, and who acknowledged to me that he signed the foregoing instrument freely and voluntarily and for the use and purposes therein mentioned.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto set my hand and affixed my official seal the day and year first above written.

(SEAL) \_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public in and for Alaska  
My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_

CERTIFICATE OF ACCEPTANCE

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that the State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources (**or municipality**) GRANTEE, herein, acting by and through its Commissioner, hereby accepts for public purposes the TRAIL EASEMENT described in this instrument and consents to the recording thereof.

**STATE OF ALASKA, DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Commissioner

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

STATE OF ALASKA )  
 ) ss.  
\_\_\_\_\_ JUDICIAL DISTRICT )

The foregoing instrument was acknowledged before me this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2\_\_\_\_, by \_\_\_\_\_, who is known to me to be the Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, State of Alaska, and who acknowledged to me that he signed as accepting the foregoing TRAIL EASEMENT conveying to the Grantee, the easement described therein, and he acknowledged to me that he executed the foregoing instrument freely and voluntarily.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Notary Public in and for Alaska

(SEAL)

My commission expires: \_\_\_\_\_

**AFTER RECORDING RETURN TO:**

State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources  
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