

INTERIOR TRAILS NEWSLETTER

Dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of trails in interior Alaska

November 2019

INTERIORWIDE

NEW NON-MOTORIZED TRAIL IN CHENA REC AREA READY FOR USE

The Mastodon Trail, the newest trail in the Chena River State Recreation Area, is open and ready for use.

The non-motorized trail will be groomed and maintained by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, including during the winter.

"The plan is to routinely drag a tire and cut out blow downs over the winter," Superintendent Brooks



Ludwig wrote in an email. "With all the fire scars we anticipate a lot of trees falling into the trail."

Much of the trail goes through recently fire-scarred land. As of October 26, it was mostly cleared of fallen trees, but a few covered or partially covered the trail near its far end. The trail has incredible views due to the burns.

"Mastodon Trail stays high

contouring the hillside offering many scenic views of the valley and surrounding hills," Jon Underwood, the contractor who built the trail, wrote in an October 11 post on the Alaska State Parks Facebook page.

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner recently had a story on the trail: <https://tinyurl.com/y53pljhb>

The trail, which begins at mile 38.6 Chena Hot Springs Road, is about 13 miles long and ends at the Nugget Creek Cabin. Previously that cabin had been accessible only via the South Fork Winter Trail or the little-known and difficult Mist Creek Trail. Now the cabin will be accessible year-round. (See more on the cabin at: <https://tinyurl.com/y2yuxrg9>.) State Parks is partnering with The Folk School Fairbanks to build a new cabin that will be placed near the old cabin, but a little higher on the hillside. The old cabin is slowly sinking and will eventually be torn down, but for a while there should be two cabins available there. The News-Miner also had a story on the cabin project: <http://tinyurl.com/y6e4z2vq>

Winter trail users should be aware that the trail has some icy spots about a quarter-mile on either side of the bridge over Mastadon Creek, at about 3 miles.

LINKS TO INTERIOR TRAIL INFORMATION

A lot of information about trails in interior Alaska exists, but it's often hard to find. Here is a collection of trail-related resources: <https://www.interioralaskatrails.org/resources/>. (If you find any broken links or other problems please send an email to fbxtrails@gmail.com)

One of the challenges for state parks will be to educate motorized users that the trail is for non-motorized use only. The trail is in a section of the recreation area designated for non-motorized use and the funds used to build the trail require that it remain non-motorized. The recreation area has several motorized trails, including the winter-only South Fork Winter Trail, which also accesses the Nugget Creek Cabin. Most other motorized trails are north of Chena Hot Springs Road.

The addition of the trail adds a new possibility for non-motorized winter users. By connecting the Mastodon Trail and the South Fork and Chena Hot Springs winter trails, a loop of about 30 miles can be created, though it includes a couple of short road sections to connect trailheads. An even longer loop could be made by adding the Stiles Creek Trail.

(Photo by Eric Troyer: Corrine Leistikow bikes along the Mastodon Trail in late October.)

DENALI WINTER, SHOULDER PLAN HAS POTENTIAL TRAIL CHANGES

COMMENT Trails may be a big part of changes being considered in the Denali National Park Winter and Shoulder Season Plan.

Public comments on the plan can be submitted **until November 15**. The plan and links to comment forms can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/dena/getinvolved/winter-plan.htm>

The plan is large—more than 70 pages—but page 57 has a chart with five plan concepts that give an idea of things being considered. The least active concept would have minimal changes to trails, and would even cut back on the minimal trail grooming that was started a couple of years ago. The more active concepts call for new trails being built and additional grooming for walking and skiing.

Interestingly, fatbikes, a relatively new addition to winter sports, are not addressed in the plan. When snow is not on the ground bikes are allowed on the park road and a couple of trails near the entrance. The plan does not address if that would continue or if fatbikes would be allowed on other trails.

The park management recently had a public comment period on the Kantishna and Wonder Lake Area Plan, which also included the possibility of adding trails on that end of the park road. A long-time bus driver and naturalist wrote an editorial criticizing some of the plan's proposals. It ran in the Anchorage Daily News (<https://tinyurl.com/y6s9kucs>) and the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner (<https://tinyurl.com/y5zfm2fo>). The formal comment period for that plan ended October 31. That plan can be found at: <https://www.nps.gov/dena/getinvolved/kantishna-plan.htm>

The park has been guided by a principle that largely eschews trails in order to keep a wilder experience for park visitors. However, an increasing number of visitors, as well as more guided hikes in the Kantishna area, and more widely disseminated information about popular hiking areas have challenged that principle. Some social trails have been used so much they appear to be formal trails, but they are not signed and often do not follow sustainable trail practices.

WINTER WALKING TRAIL ACROSS UAF'S SMITH LAKE REROUTED

The east-west walking trail across Smith Lake on the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) campus will be rerouted to the north shore of the lake. Grooming equipment has been stuck several times on that trail due to

overflow.

"The problem is the lake ice isn't getting as thick as it used to," according to UAF Trails Manager Jason Garron. "The weight of the snow is pushing the thinner ice down forcing water up on top of it. The most affected place is the center of the lake where the walking trail goes."

The ski trails on the lake will remain as they have been in the past, though Garron pointed out that the problem of overflow is affecting the ski trails on the lake more than it used to.

A map of the UAF winter walking trails can be found here: <https://uaf.edu/fs/files/walkingtrails.pdf>

SEEN RECENTLY ON THE INTERIOR FACEBOOK PAGES

ALASKA STATE PARKS

October 30: CLOSURE NOTICE:

Alaska State Parks is temporarily closing Colorado Creek Trail within Chena River State Recreation Area due to the Colorado Creek bridge partially collapsing. We anticipate the bridge should be replaced by November 24th.

October 29: Check out these new picnic sites along the multi-use trail system in Lower Chatanika State Recreation Area. A new 3 mile multi use trail has been completed at Olnes Pond with three remote picnic sites along the Chatanika river. This project was funded through the Recreational Trail Grant program and provides the first ATV friendly campground in Alaska State Parks. (A downloadable brochure of the rec area and its trails can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/y685q2t9>.)



October 24: A new cabin is in the works in the Northern Region of Alaska State Parks!

This latest addition is taking shape at Mile 2 of the Compeau Trail within Chena River State Recreation Area. The cabin measures 14' x 16' and will accommodate up to 6 people. The goal is to have it ready to rent by December 1st. We will let you know when it is available to book!

BLM-WHITE MOUNTAINS NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

October 8: Looks like a snowy week for the Fairbanks area. As of yesterday, snow depth in and around the White Mountains after recent storms was highly variable -- Wickersham Dome had received about 7 inches,



but areas just a few hundred feet lower in elevation had received 0-2 inches. More snow is expected through the week, and difficult travel conditions are likely. Rivers and creeks remain unfrozen. If you're heading to Fred Blixt Cabin, please be aware that snow accumulation will likely bring down more trees whose roots were burned or otherwise weakened in the Hess Creek Fire this summer.

NORDIC SKI CLUB OF FAIRBANKS

October 18: There have been quite a few posts about Moose Mountain, but there's another way to access skiing up high and close to town. Head out to Old Murphy Dome from the Elliott Highway. Where the plowing stops, the skiing starts! Many thanks to the mushers who groom those trails. You can thank them by sending them some mushing tour activity. There are a few up there who give tours.

<http://www.alaskaskijoring.org/trailinfo/oldmurphy.html>

FAIRBANKS CYCLE CLUB

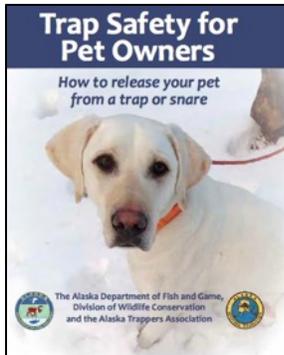
October 17: Is your fatbike looking at you with puppy dog eyes, saying you never take it snowbiking anymore? Well, head up to Moose Mountain, Old Murphy Dome Road, Wickersham Dome. There's snow at higher elevations! These pics were taken on Thursday between Moose Mtn and Old Murphy Dome Road. Get out there!

SKARLAND & PEARL CREEK PARK TRAIL USERS

BRUSH October 30: What do frustrated skiers do? Cut brush! I cleared Thrill Hill and Thrill Hill bypass but all the other trails probably need help.

RESOURCES HELP REDUCE PET/TRAPPING CONFLICTS

Trapping season is here, so trail users who let their dogs run loose should make sure they know some basic information about traps and trap lines. A pamphlet and videos are available.



PAMPHLET: A pocket-sized pamphlet titled "Trap Safety for Pet Owners" describes the types of traps and snares that may be encountered and provides illustrated instructions on how to free pets swiftly and safely. It is produced by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) and the Alaska Trappers Association (ATA). Copies are available free of charge at department offices, or may be viewed on the website at: <http://tinyurl.com/m6oulhk>. More information, including video footage featuring trap removal instructions, is found on the department's website at www.adfg.alaska.gov (see "Sharing the Trails" under the "Hunting > Trapping"

dropdown menu), and on the ATA website (www.alaskatrappers.org).

VIDEO: The ATA also sells a 30-minute video, "Sharing Alaska's Trails," that includes information such as how to know if you are on a trap line, trap line safety, the physics of handling and opening traps and snares, and tips for first-aid for pets accidentally caught in traps. The video doesn't promote trapping, but deals with the practicalities of sharing the trails. A three-minute excerpt of the DVD



can be found on YouTube (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jk242jZwEAQ). To order a copy of the DVD check the ATA store (www.alaskatrappers.org).

Most trapping seasons run from November 1 to the end of February, but the season for a few species lasts longer. Wolf traps could be active well into April.

INTERIORWIDE LINKS

- Transportation projects next summer include pedestrian (and trail) enhancements: <https://tinyurl.com/y2zobmae>
- Fairbanks North Star Borough sees dozens of building project proposals (including several trail and trailhead proposals): <https://tinyurl.com/yyb4pajf>

SLIGHTLY OFF-TRAIL

- **ATTEND** Burgers, Brews, and Bogs (Interior Alaska Land Trust fundraiser, Nov. 2): <https://tinyurl.com/y2ouj7jg>
- Fairbanks REI classes and events: <https://www.rei.com/events/p/us-ak-fairbanks>
- Nenana Fire Department acquires snowbulance: <https://tinyurl.com/yygb2jhj>

STATEWIDE

LONG-TIME STATE RTP ADMINISTRATOR SUBMITS RETIREMENT

The Recreational Trails Program in Alaska has been dealt another blow, but the state parks director says the program will continue as normal.

Grants Administrator Steve Neel, a 24-year state employee, recently announced his retirement. Neel has more than 12 years of experience working in state parks, including working on more than 400 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) projects. How Neel's retirement will affect the program is uncertain, especially because the program's other administrative position, the program manager for the Alaska State Trails, was recently cut.

However, Ricky Gease, director of the state Parks and Outdoor Recreation, says Neel will be replaced soon and the RTP process will continue as planned.

"Pending hiring approval DPOR will have someone in place to incorporate cross training before Steve Neel leaves," Gease wrote in an email. He added that the RTP in Alaska will "stay the same."

The RTP program has many federal requirements. Specific projects and even the entire program could be run into problems if those requirements are not followed properly. Much will depend on how quickly a replacement is found for Neel and the experience and skills of that person.

Even more unfortunate is that Neel will be retiring on December 31, which is just before the Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board (ORTAB) meets to review and recommend funding for the RTP. ORTAB advises the Director of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation on project funding RTP projects.

But Gease said the ORTAB meeting will go on as planned. He also pointed out that the committee is, as its name states, advisory.

"Just for clarity, it is always up to the Director as to which projects are approved," Gease wrote.

This federal program, which is administered by the state, brings in more than \$1 million a year to trails across Alaska. Darcy Harris was the most recent Alaska State Trails program manager. When her position was

slated for elimination as part of the budget process, she quit to take a position with the Municipality of Anchorage. Harris has expertise to approve Environmental Review Checklists, basically a mini-Environmental Impact Statement, required under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The loss of Harris and tight deadlines due to the lengthy budget wrangling resulted in a severe restriction of types of projects accepted for this grant cycle. (See story below.)

There have also been some rumblings that the current RTP grant process is unnecessarily complex and may be streamlined. More will be reported on that as it comes to light.

REC TRAILS PROGRAM GRANT APPLICATIONS DUE IN NOVEMBER

Applications for Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grants are due 4 p.m. on Friday, November 22. The types of projects that will be accepted are severely limited from previous years.

Because the program, which is administered by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, was caught up in the recent state budget wrangling, the schedule has been modified from previous years. The current remainschedule is as follows:

- November 22: Application due date
- December 30: Qualified applications sent to ORTAB for review
- January 22-23, 2020: Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board meeting for final scoring of qualified applications
- February 2020: Applications recommended for award will be forwarded to Federal Highway Administration for review
- March through June 2020: Award and grant agreements are signed and implemented

Due to staffing cuts and a short timeline, applications for projects are limited to "Stipulation 1" projects, which have either no or minimal environmental, cultural, and social, etc., impacts. This means projects will almost exclusively be limited to brushing and clearing trails and minor trail repair within an existing footprint. (allowable activities listed below).

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations, educational institutions, state, local and federal government entities, native corporations and tribal governments. The state anticipates that \$1.2 million may be awarded to eligible Alaska projects. The application package is available at

<http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/grants/trails.htm>.

Projects usually accepted under Stipulation 1 include:

- Purchase of trail maintenance equipment, materials and supplies;
- Rehabilitation contained within the footprints of existing trails and trailhead facilities, including resurfacing or improving the trail facility surfaces;
- Regrading within the footprint of existing trail and/or parking areas;
- Striping and/or re-striping of existing trail facilities;
- Development and distribution of educational materials;
- Replacement, renovation, and/or rehabilitation of existing signs, kiosks, and markers;

- New installation of signs, kiosks and markers at, and along, existing facilities;
- Minor alterations to existing facilities in order to make them accessible to people of different abilities (Example: replacement of stairs with ramps, installing hand rails, etc.).

For more information contact parks.RTPgrantapp@alaska.gov

RTP TRAILS THAT ALLOW E-BIKES CANNOT BE NON-MOTORIZED

People applying for Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grants that include bicycle use should know that the advent of electric bikes complicates matters.

According to Steve Neel, the state grants administrator for RTP grants, “electric bikes are considered motorized recreation” for RTP grants. A trail built or maintained for mountain bikes AND e-bikes would fall in the “diversified” RTP category.

By law RTP funds must be divided three ways: 30 percent for motorized recreation, 30 percent for non-motorized recreation, 40 percent for “diverse” recreational use.

“No trail built with RTP funds as a non-motor trail should allow ebikes on it,” Neel wrote in an email. In a subsequent email, he elaborated further:

Yes, you can designate a mountain bike trail to allow both nonmotorized bikes and e-bikes, and call it diverse, but it is neither nonmotorized nor motorized.

Also note that if you have a mountain bike trail and decide to allow e-bikes, that doesn’t turn the trail into a motorized trail for the purposes of meeting your 30 percent motorized requirement. It might be diverse, but if most of the use is nonmotorized, then you can’t call it motorized.

People wanting more guidance on this issue should refer to the Federal Highway Administration’s “Framework for Considering Motorized Use on Nonmotorized Trails and Pedestrian Walkways under 23 U.S.C. [sect] 217”: <https://tinyurl.com/y6htb8yd>

PUBLIC INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN SNOWTRAC MEETING

JOIN IN The Snowmobile Trails Advisory Council (SnowTRAC) will hold its annual advisory meeting via teleconference on November 7 from 2 to 4pm. The public is invited to participate via free teleconference; by calling 1-877-226-9607 with Conference Code: 7547916061#. SnowTRAC currently consists of six members who are regionally selected from areas across Alaska. The primary purpose of the group is to advise the director of the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation on funding for eligible grant projects under the Snowmobile Trails Grant Program. The Snowmobile Trails Grant Program is funded through legislative authorization to receive funds from snowmobile point-of-sale registration fees. These funds are used to support snowmobile trail development and maintenance.

(From What’s Up? by Peg Tileston)

STATEWIDE LINKS

- **APPLY** Outdoor Recreational Trails Advisory Board recruiting new members: <http://notice.alaska.gov/195957>

SLIGHTLY OFF-TRAIL

- Luc Mehl: Brooks Range Traverse: Part Three of Three: <https://tinyurl.com/y57cpyc7>

NATIONWIDE/WORLDWIDE

NATIONWIDE / INTERNATIONAL LINKS

WEBINARS, MEETINGS, CONFERENCES, TRAINING, ETC.

- For a listing of upcoming trail webinars workshops, conferences, and other meetings, see the American Trails calendar at: www.americantrails.org/Calendar.html

TRAILS-RELATED NEWSLETTERS

- American Trails news publications: <http://www.americantrails.org/trailtracks/index.html>

VOLUNTEER

- American Hiking Society's Volunteer Vacations: <http://tinyurl.com/ydh95kp8>
- Volunteer Stewardship Tools: www.americantrails.org/resources/volunteer-stewardship-tools
- American Trails [Volunteer Portal: www.americantrails.org/connect/volunteer](http://www.americantrails.org/connect/volunteer)
- [Conservation International](http://www.conservationalinternational.org) VIP newsletter (October): <http://tinyurl.com/y4czybqt>
- American Hiking Society's 2020 Alternative Spring Break schedule: <http://tinyurl.com/yxbnlema>
- Alternative Spring Break Scholarship (applications due Nov 15): <https://tinyurl.com/y436r6z5>

ADVOCATE

- Tell Congress to Protect, Preserve, and Expand Trails and Public Lands: <https://tinyurl.com/y653vuo2>

TRAIL GUIDES

- 4 Heart-Pumping Mountain Bike Trails in Pennsylvania: <http://tinyurl.com/yxjq9jry>
- Historic hikes: 4 must-visit trails for history buffs: <https://tinyurl.com/y4u8l2co>
- Long Island horseback riding trails for families: <https://tinyurl.com/y6qp9alk>

STUDIES

- New Research Finds Public Investment in Trails, Walking and Biking Infrastructure Delivers Potential Economic Benefits of \$138.5 Billion Annually: <https://tinyurl.com/y53gg3qw>
- Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing: <https://tinyurl.com/y23zzaly>
- Actually, you do have enough time to exercise, and here's the data to prove it: <https://tinyurl.com/y5ob7vpe>

OTHER NATIONAL LINKS:

- Should government be able to seize private property to build rec trails? Ohio lawmakers study: <http://tinyurl.com/y34t5w2q>
- The impact of an ATV trail system on the local economy: <http://tinyurl.com/y67jml4m>
- 50 years after fire, Cuyahoga River gets water trail designation: <http://tinyurl.com/y3npbluk>
- When Biking and Bears Don't Mix: <https://tinyurl.com/yymha766>
- U.S. parks and trails rely on a volunteer labor force: <https://tinyurl.com/yxpsxgxw>
- Building faster and prettier backyard (mountain bike) trails (7 min video): <https://tinyurl.com/yy7osr3r>
- Equestrians work with Forest Service, Conservation Corps for effective trail maintenance: <https://tinyurl.com/y5943zfv>

SLIGHTLY OFF-TRAIL

- Endurance Exercise May Be a Speed Bump That Slows Down Alzheimer's: <http://tinyurl.com/yy6ntlz3>
- 9 Books That Will Change How You Look at the Outdoors: <https://tinyurl.com/y56jaxhs>

Interior Trails Newsletter is a free monthly email newsletter written and distributed by Eric Troyer, a lifelong Alaskan and trail user. To submit items, get on or off the mailing list, report problems, or anything else email Eric at fbxtrails@gmail.com. Note: submissions may be also be used in the statewide Alaska Trails newsletter, from which this newsletter is excerpted.

DISCLAIMER: Interior Trails Newsletter is not a product of any organization. However, I am a board member of the Interior Trails Preservation Coalition, a member of several Interior trail user groups, and a member of Alaska Trails and editor of its newsletter.