

# **INTERIOR TRAILS QUARTERLY**

**Dedicated to the preservation and maintenance of trails in interior Alaska**

**December 2013**

## **INTERIORWIDE**

### **PEOPLE SHOULD SPEAK OUT TO SAVE TRAIL FUNDING IN ALASKA**



Trail advocates across Alaska need to take action to save the most important trail funding source in the state.

Gov. Sean Parnell has not yet committed to funding the administration of the Recreational Trails Program. The RTP funnels about \$1.5 million toward trails in Alaska each year. If the state does not pay for administering the RTP, the money will go back to the federal government. This federal program, which is paid for by gas tax from off-road vehicles, has been instrumental in funding trail projects throughout the state.

From 2006 until last year RTP administrative costs were partially defrayed by money from the Alaska Trails Initiative (ATI), a federal program first championed by former Senator Ted Stevens. However, money from the ATI has been spent and now it's up to the state to fully cover the costs, as it did before 2006.

In order to continue the program in Alaska, the governor needs to commit to funding a grant administrator, a program coordinator, an accounting technician, and a part-time GIS specialist.

The program faced an earlier crisis due to legislation changes that came in 2012 when Congress allowed governors to opt out of the program each year. Opting out means the states still get the funds, but they can be diverted to other transportation projects, like highways. Governor Parnell chose not to opt out of the program, but that won't help if the program administration is not funded.

In July, Alaska Trails sent a letter to Gov. Parnell, signed by a dozen trail groups across the state, urging him to continue accepting the RTP and to pay for its administration. While the governor did not opt out of the program, he still has not committed to funding its administration. Please let your voice be heard.

If you do contact the governor, don't forget to mention all the benefits of trails and the RTP, such as increased tourism, healthier citizens, protection of green spaces, access to natural resources, and a 25 percent funding match requirement that leverages even more money for trails. The return on the governor's investment is huge.

#### **LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD**

If you care about trails in Alaska please write the governor and urge him to fully fund administration of the RTP. You can send a letter, (P.O. Box 110001 Juneau, AK 99811-0001), give his office a call (907/465-3500), or send him an email

Below is a partial listing of Interior trail projects recently funded or partially funded by the RTP:

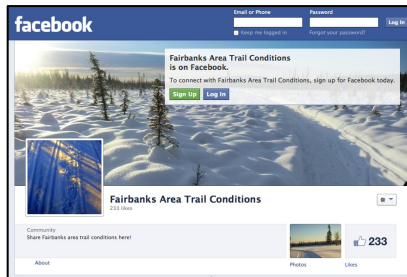
- Trailhead parking lot construction and trail hardening for Isberg Recreation Area near Fairbanks
- Construction of several trails in the Chena River State Recreation Area including the Compeau Trail, the Angel Creek Hillside Trail, and the Mastodon Trail (still under construction).
- Improvements to the Stiles Creek Trail in the Chena River State Recreation Area
- Happy Valley (Ester Dome) Singletrack Trails

*(Photo by Mike Mathers of bikers on RTP-funded Compeau Trail in the Chena River State Recreation Area.)*

## FAIRBANKS AREA

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### NEW FACEBOOK PAGE HIGHLIGHTS FAIRBANKS TRAILS



Someone has started a new Facebook page called “Fairbanks Area Trail Conditions.” It was started on November 25 and some interesting posts were up within a couple of hours. In one about fatbikers using Alaska Dog Mushing Association Trails, Josh Spice talked about the need for bikers to “ride all over the trail, not just in the same track down the center, in order to not create a rut that can hurt dogs and to help evenly pack the trail all across its width.” Another talked about a dog that was

caught in a leg-hold trap on a trail between Coyote Trail and Howling Dog Trail roads in the Goldstream Valley area. Other posts had information and questions about trails and trail conditions.

See the website at: <https://www.facebook.com/fairbankstrails>

### SURVEY TO HELP IMPROVE ESTER DOME SINGLE TRACK TRAILS

The managers of the Happy Valley Singletrack Trails (also known as the Ester Dome Singletrack Trails) have put together a survey to help them better understand who is using the trails and how to better manage them.

The Happy Valley Singletrack Trails are set of trails, consisting of three loops, on the east side of Ester Dome. They are accessed mainly by a parking lot about a mile up Ester Dome Road on the left side of the road. The loops are of different lengths: 6 miles, 3 miles long, and three-quarters of a mile.

See the survey at: [www.surveymonkey.com/s/5VLSDCP](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5VLSDCP)

### DOG MUSHING GROUP STARTS GROOMING RACE TRAILS

The Alaska Dog Musers Association plans to groom their trails this winter despite financial problems.

According to a November 27 listserv message by Mike McCowan, the group’s president, ADMA has a “tentative agreement” with Sam Harrel to groom trails for the season and is working on a “final agreement.” Harrel then posted a listserv message on December 1 saying he had packed the trails through 19 mile, though the trails are “still very bumpy with lots of dips.”

In a September Fairbanks Daily News-Miner story, the ADMA announced that it was financially struggling and would close the Mushers Hall on Farmer's Loop for the winter in order to save money. In the story McCowan said the group planned to continue grooming the trails and holding races, though he was uncertain how the group would accomplish that. See the story here: <http://tinyurl.com/p3z96e9>

Regular users of the trails should buy trail passes and any users should donate to the trail fund at <http://tinyurl.com/pay54x7>. Trail users can also pay daily fee of \$5 by depositing money or a check to the ADMA in the lock box at Mushers Hall.

## **VOLUNTEERS CLEAR TREES FROM AREA TRAILS AFTER STORM**



After a winter storm created havoc in the Interior in November, volunteers and employees came out in hordes to help clear local trails.

The popular Jim Whisenant Trails at Birch Hill Recreation Area probably saw the largest group of volunteers. The storm hit mid-week and volunteer work parties were organized for Friday and Saturday. Only a few people showed up on Friday, but on Saturday more than 70 people showed up to help clear the trails. More than a dozen trees, some more

than 18 inches in diameter, had fallen across the trails, which were also strewn with debris from trees that stayed up. The clean up was so well organized that the volunteer crews, which gathered at 9 am, were thanked and sent home just after noon. Some lights and light cables were torn down or otherwise damaged in the storm. Those might remain that way until next summer, so some trails, such as Roller Coaster, may not be lighted as they have been in past winters.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks trails were also hit hard by the storm. More than 50 trees, big and small, were in and across the trails. UAF crew pretty much had everything cleared up by Saturday. Some lights were damaged by the storm and will be repaired as soon as possible.

Tim Mowry, of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, did a story about the trail clearing efforts: <http://tinyurl.com/kudqbmj>

According to the new Facebook page "Fairbanks Area Trail Conditions," Cort Zachel cleared some big trees that were blocking the O'Connor Creek Trail, though the post didn't indicate whether those trees fell during the storm or before.

### **FAIRBANKS AREA LINKS**

- Wild & Scenic Film Festival comes to Fairbanks: <http://tinyurl.com/qzk7832>

## **CHENA HOT SPRINGS ROAD**

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### **CORRIDOR PREPPED FOR STILES CREEK EXTENSION TRAIL**

Work is continuing on a realignment of the Stiles Creek Extension Trail in the Chena River State Recreation Area. The northern office of the State Parks and Recreation has cleared a corridor and will begin dirt work next summer. The office hopes to have the trail finished by the fall.



The 4.5-mile realignment of the motorized multi-use trail will move it from a fall-line alignment to one that will have grades no more than 8 percent. The old trail was unsafe and too steep to groom in the winter. About six years ago, a rider on a 4-wheeler was injured when he flipped his machine on the trail.

The extension trail comes off of the popular Stiles Creek Trail at about Mile 10 and connects to the Chena Hot Springs Winter Trail and Chena Hot Springs Road at Mile 41.6. Once finished it will add another loop option to the Stiles Creek Trail. State parks is considering building a public use cabin along the extension, though no definite plans have been set.

Fixing the trail is the last in a series of projects to realign or otherwise repair motorized multi-use trails in the recreation area that

were not originally built to modern, sustainable standards.

*(From Brooks Ludwig email; Park Specialist Brian Charlton on the new trail corridor; photo from State Parks.)*

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## STATEWIDE

### **BLM EXTENDS COMMENT PERIODS FOR TWO PLANS**

The Bureau of Land Management has extended comment periods for two Resource Management Plans (RMP) due to the recent federal government shutdown. The scoping periods for both the Central Yukon RMP and the Bering Sea Western Interior RMP are now open until January 17, 2014. Public meetings for the plans will be held in December. For more information see the websites of the Central Yukon RMP (<http://tinyurl.com/kcjlpro>) and the Bering Sea Western Interior RMP (<http://tinyurl.com/mq3ydul>) or just go the BLM Alaska home page ([www.blm.gov/ak/st/en.html](http://www.blm.gov/ak/st/en.html)).

### **DATES SET FOR 2014 ALASKA TRAILS STATEWIDE CONFERENCE**

The Alaska Trails Statewide Trail Conference will be held April 24-26 at Alaska Pacific University (APU) in Anchorage. Registration information and agenda to follow soon. Alaska Trails is still seeking volunteers to help with the conference. Please call or e-mail the Alaska Trails office ([907-334-8049](tel:907-334-8049); [office@alaska-trails.org](mailto:office@alaska-trails.org)) to volunteer.

### **ALASKA TRAILS HAS INFORMATION ON STATEWIDE TRAILS**

Alaska Trails has an online database of trail guides and other trail-related information found on the Internet. The information is broken down into folders based on regions including statewide, Southeast, Southcentral, and Interior. Clicking on a folder gives a user more folders from which to choose.

The online trail maps are extremely varied. Some are produced by government agencies, such as the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation or the National Park Service, while others are produced by private groups or individuals, such as TrailMapper, a statewide resource that allows users to add their own trails and descriptions.

People interested in exploring new trails to will find an abundance of resources at their fingertips. See the database at: <http://www.alaska-trails.org/cgi/otg/trailguide.cgi>

## STATE CONDUCTING SUSITNA RIVER USER SURVEY

The State of Alaska has contracted with URS / Environmental Resources Management (ERM) to conduct a survey of individuals recreating on the Susitna River. This survey is part of the environmental studies being conducted for the proposed Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project.

To take the survey, go to: [www.susitnariversurvey.com](http://www.susitnariversurvey.com). Respondents completing a survey will be entered into a drawing for a \$250 gift certificate redeemable at Amazon.com or Cabela's. Your responses to the survey will be kept completely confidential. If you have any questions about completing this survey please contact Erik Steimle at [erik.steimle@erm.com](mailto:erik.steimle@erm.com).

*(From What's Up? by Peg Tileston)*

## STATEWIDE TRAILS-RELATED NEWSLETTERS

- Alaska Public Lands Update: <http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/cacfa/>
- State Parks' Eagle Watch: <http://tinyurl.com/qxdcshg>

## STATEWIDE LINKS

- Trails are well represented in all categories in the Alaska Sports Hall of Fame Class of 2014 election. Voting will close at midnight on December 4: <http://tinyurl.com/lbl2nmw>
- 300 miles across Alaska's North Slope to the Arctic Ocean: <http://tinyurl.com/lz87725>
- An argument by Craig Medred for getting kids moving (including on trails): <http://tinyurl.com/kalg3o6>
- Argentina to Alaska on horses, much of the trip on trails: <http://tinyurl.com/knh2hmf>
- The Kachemak Bay Water Trail named trail of the month in Conservation + Recreation: <http://tinyurl.com/n5duuxf>
- Halloween Hustle inaugurates new multi-use trail in Homer area: <http://tinyurl.com/mu8m5nm>
- Outdoor Explorer looks into the history of the Crow Pass Trail: <http://tinyurl.com/knb4fsv>
- More trail options available for recreational use on Kenai Peninsula: <http://tinyurl.com/mm3edrv>
- Loose dogs a danger on local Soldotna trails: <http://tinyurl.com/l36beyc>
- Alaska Huts reservations are now on-line: <http://www.alaskahuts.org>
- Matanuska Greenbelt now has almost 100 posts with almost 300 signs: <http://tinyurl.com/m5rnpff>
- Outdoor Explorer takes a look at public-use cabins, mostly in Southcentral: <http://tinyurl.com/lfmuftw>
- Dog owners, trappers come together for "Sharing Juneau's Trails" presentation: <http://tinyurl.com/n3mxfjz>
- Carstensen releases book on Juneau trails: <http://tinyurl.com/pzas2xh>
- DOT project would add 'cycle tracks' to Egan Drive: <http://tinyurl.com/qgj8g87>
- On the Trails: Wanderings in early November: <http://tinyurl.com/p26mzvc>
- On the Trails: Cranberries: <http://tinyurl.com/lwspzny>
- Outdoor Explorer: Long-Range Snow Machine Expeditions: <http://tinyurl.com/oo4tmpk>
- Tree thinning will make trails a bit more scenic: <http://tinyurl.com/ohm5h7o>

## NATIONWIDE

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### NATIONWIDE LINKS

#### MEETINGS, CONFERENCES, TRAINING, ETC.

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

#### RECENT TRAILS E-NEWSLETTERS

- Rails-to-Trails Conservancy (November 2013): <http://tinyurl.com/lfa95ua>
- American Trails (November 2013): <http://tinyurl.com/lfjkhog>
- National Park Service's *Conservation + Recreation* (October): <http://tinyurl.com/n5duuxf>

#### OTHER LINKS:

- Britain is experimenting with a glowing, seemingly self-aware bike path: <http://tinyurl.com/luo2g8v>
- Do trail (running) races result in unnecessary damage to the environment?: <http://tinyurl.com/kxquarj>
- 10 best urban hiking trails in America: <http://tinyurl.com/o3t25do>
- Elements for a good trail contract (also good for writing trail grants): <http://tinyurl.com/khp2g6u>
- Arizona User Groups Cooperate And Compete On Trail Day: <http://tinyurl.com/nodj86n>
- Smartphone app gets some blame for illegal trails near San Diego: <http://tinyurl.com/kq2zclh>

## REGULAR NOTICES

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### TRAIL EASEMENT MIGHT LOWER YOUR PROPERTY TAX

If you've got a recreational trail running across your property that is open to the public, you may qualify for a reduced property tax.

State law requires that land subject to a public recreational use easement (which can include trails) must be assessed at its true value. This recognizes that such easements restrict what a landowner can do with the property subject to the easement. (See AS 29.45.062 and AS 34.17.100. Find Alaska Statutes at [www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folio.asp](http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/folio.asp).)

However, the land or trail in question must have a legal easement. Granting an easement to the state is free and fairly easy. Download the two-page "Public Recreation Easement" form under the "Land Forms" tab at <http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/forms/>. Granting the easement will also give the landowner tort and liability immunity (AS 34.17.055).

If you think you may qualify for a property tax reduction due to this law, contact your local government's Assessing Department.

### COMPREHENSIVE TRAIL PLAN HELPS PRESERVE TRAILS

If you've got a trail you like and you're not sure if it's protected for future use by the public, check to see if it's included in the Fairbanks borough's Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan.

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The plan was first adopted more than 20 years ago and trails are added to it regularly. If your favorite trail is not included in the plan then you should strongly consider getting it added. The plan is one of the best ways to protect a trail from being lost to development. To find out more about the plan and how to get a trail added contact Borough Trails Coordinator Tom Hancock (459-7401; [thancock@co.fairbanks.ak.us](mailto:thancock@co.fairbanks.ak.us)).

Another way to find out about the trails plan is to attend a borough Trails Advisory Commission meeting or contact one of the members (see info below).

## **BORO TRAILS ADVISORY COMMISSION MEETS MONTHLY**

The Fairbanks borough's Trails Advisory Commission (TAC) meets the second Tuesday of each month in the Pioneer Hall Lobby at Pioneer Park, at 6 p.m. unless otherwise announced. For further information, contact the Parks and Recreation Dept. at 459-1070 or email [parks@co.fairbanks.ak.us](mailto:parks@co.fairbanks.ak.us).

The commission advises the borough government on matters relating to trails within the borough, especially relating to the Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan. A list of TAC members can be downloaded at <http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/Boards/trailscomm-members.pdf>.

## **KEEP TRACK OF LAND USE PLANS FOR TRAILS IMPACT**



The state Department of Natural Resources has several plans and studies underway across the state that affect how the state deals with its lands. Often this includes land and water trails. These plans and studies have opportunities for public comment.

Take a look at the planning web page for the Division of Land, Water, and Mining (<http://dnr.alaska.gov/mlw/planning/>). If you see a plan or study that affects an area with trails important to you, please look into opportunities for public comment.

## **FORAKER GROUP OFFERS CLASSES FOR NON-PROFITS**



The Foraker Group, which is dedicated to strengthening Alaska's non-profits, offers classes about the proper workings of non-profit groups, which include many trail and trail user groups. If you are a member or employee of a non-profit group consider taking one of the classes, which are offered in several communities and statewide by teleconference. For more information visit the Foraker Group website ([www.forakergroup.org/](http://www.forakergroup.org/)) or call 907/743-1200 or (toll free) 877/834-5003.

## **LINKS TO INTERIOR TRAIL USER GROUPS**

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### Dog mushing groups

Alaska Dog Mushers Association: [www.sleddog.org/](http://www.sleddog.org/)

Alaska Skijoring and Pulk Association: [www.alaskaskijoring.org/](http://www.alaskaskijoring.org/)

Two Rivers Dog Mushers Association: [www.trdma.org/](http://www.trdma.org/)

### Misc.

Alaska Outdoor Council: [www.alaskaoutdoorcouncil.org/](http://www.alaskaoutdoorcouncil.org/)

Alaska Trappers Association: [www.alaskatrappers.org/](http://www.alaskatrappers.org/)

Arctic Audubon Society: [www.arcticaudubon.org/](http://www.arcticaudubon.org/)

Chena Flats Greenbelt Project: <http://interioraklandtrust.org/chena-flats-greenbelt-project/>  
 Delta Nordic/Ski Trail Club: <http://deltanordicskitrail.ning.com>  
 Ester Trails Committee: [www.estercommunity.org/committees/trails.html](http://www.estercommunity.org/committees/trails.html)  
 Fairbanks Cycle Club: [www.fairbankscycleclub.org/](http://www.fairbankscycleclub.org/)  
 Fairbanks Mountaineers: [www.meetup.com/FairbanksAreaMountaineers/](http://www.meetup.com/FairbanksAreaMountaineers/)  
 Friends of Creamers Field: [www.creamersfield.org/Welcome.html](http://www.creamersfield.org/Welcome.html)  
 Fairbanks Paddlers: [www.fairbankspaddlers.org/](http://www.fairbankspaddlers.org/)  
 Interior Alaska Trail Riders Association (for horseback riders): [www.ptialaska.net/~lnorth/](http://www.ptialaska.net/~lnorth/)  
 Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks: <http://www.nscfairbanks.org/>  
 Running Club North: [www.runningclubnorth.org/](http://www.runningclubnorth.org/)

#### Mountain climbing groups

Alaska Alpine Club: [www.alaska-alpine-club.com](http://www.alaska-alpine-club.com)  
 Alaskan Alpine Club: [www.alaskanalpineclub.org/](http://www.alaskanalpineclub.org/)

#### Off-road groups

Arctic Offroad: [www.arcticoffroad.com/](http://www.arcticoffroad.com/)  
 Fairbanks Offroad Lions Club: [www.fairbanksoffroadlions.com/](http://www.fairbanksoffroadlions.com/)

#### Snowmachine groups

The Fairbanks Snow Travelers: [www.snowtravelers.org/](http://www.snowtravelers.org/)

#### University of Alaska Fairbanks-related

UAF Trails Club: <https://sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/trails/>  
 UAF Outdoor Adventures: [www.uaf.edu/outdoor/](http://www.uaf.edu/outdoor/)  
 UAF North Campus Recreation: <http://facilities.alaska.edu/uaf/ncampus/index.cfm>

Interior Trails Quarterly is a free email newsletter that comes out four times a year: March, June, September, and December. ITQ Action Updates come out once a month in between regular editions of the ITQ. Both are 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](mailto:fbxtrails@gmail.com). Note: submissions may also be used in the statewide Alaska Trails newsletter.

**DISCLAIMER:** Interior Trails Quarterly and ITQ Action Updates are not products 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.