

ACTION UPDATE

April 2015

INTERIORWIDE

SNOWMOBILE TRAILS PROGRAM NOT INCLUDED IN BUDGET

Trail users from across the Interior who believe the Snowmobile Trails Program is an important part of the state's budget need to let their legislators know right away.

Gov. Bill Walker did not include the program in his budget. Normally this time of year grant applications start becoming available on April 1, but a notice on the program's web page states: "Currently no new grant applications are being accepted."

Funding to administer the state's other big trails fund, the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), is still in the budget, according to Darcy Harris, the state trails coordinator. Last year, it appeared for a time that then-Gov. Sean Parnell might not fund administration of the RTP. After a vigorous lobbying campaign by trail groups, Parnell including administration funds in his budget. Groups continued to lobby to make sure the state legislature kept those funds in the budget.

A similar lobbying campaign is needed to save the Snowmobile Trails Program, which benefits more than snowmachiners.

The Snowmobile Trail Program has two main parts. One is the Grooming Pool, which pays for grooming and marking of snowmachine trails in a variety of places in interior and southcentral Alaska, as well as the Juneau area. The other part of the program provides grants for trail easement acquisition, development and maintenance of trails and trail-related facilities for snowmobile use, and for safety and educational programs. Matching funds are required for all except the safety and educational programs.

Winter trail grooming benefits any winter users who use those trails. Grooming in the Interior from the Grooming Pool happens in the Chena River State Recreation Area, along the Yukon Quest Trail, and along the Denali Highway. Trail easement acquisition, trail maintenance, and trail-related facilities can benefit other trail users, even in summer.

Funding for the two programs come from different places. Funding for administration of the RTP comes from state general funds, but the actual grant money comes from a portion of the federal gasoline tax. If money for RTP administration hadn't been restored last year, the grant money would have gone back to the federal government.

Funding for the Snowmobile Trails Program comes from registration fees paid by snowmobile owners. However, the program is not guaranteed each year and must be included in the state budget. If the program is cut the money will be dispersed into the state's general fund. The chances that any of it will be used for any type of trails are slim.

The state Department of Natural Resources decides how to distribute the Snowmobile Trail Program funds, but it is guided by the Snowmobile Trails Advisory Council (SnowTRAC), which reviews funding requests and makes recommendations.

Some snowmobile groups in Alaska, including the Fairbanks Snow Travelers (FST), have been unhappy with how the Snowmobile Trail Program funds have been distributed and used. Some groups, such as the FST, would like to see SnowTRAC become a governor's board, rather than a part of the state parks department.

However, dissatisfaction with how funds are used shouldn't get in the way of supporting the existence of the program. If you use snowmachine trails, whether in winter or summer, speak out now. Let your legislator know that you want the Snowmobile Trails Program included in the state budget. Contact information for senators and representatives can be found at: <http://w3.legis.state.ak.us/>

SPRING TRAILS ARE VULNERABLE, PLEASE USE WITH CARE

Please keep in mind how your trail activities might affect other trail users, especially in the spring.

Early in spring snow trails are still usable, but soft snow trails can easily be rutted or otherwise damaged. As snow melts and the ground thaws, the trails become extremely muddy. Using really muddy trails can result in ruts that stay all summer when the trails dry out. Those ruts can make the trails difficult to use all summer and help create erosion by keeping water on the trails.

Early season damage of trails is a recurring problem. Many people are chomping at the bit to get outside in the sunshine. And some people love to get as muddy as they can while out on the trails. But with a little thought this problem can be greatly reduced.

- **Try to be patient.** Stay off the trails if you are damaging them. If you are unsure if a trail is ready to be used, check it out with the commitment to turn back if you are doing too much damage.
- **Choose low impact.** If you use the trails in several different ways, choose the method of travel that will cause the least amount of damage if you do run into soft snow or mud.
- **Pick your trails carefully.** To avoid muddy sections, use well-drained trails with lots of southern exposure. They typically dry out the quickest. If you just have to get muddy, please limit your activities to trails that are already thrashed. A little more damage probably won't make a big difference, but a trail in nice shape can be damaged for a season in a hurry.

If we all head out onto the trails with other users in mind, everyone will have a better trail experience.

(Unfortunately, at least one ATV has recently been venturing farther and farther out onto the groomed Alaska Dog Mushing Association trails between Farmer's Loop and College roads. ATVs can cause a lot of damage to soft snow. Please spread the word to any ATVers you know to please use trails in a way that doesn't ruin them for other users.)

NATIONAL TRAILS DAY COMING UP IN JUNE

Two Alaska events are already registered for American Hiking Society's National Trails Day on Saturday, June 6, but it would be great to see more.

If you are interested in leading or organizing an event, visit www.nationaltrailsday.org for information on how to host an event, where to register an event, and how to subscribe for updates.

National Trails Day is the country's largest celebration of trails. Events will take place in every state across the country and will include hikes, biking and horseback rides, paddling trips, birdwatching, geocaching, gear demonstrations, stewardship projects and more.

The two registered Alaska events are a resource restoration and trail work party at Denali National Park (<http://tinyurl.com/nv4nwpc>) and an event with several activities at Kachemak Bay State Park (www.nationaltrailsday.org/events/trailsday/).

ALASKA TRAILS HAS TOOL TRAILER READY FOR PROJECTS

As you start planning trail building and maintenance projects, remember that Alaska Trails has a mobile tool cache available in the Fairbanks area to loan to organized trail groups in the Interior. The trailers were upgraded recently and have many trail tools including mcleods, pulaskis, rakes, gloves, and much, much more. If you would like to borrow one of the caches, please contact *Geoffrey Orth* (gcorth@straydogs.us)

INTERIORWIDE LINKS

- Ski mountaineering class takes on Castner Glacier: <http://tinyurl.com/lfq9e6r>
- Exclusive Paving gets contract to upgrade Plack Road (separate path not included in project): <http://tinyurl.com/o9sw6wj>

STATEWIDE

STATEWIDE TRAILS CONFERENCE HAPPENS THIS MONTH

There is still time to register for the 2015 Statewide Trails Conference, which will be held April 23-25 in Wasilla.

The conference will be held at the Curtis D. Menard Memorial Sports Center (1001 S. Mack Drive.). To find the center, turn south off the Parks Highway at the intersection of Church Road and S. Mack Drive. For out-of-town participants, Alaska Trails has arranged for a discounted rate at the Grand View Inn and Suites, close by the conference.

To register and find out details about lodging and the conference please see: www.alaska-trails.org/trail_teachers/2015/conf.shtml

"Partnership – Working Together for Alaska Trails" is the theme of this year's trails conference, which is presented by Alaska Trails with help from the Mat-Su Health

Foundation, the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation, ConocoPhillips, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Alaska Recreation and Park Association.

This year's conference introduces the first-ever Trail Olympics! On the first day of the conference, teams will work together as they compete against other teams to see who can accomplish a variety of trail-building skills.

Before the conference, a two-day workshop on trail design and layout will be taught by Mike Shields April 21 and 22. To find out more contact Alaska Trails ([907/334-8049](tel:9073348049); office@alaska-trails.org) and see this flyer: www.alaska-trails.org/trail_teachers/2015/preconference_2015.pdf.

STATEWIDE TRAILS AND PUBLIC-LANDS RELATED NEWSLETTERS

- Eagle Watch, Alaska State Parks (March): <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/> (> Newsroom)
- Alaska Lands Update (February): <http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/cacfa/newsletters2.html>

STATEWIDE LINKS

- Call '8,000 Miles Across Alaska' an instant classic of Alaska outdoors literature: <http://tinyurl.com/mz6mev5>
- Too cold? Too snowy? Too much?: www.adn.com/article/20150329/too-cold-too-snowy-too-much
- Former UAF professor capturing part of Iditarod trail for Google: <http://tinyurl.com/ngmkm4b>
- Amendment 13 to the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) adopted; Amendment 14 open for public comment: <http://tinyurl.com/m74wwqr>

Southeast links

- A Favorite Trail for Every Situation: <http://tinyurl.com/ppx943k>

Southcentral links

- Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers Bike Film Fest fundraiser set for April 10: <http://tinyurl.com/og67dqq>
- As state eases Hatcher Pass snowmachine ban, debate rages on: <http://tinyurl.com/otxa9ex>
- Trapping, recreation collide in Cooper Landing: <http://tinyurl.com/mfaocv4>
- Game board kills proposed Kenai Peninsula trailside trapping ban: <http://tinyurl.com/k8enctc>
- Craving the crust: Spring cycling offers the best of winter, summer: <http://tinyurl.com/lacm4op>
- Alaska Board of Game takes no action on Kincaid Park moose hunt plan: <http://tinyurl.com/kdhulyg>

- Arctic to Indian traverse a sky-high tradition: <http://coast-magazine.com/site/spring-soujourn>
- Hiking 101: <http://www.adn.com/article/20150322/hiking-101>
- DOT diverts \$1.3M meant for Anchorage bike infrastructure to other projects: <http://tinyurl.com/pxvr8de>
- Taking to the trails: Choose your method: ski, bike, foot, or train: <http://tinyurl.com/oq8l7yv>

CORRECTION

In the Statewide section of the March issue of this newsletter in an article about Lisa Holzapfel's retirement, I incorrectly included that she served as the the Alaska Trails vice president for a time. Lisa served on the Alaska Trails board but only as a non-voting member because of her federal position.

NATIONWIDE

ACTION SOUGHT ON PROGRAM THAT FUNDS TRAILS

Congress is preparing to take action on a new federal transportation bill. Given the shortfall of federal transportation dollars, some members of Congress are already questioning why the federal government provides any funding for bicycling and walking.

We need your help to make sure that Congress doesn't cut funding to help local communities build sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, trails and more. Please ask your senator to co-sponsor S. 705, The Transportation Alternatives Program Improvement Act.

The Transportation Alternatives Program provides hundreds of millions of dollars each year to local communities to invest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. It's the only federal program specifically focused on local transportation priorities. S. 705, the Transportation Alternatives Program Improvement Act, written by Sens. Thad Cochran (R-MS) and Ben Cardin (D-MD), makes changes to the program to make it more effective and easier for local governments to use.

For decades, our federal transportation system has focused the bulk of its resources on building roads, leaving many of our communities with few transportation options and rising safety risks for people bicycling and walking. More and more Americans want options for bicycling, walking and transit to live healthier and safer lives. More and more cities and towns are clamoring for more facilities for biking and walking to make their communities more attractive to residents and to improve their economies. S. 705 would help make sure that Congress continues to invest a small share of federal transportation dollars in these types of projects.

Ask your Senators to cosponsor S. 705, the Transportation Alternatives Program Improvement Act, to ensure that our federal transportation system continues to provide funding for bicycling and walking.

Click this link to log in and send your message:

<https://www.voterve.net/link/target/bikeleague/JKGWfRGbt.aspx>

(From League of American Bicyclists email)

GROUP KICKS OFF 2015 VOLUNTEER TRAIL WORK SEASON

Registration has opened for the 2015 American Hiking Society volunteer season and the group is excited to offer many diverse trail maintenance projects across the country. The 2015 Volunteer Vacations schedule provides both backpacking and day hiking options, a variety of difficulty levels, and indoor and outdoor accommodations- to suit all experience levels and backgrounds. No prior trail maintenance experience is required, just the willingness to get a little dirty and give back to the hiking trails you love. Find out more at: <http://www.americanhiking.org/em-volunteer-vacations/>

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
- Registration for the International Trails Symposium (May 17-20) is now open: <http://tinyurl.com/m39j8y8>

RECENT TRAILS-RELATED E-NEWSLETTERS

- Rails-To-Trails Conservancy (March): <http://tinyurl.com/lm988b7>

STUDIES/REPORTS:

- Infographic: Active Kids Learn Better: <http://tinyurl.com/qgrlgok>
- Counting Pedestrians and Bicyclists to Better Manage the Transportation System: A Case Study from Minnesota: <http://tinyurl.com/ovesegn>
- Green infrastructure and the Sustainable Communities Initiative: <http://tinyurl.com/on2avsw>

OTHER NATIONAL LINKS:

- Surge In Long Distance Hiking Spurs Interest In Creating New Trails: <http://tinyurl.com/o84plme>
- Connecting a Town with Singletrack Sidewalks: <http://tinyurl.com/py3elou>
- New York County Launches Mobile Apps To Promote Trail Tourism: <http://tinyurl.com/nmvokeg>
- Let's Get Every Kid in a Park: <http://tinyurl.com/l23stdm>
- Saving Ancient Trails in Hawaii: www.jpri.org/publications/critiques/critique_XXI_3.html
- Hiker-biker clash reignites tension on Marin trails: <http://tinyurl.com/pgyfh66>
- Idaho bill that would make protecting bike trails harder has hearing Tuesday: <http://tinyurl.com/ma9x5bt>
- Designation would put Texas trails on the national map: <http://tinyurl.com/oor462v>
- Hiking the Unfinished (Continental Divide) Trail: <http://tinyurl.com/q997lqk>

- Video: Riding the White Line – vertigo inducing trail provides challenge: <http://tinyurl.com/l6gongc>
- FHWA's *Strategic Agenda for Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation* webinar: <http://tinyurl.com/jvu34cj>
- More rescues at Oahu's more dangerous ridge trails: <http://tinyurl.com/o5nm6fn>
- 5 best bike trails near Seattle: <http://tinyurl.com/or8ab7v>
- 10Best: American trails for a memorable spring hike: <http://tinyurl.com/lv9gs58>
- Opinion: Confessions of a trail dumb downer: <http://tinyurl.com/n5usef3>
- Bill in Montana could create snowmobile fees to fund grooming trails: <http://tinyurl.com/qe839ce>
- Congressional allies champion Recreational Trails Program: <http://tinyurl.com/qfyh5yl>
- CCC Of Michigan Moves From Printed Maps To Flash Drives And Mobile Apps: <http://tinyurl.com/p866bff>
- INOHVAA Board Members Agree: Learning To Ride Is A Big Plus For State Program Managers: <http://tinyurl.com/pnvw9ka>

SLIGHTLY OFF-TRAIL:

- 12 unconventional commutes from around the world: <http://tinyurl.com/qzeuz2a>
- Traffic Sign in Norway Encourages People to Walk Silly!: <http://tinyurl.com/my4w38g>
- These revolutionary bike lanes could change cities for the better: <http://tinyurl.com/pc66n77>
- Farthest distance on a snowmobile on water: <http://tinyurl.com/ku75y5e>
- Camera lost on Alaska hiking trail returns to Maine: <http://tinyurl.com/nmay5oy>

Interior Trails Quarterly is a free email newsletter than 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. Note: submissions may be 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.