



INTERIOR TRAILS PRESERVATION COALITION

ITPC

Friday, January 7, 2011

Sen. Lisa Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Sen. Murkowski,

We urge you to fight for the Recreational Trails Program, which is now under attack from people who would like to see it cut. The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) should be continued out of a sense of vision for the future and a sense of fairness. This program provides enormous benefit to Alaska and the nation, is funded fairly, and has a great deal of local control.

The RTP is tremendously beneficial to Alaska and the nation. Properly built and maintained trails help get people outside and keep them active. Such activity keeps them physically and mentally healthy. In a world with increasing rates of obesity, mental illness, and other ailments, we need to provide people with opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles. Using trails is a great way to stay healthy. Trails also help us reduce our use of fossil fuels and reduce wear and tear on roads by allowing people to use non-motorized forms of transportation.

The variety of trail projects supported by the RTP has been tremendous in the Interior. Recent projects funded by this program include the Ester Dome Singletrack Project (built to attract mountain bikers but open to other uses), the Angel Creek Valley Hillside Trail (a multi-use, motorized trail that provides year-round access to two very popular public use cabins), and trail hardening of the 100-Mile Loop Trail through the Isberg Recreation Area. We could list many more projects and together they provide a plethora of benefits to a wide variety of people across the Interior.

Besides providing benefits now and into the future, the RTP is fair. The program is funded by federal taxes on gasoline purchased for off-road motorized vehicles. Now some groups and politicians want *all* gas taxes to pay only for highway infrastructure. We feel this is immensely unfair. Gas taxes paid for trail use should go toward trail maintenance and construction.

The RTP is also attractive because it provides a lot of local control. Funds collected for the RTP are given back to states to decide how to distribute. While states have to follow certain guidelines, state governments have a lot of latitude in determining how to use those funds.

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In Alaska, the Outdoor Recreation and Trails Advisory Board distributes Alaska's share of the funding through a competitive process open to private nonprofit groups, state government divisions, and local governments. The competition has resulted in projects that are high quality, have a lot of local support, and are well thought out. The ability of nonprofit groups to compete for these funds, keeps the citizenry involved in trail construction and maintenance throughout the state and brings many volunteers into the process.

For all these reasons, we ask that you fight for the continued existence of the Recreational Trails Program. And please reject any attempt by RTP opponents to reduce funding of the program. The RTP is government program that is fairly funded, locally distributed, and highly beneficial. It needs to be preserved.

Sincerely,

Eric Troyer
Vice President