

2025 Alaska Trails Statewide Conference Presenters

(in order of appearance)

Wednesday, April 23



Mike Shields – Trail Consultant

Mike Shields started working on trails in 1960 at Olympic National Park. A graduate of the University of Idaho, in his NPS career he's been a Crew Leader, Ranger, Roads Foreman, Maintenance Mechanic, Trails Foreman, and Facility Manager, but primarily and always a trailman, and has worked trails in Olympic, Big Bend, Canyonlands, Natural Bridges, North Cascades, Kings Canyon, Rocky Mountain, and Denali. Two of those parks (Canyonlands, North Cascades) were brand new and he helped "invent" the trail systems in both. Since his retirement as Denali's Chief of Maintenance in late 1996 he has been a small contractor providing training, trail layout, and technical consulting services from Alaska to West Texas and California to Ohio. In 2010 he received American Trails "State Trail Worker Award" (Alaska) for his efforts at training and mentoring younger folks, and in 2015 the Professional Trail Builders Assn "R.H. Bell Lifetime Achievement Award" for excellence in trail design and construction.

Thursday, April 24



Pete Didishiem – Senior Director, Advocacy-Natural Resources Council of Maine

Pete brings 40 years of professional experience in senior-level policy making to his work at NRCM, where he provides overall management and direction for NRCM's advocacy program. Pete works with NRCM's advocacy staff on legislative and issue campaigns, research and analysis, and lobbying and public outreach. Prior to starting at NRCM in 1996, Pete was Chief of Staff for U.S. Congressman George Brown, Jr. (D-CA), Deputy Chief of Staff of the House Science Committee, and Special Assistant to U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary. He holds a B.A. from Williams College and a master's from the Harvard Kennedy School. He lives with his wife in Brunswick, loves the Maine outdoors, and is always happy when his two adult sons return to Maine for visits.



Al Swett – Director of Operations, Maine Snowmobile Association



Alan McClain – Outdoor Recreation Trail Specialist, Mat-Su Borough

Alan has been working with the Mat-Su Borough Trail Crew since 2016 and has been the Outdoor Recreation Trail Specialist since 2017. In the summer, he oversees a Crew of 12 hardworking people as they build and maintain trails managed by the Mat-Su Borough. In the winter he helps to snowplow the trailheads, grooms trails, removes downed trees, and plans for the summer season.

Alan has lived in Alaska since 1998. In addition to working for the Mat-Su Borough, he has been the Program Director for an indoor climbing gym in Wasilla, served on the Mat Su Ski Club Jr. Nordic Advisory Committee, and oversaw the Recreation and Student Leadership Development programs at the Alaska Job Corps Center in Palmer. He also worked in outdoor retail, construction, and commercial fishing on Kodiak Island. In addition to working in various capacities in Alaska, Alan has guided juvenile felons in a wilderness therapy program in Southern Utah, and led trips for “at risk” youth in Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois, and Colorado. He also worked as a Surveyors Assistant, Summer Camp Counselor, canoe guide, and industrial construction worker in Indiana.

Alan has a Bachelor of Science degree from Indiana University in Outdoor Recreation and Resource Management, where he specialized in Adventure Education. He has had his Wilderness First Responder certification since 2002 and has his S-212 Wildland Fires Chain Saw certification. Alan was the 2024 recipient of the Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation Pathfinder Award. When not at work, Alan enjoys spending time with his family exploring the outdoors and experiencing all that Alaska has to offer.



Lee Hart – Founder Valdez Adventure Alliance, Confluence AK, Alaska Outdoor Alliance

Lee Hart has specialized in being a changemaker in the outdoor, snow sports, bike and adventure travel industries for the past two decades as a communicator and brand strategist. Hart's journalism degree and early work as a newspaper reporter provided a foundation that led to a 20-year career in the outdoor industry, during which she built a successful track record providing marketing, event planning, production services, and media relations for established and emerging national and international brands, NGOs, and destinations. Hart has shared her branding expertise as an invited speaker at adventure travel conferences from Alaska to Colorado, New York and Venezuela. Hart's work in Alaska marries her professional expertise and connections with a fervent belief in the positive impact the outdoor recreation sector can have on state and gateway community economies, as well as the mental and physical benefits that come with recreating outdoors.



Natura Richardson – Executive Director, Island Trails Network

Natura has always lived up to her birth given name, which translated means nature. With a love of the outdoors, she and her husband Michael started their life together in Kodiak in 2009. She worked with Alaskan fisheries for over a decade in fisheries management and research. She started a second career with a focus specific on the Kodiak community, bringing experience in project management, remote field work and logistics, technical writing and reporting, and an extensive Alaska network. After serving as the treasurer on the Island Trails Network board, she took the role of Executive Director in November 2024. She strongly believes great communities need great trails and can frequently be found hiking the local trails.



Jessica Deviche – Forest Service: Partnership and Volunteer Coordinator for the Tongass National Forest

Jess moved to southeast Alaska "for one year" as an AmeriCorps volunteer in 2014. Quickly enchanted by the community and recreational opportunities, she was hooked. Jess worked in secondary education for 9 years. In 2018 and 2019 she spent her summers working for a local non-profit, Outer Coast, as their Service Coordinator taking high school students out to volunteer in the community, with an emphasis on trail work. In 2020 she worked as a summer seasonal for the Forest Service helping to operate the sockeye weir at Redoubt Lake outside of Sitka. In 2023 Jess moved into her current role with the Forest Service as a Tongass National Forest Partnership and Volunteer Coordinator.



Meghan Chamberlain – Recreation Planner, Sitka Ranger District

Meghan is a former corporate marketing manager who changed paths into public lands back in 2018. She's always had an appreciation for public lands and the recreation opportunities they provide. Meghan started her Federal career as a Park Ranger for Glacier National Park in Montana. After 3 years with NPS, she moved over to the US Forest Service with the recreation department of the Flathead Forest - also in Montana. In 2023 she moved to Sitka to join the Sitka Ranger District within the Tongass National Forest.



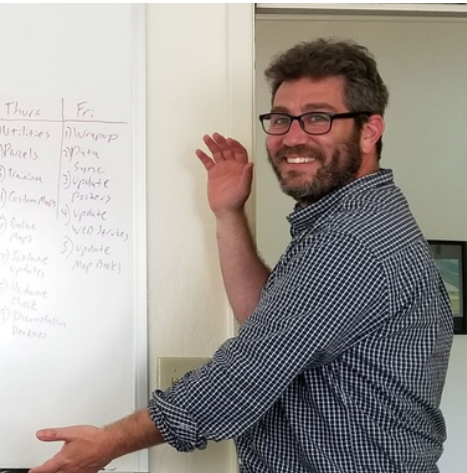
Ben Hughey – Executive Director, Sitka Trail Works

Ben launched his career in natural resources at Sitka Trail Works as a crew member in 2006, before three seasons on the Sitka Ranger District cabin and trail crew. After college, Ben worked in land conservation and outdoor recreation planning in the Cascades from Seattle for six years. A post-Master's fellowship took Ben to the other Washington in 2019, where he served as legislative staff for Senator Cory Booker. Ben returned home to Sitka during Covid and directed the Sitka Conservation Society's CARES Act jobs program, leading out-of-work Sitkans on recreation and restoration projects. Ben joined Sitka Trail Works at the end of 2020 and became Executive Director in 2021.



Ricky Gease – Director, DNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Ricky Gease is the Director of the DNR Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, a position held since 2019. He has more than 30 years of experience in the outdoor recreation industry in Alaska, and lives in Kenai with his wife Bunny. He is a passionate personal use dip netter each summer for salmon on the Kenai River.



Gary Greenberg – Founder, Alaska Map Company, LLC

Gary Greenberg is the founder of Kenai, Alaska based Alaska Map Company, LLC. Gary is a certified GIS Professional and holds an MBA in information and decision support systems. He has been working on GIS projects throughout the State of Alaska since 2003 and has helped organizations of all sizes to develop systems that meet the highest federal quality standards with minimal resources.



Randy Goodwin – Interior Alaska Trails and Parks Foundation

Randy Goodwin began working for the Bureau of Land Management and helped develop the recreation and trail program in the White Mountains National Recreation Area. Randy worked on statewide issues as the BLM-Alaska statewide program leads for the travel management and transportation planning program, and as the acting recreation program lead. Prior to working for BLM, Randy worked for the National Park Service in Yosemite and the US Forest Service in the Inyo and Chugach National Forests. Randy retired in 2019 and is currently on the board of the non-profit Interior Alaska Trails and Parks Foundation.



Meghan Tabacek – Executive Director, Trail Mix

Meghan (she/her) moved to Juneau in 2019 to attend the University of Alaska Southeast. She graduated May 2021 with a degree in Environmental Studies. As part of the Outdoor Studies Program at UAS, she became familiar with the trails of Juneau and enjoys using them to ski in the winter and hike in the summer. Meghan has been with Trail Mix since May 2020. She spent the summer shoveling gravel, chainsawing fallen trees, and working with her crew. Now, she spends her time coordinating Trail Mix's crews, volunteers, and trail program.



Brandon Drzazgowski – Stream Watch Coordinator at the Kenai Watershed Forum

Brandon Drzazgowski is the Stream Watch Coordinator at the Kenai Watershed Forum. Brandon was born and raised in Michigan, and attended Michigan State University for a double major in Environmental Studies and Sustainability & Sustainable Parks, Recreation, and Tourism with a minor in Environmental Economics. Brandon has enjoyed the outdoors for as long as he can remember, with his favorite hobbies being fishing and hunting. Brandon started as a Kenai Watershed Forum intern in 2021, but has since made the jump to a full time employee and Alaskan, managing the Stream Watch program. Brandon spends most of his time working interacting with various volunteers on projects including trash clean up, education/outreach, and stream bank restoration and protection.

Friday, April 24



John Underwood – President, Happy Trails Inc.

Jon Underwood has had a life-long fascination with trails as a biker, skier, runner, walker, and ATV rider. In 2006 Jon started Happy Trails, Inc. to provide trail design and construction in Alaska. Since then he has designed and built trails all over the state, having so much fun he is astonished when it is sometimes profitable. Jon is past president of the Professional Trail Builders Association.

Go to www.happytrailsak.com to see more.



Mariyam Medovaya – Alaska Long Trail Project Coordinator

Mariyam Medovaya joined the Trails Initiative program of Alaska Trails in 2019. Mariyam brings diverse experience and skills needed for our ambitious initiative. This includes guiding hikes for a local ecotourism business and developing interpretive programs on natural and cultural history of Prince William Sound for the US Forest Service. She has worked in the non-profit world, including positions with the World Wildlife Fund, Center for Sustainable and Cooperative Culture, and the Girdwood Art Institute. Mariyam grew up in Russia and holds MS in Marine Environmental Sciences from Stony Brook University, as well as MA in Cultural Geography from U of Colorado, Boulder.



John Cannella – National Program Manager, National Trails System & National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, Washington Support Office - U.S. National Park Service

For more than 15 years John has valued collaborating and partnering with others across numerous landscapes and communities of our nation through various roles related to the National Trails System. John currently serves as the National Program Manager for the National Trails System & National Wild and Scenic Rivers System Branch in the Partnerships and Civic Engagement Directorate, Washington Support Office, U.S. National Park Service (NPS). Prior to joining the NPS, John worked for other federal agencies, universities, and nonprofit organizations. He has held positions on varied topics that have included trails, rivers, GIS, recreation, natural and cultural resources management, and ecology. John earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from St. Lawrence University, graduated from the NPS Generating Organizational Advancement & Leadership (GOAL) Academy, and received a Master's in Public Administration from the University of New Mexico.



Haley Johnston – Executive Director, Alaska Trails

Haley Johnston joined the staff of Alaska Trails in January 2021 as the Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trail Strategy Project Manager. When that project concluded she transitioned into her role as Trails Initiative Manager and now serves as Alaska Trails' Deputy Director. Prior to her work at Alaska Trails, Haley was the Business Specialist at the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage and spent a decade working in Alaska's adventure tourism industry. Haley passionately believes outdoor recreation is critical to the quality of life in Alaska, the health of our communities and the resilience of the Alaskan economy. When she's not working, Haley spends as much time as possible skiing and hiking on local trails and in Alaska's remote backcountry.



Will Taygan – Executive Director, Chugach Mountain Bike Riders

Raised in Minnesota, Will and his family have lived in Chugiak for over 20 years. Will serves as the Executive Director of the [Chugach Mountain Bike Riders \(CMBR\)](#).

Over the past eight years, Will has led the development of the Mirror Lake Singletrack, Ben's Bike Playground, and has written dozens of grants bringing over a million dollars into Chugiak-Eagle River for trail development.

Will has spearheaded a coalition of Chugiak-Eagle River trail groups to more effectively advocate for local projects, and is looking forward to empowering mountain bikers with a new statewide Alaska Off-Road Cycling Alliance (ORCA).



Hig Higman – Executive Director, Ground Truth Alaska

Co-founder and Executive Director of Ground Truth Trekking, Hig and Erin Mckittrick are responsible for the existence, vision, and ongoing development of the organization. Hig received a PhD in geology from the University of Washington in 2007, following a BA in geology from Carleton College in 1999. Hig grew up in Seldovia, Alaska, where his family moved when he was 8 months old. After graduating from high-school there he spent 13 years in college and grad school, studying glass art, and walking from Seattle to the Aleutians before moving back to Seldovia. He and Erin now live in a yurt a hundred yards from his mother where they're raising their children and running Ground Truth Trekking. Hig and others continue their work on the [Tutka Back Door Trail](#).

Laura Butcher – Nevada Program Manager - Tread Lightly!

Laura Butcher is Tread Lightly!'s Region 4 Program Manager. Laura creates and fosters relationships with the land managers that allow for the implementation of Tread Lightly!'s stewardship, education, and outreach programs. Laura went to the University of Alaska- Fairbanks, earning a bachelor's degree in Emergency Management. Throughout her career she has spent time as a firefighter/paramedic in many areas of Nevada, including wildland fire experience.

When she's not working, Laura enjoys family outings whether it be camping trips or off-roading with her husband, daughter, and their dogs.