


ALASKA LONG TRAIL STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2025-2030

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January 1, 2025

To Alaskans and the Alaska Long Trail Community:

The Alaska Long Trail (AKLT) is a work-in-progress, 500-plus mile multi-modal route connecting trail systems across Alaska, from Seward to Fairbanks. Since 2021, I'm proud to share that Alaska Trails has successfully advocated and secured nearly \$20 million dollars to advance the AKLT. These funds have been used to address the backlog of maintenance in Alaska State Parks and Chugach National Forest, as well as plan and construct new access, trails, and bridges.

With this success, and with the guidance of partners and funders, we set out to determine where we are headed over the next five years. In the fall of 2024, we initiated an AKLT strategic action planning process. We engaged dozens of individuals, organizations, and agency partners to take a critical look at where we are currently situated, what is going well, and what needs improvement.

We learned a lot! We confirmed that there is overall excitement for the AKLT and that Alaska Trails' leadership and advocacy to secure significant project funding has been both successful and valued. Many are inspired by the progress between Seward and Anchorage and look forward to this success, igniting action in other regions of the state.

We also identified work we need to do in other areas of the state to both select the route, communicate with communities, and address opposition. Alaska Trails needs to have better communication tools readily available for those wanting to share details about the AKLT. Finally, Alaska Trails needs to ensure that the AKLT reflects the values of the communities through which it may travel.

We are thrilled to share with you the 2025 – 2030 Strategic Plan for the Alaska Long Trail. The goals and strategies in this document will guide the work of our Staff, Board of Directors, and other project partners for the next five years. We lay our ambitious plans to move the Alaska Long Trail forward toward completion, communicate about the project, continue building support for the project, and ensure that the trail has a sustainable financial plan into the future.

We are looking forward to the next five years successfully advancing the Alaska Long Trail. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us to join in the effort!

Sincerely,

Steve Cleary
Executive Director, Alaska Trails

ALASKA TRAILS

ABOUT US

As a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit, incorporated in the state of Alaska, we provide funding ideas and sources as well as technical assistance for on-the-ground trail related projects and programs such as development, maintenance, easement acquisition, safety, education, and more.



EKLUTNA GOLDEN SHOVEL CELEBRATION - ALASKA TRAILS

OUR MISSION

Building trails for Alaska's people, communities, and economy

OUR VISION

Alaska connected by sustainable trails

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Advocating for trails and access, and building public support
- Building the leaders of tomorrow's trails
- Connecting volunteers to trails through stewardship
- Convening trail users and trail-focused groups to share, partner, and build
- Educating Alaskans on the value of sustainable trails

ALASKA LONG TRAIL

Alaska Trails and partners are working on a multi-braid trail system connecting Fairbanks and Seward. When complete, the AKLT will incorporate a variety of year-round uses (motorized and non-motorized) along different braids. Many sections of the proposed trail already exist or are currently planned, and the route is almost entirely on public lands, reducing complexity and cost.

In addition to the various other programs that Alaska Trails manages, Alaska Trails is leading this ambitious project, while collaborating closely with partners, gateway communities, and local working groups including landowners, residents, businesses, and trail users. Alaska Trails is working alongside partners to determine preferred routes and uses, and long-term solutions for trail maintenance and management.

Other well-known long trails took decades to build and are still not entirely complete. The Appalachian Trail recently celebrated 100 years, and its partners and managers are still working to fill in gaps along the route. While the Alaska Long Trail has seen recent progress and success, Alaska Trails is in it for the long haul and will see this project to completion. Almost 95% of the proposed route traverses public land, which will make the process move more quickly.

It's time for Alaska to invest in its future by creating a route that will stand with the other great long trails of the world.



ALASKA LONG TRAIL

VISION

A world-class trail system connecting 500+ miles of Alaska's iconic terrain and diverse communities from the Pacific to the Interior, embracing the many ways Alaskans recreate outdoors and bolstering the Alaska economy by attracting visitors from all over the world.

USER EXPERIENCE

The trail aims to support diverse trail users. Uses on specific trail segments will be determined by the terrain as well as the management policies of individual landowners and agencies. Existing agency policies regarding motorized / non-motorized use for any given trail will not be changed. The ultimate goal is a network of routes accommodating a variety of uses, including some braids open to motorized use, and others for non-motorized hiking, biking, horseback riding, and skiing. Water routes and railroad connections will be incorporated to diversify ways to enjoy the trail system and bridge gaps to traverse difficult terrain.



ALASKA LONG TRAIL

ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The AKLT would be beneficial for the economy in Alaska as a whole, but particularly for gateway communities along the trail who could see an increase in jobs, business opportunities, and tax revenues.

Small increases in length of stay translate into hundreds of millions of additional visitor spending each year, which would contribute to Alaska's tourism industry. It is estimated that visitors would spend an additional \$250 million annually if they had a reason to stay one more day in the state. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis' Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account (ORSA), in 2023, the outdoor recreation industry in Alaska generated \$3.1 billion in economic output, supported more than 21,000 jobs, and accounted for 4.6% of the state's economy. Additionally, in 2023 Alaska ranked first among all states in outdoor recreation employment growth.

Along with mineral resources, outdoor recreation is Alaska's greatest natural asset. Outdoor recreation projects like the AKLT offer economic development solutions to Alaska's declining population and stagnant economy.

MAKE ALASKA BETTER FOR ALASKANS

Six out of ten Alaska residents list opportunities for outdoor recreation as a reason for living in Alaska (SCORP 2023-2027). Additionally, Alaska has the highest rate of participation in outdoor recreation activities in the country (tied with Montana).

The establishment of a long trail will enhance recreation opportunities for Alaskans, improving residents' quality of life. Additionally, the Alaska Long Trail has already attracted funding for trail maintenance, trail repairs, and new trail infrastructure. Investments in trails will enable more residents to go out and enjoy their surrounding



ALASKA LONG TRAIL

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this Strategic Action Plan is to guide Alaska Trails over the next 5 years as we continue to advance the Alaska Long Trail. Through Alaska Trails, the AKLT has been able to gain traction and progress significantly over the last three years. Our work has been integral in getting attention from legislators, securing funding, planning and building trails, reaching out to gateway communities, communicating the concept to the public, and getting the Alaska Long Trail name recognition.

The project is now at a point where it is important to evaluate the progress thus far, and ensure that going forward, we have a clear understanding of the strategic vision for the Alaska Long Trail and know what next steps are needed to bring the vision to life.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

Alaska Trails staff and Board of Directors reviewed what has been accomplished thus far, and evaluated the project's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Additionally, Alaska Long Trail Coalition members, who are land managers and representatives from regions along the route, participated in individual interviews to provide their input on how the project is progressing, and what they would like to see happen going forward. This feedback was valuable for understanding the unique perspectives of stakeholders along the route.

The culmination of these efforts led to the creation of this document. After listening to feedback from our staff, our Board, and the Alaska Long Trail Coalition members, we are excited to have clear and focused, actionable goals through which we can continue advancing the Alaska Long Trail. While there is still a lot of work ahead of us, we are excited about the direction the project is headed, and are looking forward to continuing to invest in Alaska's future by creating a route that will stand with the other great long trails of the world.





GOAL 1 | BUILD

Continue to advance the planning, design, and construction of sections of the Alaska Long Trail (AKLT).

KESUGI RIDGE, DENALI STATE PARK - PAXSON WOEBLER

1.1 DEVELOP A CONNECTED ROUTE BETWEEN SEWARD & HATCHER PASS

- Secure funds for the US Forest Service to construct the Twentymile Trail near Girdwood within Chugach National Forest.
- Confirm specific trail alignments with Chugach State Park and the US Forest Service.
- Identify the Alaska Long Trail route between Pioneer Peak and Hatcher Pass.
- Construct a connector between Fishhook Rd and Hatcher Pass.
- Connect the community of Moose Pass to AKLT.
- Install AKLT trail markers along the route, with permission from land managers.
- When funding is secured for planning or construction of trail segments, assist land managers in projects.

1.2 FINALIZE THE ROUTE BETWEEN HATCHER PASS & DENALI STATE PARK

- Identify a shovel-ready alignment through the Talkeetna Mountains.
- Work with State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Mining, Land and Water on long-term legal access, easements and overall framework of the AKLT on general state land.
- Work with the Alaska Railroad on connections north of Talkeetna to Denali State Park.

1.3 ENGAGE WITH LAND MANAGERS BETWEEN DENALI STATE PARK & FAIRBANKS

- Engage with land managers and stakeholders to plan the route between Nenana and Fairbanks.
- Secure funding for purchasing key easements in the Fairbanks area.
- Continue to support securing design, engineering, and construction funding for separated pathways projects between Cantwell and Healy in Denali Borough.
- Create a well-marketed package with local rafting companies to establish an option for a water segment between Healy and Nenana as one of the AKLT braids.



GOAL 2 | COMMUNICATE

Produce informative materials to ensure that the public, partners, and decision-makers are aware of the AKLT and informed of management goals and current strategies.

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST, SEWARD RANGER DISTRICT - USFS SARAH SCHUH

2.1 DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE AKLT COMMUNICATIONS PLAN & TOOLKIT

- Establish a cohesive AKLT brand.
- Create media assets for the entire trail, as well as for specific regions along the route.
- Develop the communications toolkit with the intention to share with partners for their use.
- Develop media assets for different audiences: decision-makers, users, funders, community partners, and critics.
- Expand efforts to communicate information about the AKLT to all audiences.
- Highlight economic and community development opportunities.

2.2 ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO USE THE AKLT

- Market the existing sections of trail and encourage people to use the AKLT, highlighting experiences and adventures in gateway communities.
- Get the AKLT on major mapping applications with trailheads and other trail user support facilities identified.

2.3 COMMUNICATE ABOUT THE AKLT NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL (NST) FEASIBILITY STUDY & POTENTIAL DESIGNATION

- Develop media publications, radio interviews, and informational videos to communicate accurate information about the National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study led by the Bureau of Land Management.
- Conduct public outreach about the National Scenic Trail Feasibility Study by attending and presenting at community and user group meetings in communities along the Alaska Long Trail route.
- Given the potential of a NST designation to bring maintenance funding and support from federal land managers, engage with congressional delegation on options for designation.



GOAL 3 | SUPPORT

Develop new and expand existing relationships to increase stakeholder involvement with the Alaska Long Trail, as well as strengthen support for it.

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST, SEWARD RANGER STATION - USFS SARAH SCHUH

3.1 COLLABORATE WITH LAND MANAGERS

- Work with and support land managers and agencies to integrate the AKLT into their land use, management, and planning documents.
- Engage land management agencies in the Land Managers Advisory Board.

3.2 ENGAGE WITH GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

- Work with local communities to understand their goals, needs and concerns to ensure that the trail enhances regional priorities.
- Enhance existing relationships and build new relationships with stakeholders in gateway communities along the AKLT route.
- Identify opportunities to provide resources and support to link the AKLT effort to community goals.
- Following an outreach process, seek resolutions of support from local governments.
- Work with and support local communities along the route who want to integrate the AKLT into local and regional planning and management documents.

3.3 CONNECT WITH FUNDERS

- Use the communications plan and toolkit to increase legislative support for the AKLT at local, state, and federal levels.
- Develop a funding or grant program for gateway communities to implement trail planning and construction projects at the local level.
- Develop and coordinate an annual capital funding plan for AKLT projects including local, state, and federal appropriations, grants, local bonds and other funding sources.



GOAL 4 | STEWARD

Ensure project sustainability and longevity by reorganizing management frameworks and assessing budgetary needs.

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST - USFS SARAH SCHUH

4.1 RESTRUCTURE THE ALASKA LONG TRAIL OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Increase the organizational capacity of Alaska Trails to implement the AKLT by providing staff support in communities / regions along the route.
- Create a Land Managers Advisory Board to provide a more effective framework for agencies and land managers to participate in the AKLT effort.
- Create an AKLT “Champions” Steering Committee comprised of influential Alaskans to provide high-visibility leadership, generate support, and communicate about the AKLT to a broad range of statewide constituencies.
- Consider the transition of the AKLT project from Alaska Trails to a trail association responsible for the long-term care, maintenance, and advocacy for the trail. Complete an Alaska Trails / AKLT business analysis to aid in this consideration.
- Review the AKLT work plan and strategic plan annually to adjust and prioritize efforts based on successes.

4.2 DEVELOP & IMPLEMENT A SUSTAINABLE FUNDING STRATEGY FOR THE ALASKA LONG TRAIL PROGRAM AT ALASKA TRAILS

- Develop a funding plan to ensure financial sustainability at Alaska Trails for the AKLT.
- Grow the AKLT fund at the Alaska Community Foundation.
- Increase individual giving for the AKLT.
- Reach beyond Alaska to seek funding.

4.3 DEVELOP A PLAN TO ENSURE LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY FOR THE ALASKA LONG TRAIL

- Develop maintenance, operations, and risk management plans for new trail segments in collaboration with land managers.
- Secure funding and resources (trail crews) for maintenance of new trail segments.
- Advocate for NST designation as a vehicle to secure maintenance funds.
- Engage with the State of Alaska to improve Search & Rescue operations and funding.