

Alaska Trails Initiative

STATEWIDE TRAILS INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Appendix B – Summary

This is an extract of the full document; extracting the first page or two each of the chapters in that document <https://www.alaska-trails.org/alaska-trails-initiative>



Work in Progress Draft

April 2020



SPONSORED BY ALASKA TRAILS & GROWING ALLIANCE OF STATEWIDE PARTNERS;
FUNDING PARTNERS INCLUDE:

Sitka Trail Works | Juneau Trail Mix | Mat Su Parks and Trails | Anchorage Park Foundation |
NPS Rivers Trails Conservation Assistance | Kenai Mtn Turnagain Arm National Heritage
Area | USFS Alaska Regional Office



COVER IMAGES CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: 1) Two hikers start the gradual climb from Beaver Creek Wild and Scenic River on their way to the eastern end of the 20-mile-long Summit Trail. *Source: BLM*; 2) Biking on Denali Park Road. *Source: NPS, Kent Miller*; 3) Two snowmobile riders reach the top of the big hill out of Fossil Creek on the Windy Creek Trail in the White Mountains National Recreation Area, Alaska. *Source: BLM*; 4) Kids run on trails at Eagle River Nature Center. *Source: Visit Anchorage, JodyO.Photos*

INTRODUCTION

Alaska has only just begun to take full advantage of our State's phenomenal outdoor recreation resources.

Rich with vast wilderness landscapes, sky-high mountains, forests of sun-dappled birch and moss covered cedars, pristine creeks fed by glaciers, and blue coastal waters filled with marine life - Alaska is yet to fully plan for and capitalize on the economic, health and community benefits of our magnificent natural setting. This *Statewide Trails Investment Strategy* focuses on ways to build on and expand trail infrastructure to help Alaska make the most of our outdoor recreation potential.



Hiking Angel Rocks to Chena Hot Springs trail on a summer day. Source: Bryant Wright

Specific goals for the Trails Initiative and the investments identified in this document include:

- build a stronger, more durable Alaska economy, particularly at this critical time when AK needs both near term jobs and investments to create lasting, diversified economic health
- attract and retain residents, businesses, retirees
- make it easier and more inviting to lead active, healthy lives
- help expand diversity in outdoor recreation users
- guide growth to help sustain what makes Alaska unique

STATUS AND CONTENTS

This is a work-in-progress draft. It covers a large area of a big state, and presents information on over 50 discrete trail projects, each with its own complexities. While every effort has been made to accurately convey the recommendations provided by our partners, we apologize in advance for the inevitable omissions, errors and nuances lost in translation. Those are the failings of the principal authors, not our partners. The good news is we will keep this process going, and continue to refine, improve, and expand this document over the coming months and years.

Contents of this Draft Investment Strategy Document

1. Introduction & Overview
2. Recommendations for Site-Specific Trail Investments
 - Fairbanks region
 - Denali
 - Matanuska-Susitna
 - Anchorage
 - Seward to Anchorage
 - Northern Southeast – Juneau, Sitka
 - *Coming soon* – projects in other locations around AK
3. Recommendations for Statewide Trails Policies, for example strategies for:
 - capital and operations funding
 - streamlining trail approvals
 - maximizing the economic benefits of outdoor recreation
 - guiding growth to better stewarding Alaska's outdoor recreation resources
4. Appendices
 - A. Summary of Federal and State funding opportunities
 - B. **Summarized version of Site-Specific Trail Investments (extract of sections above)**

THIS
DOCUMENT



FEEDBACK AND NEXT STEPS

We hope this document provides enough supporting material and evidence to make a case for the need of more investment for trails in Alaska. We are welcoming your thoughts and feedback on this subject, and can be reached at Alaska Trails Initiative – contacts below.

“The Trails Initiative and Statewide Trails Investment Strategy are very impressive! With our current world situation, the importance of access to outdoor space has been so popular.”

- Melinda “Mindy” Eggleston, President, Delta Junction Trails Association. 4.21.90 Email

Contacts for more info, for submittals of recommendations additions or changes

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Note: Alaska Trails Initiative produced an *Alaska Statewide Trails Report* in 2019 (available at AK Trails website). Updated versions of key sections of that report are being developed, to be uploaded on the Alaska Trails website. These include sections on economic benefits, market trends, and a graphic/photographic overview of the diverse benefits and beneficiaries of trails.

FAIRBANKS: Trails in Alaska's Golden Heart



Fairbanks offers four seasons of outdoor fun, exploring vast tracts of Alaska wilderness. Left: Climbing Angel Rocks. Source: Explore Fairbanks. Above: Snomachining in Angel Creek Valley. Source: AK State Parks

Fairbanks is a vibrant river city in the far north, and gateway to Interior Alaska. Whether it's the aurora dancing in the night sky or the midnight summer sun shining up to 24 hours a day, the Fairbanks region is an exceptional destination 365 days a year. Where else can you travel to such a remote locale and still enjoy all the amenities of a charming downtown, a thriving arts community, rich Alaska Native culture, authentic Alaskan activities and endless opportunities for outdoor adventure? Here there are pristine rivers and lakes, beckoning ridgelines, abundant wildlife, and a certain poignant solitude that is found nowhere else on earth.

Although Fairbanks boasts large expanses of public land and water suitable for recreating, and has a decent start at a trail system, many of the access points and trails are informal, and not well known outside a small group of regular users. There is a great opportunity to expand options to enjoy the region's outdoor world. This could happen by developing more and better trails, and also by getting more benefits from existing trails, through better trail signage, upgraded trail heads, and improved mapping and marketing. These conclusions are backed up by the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan which states the highest regional priority is for trail and facility upgrades or improvements.

Expanding four-season trails in and around the Golden Heart City – trails for hiking, skiing, biking, dog sleds, snowmachines and ATV's– will benefit residents and help strengthen prospects Fairbanks' economic future.

Investment Incentives

Jobs: From 2015 to 2017 the Fairbanks area visitor industry sector gained 3,500 jobs.

Tax Revenue:

Tax collections in 2019 saw another record-breaking year. The Fairbanks North Star Borough collected \$5,755,037 in hotel tax revenue, the 5th consecutive year of record-breaking of hotel/motel tax collections.

Economy:

Visitor spending estimate is \$208.8 million. The total direct and indirect economic impact is nearly \$522 million.

Data provided by the Explore Fairbanks

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED INVESTMENTS

Fairbanks and nearby Denali National Park are the second and third most visited overnight destinations in Alaska, and opportunities for outdoor recreation are one of its key attractions. Developing better access to trails, building new trails, and improving existing routes would help attract more visitors with varying physical abilities and interests. The improvements would also cater to different travel time frames and transportation modes, from single independent travelers to organized larger groups arriving by train or motor coach.



Fairbanks has a well-deserved, and growing reputation as place for outdoor fun in the fall, winter and spring, for activities ranging from ice fishing to biking. Source: State of Alaska, Matt Hage

Projects outlined on the following pages are summarized in the table below. These projects were provided by local, state and federal agencies as well as trail organizations and businesses, and identify practical, near-term trail development projects with significant benefits.

Greater Fairbanks Area Projects Summary			
Project	Lead and Support	Estimated Cost	Priority & Status
1. Angel Rocks Trail	Alaska State Parks	\$1M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
2. Angel/Stiles Connector	Alaska State Parks	\$150,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
3. Equinox Marathon Trail	FNSB	\$1.4M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
4. Wayfinding, signage, mapping & marketing	Alaska State Parks, FNSB, Visit Fairbanks	\$500,000-\$3M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
5. Fairbanks to Nenana "Long Trail"	DNR Division of Forestry and local trail organizations	\$500,000	Mid Term - Planning in Progress
6. Isberg All-Season Trails	FNSB	\$3.1M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
7. Delta Junction Riverwalk Trail and Park	City of Delta Junction, Delta Junction Trails Assoc., Nat'l Park Service RTCA	\$200,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)

SUPPORTERS AND PARTNERS¹

Partners and supporters that helped develop these recommendations include Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation staff, the Fairbanks North Star Borough Parks and Recreation Department, Explore Fairbanks, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Interior Trails and Parks Foundation, and a range of local trail users and outdoor businesses.

¹ See *Introduction* for discussion on partners and supporters.

DENALI BOROUGH

BUILDING FOUR SEASON FRONTCOUNTRY RECREATION



Front Country pleasures: skiing the Nenana River (*photo by Dave Talerico*); autumn color along the Triple Lakes Trail (*photo by DowntheTrail.com*); and adventure along the Park Road (*photo by Chris Beck*)

Denali Borough is home to Alaska’s world-renowned wilderness gem: Denali National Park and Preserve. Each year hundreds of thousands of visitors travel to this area from Alaska and around the world. Summer visitation dominates, but winter visitation is accelerating.

While the wildlife and spectacular landscapes of the Park’s interior are the main attraction, there is a real opportunity to expand “frontcountry” and non-summer travel. This responds to the interest by the many National Park visitors who spend much of their visit enjoying park-edge “gateway communities” and adjoining outdoor recreation activities. An additional motivation is the need to accommodate continued growth while dealing with the realities that Denali Park Road has finite capacity and serious maintenance challenges.

Much more could be done to take full advantage of the scenic frontcountry corridor along the Parks Highway, at the Park’s eastern boundary. This includes creating new and improving existing trails, trailheads, and signage to respond to visitor and resident interests in accessible active outdoor recreation and provide an appealing counterpoint to the less accessible, wilder Park interior. These same trails can help expand fall, winter and spring opportunities. Making these investments will benefit residents and visitors, increase visitor length of stay and spending in the borough, and support growth in jobs, business opportunities and bed tax. Finally, creating year-round, attractive, concentrated walkable visitor/resident villages, for example in Healy, will promote more visits and longer stays, and provide an attractive place to live or stay for seasonal employees, visitors and residents.

Total Park Visits
nearly doubled to
600,000 in last 10 years

23% Out-Of-State AK
visitors travel to Denali
430,000 people

Visitors generated
\$4.05 M in Bed Tax
95% of all Borough tax
revenues

Fall/Winter/Spring
Visitation - small but
growing faster than
summer- from 6000 to
20,000 people in last 10
years

Data from: Alaska Visitor Statistics Program 7
– Summer 2016 ; Alaska Taxable 2018; NPS
Visitor Use Statistics - IRMA

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED INVESTMENTS

The table below summarizes projects selected for inclusion in this document based on their potential for creating attractive, four season, Denali frontcountry outdoor recreation options. These options aim to diversify recreation opportunities for residents and visitors, expand the local economy, and ease the burden on the Denali Park Road by offering visitors more choices.

The projects are presented in more detail on pages that follow. The scope of work proposed here ranges from improving an existing trailhead and trail, increasing road safety and walkability of a hub community, and expansion of snowmachine and other winter activities.



Mt. Healy Overlook Trail (photo by National Park Service)

Denali Borough Projects Summary			
Project	Lead and Support	Estimated Cost	Priority & Status
1. Bison Gulch Trails	Denali Borough, NPS, AK DOT	\$450,000-\$500,000	Near Term – Planning in Progress
2. McKinley Village Bridge/Trail Head & Trails	Denali Borough, AK DOT	\$48M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
3. Nenana River Bluff Trail	NPS, Denali Borough	\$400,000-\$600,000	Mid Term – Planning in Progress
4. Winter Recreation: Cantwell/Denali Highway	Denali Borough, AK DOT	\$25,000-\$50,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
5. Nenana River boat/raft launch	Denali Borough, AK DOT	Cost Estimate being developed	Mid Term – Planning in Progress

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS²

Partners and supporters that provided feedback on these recommendations include Denali Borough, Denali National Park, NPS Rivers Trails Conservation Assistance program, and the AK Department of Transportation. The Denali Borough Land Use and Economic Development Strategic Plan, approved by the Borough Assembly in 2018, was another important reference.

It is important to note there are a number of detailed, thoughtful National Park Service plans affecting future trail development, fall/winter/spring improvements, etc. The recommendations presented here by necessity cannot capture the depth and breadth of those plans, but instead aim to focus on a representative subset of identified, high value projects.

² See *Introduction* for full discussion on partners and supporters.

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA VALLEY

CREATING A MULTI-DAY DESTINATION

Palmer Hay Flats. Source: ADF&G

The Mat-Su Valley holds everything outdoor Alaska has to offer - mountains, glaciers, rivers, lakes, forests, fish and wildlife, culture and history. From skating frozen lakes in the winter to summer duck hunting, recreation opportunities abound for every kind of outdoor enthusiast. While the area is rich in outdoor recreation potential, most out-of-state visitors pass quickly through on their way north to Denali or south to Anchorage (see statistics in sidebar³).

What if the large number of visitors on their way to Denali had more reasons to spend time in the Mat-Su Valley?

Attracting more visitors requires creating overnight destinations with quality lodging, dining and shopping plus convenient access to quality trails and other outdoor recreation opportunities. Improvements at South Denali and in the Independence Mine/ Hatcher Pass area can help these areas become stronger overnight destinations, communities like Palmer, Wasilla and Sutton have similar potential. Talkeetna is the borough's most established overnight destination, but work is needed to match current and projected growth with the community's carrying capacity and to maintain what makes this town special.

This chapter outlines investments to expand the range of recreation opportunities, aiming to serve diverse interests of out-of-state visitors - both package and independent - as well as in-state residents, who are Mat-Su's primary visitor market⁴. Trails and other recreation opportunities should cater to different time frames, physical abilities, expectations and interests, and be available year-round.

Expanding recreation options in the Valley along with securing funding for infrastructure maintenance and operations funding will lead to increased visitation and longer stays, helping Mat-Su take much greater advantage of its strategic location and recreation assets.⁵

Investment Incentives



Most Visitors Pass Through

47% of all out-of-state travelers visit Anchorage, 23% visit Denali, but **only 11% stop in Mat-Su** ¹

Spending by Visitors AND AK Residents

Out-of-state \$98 million/year

In-state \$160 million/year

Total = \$258M ²



Big returns on modest investment

Experience around the US shows returns of 2 to 10 times return on investments in trails & outdoor rec. ³

³ AVSP 7 – Summer 2016 Section 5: Visitor Profile - Destinations and Activities

⁴ Economic Impact of the Visitor Industry in the Mat-Su Borough. Prepared by McDowell Group for Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau. 2017

⁵ Matanuska-Susitna Borough Tourism Infrastructure Needs Study, McDowell Group 2008, Anchorage, AK; <https://www.bicycling.com/rides/a20011794/how-bike-touring-saved-this-small-town>; <https://conservationtools.org/guides/97-economic-benefits-of-trails>

Summary of Recommended Investments

While the region offers a decent inventory of existing trails, new investments are needed to attract new visitor markets, more repeat and year-round visitation, and to build a stronger reputation among trail enthusiasts and all travelers.

The table below summarizes projects identified in discussions with regional partners; pages that follow provide more detail. These projects were selected based on their potential for bringing significant economic and other returns on investment. Projects include new trails and trail connections, enhanced and new trail access points and waysides, improved wayfinding and trail marketing, and two visitor centers.

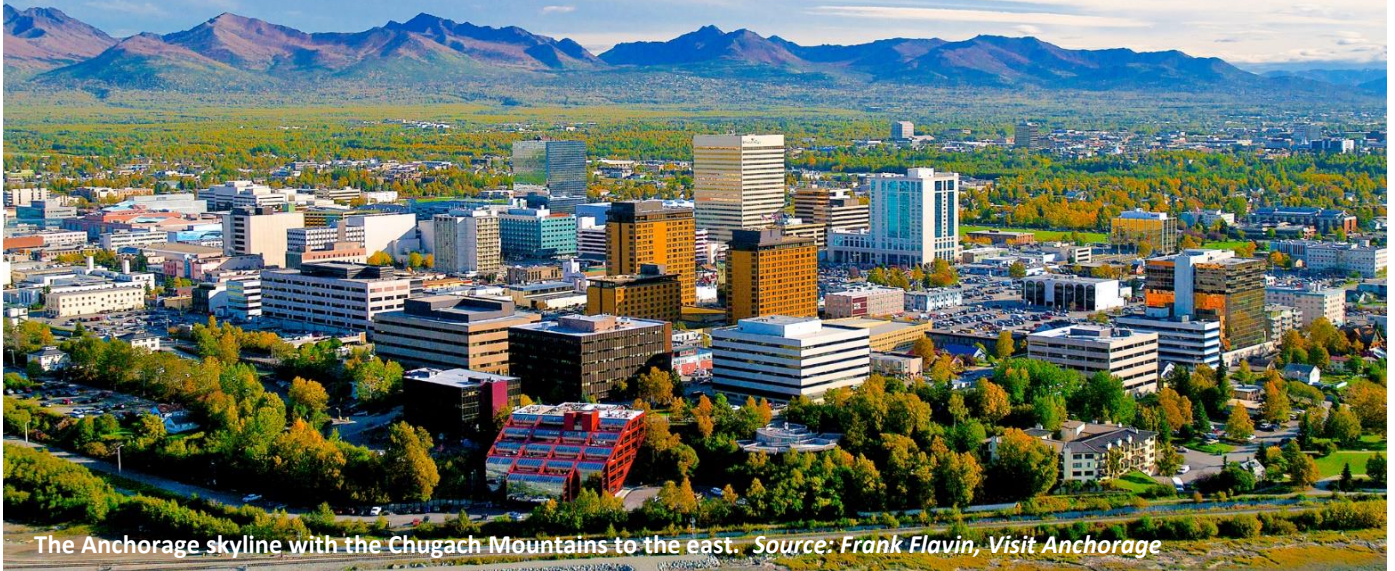
Mat-Su Projects Summary			
Project	Lead (s) & Support	Est Cost	Priority & Status
1. Government Peak Traverse and Little Susitna Loop	MSB, AK State Parks, Valley Mountain Bikers and Hikers, Hatcher Alpine Xperience, Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation	\$1.0 M	Near Term Planning in Progress (close to Shovel Ready)
2. Knik Glacier Trail Enhancements	MSB, AK Department National Resources	\$1.0 M	Near Term Planning in Progress
3. Knik River Access - Gold Star Monument Wayside	ADF&G is lead for parking / wayside developments; Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation is lead for monument.	Trailhead / wayside: \$500,000; monument: TBD	Near Term Planning in Progress (close to Shovel Ready)
4. Denali State Park			
1) South Denali Visitor Center	Alaska State Parks, in partnership with AK Industrial Develop & Export Authority & private investors	\$5M for design & engineering; \$7M to extend electrical; \$30M for facility	Near Term Planning in Progress (close to Shovel Ready)
2) Curry Ridge to Kesugi Ridge Trail Connector	Alaska State Parks and Mat Su Trails and Parks Foundation	\$1M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
3) Curry Ridge to Kesugi Backcountry Hut System	Alaska State Parks	Approximately \$40K per hut	Mid Term – Planning needed
5. Mat-Su Visitor Center and Trails Hub			
1) Gateway Visitor Center	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Mat-Su Borough	\$5.8 million	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
2) Three Trails Hub	Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, ADF&G, Mat-Su Borough	Costs to be determined	Near to Long Term: projects from Shovel Ready to Need Planning
Wayside Planning & Operations Plan	Alaska State Parks	\$200,000	Near Term – ready to go subject to funding

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS⁶

Partners and supporters that provided feedback on these recommendations include Alaska Department of Natural Resources/Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation, Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau, Alaska Department of Fish and Game/Division of Wildlife Conservation, and Mat-Su Borough Community Department.

⁶ See *Introduction* for discussion on partners and supporters.

ANCHORAGE: BUILDING A BETTER FOUR SEASON “BASE CAMP” DESTINATION



The Anchorage skyline with the Chugach Mountains to the east. Source: Frank Flavin, Visit Anchorage

Anchorage is Alaska’s largest city, economic hub, gateway to America’s Arctic, and most visited overnight destination. Tourism and outdoor recreation already bring many benefits to Anchorage, but too many out-of-state travelers currently pass quickly through the town, heading to destinations seen as better delivering “the Alaska experience”. Better trails, trailheads, hut systems and wayfinding could change this situation, helping Anchorage become a much stronger four-season, multi-day destination. Anchorage is a community with the highest visitor spending in Alaska, due to overnight lodging expenses. Adding One More Day to visitors’ stay will boost the local economy considerably.

Chugach State Park, the third largest state park in the country, is a stunning community and statewide outdoor resource. With the right investments the Park could become an even more central attraction for Anchorage visitors. Investing in Chugach State Park would not only drive more visitor spending, but help hold and attract a skilled community workforce, enhance quality of life for residents and retirees, invite healthy living, and support the businesses that make Anchorage a better place to live and work.

INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

JOBS: 1 in 9 Anchorage jobs is in tourism.

TAX REVENUE: Each year, travelers contribute \$38 million in local hotel and car rental taxes to the Municipality of Anchorage.

ECONOMY: Visitors spend \$297 million in Anchorage annually, on top of what they pay for a cruise or airfare.

Source: Visit Anchorage

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED INVESTMENTS

The table below summarizes projects identified in discussions with regional partners; the pages that follow provide more detailed information. These projects were selected based on their potential for bringing significant economic and other returns on investment. These projects include new trail development, existing trail repairs, improvements of existing trail access points and additions of new access points, building trail connections where gaps are identified, branding and improved wayfinding of signature destination trails, and strategic plan development.

Anchorage Area Projects Summary			
Project	Lead (s) & Support	Est Cost	Priority & Status
1. "Moose"			
Lk Otis Overpass	Park Foundation, MOA, DOT/PF	\$10-13 M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Wayfinding – Phase 1	Park Foundation, MOA, Visit Anchorage	\$100,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Wayfinding – Phase 2		\$2 Million	
2. The Dena'ina Indigenous Place Name Project, Phase 1			
	Native Village of Eklutna, Park Foundation, Anchorage Museum, Alaska Native Heritage Center	\$500,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
3. "Mtns to Sea" Connecting Trail			
Fill the ¼ mile gap in the route	MOA, STA	+/- \$10,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Wayfinding – signs, marketing	Park Foundation, MOA, Visit Anchorage	+/- \$50,000	Near Term – Planning in progress
4. Chugach Alpine Frontcountry			
<i>Improved Access - "Five Front Doors"</i>			
1. Arctic Valley	Chugach State Park, Arctic Valley Ski Club	See notes	Mid Term – Planning in progress
2. South Fork of Eagle River	Chugach State Park, MOA	See notes	Longer Term – Planning needed
3. Glen Alps	Chugach State Park, MOA	See notes	Mid Term – Planning in progress
4. Rabbit Creek/Flattop South	Chugach State Park, MOA	See notes	Near Term – Planning in progress
5. McHugh/SW Chugach	Chugach State Park, MOA	See notes	Mid Term – Planning in progress
<i>Improved CSP Trails</i>			
1. Flattop Trail	Chugach State Park	\$1,000,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
2. Little O'Malley Trail	Chugach State Park, Park Foundation	+/- \$50,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
3. Two Valleys Loop	Chugach State Park	+/- \$100,000	Near Term Planning in progress
Comprehensive CSP Strategic Plan	Chugach State Park, MOA	+/- \$100,000	Near Term
5. Regional Connections			
Anchorage to Points South	See Seward to Anchorage Chapter		
Anchorage to Palmer – Phase 1	DOT/PF, MOA, Park Foundation,	\$6 M	Longer Term - Planning needed

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS⁷

Partners and supporters that were actively involved in developing these recommendations include Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation staff, Chugach State Park Citizen Advisory Board, MOA Parks Department, Anchorage Park Foundation, Single Track Advocates, and several local businesses. Other parties consulted include Downtown Partnership, Visit Anchorage and Anchorage Economic Development Corporation.

⁷ See *Introduction* for what is meant by partners and supporters.

Seward to Anchorage Corridor:

EXPANDING TRAILS & HUTS IN ALASKA'S MOST ACCESSIBLE ALPINE SETTING



Just another sweet day in the Chugach – Upper Winner Creek trail, a segment of the Iditarod National Historic Trail.
Source: USFS

The Seward to Anchorage corridor offers something valuable and rare in Alaska: a road accessible, beautiful mountain landscape, connecting Alaska's centers of population and most visited destinations⁸, and managed to provide and sustain recreation opportunities. The 120+ mile drive from Anchorage to Seward goes through awe-inspiring terrain, from coastal waters to alpine valleys, crossing through Chugach National Forest and Chugach State Park. Along the way is a string of attractive small towns, providing commercial services from hotels to gear rentals.

The area is rich in recreation, history and culture, including the Southern Trek of the world-renowned Iditarod National Historic Trail. Much of the Iditarod route and the adjacent trail system is already in place, ranging from well-established to primitive backcountry routes. Filling these gaps could provide a seamless route from Seward to Anchorage, and a big, achievable step towards a "long trail" extending to Fairbanks.

The Iditarod is just one part of a larger system of trails in the corridor. In the National Forest these include the Resurrection and Lost Lake trails, and Whistle Stop system with its planned hut-to-hut system. Trail routes continue into Chugach State Park, including Arctic to Indian, Crow Pass trails and trails along Turnagain Arm with a key missing link near the community of Indian. Improving these trails and taking greater advantage of the area's inviting towns and other recreation amenities could help this corridor become an even more attractive statewide and international four-season destination, bringing real benefits to corridor communities and regional residents and helping grow year-round jobs and businesses.

Opportunities:

Alaska's most visited overnight destinations

Anchorage #1, Seward #4

186 Mile "Long Trail"

once gaps are filled between Seward & Eagle River/Anchorage

5 communities

along the Corridor; inviting places to stay, dine, shop or refill a backpack

+22.9%

⁸ Alaska Visitor Statistics Program - AVSP 7 – Section 5: Visitor Profile - Destinations and Activities

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED INVESTMENTS

The table below presents the list of projects identified in discussions with agencies, industry associations, public interest nonprofits and trail user groups. These projects fill the gaps and add bridges along the route of the Southern Trek of the INHT, and also recommend implementation of the Whistle Stop hut-to-hut trail system, as well as extension of the INHT through the State Park and improvements to adjacent trail systems. Details are presented on the following pages.

<i>Seward-to-Anchorage Corridor Projects Summary</i>			
<i>Project</i>	<i>Lead and Support</i>	<i>Estimated Cost</i>	<i>Priority & Status</i>
1. Iditarod National Historic Trail – Southern Trek			
Phase 1 - Trail Construction	Forest Service, National Forest Foundation, Alaska Trails, Student Conservation Association, Chugach Children’s Forest	\$970,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Phase 1 - Trail Bridges		\$4.6 million	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
2. Whistle Stop/Glacier Discovery Trail and Hut to Hut System			
Planned Trail Construction	Forest Service, Alaska Huts Association, National Forest Foundation, AK Railroad	\$3.4 million	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Trail Bridges		\$750,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Hut-to-Hut System, Phase 1	Alaska Huts Association	\$1.032 M	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Hut-to-Hut System, Phase 2	Alaska Huts Association	\$1.08 M	Near Term – Planning in Progress
3. Chugach State Park Connectors			
Crow Pass Trail - Brushing	Chugach State Park, Alaska Trail Stewards	\$15,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready)
Crow Pass Trail - Reroutes	Chugach State Park	\$3 million	Mid Term - Planning needed
Arctic-to-Indian – winter	Chugach State Park	\$10,000	Near Term – Planning in Progress
Arctic-to-Indian – summer	Chugach State Park	\$350-500,000	Mid Term - Planning needed
Windy Corner Connector	AK DOT/PF	\$3 million	Near Term – Planning in Progress
Potter Marsh-Indian Trail	AK DOT/PF	Est. \$5 million	Longer Term – Planning needed

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS⁹

Partners and supporters that helped develop and refine these recommendations include Chugach National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, Chugach State Park, National Forest Foundation, Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, Kenai Mountains -Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area, Alaska Trails, Seward Iditarod Trail Blazers, Alaska Mountain and Wilderness Huts Association.

⁹ See *Introduction* for what is meant by partners and supporters.

SOUTHEAST ALASKA: MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAILS



Mt Edgecumbe, Tongass National Forest, view from Sitka. Source: USFS Jeffrey Wickett

Southeast Alaska is our state's coastal wilderness gem, combining ocean, rich culture and history, untrammelled forests, blue glaciers, and magnificent mountains. The 300-mile long Alexander Archipelago features endless miles of wild coastline and over 1,100 islands. Deep channels and fjords separate the islands and cut them off from the mainland. The majority of islands and mainland coast of Southeast are accessible only by boat or plane and are part of the Tongass National Forest.

In recent years, Southeast has seen a significant increase in visitor numbers¹⁰, and work is needed to meet growing demand for hiking opportunities in the area¹¹ (sidebar). Charter boat, yacht or small cruise outfitter/guides have limited opportunities to get passengers off the boat and exploring the land. Overuse of the few existing trails and need for permits for new trail guide businesses is a growing reality. By creating additional safe, accessible opportunities now, land managers will avoid costly impacts to trail resources due to overuse and allow for growth in SE Alaska's outdoor recreation economy. Dispersing guided hikes also ensures that client experiences are maximized and conflicts with local use minimized.

The featured projects will create jobs building the trails, provide for new small business opportunities guiding hikes and offering tours, kayak rentals, and bring business for sea taxis. Creating new recreation infrastructure will increase Sitka's and Juneau's appeal as visitor destinations and increase the length of time independent visitors remain in the area.

Why do we focus on Northern Southeast and Sitka and Juneau? The answer is simple: we have not yet had time nor resources to reach more Southeast communities and get their suggestions and support. With this document as a reference, we will reach out to those partners, and document additional quality projects in subsequent editions of this Investment Strategy.

INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

Cross-gulf passenger volume rose between 2018 & 2019 ¹

+22.9%

Small ship passenger volume

+38.4%

For cruise visitors hiking & nature walks grew faster than any other activity 2011-16

+20 to 26%²

¹⁰ Alaska Visitor Volume Report, Summer 2018. McDowell Group

¹¹ AVSP VII: Section 5 Destinations & Activities - Participation by Transportation Market: McDowell Group

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED INVESTMENTS

Given its remote location and relative isolation, Southeast AK region is challenged to diversify and strengthen its economic base. Building new trails and improving existing routes will give resident, independent and cruise visitors more adventure options. This in turn will provide and more reasons to get outside, be healthy and spend time and money in Alaska.

The table below presents the list of projects identified in discussions with agencies, local governments, public-interest nonprofits and trail user groups. The projects listed aim at bringing high return on investment through improving existing routes, creating new signature trails that would have an international appeal, capitalizing on the Southeast's unique coastal location, and expanding outdoor recreation options to create multi-day adventures.

Southeast AK Projects Summary			
Project	Lead (s) & Support	Est Cost	Priority & Status
Sitka Alpine Access (road access)			
1. Starrigavan Valley Trails			
A. Starrigavan Ridge Trail – 4.8 mi	USFS, Sitka Trail Works	\$3.8 million	Near Term - Planning in Progress
B. Eagle Dip Lake Trail – 1.7 mi	USFS, STW	\$1.3 million	Near Term - Planning in Progress
C. So. Fork Starrigavan Creek to Harbor Mountain/Gavan Hill trail – 2.5 mi	USFS, STW	\$1.3 million	Near Term - Planning in Progress
2. Gavan Hill Trail	USFS, STW	\$1.6 million	Near Term (Shovel-Ready)
Sitka Coastal Access (water access)			
3. Sea Lion Cove State Marine Park Trail Upgrade	Alaska State Parks, Sitka Trail Works (STW)	\$250,000	Near Term (Shovel-Ready)
4. South Sitka Sound Coastal Trail, Hut to Hut	USFS, CBS, STW	\$5.3 million	Mid Term - planning in progress
Juneau Trails Projects			
1. Cross Admiralty Canoe Route	USFS/TM	\$500,000	Longer Term - Planning needed
2. Horse Tram Trail	CBJ/TM	\$100,000 additional funds needed	Near Term (Shovel Ready) \$150k in funding secured
3. Peterson Lake Cabin/John Muir Cabin Connection Trail	USFS/TM	\$1.5 million	Near Term Planning in Progress
4. Bonnie Brae Trail	CBJ/USFS/TM	\$400,000	Near Term (Shovel-Ready)
5. Douglas Loop Trail	CBJ/DNR/Goldbelt/TM	\$1.5 Million	Longer Term – Planning in Progress

PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS

Partners and supporters that helped develop and refine these recommendations include US Forest Service, Sitka Trail Works, Juneau-based Trail Mix, City and Borough of Sitka, and City and Borough of Juneau.

Alaska Trails Initiative

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED TOOLS & POLICIES

See the Alaska Trails website for details: <https://www.alaska-trails.org/alaska-trails-initiative>

- 1. Invest strategically for greatest impact (take greater advantage of the potential economic benefits of outdoor recreation)**
 - Increase marketing and infrastructure to grow Fall/Winter/Spring activities, (grow more living-wage jobs)
 - Outdoor adventure for the “missing middle”; huts, trail signs and maps, comfort
 - World class “long trails”
 - Gateway towns
 - “Must See” high volume outdoor recreation destinations
 - Bigger pie –for all sectors: independents, cruise, residents
- 2. Spread the benefits - all regions, all kinds of Trail-based activities**
- 3. Stabilize and expand resources for trails & outdoor recreation**
 - Maximum use & leverage of Federal Outdoor Rec. funds
 - Agency Funding for Operations and Maintenance
 - Pending Bills in Congress
 - Solving the “Alaska Disconnect”
 - Develop partnerships to build and maintain trails
- 4. Streamline authorizations for use of public land –regulatory relief**
- 5. Improve marketing & user Information (take more advantage of what we have)**
- 6. Political Power and Leadership**
 - Establish a state Office of outdoor Recreation
 - New partners
- 7. Relentlessly make the case for all the benefits of trails**
 - better data, focused on economic impact
 - Include in & out of state
- 8. Include outdoor recreation in "working landscapes"**
- 9. Actively guide growth through Management/ Stewardship**

See the Alaska Trails website – Chapter 8 of the Statewide Trails Initiative
for details on all these recommendations

<https://www.alaska-trails.org/alaska-trails-initiative>