

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 numbers¹, and work is needed to meet growing demand for hiking opportunities in the area² (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

¹ Alaska Visitor Volume Report, Summer 2018. *McDowell Group*

² 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.

<i>Southeast AK Projects Summary</i>			
<i>Project</i>	<i>Lead (s) & Support</i>	<i>Est Cost</i>	<i>Priority & Status</i>
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.

SITKA AREA PROJECTS

Sitka, a small town on the outside of the Southeast's Alexander Archipelago, is the only SE Alaskan community exposed to the open North Pacific Ocean. In Sitka, where the mountains meet the ocean, the green temperate rainforest and snowy mountain peaks erupt from the sea. The area offers unlimited opportunities to explore the wilderness: trails, beaches, islands, and mountain peaks beckon seasoned or novice hikers to Sitka.

In recent years, the surge in the numbers of independent travelers touring Southeast waters in private vessels, charter yachts and small cruise ships has been significant, and the demand for hiking opportunities is causing pressure and impacts on existing coastal trails. Construction of new venues will help accommodate this increased use. Proposed projects presented in this section include a premier outer-coast, ocean-front hut to hut trail system; safety and access improvements to popular mountain hikes; and building new signature destination routes.

1. STARRIGAVAN VALLEY TRAILS

The US Forest Service Starrigavan Recreation Area, at the oceanside/estuary end of the Starrigavan River, has an existing trail system and is the terminus of the Cross Trail. The existing trail system, picnic shelters and campground are very popular recreation destination for locals and visitors. In addition, two user-made trails, Starrigavan Ridge and Eagle Dip Lake, lead to sub-alpine and alpine locations further upstream in the Starrigavan watershed, accessible via the Nelson Logging road. The alpine area is incredibly scenic with breathtaking views of Sitka Sound and numerous islands, mountains, Mount Edgecumbe and the open Pacific Ocean beyond. Surrounding federal lands are very popular with deer hunters and berry pickers. Three new trails located further up Starrigavan Valley are proposed for this area.



Outstanding views from the Starrigavan Ridge Trail.

Source: Sitka Trail Works

A. The Starrigavan Ridge Trail is steep, muddy and has numerous locations of excessive erosion from use and water running down the trail. Resource damage is occurring with a network of user-made trails going straight up the hill. Steep, eroded pitches, wet trail conditions and exposed roots result in slippery, hazardous trail conditions.

B. The Eagle Dip Lake Trail is uneven and brushy and has a steep section where users have created multiple routes up and down. There is no bridge for crossing the upper Starrigavan stream channel which can be challenging during elevated stream flows.

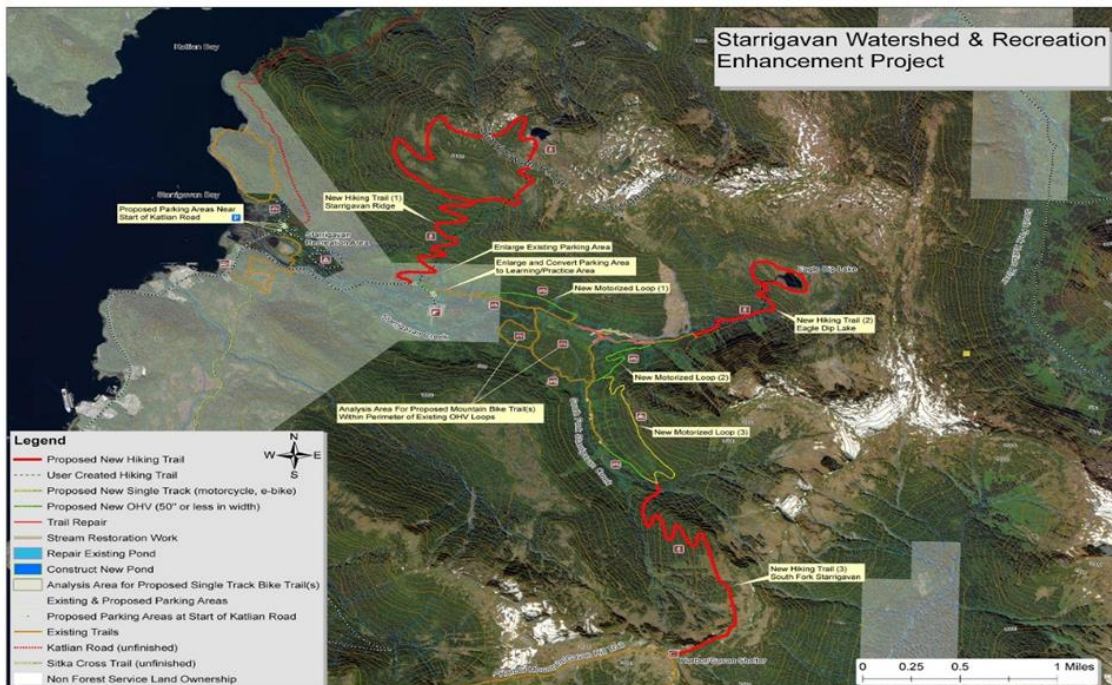
C. The third trail, the South Fork of Starrigavan Creek to Harbor Mountain/Gavin Trail, will connect the Starrigavan Valley to the alpine trails system. The trail will open access to both downtown Sitka and the Harbor Mountain Recreation Area from Starrigavan. As result, multiple longer distance routes for more ambitious hikers will be created, attracting adventurous travelers who seek out more challenging, but more rewarding day hikes.

Summary of proposed developments:

- Trail A: Construct new 4.8-mile Starrigavan Ridge Loop Trail
- Trail B: Construct/improve 1.7 miles of Eagle Dip Lake Trail in the same general vicinity as the existing user created trail with reroutes for resource protection and maintenance considerations.
- Trail C: Construct an approximately 2.5-mile hiking trail from the South Fork Starrigavan Creek to Harbor Mountain/Gavan Hill trail. The proposed route would tie into the Harbor Mountain/Gavan Hill trail near the existing shelter. The project area is included in the Starrigavan watershed but focuses mainly on creating additional recreational opportunities accessible from the Sitka road system.

<i>Project*</i>	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Benefits & Challenges</i>	<i>Costs</i>	<i>Priority & Status</i>
Construction of three new routes and improvement of existing trails (9 miles altogether)	US Forest Service, Sitka Trail Works	- Improve hiking safety - Create a long-distance hiking option - Connect downtown to outdoor recreation options - Prevent and stop habitat degradation - Funding is a challenge	Trail A: \$3.8M Trail B: \$1M Trail C: \$1.6M	Near Term - Planning in Progress Public scoping for the project was completed spring 2020. Project funds are identified but are not secured for the trail construction or other recreation improvements.

*where relevant this column includes background on status



Three ways to create more fun, more outdoor opportunities in the Starrigavan Valley

Source: Sitka Trail Works

2. GAVAN HILL TRAIL

The 5.5-mile-long Harbor Mountain / Gavan Hill Trail is one of the most popular and the longest subalpine trail accessible from the Sitka road system. It directly connects the community via the Sitka Cross Trail to the top of Gavan Hill for a ridge hike ending at Harbor Mountain road, the only road in southeast Alaska that accesses the sub-alpine. This easy access to the upper elevations draws many hikers who might not otherwise want to climb from sea level to the ridge top at Gavan Hill. The trail is used year-round by hikers, hunters, snowshoers and skiers. For the past 25 years, the Alpine Adventure Run mountain race has been held on the Harbor Mountain/Gavan Hill Trail bringing competitors from all over Alaska and increasingly from the lower 48.



One critical portion remains to be completed - the Gavan Hill portion that leads from the Sitka Cross Trail to the ridge top. This project will replace the unsafe, decaying boardwalk and eroded natural tread with durable, low maintenance gravel. Sitka Search and Rescue has logged five litter-rescues of hikers injured on the trail; the incidence of which can be expected to increase in number and severity as the structures become more decayed.

Project work will include 2.1 miles of new construction of the Gavan Hill segment of the trail and demolition of the old section. The proposed trail reroute will lengthen the overall trail by nearly 3/4 mile from 5.5 to 6.2 miles while reducing the overall grade. The reroute will require excavation to produce a 3' wide trailbed, addition of aggregate, drainage structures including, rock fords and timber bridges with a maximum length of 40 ft.

Three rest areas will be strategically located along the reroute to provide viewpoints and benches. A trailhead will be built at the intersection with the Sitka Cross Trail and include a small facility to lock bicycles. Several trail destination signs will be placed at various locations along the 6.2-mile trail to orient hikers to key trail features with updated mileages.

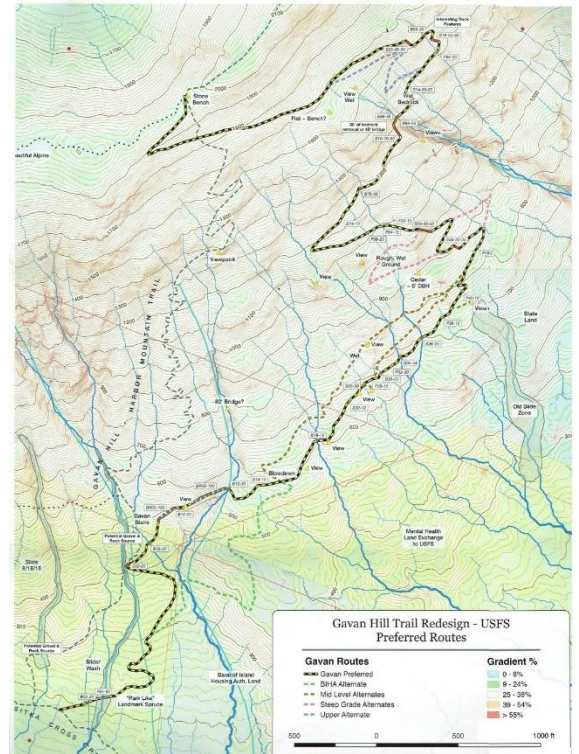
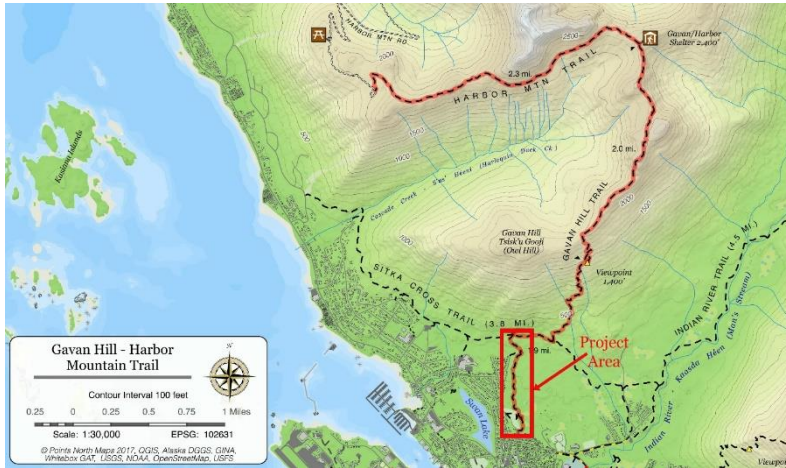
The project area is connected via the Sitka Cross Trail to neighborhoods adjacent the town core making it an easily accessible trail by foot or bike for many Sitkans and visitors alike. The proposed project will promote a sustainable recreational activity since improvements to the trail will allow a broader spectrum of guided and unguided recreation enthusiasts to experience the route while providing an additional commercial opportunity to outfitter/guides. The steepness of the current alignment combined with the overall poor condition of the trail has resulted in a US Forest Service decision to not permit guided use of the trail at this time. The likely consequences of not completing the proposed project are a continued moratorium on commercial use of the route, an increase in injuries to trail users from slips, trips and falls, and potentially closing the route within the next 10 years until funding is secured for the project.

Project*	Lead	Benefits	Challenges	Costs	Priority & Status
This project will 1) replace the unsafe, decaying boardwalk and eroded natural tread with durable, low maintenance gravel; 2) reroute the trail with 2.1 miles of new trail construction.	US Forest Service, Sitka Trail Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decrease the grade of the trail from an average of 29% to an average of 16% - Reduce the number of treated slippery wood structures - Improve dramatically the trail safety - Reduce annual maintenance costs by 75% over 20 years - Mitigate erosion and sedimentation through using durable materials to surface the trail - Meet Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA Forest Service, 2016) Forest-wide goals and objectives for Recreation and Tourism 	One section of this reroute (about 1800') is currently on Alaska Mental Health Trust lands, however these lands are in the process of being conveyed to the Federal Government to become part of the Tongass National Forest. An agreement is in place to complete the conveyance in Spring 2020.	\$1,318,114 Agency matching funds will be made available for this project from Tongass National Forest allocated trails program dollars.	Shovel Ready 2003 Sitka Trail Plan identifies this project as priority. The proposed route was ground-truthed and a conceptual design, including cost estimate, is complete. NEPA review has begun and is expected to be completed in 2020.

*where relevant this column includes background on status



A place you want to be on a sunny day: Alpine views from the Gavan Hill.
Source: Sitka Trail Works



Wooden staircases along the Gavan Hill Trail.
Source: Sitka Trail Works

3. SEA LION COVE STATE MARINE PARK TRAIL

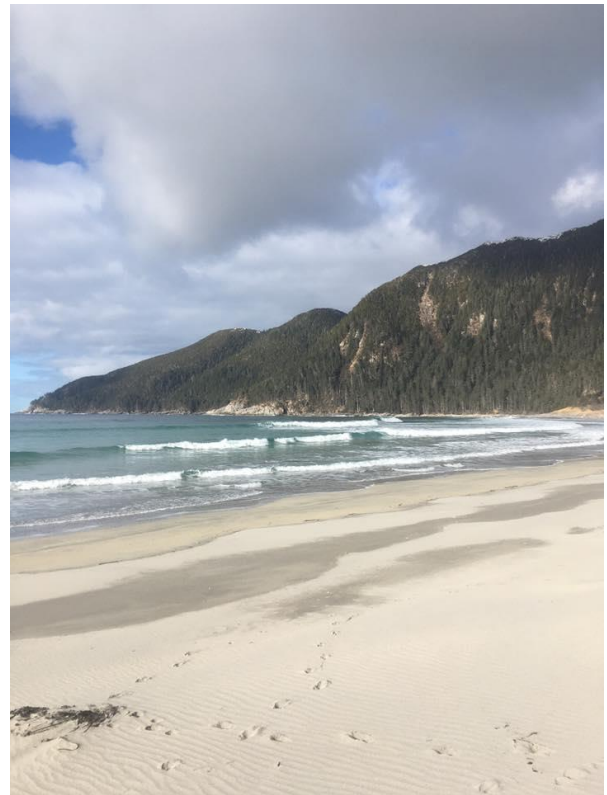
Sea Lion Cove State Marine Park Trail is the only trail in Southeast Alaska that leads to the rugged, outer coast of the Pacific Ocean. Remotely located north of Sitka on Kruzof Island, the trailhead is approximately 1 1/2 hours away by boat at the south end of Kalinin Bay. This trail provides a unique, world-class hike to an expansive beach on the outer coast of Kruzof Island, the only volcanic island in SE Alaska's temperate rainforest. It requires only an easy to moderately difficult hike (if the trail is repaired). However, much of the boardwalk installed over twenty years ago is reaching the end of its functional lifespan. Sea Lion Cove State Marine Park trail repair project will improve trail tread to create a safer and more sustainable trail surface on this 2.5-mile-long trail.

At the moment, access by commercial operators is limited due to the dangerous, slippery, muddy condition of the trail. The upgrade project will rectify this barrier to access, and State Parks will benefit economically from an increase in outfitter-guide permits.

Project*	Lead	Benefits & Challenges	Costs	Priority & Status
Project will improve trail tread to create a safer and more sustainable trail surface, replacing the existing deteriorating wooden structures.	Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation and Sitka Trail Works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve hiking safety - Improve access - Minimize costly long-term maintenance - Increase commercial permit use and hence increase revenue to State Parks 	\$250,000	Near Term (Shovel Ready) Recreation Trails Program (RTP) grant for 2020 received to address immediate safety concerns.

*where relevant this column includes background on status





CLOCKWISE: 1) Deteriorating wooden boardwalks along the Sea Lion Cove trail. 2) Walking on wooden planks along the grassy coastal trail. 3) Mossy wooden steps present safety concerns. 4) Sandy beach, the reward after a pleasant hike. *Source: Sitka Trail Works*

4. SOUTH SITKA SOUND COASTAL TRAIL

Located on the outer coast of Baranof Island on Hot Springs Bay off Sitka Sound, 16 miles south of Sitka, this remote trail will be accessible by boat. This project would create two loop trails, the 10.8-mile North loop with three huts and the 6.3-mile South loop with one hut (17 miles total of new construction), while also providing access to the Goddard Hot Springs bath houses. These developments will result in three to four-day hiking opportunities with overnight stops at proposed coastal huts or at an existing coastal US Forest Service cabin. Multi-night coastal trails linking hut systems are a powerful attraction all over the world – the Able Tasman Trail systems in New Zealand is one premier example.³ When complete, this ambitious coastal route will be a signature destination for multi-day outdoor enthusiasts from all over the globe.



The trail will also feature 12 lakes (including Redoubt Lake, a nine-mile-long fjord lake). A portion of the trail is historic, a relic of the era when there was a sanatorium/hospital at the hot springs. Portions of the historic trail exist and include remains of a Goddard Civilian Conservation Corps shelter at Redoubt Lake. Since the trail isn't formalized it only gets sporadic use by adventurous hikers and hunters when the weather is good.

At left: Exploring the always fascinating world of coastal SE Alaska (and thinking "this would be even sweeter if we would end the day in a cabin"). Source: Sitka Trail Works

History of Hot Springs at Goddard: This may have been the earliest Alaska mineral springs known to the Europeans. Before their arrival Alaska Natives came from many miles away to benefit from the healing waters. In the mid-1800s there were 3 cottages at Goddard that were used to house invalids from Sitka. By the 1920s a 3-story hotel was built to provide more sophisticated accommodations. The building was purchased in 1939 by the Territorial Legislature as an overflow home for the Sitka Pioneers' Home. After 1946 the building fell into disuse and was torn down. Today, the city of Sitka owns the property and maintains 2 modern cedar bathhouses for recreational use. There are open shelters over the hot tubs, which feature natural hot springs water and cold water.



Goddard Bath House. Source: Sitka Trail Works

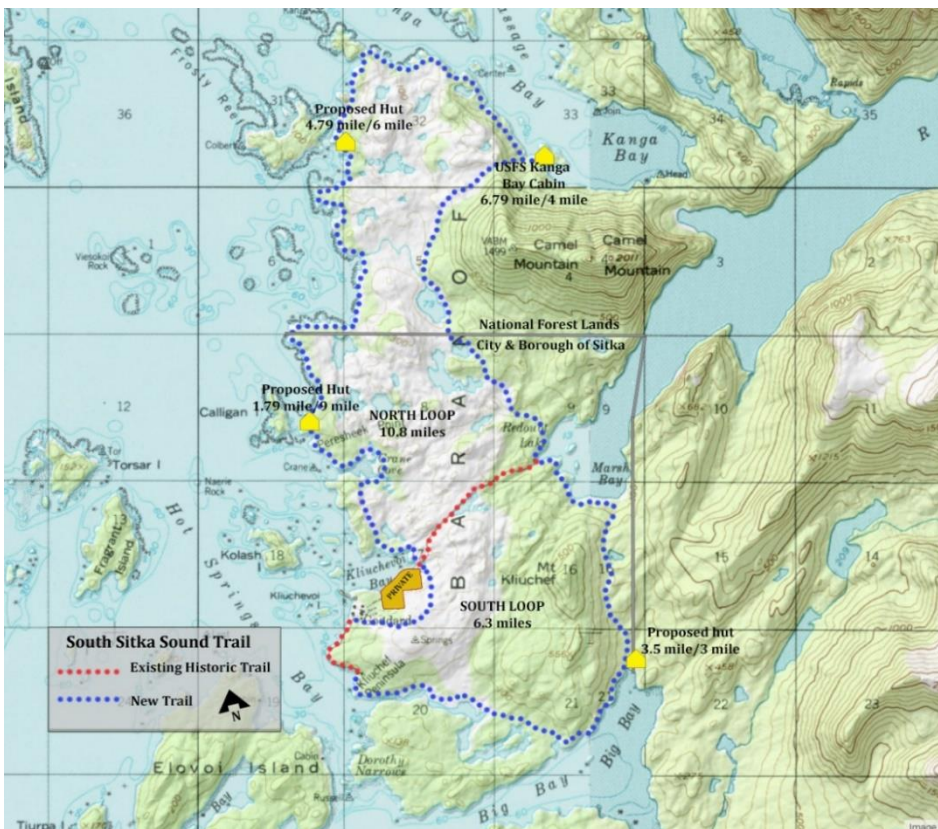
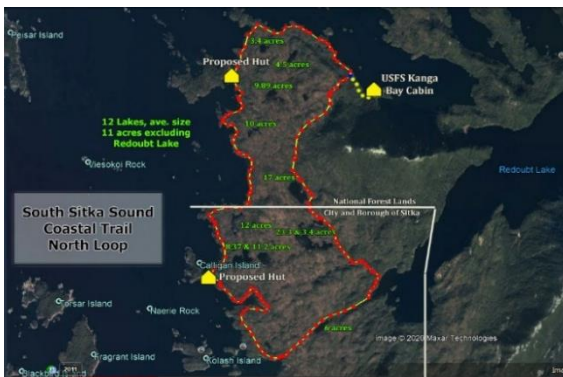


Outer Coast backpacking. Source: Sitka Trail Works

³ <https://www.newzealand.com/us/feature/abel-tasman-coast-track/>

Project*	Lead	Benefits	Challenges	Costs	Priority & Status
Construction of two loop trails, 17 miles total; building of four huts to create a multi-day experience; providing access to Goddard Hot Springs.	Sitka Trail Works with partnership from the City and Borough of Sitka and the US Forest Service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides opportunity for multi-day trips - Allows for use by people of a wide array of abilities, including families - Potential for becoming an international destination - Connects to historic heritage - Provides outdoor recreation business opportunities 	Funding for design and engineering, trail alignment and survey, permitting and construction needs to be identified and secured.	\$5.3M	Mid Term - planning in progress Project is included in the 2003 Sitka Trail Plan and 2011 Sitka Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan. A conceptual design is planned in the near future.

*where relevant this column includes background on status



Destined to be epic: the planned 17-mile South Sitka Sound hut to hot springs to hut trail.

Options for boat shuttle service, as occurs at Abel Tasman National Park in New Zealand, allow for great variety of options, from hiking all or a portion of the trail, with options for kayak legs too.

Source: Sitka Trail Works

JUNEAU AREA PROJECTS

Juneau area offers a variety of recreational escapes ranging from urban historic sites to road accessible recreation areas and marine parks that are accessible only by boat. Attractions include public-use cabins for renting, trails for hiking, skiing, and snowshoeing, and campsites. Ever increasing tourist traffic to Southeast Alaska, and growing interest by both cruise and independent travelers, drives a need for more trail opportunities for a wide range of abilities, interests and time frames. The result would decrease the intensity of use and potential impacts on existing trails and create attractive new adventure destination options.

The three projects presented here will expand the available trail opportunities, develop adventure water trails, and connect existing cabins to establish multi-day trip opportunities.



Enjoying the reflections on a dead calm day Eagle Beach State Rec area. Source: Pamela Himsworth Randles

1. HORSE TRAM TRAIL

The Horse Tram Trail in Juneau will connect two existing popular day hiking destination trail systems: Amalga Meadow and Boy Scout Beach. The recent addition of a City and Borough of Juneau's public use cabin adds a multi-day recreation option. The Horse Tram Trail will make these two recreation sites more accessible as well as inviting for overnight trips.

The 1.25-mile trail was established in the early 1900's as an actual tram to transport ore to Amalga Harbor and has been in disrepair and largely abandoned for decades. Reviving this trail is a large project taken on in partnership by CBJ and Trail Mix, Inc. In 2018, Trail Mix began the permitting and planning process. Work began in earnest in 2019 completing a 2000' reroute at the north end of the trail. Trail Mix will continue to harden the trail tread in 2020. CBJ has invested in the area in other ways as well, including building a public use cabin accessible from Amalga Meadows, and Boy Scout Beach has been a long-time popular camping spot for Juneauites.

Completing the Horse Tram Trail project will provide another attractive recreation option and a reason for independent travelers to stay 'one more day' in Southeast Alaska.

Project*	Lead	Benefits	Challenges	Costs	Priority & Status
Construction of the Horse Tram Trail connector to establish a new multi-day trip route	Trail Mix Inc, City and Borough of Juneau	- Provide multi-day recreation option - Create a new attractive recreation route	Minimal	CBJ has provided \$145k in CIP funding. Trail Mix is currently seeking additional funding up to \$100k for project completion.	Near Term (Shovel Ready) Near completion. Trail Mix, Inc. is planning to complete this project no later than 2021

*where relevant this column includes background on status



“Trails Are Magic” – The proof of that claim is visible in a (more or less) before and after picture of what a difference a trail makes. A trail through Southeast rainforest allows a comfortable stroll through terrain that would otherwise be a bit of a slog. (And there remain no lack of options for those who prefer the slog.)

Source: Trail Mix, Inc.



2. CROSS ADMIRALTY CANOE ROUTE

The Cross Admiralty Canoe Route is a 32-mile portage trail that offers a challenging adventure for those wanting to explore Admiralty National Monument. The chain of lakes has been used to cross the island by the Tlingit people since time immemorial, and public use cabins were built along the route in the 1930's.

Most of the portages on this route are surfaced with imported planking, some natural timber. There are several areas with rotting, slippery planks, or muddy sections. This project would replace the slippery planking and install tarred and braided seine netting as traction. Better signage and trail blazes would be included in the project. Trail Mix, Inc. of Juneau has partnered with invested groups such as SEAlaska, USFS ANM, and the National Forest Foundation to complete similar projects.

Apart from creating a safe portaging route, the completion of the project will result in an easier connection from the Seymour Canal to Angoon, which is currently serviced by the AMHS. Through marketing and partnering with local tourism and travel agencies, the Cross Admiralty Canoe Route could become a destination trail for independent travelers visiting SE Alaska.



Invitation to world class adventure – a combined walking and portaging route across the Island with some of the highest concentrations of brown bears in the world. The advent of pack rafts makes several of the longer portages much less daunting. Source: Trail Mix, Inc.

Project*	Lead	Benefits	Challenges	Costs	Priority & Status
Replacing deteriorating wooden trail structures to create a safer and more accessible version of this ancient route across Admiralty Island.	Trail Mix Inc, USFS Admiralty National Monument, SEAlaska TRAYLS program	- Replaces muddy portages and slippery planking with a safe, well-defined route - Creates a signature adventure destination trail	ANM is a designated wilderness and as such would require special care and permitting to import the materials as well as the tools available for use.	Est \$500,000 Materials and material transportation represent the bulk of the cost on this project. By partnering with organizations like Trail Mix and TRAYLS, costs could be kept lower.	Longer Term - Planning needed The ANM staff has worked to keep up with standard maintenance on the portages.

*where relevant this column includes background on status

3. PETERSON LAKE CABIN/JOHN MUIR CABIN CONNECTION TRAIL

The public use cabins on the Juneau road system are known to locals as a special resource to escape and appreciate Southeast Alaska’s natural beauty. By linking two of the most popular cabins, Juneau could begin to build a ‘hut-to-hut’ trail system that would give visitors reasons to stay at least one more day in Alaska. This 2.1-mile trail would be a totally new construction through muskeg and forested uplands and would begin and end at the respective cabins. While there are several challenges in conceptualizing this project, such as funding for design and layout, construction and NEPA review, these two cabins would be the most effective start to developing a ‘hut-to-hut’ system accessible by the road system.



One of the cabins to be connected by the proposed trail.
Source: Trail Mix, Inc.

Project*	Lead	Benefits	Challenges	Costs	Priority & Status
Construction of 2.1 miles of trail to connect two popular cabins in order to develop a multi-day trip option.	Trail Mix Inc, USFS	Links two popular USFS public use cabins and creates the beginning of a ‘hut-to-hut’ system on the Juneau road system.	While there are several challenges such as funding sources, NEPA review, COE permitting, these are the standard challenges faced with any new trail project	Estimated to be \$1.5 million in total costs.	Near Term Planning in Progress

*where relevant this column includes background on status

