

Outdoor Recreation as a Strategy to Build a Better Alaskan Economy

***Boots on Ground Work on Outdoor Recreation:
Lessons from the Local & Regional Scale
Statewide Trail Initiative***



**Alaska Trail Alliance
Confluence
Alaska New Venture Trust**

**Chris Beck
Agnew::Beck Consulting, Inc
Alaska Trails Board Member**





Alaska Trails mission is to enhance the Alaska trail experience by supporting sustainable, world-renowned trails through advocacy, education and technical assistance

WELCOME TO ALASKA TRAIL STEWARDS



Current Volunteer Events



Map of Volunteer Events



ATS Resources



ATS 2017 Stats

<http://www.alaska-trails.org/>

Thanks BLM/Tom Bickhauskas!

Starting Assertion #1

Alaska has barely opened our state's outdoor recreation treasure chest, and grossly underinvested in outdoor recreation, our State's greatest natural asset.
Competing destinations are doing the opposite.



Starting Assertion #2

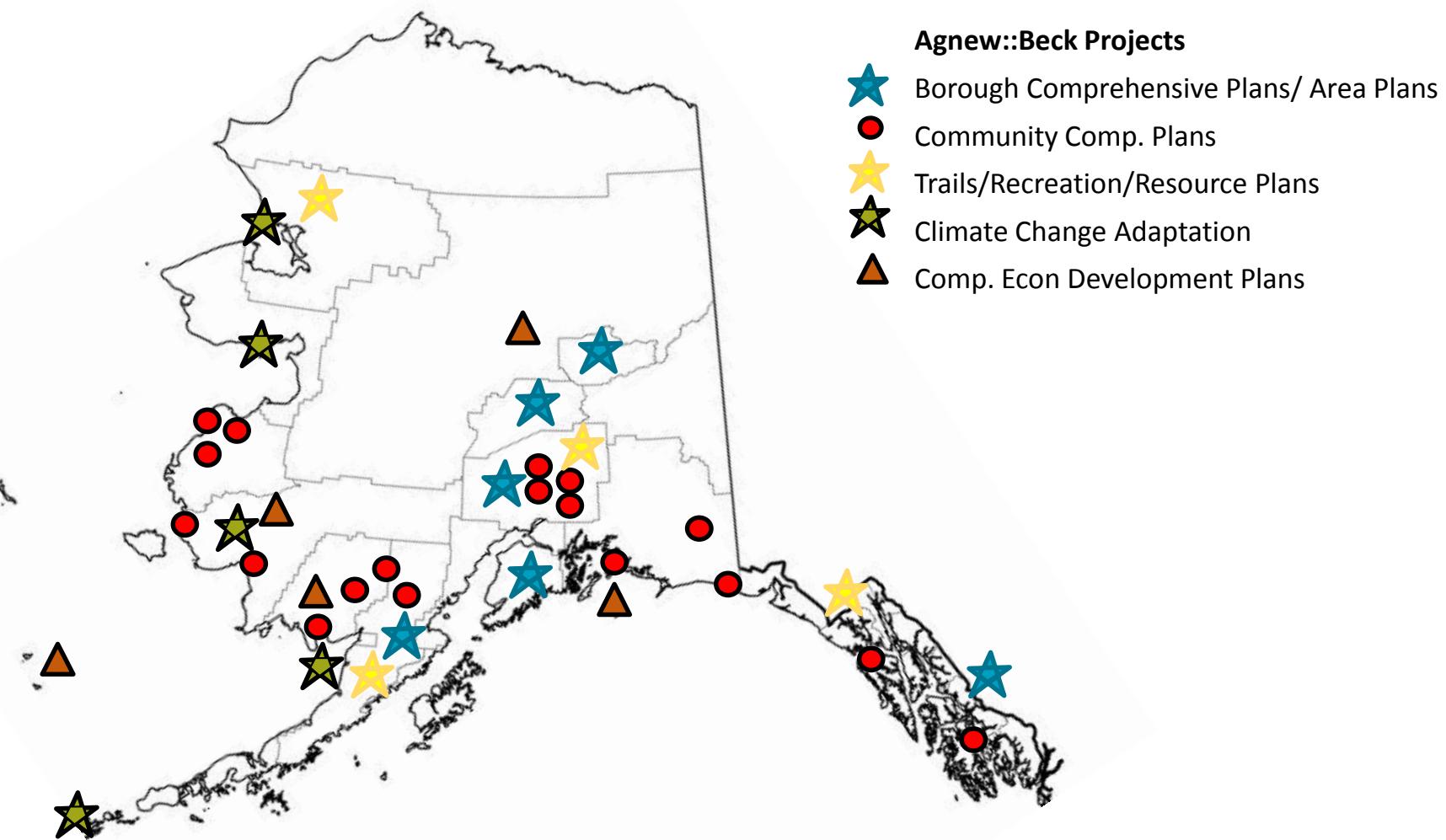
We are missing our chance to build a stronger, more durable economy, with more: good, year round jobs; businesses opportunities; and incentives for footloose residents & businesses more reasons to choose Alaska...



So – How to Get There?

- I. Work and Lessons at Local & Regional Scales
2. Work Statewide – The Alaska Trails/Outdoor Recreation Initiative
3. Conclusions: “We have a dream...”

I. Examples: Plans with a Strong Economic/Outdoor Recreation/Land Management Component



Reoccurring Plan Process

– lots of listening



Reoccurring Goals

“Everything important to me is here: it is my home”

“The Kenai River provides us with fish all summer long”

“Peace and quiet, and the freedom to do what you want”

Rural,
small-town
lifestyle

Strong
community
connections

Beautiful
scenery &
wildlife

Our
Values

Freedom,
with few
constraints

Abundant
natural
resources

“We all help each other out, it's a **close community**”

“There are a lot of **activities**, recreation options in summer and winter”

“It's a **beautiful place**: mountains, wilderness, water...”

Reoccurring Strategies

Extract from Outdoor Rec/Tourism Chapter of KPB Comp Plan

- Provide great outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities for a wide range of users, to create **a stronger, more enduring borough economy and support resident health and quality of life**
- Improve recreational **trails, recreational access** and mobility
- Protect the **underlying quality** of recreation and tourism places and resources.
- Expand the recreation and tourism **appeal of borough communities**
- Encourage and take greater advantage of **partnerships** to better support, expand, and manage growth in tourism and outdoor recreation

Successes? – Sitka Outdoor Rec Plan

The Sitka, Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan is the product of more than a year of active, community-wide planning. The plan builds from a spectrum of community perspectives, including:

- views expressed in resident and visitor surveys
- focus groups with community leaders, youth and “vintage” residents
- interviews with individuals, businesses and organizations
- Assembly briefings
- a series of well-attended community workshops

Mike Eberhardt, Southeast Alaska Superintendent
Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
Alaska Department of Natural Resources

Marcel LaPerriere, President
Sitka Conservation Society

Brian Hanson, President
Sitka Trail Works, Inc.

Charles Clement, CEO
Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium

The plan presents two main products: an ambitious, comprehensive set of outdoor recreation projects, and a subset of this full list identifying first tier priorities. While the process was sponsored by the US Forest Service, the final implementation of the plan rests with the plan partners and the public. Support for this plan does not establish a rigid obligation to carry out these projects, but the signatures do indicate support for the plan and the intent to work in good faith to implement these projects. By agreeing to continue to work together, these parties are expanding the community's capability to implement projects, and helping Sitka to be a better place to live, visit, work and play.

Jim Dinley
Municipal Administrator
City and Borough of Sitka
Subject to Assembly Approval.

Randy Larson, Superintendent
Sitka National Historical Park

Lawrence Widmark, Tribal Chairman
Sitka Tribe of Alaska

Carol Goularte, District Ranger
Sitka Ranger District
Tongass National Forest

Sitka Sustainable Outdoor Recreation Plan



Successes?

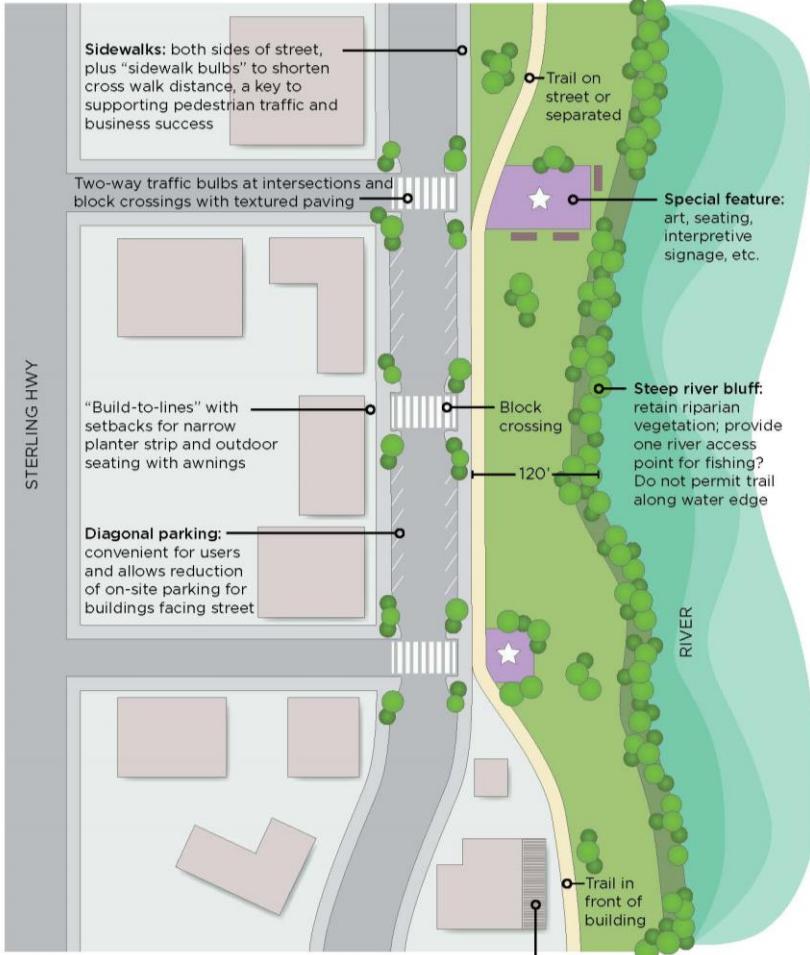
BBNC Acquires Katmai NP Concession



Successes?

Concepts for Soldotna

14



I. Lessons from the local/regional scale?

Summary: the Good News

- Widely held interest in outdoor recreation as an economic engine
- Approved plans and strategies, with great projects and sensible policies
- Soft but growing voices saying... “time to grow up Alaska”

But, Continuing Weak Implementation & Limited Investment in Outdoor Recreation

- **Grumpy Alaskans** – “already too crowded” “too bad if they’re lost”
- **Business disconnect** – “support outdoor rec just means greenies kill real economic development”
- **Fiscal disconnect** – e.g., Hope AK; want growth, but volunteers tired of cleaning the one outhouse
- **Opposition** to taxes, rules, growth
 - **Tight budgets, limited staff, lack of coordination between land owners**
 - **Painful process** to reserve trails
 - **Friction & fragmentation** among outdoor recreation “tribes”
 - **Circular arguments:** “There’s no money in it” “visitors don’t want to get outside” (because the trails are crappy, people are afraid of bears...)

2. Alaska Trails & Outdoor Recreation Initiative

Making a difference: local/regional, statewide..

Who's Doing the Work?

Today's Core Team

- Steve Cleary – Alaska Trails
- Stuart Leidner – Mat Su Trails Foundation
- Lynne Brandon – Sitka Trail Works
- Erik Boraas – Juneau Trail Mix
- Lee Hart – Levitation 49/Confluence
- Jessica Szelag – Kenai Mountains Turnagain Arm Nat'l Heritage Area
- Paul Clark – NPS Rivers Trails Conservation Assistance
- Pat Pourchot – AK Long Trails
- Beth Nordlund – Alaska Park Foundation
- Chris Beck – Alaska Trails/Agnew::Beck Consulting

Working with

- Agencies & local gov'ts
- Major land owners
- Tourism organizations
- Non-profit foundations
- Diverse outdoor recreation user groups
- Economic Development organizations
- Local governments
- Health organizations
- And others... (you!)

Who? “Big Tent” – Non Denominational



All the outdoor recreation tribes: active fun for young & old; motorized & non;
package & indep., hunting & fishing, hiking, kayaking, climbing, biking, boating...



2. Alaska Trails & Outdoor Recreation Initiative

Process & Products

1. Inventory proposed trails/O.R. projects statewide
2. Highlight a subset of most promising projects
3. Use case studies to highlight economic benefits

What's
Your
Project?



Objectives & Outcomes

- Build a coalition; sealed with a statement of “good faith support” from partners & agencies
- Add momentum to specific trails/outdoor recreation projects
- Win hearts, minds, wallets of elected officials, agencies, funders

"TRACKS PLAN"

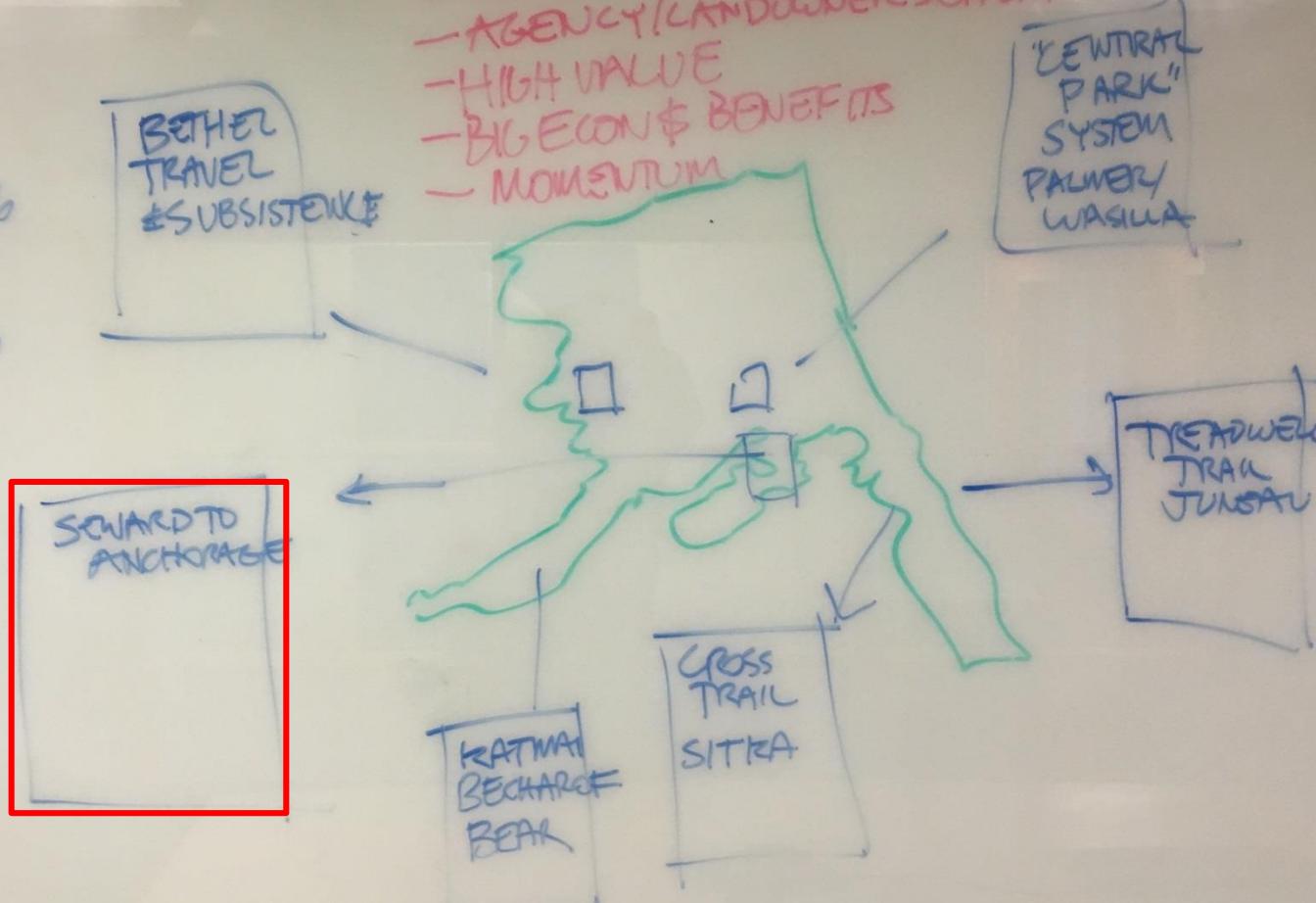
1. INVENTORIES

2. FEATURED TRAILS

FEATURED TRAILS

- PROXIMITY/IMPORTANCE TO USERS
- AGENCY/LANDOWNER SUPPORT
- HIGH VALUE
- BIG ECON \$ BENEFITS
- MOMENTUM

"CENTRAL PARK"
SYSTEM
PALMER
WASILLA





Much of the original trail was built over by the railroad and Seward Highway

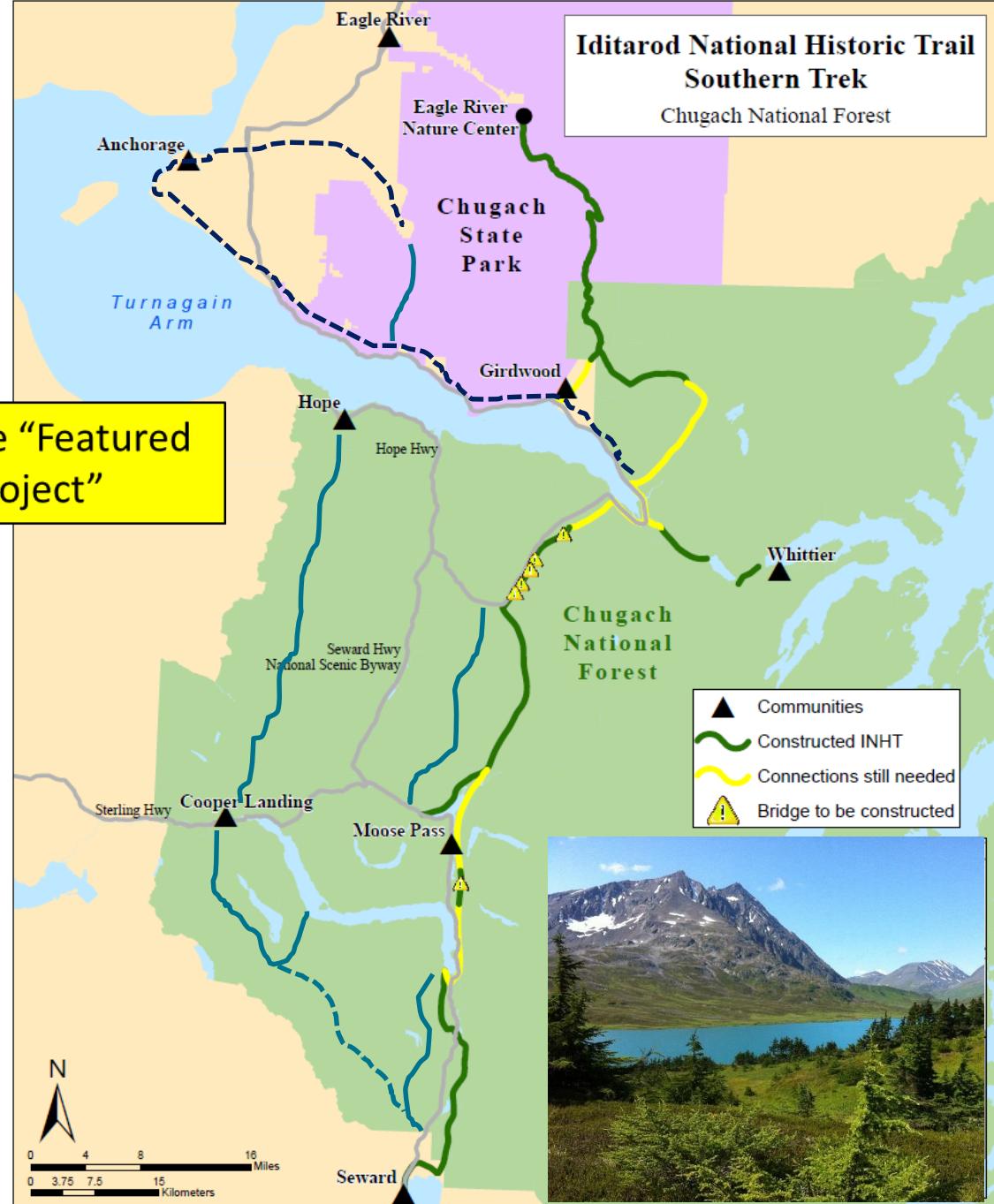
The vision for the INHT Southern Trek is a re-connected , 180-200 mile *Long Trail*

A few bridges and planned segments are all that is left to reconnect the INHT

In 2018, the INHT was recognized by the USFS as a trail maintenance *priority area*, one of only 15 areas in the entire US

In 2018, the USFS Chugach National Forest and partners celebrate two anniversaries relevant to the INHT

Sample “Featured Trail Project”



Map of the Southern Trek of the Iditarod National Historic Trail

ANCHORAGE ↔ Seward / IDITAROD TRAIL

ANCHORAGE TO SEWARD TRAIL

OVERVIEW

The 120+ mile trek from Anchorage to Seward goes through awe-inspiring terrain ranging from coast to alpine, along the same routes traveled by people for thousands of years.....

Land Managers: Municipality of Anchorage, Chugach State Park

CURRENT PROJECTS

Portage Curve:
Crow Pass Improvements:
Turnagain Arm Trail Improvements:
Anchorage Non-Motorized Plan:

NEEDED INVESTMENTS

USFS – bridges and trail segments, \$5 million
CSP – Feasible route between Bird and Anchorage, \$2.5 million
Muni of Anchorage – Route from Coastal Trail or other key trail, \$7 million

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Here's what we're gonna do!.....

A map titled "Iditarod National Historic Trail Southern Trek Chugach National Forest" showing the trail route from Anchorage to Seward. The trail is marked with a green line, with yellow segments indicating planned trails. Key locations marked include Anchorage, Turnagain Arm, Eagle River, Eagle River Nature Center, Chugach State Park, Monarch Mine #100, Girdwood, Hope, Hope Bay, Ingram Creek #161, Turnagain Pass #158, Johnson Pass #310, Moose Pass, Cooper Landing, Sterling Bay, Meridian Lakes #339, Bear Lake #315, and Seward. The map also shows the Seward Hwy National Scenic Byway. A scale bar shows distances in miles and kilometers, and a compass rose indicates North.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GEMMA AMORELLI / USFS; Upper Winner Creek Trail, Campbell Tract, Johnson Pass

ECONOMIC CASE: WHY THIS TRAIL?

- Proximity to Visitors & Residents
- Most accessible mtn environ in AK
- Managed, public lands...

Business Benefits

- Lodging
- Rentals
- Guides...

Community Benefits

- Anchorage.....
- Girdwood....
- Cooper Landing...
- Moose Pass....

Who's Involved and Next Steps

- N

OTHER “FEATURED TRAIL” PROJECTS...



Conceptual drawing of Healy Town Center (1999)

O.R. PRIORITIES – Path to AK Prosperity

1. OUTDOOR ADVENTURE SERVING THE “THE MISSING MIDDLE”

More investment and better partnerships to serve what most people want, that is: affordable, safe, short-term adventure, with a bed and shower, good food and drink, and fast internet at the end of the day

2. WORLD CLASS DESTINATION ADVENTURE

A few more adventurous opportunities; long trails summer & winter, motorized & non motorized. Trails/cabins like the Pacific Crest trail, New Zealand’s walks. More reasons to fly over the Sierras, the Rockies, the Alps and come to Alaska

3. “DESTINATION TOWNS” – WALKABLE HIGH AMENITY TOWNS WITH OUT-THE-DOOR ACCESS TO BIG FUN AT THE EDGE OF TOWN

Alaskan communities that can compete with destinations around the planet; communities that provide compelling reasons to move to or stay, to visit, to start or grow a business

WHAT KIND OF INVESTMENTS?

Ways to get outside and experience Alaska –
trails, huts, tent platforms...

Marketing – more information about outdoor experiences

Information – radical ideas like trail signs

Guiding growth – “curating”/stewarding
our outdoor recreation resources; better
town planning

Investments with real returns

Investments that don't cost a fortune

A few examples....



GOOD TRAILS

HUT-TO-HUT SYSTEMS



GIRDWOOD/CROW PASS to EAGLE RIVER –
two day walk through the heart of the
Chugach, in the center of AK population, and
a segment of the Iditarod Trail But... rough
trail, no bridge over thigh-deep Eagle River.



AK HUTS WHISTLESTOP SYSTEM – “shovel
ready” hut to hut trail project in Spencer
River/Spencer Glacier drainage. Progress,
albeit slowly, with AK Railroad, USFS, State
of Alaska, Alaska Huts.

MARINE TRAILS/CABINS

LONG TRAILS

KAYAKS & BOATS CABIN TO CABIN

SYSTEM – It's a glorious thing to kayak/boat and camp along Alaska's coasts... until it rains. The lack of cabin-to-cabin water trails holds back the potential for world class draws.

PROPOSED "ALASKA LONG TRAILS"

- Iditarod/cross Kenai adventure biking, hiking, skiing trail.
- Community to community, lodge to lodge snow machine trails
- Copper River Trail –the historical route of the Kennecott copper mine railway
- Trans Alaska Trail – 800 miles of wild Alaska, following the pipeline from sea to shining sea.



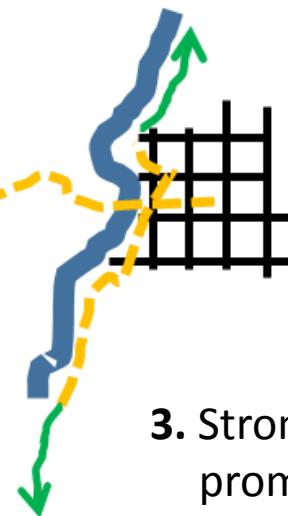
DESTINATION TOWNS...

Places like Bend OR have robust year round economies, driven by a simple formula:



1. A concentrated, walkable center with lodging, food, bars, rentals, other services

2. Inviting trails and transit link the core to surrounding recreation places



3. Strong marketing at state level promoting active recreation destinations & experiences



Bend Oregon: Outdoor Recreation Economy Begets Economic Diversification

Bend's New Businesses (2010-2015)

Rank	Industry Sector	New Establishments	% of New Establishments
1	Restaurants and Other Eating Places	122	6%
2	Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services*	118	6%
3	Residential Building Construction	104	5%
4	Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers*	89	4%
5	Offices of Real Estate Agents and Brokers	81	4%
6	Services to Buildings and Dwellings	67	3%
7	Offices of Physicians	56	3%
8	Offices of Other Health Practitioners	55	3%
9	Building Finishing Contractors	54	3%
10	Computer Systems Design and Related Services*	54	3%

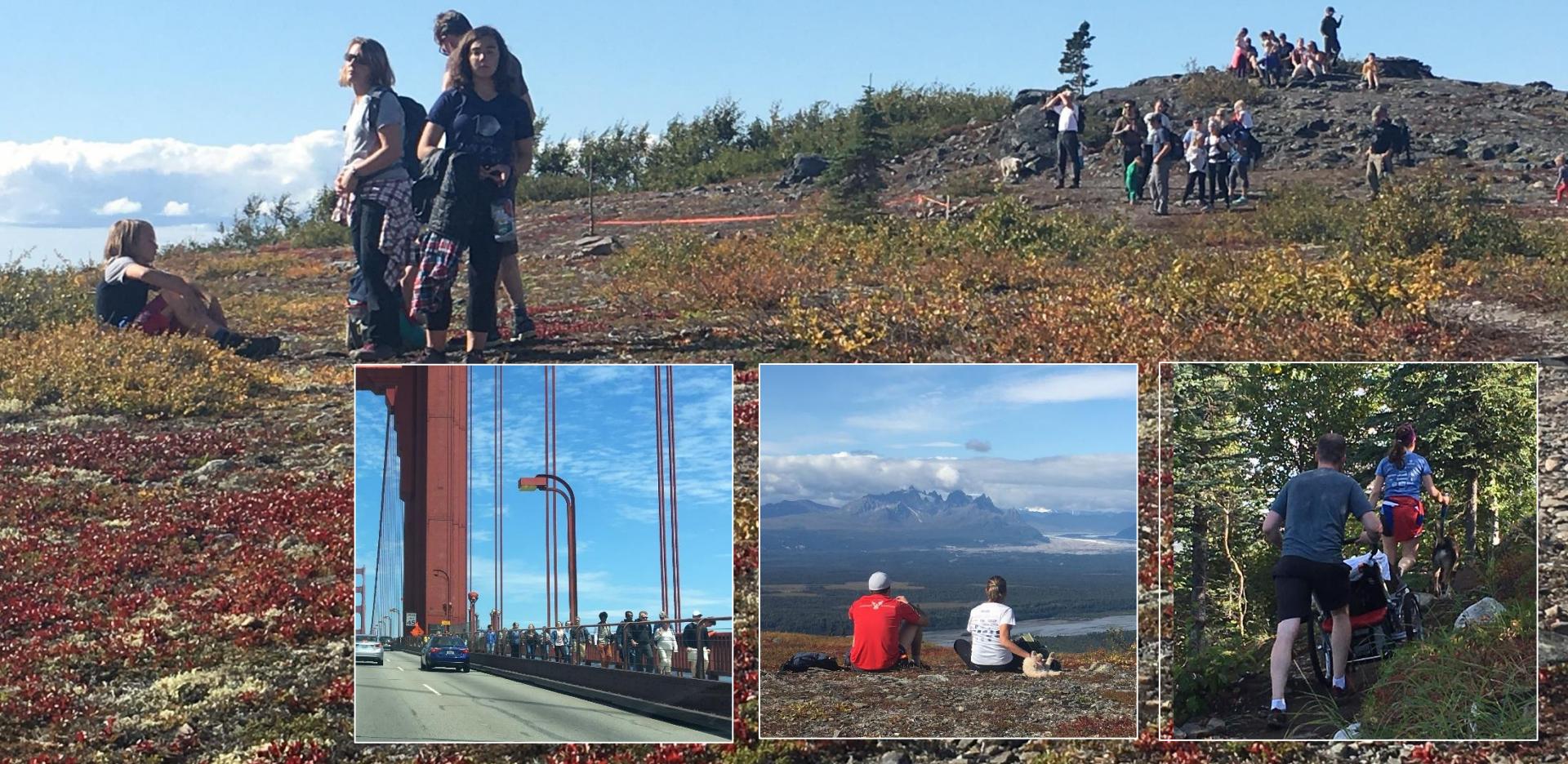
*-Lifestyle Related Industry

Damon Runberg, Regional Economist, State of Oregon

<https://www.qualityinfo.org/-/does-bend-s-adventure-label-help-attract-lifestyle-businesses->

3. We have a dream...

Is this a “build it and they will come” delusion?



3. We have a dream...

What if...

- AK wakes from its oil-fed slumber, breaks out of our “poverty mentality,” makes real investments in outdoor recreation?
- Alaska was no longer 50th in the country in our state tourism marketing budget?
- State Parks had staff and budget to build and maintain more trails, trail signs, cabins, hut to hut systems?
- Revenue generation starts matching growth in demand for outdoor recreation services?
- Our communities were as memorable as our mountains?
- Outdoor rec. interests work closely together for shared goals
- With newly strengthened support, O.R. becomes the foundation of a stronger economy, an even better place to live, and sustained stewardship of what makes Alaska unique?



Thanks!

- Chris Beck – Chris@agnewbeck.com
- Lee Hart – info@valdezadventure.com
- Steve Cleary – steve.cleary@alaska-trails.org

