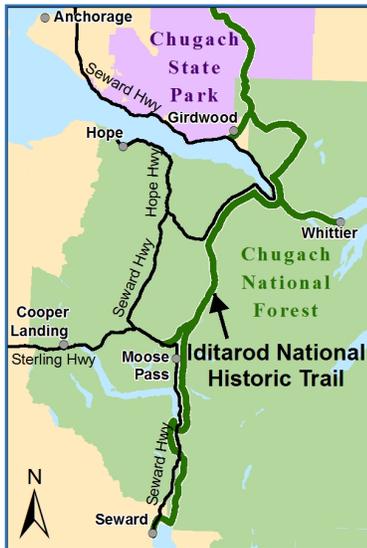




IDITAROD National Historic Trail

The Southern Trek



The National Trails Act, as amended in 1978, designated the Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) from Seward to Nome, Alaska, across federal, state, municipal and private lands. The INHT Comprehensive Plan (1986) provides guidelines for the protection, development and management of the primary route, commemorative route, and connecting trails and for associated heritage resources along the entire length of the trail. It also identifies agency responsibilities for completing sections of the primary route and connecting trails. The U.S. Forest Service has stewardship responsibilities for most of the southern end of the INHT, known locally as the *Southern Trek*. Through multiple partnerships, the U.S. Forest Service works to restore and develop over 180 miles of trail system connecting the communities of Seward, Moose Pass, Hope, Whittier, and Girdwood, along the primary and commemorative routes of the INHT *Southern Trek*.

As the only National Historic Trail in Alaska, the INHT inspires and draws Iditarod enthusiasts, history buffs, students, and outdoor adventurers from around the world. This report highlights the 2019 accomplishments, partnership successes, progress to date, and priorities for 2020 for the *Southern Trek* within the Chugach National Forest.

2019 Accomplishments

Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom (iTREC!)

Partners and agency employees completed the ninth year of the Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom program (iTREC!) in 2019. iTREC! is a yearlong professional development program that provides teachers with place-based service learning skills to help today’s youth become lifelong stewards of Alaska’s public lands, natural resources, and cultural heritage. This long-running, successful partnership is now in its tenth year with 126 teachers who have completed the training and are engaging over 10,000 students in thirteen different subject areas in eleven communities along the INHT.



School teachers and instructors for the iTREC! training held in Seward in the fall of 2019



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Stewardship and Volunteerism

The INHT was designated by the Secretary of Agriculture as one of fifteen Priority Areas within the National Forest System as required by the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. The U.S. Forest Service worked in partnership with the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance (IHTA) who received a technical assistance grant from the National Park Service, Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance program, to promote stewardship of the INHT *Southern Trek*. This assistance made it possible for the U.S. Forest Service and partners to implement a season of successful stewardship activities along the INHT *Southern Trek*.

Three stewardship events were developed with IHTA, Alaska Trails, Kenai Mountain –Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area Corridor Communities Association, several community organizations, and state and federal agencies to engage the public in trail maintenance activities and engage local communities. These weekend events were made possible by collaborative effort to recruit and work with volunteers to help build and maintain sections of trail. Local community businesses generously supported the volunteers with food and raffle items. The volunteers built or maintained approximately 2400 feet of trail during the stewardship events. Other partner organizations participated in additional stewardship activities along the trail system throughout the summer.



Volunteers working on a new section of trail

Trail Repair and Maintenance

- Completed field layout and design of new trail sections near Moose Pass and new trails leading to the Snow River Bridge at mile 18 of the Seward Highway; and initial layout of the new Vagt Lake Trailhead.
- Widened and improved the first two miles of Lost Lake Trail. Repairs included building a log retaining wall, re-establishing an eroded section of trail, removing a decked puncheon and replacing it with a drainage dip.



U.S. Forest Service employees working on trail tread

Youth Engagement

The U.S. Forest Service partnered with Alaska Geographic (Chugach Children’s Forest) to sponsor a youth crew for various activities across the forest. The youth crew helped volunteers and a Student Conservation Crew to build a new section of trail near Moose Pass. The U.S. Forest Service also worked with a youth crew from the Qutekcak Native Tribe to construct a 325 foot trail reroute which moved a section of trail further from an area susceptible to erosion, repaired a turnpike and demolished an old puncheon, and constructed and reestablished drainage dips.



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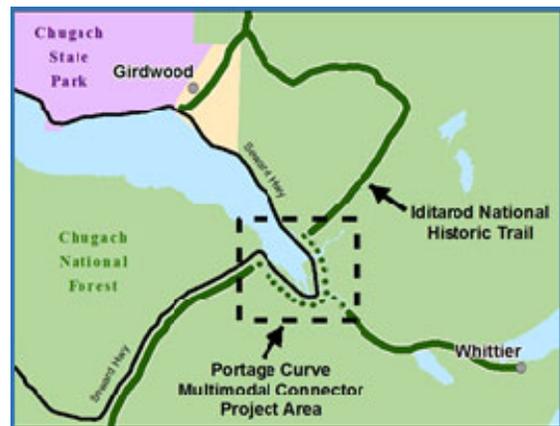
Planning, Survey, and Design

The U.S. Forest Service completed site and trail easement surveys for segments of the INHT that cross state lands. Finalizing site and trail easements and recording these with the State of Alaska continues to be a high priority for ensuring consistent management of trail segments crossing state lands and long-term availability of the trail for public use. The U.S. Forest Service also worked in partnership with a local community organization to assist with survey work of their Nordic ski loops that are adjacent to and connect with the INHT system.

Portage Curve Multimodal Connector

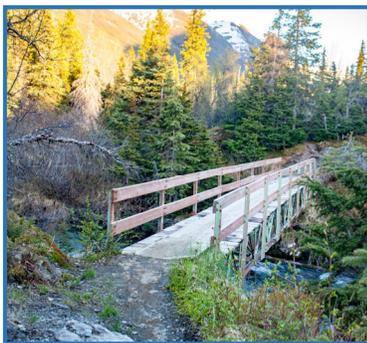
The U.S. Forest Service secured a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) grant in conjunction with Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant in 2016 to design and construct the Portage Curve Multimodal Trail system. This project will provide critical links to the INHT near Portage, AK.

The Portage Curve Multimodal Connector trail system will be a universally accessible pathway, will improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety along the Seward Highway, and will connect visitors to other recreational opportunities in the Portage Valley area, Turnagain Pass area, Twentymile River, and Placer River. By providing this connectivity, the pathway will help contribute to the recreational and economic opportunities along the highway as well as sections of the INHT corridor. This section of trail has been previously identified and approved for development in both municipal, state and federal management plans.



This project will help visitors connect with the natural and cultural heritage along this corridor. The project is scheduled to be delivered by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities in conjunction with the Mile 75-90 Seward Highway Reconstruction project. Construction on Portage Curve Multimodal Connector pathway could start as early as 2021.

New Bridges, New Connections



The U.S. Forest Service secured funding to contract with a company to install two new bridges at major creek crossings along the INHT *Southern Trek*. One will be placed over Falls Creek, connecting segments of the INHT Moose Pass Trail on the Seward Ranger District. The second bridge will be placed over Ingram Creek connecting segments of the INHT Ingram Creek Trail on the Glacier Ranger District. The construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2020.



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Planned Actions: 2020 and Beyond

Stewardship Activities

The U.S. Forest Service will prioritize continued stewardship activities and events in summer of 2020. Locations will be chosen based on district trail priorities, as well as community needs. The focus for future volunteer efforts will include recruiting volunteer groups with various skill-sets to match the different types of work (new trail construction, brushing, trail-tread maintenance); expanding the number of activities volunteers can participate in; and increasing involvement from local communities.

Other Actions

- The U.S. Forest Service received Federal Lands Access Program funding for developing the Vagt Lake Trailhead near Moose Pass over the next few years. The Vagt Lake Trail is one of the access points to the INHT. The new trailhead will resolve trespass issues for the Alaska Railroad and for local residents, and provide a better recreation facility for visitors.
- The U.S. Forest Service is participating with other federal and state agencies and organizations to highlight the INHT as part of the Alaska Statewide Trails Initiative that focuses on development of a trail system traveling from Anchorage to Seward that will enhance tourism opportunities, improve real estate values, build economic opportunities for communities, and provide numerous ways for Alaskans and visitors to enjoy a healthy way of life.

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The Iditarod National Historic Trail at Portage Pass near Whittier