

PATHS & PADDLEWAYS

the quarterly newsletter of Island Trails Network



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2008-2009: A Year in Review, a Year in Preview

On October 31 2008, just two weeks after the completion of a productive and dynamic field season, Island Trails Network celebrated our second anniversary. In those two years, we had grown from a small committed group of trail enthusiasts to an organization with a membership of over one hundred families, with a name now familiar to most Kodiak residents. Our staff is now pursuing year-round trail construction, planning, consulting and education projects. Under the direction of our strategic plan, we are creating an interconnected system of sustainable trails across community and backcountry that links people to natural resources, to the outdoors, and to each other. Please take a moment to reflect with us on the accomplishments of 2008.

Winter

In February ITN President Erin Whipple and Executive Director Andy Schroeder spoke at the Alaska Forum for the Environment on the accomplishments of the previous September at the Portage Trail, and taught other trail organizations and conservation groups how to implement trail hardening projects in rural communities. We also gave presentations on marine debris removal efforts in Kodiak as part of a workshop to share ideas, best practices, and develop standardized procedures for marine debris survey and removal across the state.

At the onset of spring, as Kodiakans prepared for the long days and adventurous pursuits of summer, ITN held its annual kayaking safety seminars. These pool clinics were offered free of charge four times throughout May, attracting over fifty avid and aspiring sea kayakers. We taught the basic skills of kayak entry and wet-exit, along with more advanced rescues and rolls.

Betsy Lund photo

Summer

Our field season kicked into high gear with the first annual Trails Summit, also held in May. This Friday event drew well over a hundred people, packing the newly-opened Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center to near capacity. The evening's series of four presentations by Kodiak adventurers held the audience spellbound, and proved to be a successful and wildly popular fundraiser for ITN.

That same weekend we held our first annual outdoor trail training sessions hosted by experts from Alaska Trails on sustainable trail construction and design. The Sustainable Trails Training event inspired many to pick up a Pulaski or shovel and take ownership in Kodiak's developing trail system. For others it may have inspired them discover our vast backcountry more, further, or all over again.

Our volunteers plied their new skills in June, when we broke ground on a series of improvements to the Island Lake Creek trail originating at Mill Bay Beach. A new bridge constructed where an old one had fallen restored trail connectivity between two adjacent neighborhoods, and provided improved access to beaches, parks and schools for many of our neighbors. A boardwalk was installed in a marshy area, allowing for easy, low impact passage through the wetland. Our work on making improvements to urban trails like the Island Lake trail promises to continue and expand in 2009.

Fall

We made great progress this summer on two major trail hardening projects at Summit Lake in July and August, and the Karluk Portage trail this September. We continue to use geoblock porous panels to provide improved riding surfaces along wet and low-lying segments of motorized trails. Under the leadership of landowner Koniag Native Corporation and working alongside its shareholders, we installed a quarter-mile of improved trail at Portage and assembled the materials for an equivalent length to be installed next year. Currently in phase II of a five-year project, the Portage Trail geoblock installation has already begun restoring hundreds of acres of wetlands that have been heavily impacted by offroad vehicle (ORV) use.

At the Summit Lake trail, approximately five miles inland from the mouth of the Olds River, we employed a trail crew that consisted of native youth from the Kuskokwim region and Little Diomedé island. Under the guidance of their crew leaders from the Southeast Alaska Guidance Association (SAGA), this energetic group established a new sustainable route while learning the importance of good land stewardship. At the end of their week on the site, they had installed 700 feet of geoblock trail and built a bridge crossing of an anadromous stream, thus completing a major re-route of this heavily used recreational trail from the lake bed to higher, drier ground.

Since our inception we have been addressing the issue of marine debris—garbage and derelict fishing gear on our beaches—as part of the stewardship of our water trails. This was our second year working with the Marine Conservation Alliance Foundation (MCAF) to identify and clean up coastal areas in Kodiak impacted by marine debris. The results were astounding; With the help of over 70 volunteers over the spring, summer and fall, we collected enough marine debris to fill ten dump trucks, a bounty weighing over 18,000 lbs. With help from groups like Boy Scout Troop 626 and Native Village of Afognak, we worked in remote locales including Shuyak, Afognak, Long Island, Spruce Island and in the face of October gales, Sitkinak. Thanks to the efforts of our volunteers throughout 2008, our shores are cleaner, more beautiful and safer for wildlife.



Forecast for 2009

This winter, we have focused our education and outreach efforts to trail users across the community. In December, ITN conducted training on legal stream crossings to over 150 Coast Guard personnel, and developed a curriculum that will soon reach all incoming Coast Guard members and dependents, as well as new members of the Kodiak community.

Our work plan for 2009 demonstrates an increased focus on urban trail improvement and connectivity efforts, as well as continued progress on remote trail hardening and marine debris clean-up activities. Our first order of business for the New Year is a Strategic Plan review on January 4th, to assess where we've been and where we're headed in light of a five-year strategic plan we adopted in November, 2007.

ITN'S MISSION IS TO
DEVELOP, MAINTAIN
AND PROMOTE
SUSTAINABLE LAND AND
WATER TRAILS AND AC-
CESS THROUGHOUT THE
KODIAK ARCHIPELAGO

Beginning in January 2009, we will become formally involved with the City of Kodiak in planning and constructing trails on Near Island, with the overall goal of connecting the south end and north end parks via the Near Island research properties and Rotary park. These new trails will enhance the value of urban green space that we feel has high recreational value but is underutilized. More importantly, this connection will network all the trails on the island, improve the overall recreational experience, and will both complement and mitigate the ongoing development efforts at Near Island.

A separate initiative, also to begin this winter will obtain the necessary easements and legal authority to construct

a path from the intersection of the Zharoff bridge and Rezanof Drive down to Mission Road. This urban connection will dramatically improve pedestrian access to downtown Kodiak from the northeast.

We hope to continue improvements to the Island Lake trail this year, adding non-skid to the boardwalk installed last year, and working toward developing short offshoots of the trail to provide public access to the trail from Antone Way and North Star Elementary. We have been engaged from the beginning in the ongoing Safe Routes to Schools trail and sidewalk discussions organized by the North Star PTA and are encouraged by the progress made there this year.

2009 (cont'd)

This year ITN will once again make improvements to publicly-owned segments of the Summit Lake trail and Portage trail to mitigate the use of ORVs on Kodiak's fragile soils. Through re-routing and installation of hardening materials like Geoblock, we have substantially reduced the impact of some of Kodiak's most heavily used trails on the surrounding environment, improved water quality in two major river systems and restored scores of acres of wetlands, and we hope to continue or expand these efforts in future years.

A recent federal court decision upheld the legitimacy of Leisnoi Native Corporation, who owns hundreds of acres of land and many miles of trails on or close to Kodiak's road system. During decades of litigation dating back to the 1970s, Leisnoi's assets were frozen and they were unable to actively manage the recreational use of these lands. Now Leisnoi has begun to institute some new land-use policies including usage permits, prohibitions and possible trail closures. ITN hopes to work with Leisnoi and other landowners to identify past, present and future trail uses, and in some cases prescribe improvements or repairs to areas impacted by improper or over-use. At the same time, we will educate the public about new policies, fostering compliance and easing the transition to a new land-use climate for Kodiak islanders.

We hope this emerging partnership between Island Trails Network and Leisnoi will lead to vast improvements to impacted areas of the Summit Lake trail on the ascent to Summit Lake.



Kevin Meyer photo

Although these areas are in more need of attention than the site of last year's re-route, until now improvements to this segment of trail could not be made because of their private ownership and Leisnoi's legal status. With these issues now resolved, we hope to move forward with Leisnoi in applying for a Natural Resources Conservation Service incentive payment to harden the trail and restore the surrounding areas to their natural state.

Although we place a high priority on keeping trails open for people's use and enjoyment, we recognize that in some cases trail closure is the only viable option. Leisnoi faces some difficult and perhaps unpopular decisions regarding motorized use on their other lands. With expertise in sustainable trail maintenance and repair we will serve as a resource to them on these issues and stand behind them in enacting trail closures where necessary.

These evolving and changing land use policies will have far reaching impacts on trail use throughout the Kodiak trail system.

Closure or user fees on certain routes will change trail use patterns and place increased pressure on public lands and the routes accessing them. By working closely with borough, state and federal landowners, Island Trails Network will prepare an appropriate response in trail management and maintenance to new use patterns on all Kodiak road system trails.

We are proud of our accomplishments in 2008 and look forward to the coming year as another opportunity to make new friends and share unforgettable Kodiak experiences in pursuit of our goals for trails and the people who use them. Please join us and share in the adventure!



Erin Whipple photo

Board of Directors:

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Island Trails Network
PO Box 4371
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

907-539-1979
info@islandtrails.org

www.islandtrails.org