



**PROJECT REPORT**  
**Alaska Volunteer Trip**  
**Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest**  
**and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park**  
**June 10-20, 2019**



**Executive Summary**

Fifteen Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) volunteers, including three trip leaders, traveled from all over the United States to work on trails with two different public land management agencies in Southeast Alaska. On the Tongass National Forest, Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (Juneau Ranger District) we installed two drainage culverts and installed associated ditches, and elevated sections of trail surface by moving and spreading 30,000 pounds of gravel. We also completed major brushing using hand tools on a cross country and summer use trail, and we made headway to eliminate invasive plants at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center. At the

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park near Skagway, we helped reroute a section of the historic Chilkoot Trail and completed some significant brushing. We worked closely and received excellent support and supervision from both National Forest Service and Park Service crew leaders at their respective locations. Tools, materials and supplies were provided by these agencies, along with some donated brushing/sawing hand tools to Juneau Ranger District from ConservationVIP. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed approximately 315 hours in three days to the Forest Service and 390 hours in four days to the National Park Service, totally 705 hours in this trip.

### **Detailed Trip Report**

#### **Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, Tongass National Forest, Juneau, Alaska:**

Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, within the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, is an extremely popular destination for visitors during the summer and for locals year around. Visitors during the summer include visiting friends and relatives, but the majority are from the cruise ships anchored downtown who are bussed to the Visitor Center to view the magnificent Mendenhall Glacier. Trails departing from the Visitor Center are used by visitors, both guided and unguided, and local residents alike. The popular Dredge Lakes unit, which is a part of the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, is directly adjacent to the Mendenhall Glacier, Lake, and River and the trail system within also receives use year-round. Overhanging alder, spruce and other vegetation hampers hiker and biker trail use in the summer and cross-country skiing in winter.

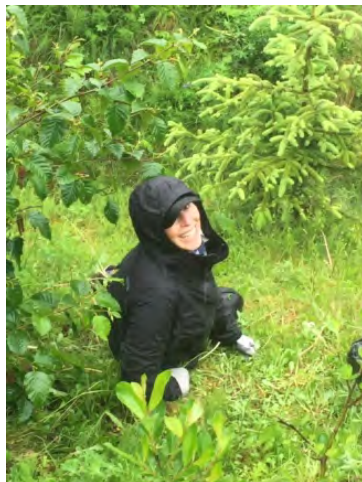
Workdays 1 and 2: After a comprehensive “Working in Bear Country” safety discussion volunteers had the opportunity to visit the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center in the morning as an orientation to this spectacular landscape.

We then proceeded to the Trail of Time trailhead with the project leader and three other Forest Service trail employees. The project leader described the project and desired outcomes and demonstrated tool use and safety. Two of our volunteers volunteered to work at a trail location adjacent to the Visitor Center to make great headway eradicating the invasive plant oxeye daisy (while saying hello to the hundreds of visitors making their way into the Center). They dug out, bagged and removed approximately 10 gallons of the insidious plants.

Part of the crew, with Forest Service crew members, proceeded to dig four ditches - two to accommodate two culverts across the trail, and two ditches to either drain into or drain out of the new culverts. The remaining volunteers proceeded to load and move 30,000 pounds of small gravel to fill in low sections of the trail. Some minor brushing was completed too. Volunteers rotated so that everyone had a chance to run those wheelbarrows! At the end of two days, we were proud of our hard work and the



improvements to the trail, especially considering the wet weather we experienced that first workday.



Because of the potential presence of bears and with so many visitors who are not woods- and wild animal-wise, food is not allowed in the vicinity of the Visitor Center unit. Because of this food closure (and yes, Workday 1 was rainy), we drove a short distance both days to eat lunch in the Ranger District conference room.





Workday 3: The third morning, we met at the Juneau Ranger District office which is also the location of a trailhead to access the Dredge Lakes Unit of Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area. We hiked approximately 1.5 miles to the River Trail where we worked under the direction of the very competent and engaging Forest Service project leader. Trail work in the location included clearing significant brush, trees, and tree branches hanging over the trail to clear the corridor 8 feet wide and 10 feet high. The goal was to open it for hiking, biking, and especially to allow snow fall on the route in winter for cross-country skiing. We used an assortment of tools including loppers, hand saws, pole saws, and clippers, along with our arms and backs for dispersing the cut vegetation. Specific work included:



- Sawing down any trees and branches larger than 1-2" within 2-4 feet on either side of the trail edge or within ten feet overhead.
- Clipping and brushing vegetation within that same 2-4 feet on both sides of the trail edge or within ten feet overhead.
- Gathering and dragging the above material into the nearby brush and forested areas far enough away so that it wasn't visible from the trail;
- Camouflaging any large cuts or stumps with dirt or moss.



We were able to hike in and out and clear approximately 0.25 mile of trail thru heavy brushing. We departed earlier than usual to return to the Trail of Time to inspect final trail work, remove signs, and continue on the loop trail to the Visitor Center to see it in its entirety.





### **Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park (Skagway and Dyea, Alaska):**

The Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park headquartered in Skagway, Alaska commemorates the history of the 1890's Gold Rush to the gold fields in the Yukon Territory. Dyea was then a bustling city but is now only a deserted town site after the railroad was constructed departing from the competing town of Skagway in 1899. Dyea still piques the curiosity and imagination of visitors who seek out this remote location. Additionally, hundreds each year challenge themselves by hiking the historic Chilkoot Trail which departs from Dyea. Tens of thousands of optimistic gold seekers in the 1890's climbed that route to get to the upper lakes and Yukon River that would hopefully lead them to Klondike gold.

After arrival in Skagway, the volunteer team walked from the ferry terminal to the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Visitor Center located in downtown Skagway. We met staff and viewed a fascinating movie about the Gold Rush of 1898, and the history of Skagway, and Dyea. Afterwards we walked to the Chilkoot Trail Center to view an excellent safety movie about bears, a requirement for anyone with a permit to hike the Chilkoot Trail (usually a 3 to 5-day hike). We then drove approximately 9 miles out of Skagway to Dyea to check into our home for the next six nights, the Chilkoot Outpost.

Workdays 6, 7, 9, and 10: We met and introduced National Park Service trail leaders at the Retreat Center of the Chilkoot Outpost the first morning, and they explained plans for the next four work days. We then headed to the Taiya River for safety briefings and



tool and rafting demonstrations. We then rafted across the Taiya River by paddle rafts to the raft take-out. A side trail from the raft take-out and a downstream commercial guide raft put-in access the main Chilkoot Trail within 1/8th of a mile. We continued up the historic Chilkoot Trail to lightly brush the trail and view elevated sections of the trail around the beaver ponds that continually flood. We also stopped to view the historic remains of the old Hosford sawmill site.



After lunch that first day, we proceeded back down the Chilkoot trail to review the project site at the reroute section. The first day's work commenced with brushing out towards the junction of the Chilkoot Trail with the raft take-out trail. Half of the group chose to continue to brush while working towards the Chilkoot Trailhead proper. When work was done, this group walked out rather than raft out. The hike required climbing up and over what is lovingly called Saintly Hill (or G\*\*D\*# Hill), approximately 1.5 miles from the reroute site. The rest of the crew proceeded brushing back to the rafts to paddle back across the river to the vehicles.

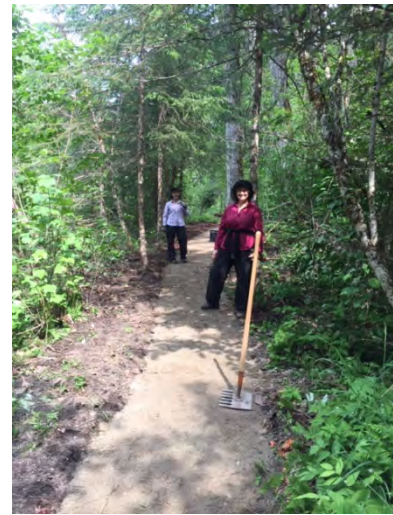




Days 7, 9, and 10 included both brushing from the reroute location back to the Chilkoot Trailhead approximately 1.5 miles and focusing on the trail re-route construction of the Chilkoot Trail where a portion of the trail was sloughing off into Tayia River. The re-route of new trail was approximately 156 feet.

Specific work on the reroute project involved the use of Pulaskis, McCleods, shovels, rock rakes, pry bars, and many wheelbarrow loads. We worked on cutting an edge into the forest floor, edging and digging down to mineral soils. We additionally dug and hauled mineral soil from a pit located down and off the trail to fill and level the newly dug trail with mineral soil.

We also worked to find, cut, haul, and place dirt, moss, leaves and other vegetation on all disturbed areas adjacent to the new trail to smoothly finish the edging to prevent that “newly-constructed/raw look.”



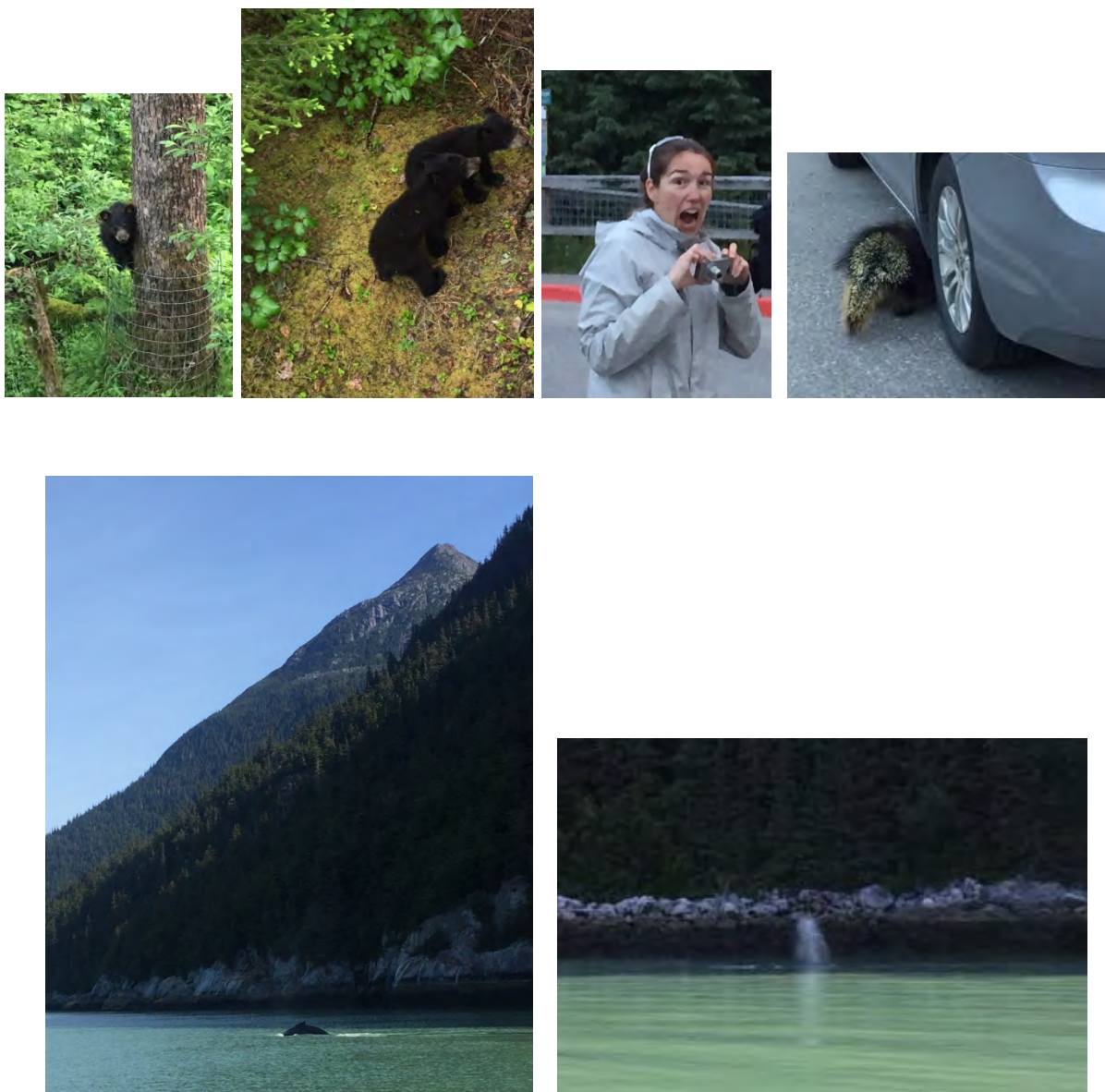
After working Day 6 and 7, Day 8 was a welcome day of rest and recreation which is described below, then we returned to the Chilkoot Trail for Workdays 9 and 10.





### General Information

This unique group of volunteers bonded quickly and formed a fun, supportive, and hard-working team. Working at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area always included looking for wildlife, and during this time most volunteers observed bears, beavers, porcupine, deer and eagles. On the ferry trip to Skagway, humpback whales and porpoises were seen. In Dyea, we continued to look for wildlife, and on the return trip to Juneau our vessel stopped to observe a sea lion rookery and numerous whales and eagles. ConservationVIP® volunteers especially enjoyed working with the outstanding (and often hilarious) Forest Service and Park Service employees. The group was proud of what our teamwork accomplished each and every day.





In Juneau, we stayed in a University of Alaska Southeast dormitory, and their cafeteria provided breakfasts and bag lunches for the week. Dinner on day 2 was an outdoor salmon bake, while days 3 and 4 were off-the-menu in restaurants in Juneau to experience the local flavor of southeast Alaska. Transportation was by two rental vans, which were newer and quite adequate. An hour break was incorporated into Day Two so the volunteers could enjoy the informative displays and movie in the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center (and to continue the search for wildlife).



We traveled from Juneau to Skagway via the Alaska State Ferry System, a very early morning ferry (a very Alaskan experience) but the morning was particularly stellar. We ate breakfast onboard during the 6-hour cruise and snacked on our boxed lunches. We rented the vans for the entire trip and took the vans to Skagway and back on the ferry, greatly simplifying transportation logistics.

Near Skagway we stayed at the Chilkoot Trail Outpost, a rustic bed and breakfast establishment with small 2-person cabins (hiker suites) and one larger dormitory-style



Retreat Center. The Outpost provided all meals except one dinner. Dinners were tasty and offered as much as one could eat -- with dessert -- and of course there were always s'mores to be had around the campfire.



After two days of work in Dyea, volunteers enjoyed a day of R&R during a half-day round trip ride on the historic White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, a narrow-gauge railroad built in 1898.





The route over White Pass to Fraser, British Columbia is spectacular and climbs nearly 3,000 feet in 20 miles. After the train excursion, volunteers were free to explore Skagway on their own and choose their dinner locations of choice.

The next two days we continued our trail brushing and re-routing project work. Evenings were often spent exploring the Dyea area, including the old Dyea Townsite with interpretive trails, the historic cemetery from 1898, and the tidal flats of Dyea where the irises were in full bloom.





The trail crew leaders, one with his spouse and new baby(!), joined us for the well-earned final dinner (surf and turf) at the Outpost our last night in Dyea. Stories, laughs and songs were shared at the gatherings. The volunteers with two ConservationVIP® leaders caught an early catamaran tour on Day 11, our last day together, to return from Skagway to Juneau, where the trip concluded at the Juneau Airport. The third leader trainee (who was remaining in Skagway) placed the two vans on the Alaska Marine Highway ferry the next day.



### Summary

The Trip Leaders consider this trip happily successful. The volunteers were impressive from the first dinner to the last boat ride. Many were committed to service trips every year and willingly shared their experiences. They were exceptional while working, playing, and talking together and always reaching out to include and check in with each other. They worked and traveled safely together with no major accidents or other incidents. They had fun, and the agency staff continues to appreciate the work we accomplish. We continue to build these important relationships with public lands managers of both the National Park Service and the National Forest Service in Alaska and both expressed hope we can continue to work together in the future.

### Happy Trails!