



**Alaska Volunteer Trip
Lena Point Trail, Juneau and
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
June 27 - July 6, 2021**



Executive Summary

Twelve Conservation Volunteers International Program ([ConservationVIP®](https://conservationvip.org)) volunteers, including two trip leaders, traveled from all over the United States to work on trails in Southeast Alaska. They worked with [Trail Mix, Inc.](#) (TM) in Juneau and the [National Park Service](#) (NPS) in Skagway. This was the first trip since the start of COVID-19, and it was carefully planned and organized to meet local, state and federal requirements and to ensure participant health and safety. TM and NPS leaders had well thought out and challenging work plans laid out for the group. In Juneau, along the Lena Point Trail, the group helped make much needed improvements to ~637 feet of trail including demolition, new trail construction, treading, revegetation, brushing and drainage. About 33,000 lbs. of gravel was moved and distributed in addition to rock shopping and transport. In the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park near Skagway, the group helped make ~558 feet of new trail to reroute trail away from the river including removal of organic soil and rocks, rigging of large stumps, treading and transporting mineral soil. In both locations, the groups were led and guided by experienced TM and NPS staff.

Tools and materials were provided by both agencies. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed ~282 hours in Juneau and ~150 hours in Skagway for a total of 432 hours.

Lena Point Trail, Juneau, AK

Southeast Alaska lies from the southern tip of the Prince of Wales Island on the south, north to the edge of the Malaspina Glacier near Yakutat Bay. The 500 mile stretch of waters provide a beautiful backdrop for glacier-carved fiords and forested islands which is referred to as the Inside Passage. The USDA Forest Service has played an important management role in Southeast Alaska's history. Over 90 percent is in the largest National Forest in the United States — the Tongass National Forest.

In Juneau, the group stayed in four apartments owned by the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). Each volunteer had his or her own room. In prior years, volunteers stayed at the UAS dorms with access to the cafeteria for breakfast and boxed lunches provided; however, due to COVID-19 precautions, this was not an option. Instead, the leaders took the group to breakfast and dinner and picked up boxed lunches for the trail.

Lena Point Trail is a ~0.9 mile lightly trafficked out and back trail located west of Lena Beach. The trail is primarily used for hiking, running, and nature trips. The end point of the trail is a look-out point overlooking Favorite Channel, Admiralty and Shelter islands as well as smaller islands such as Aaron and Cohen islands. The trail is considered easy based on distance and elevation gain, but due to major roots and rocks and outdated trail construction there are many trip hazards. The goal of TM, which partners with Alaska State Parks, the U.S. Forest Service, and the city and borough of Juneau is to make a long-lasting improvement to this trail so that all residents and visitors are able to use and enjoy this sanctuary.



Photos showing Lena Point trail in need of repair

On June 28th, the group was welcomed by Ryan O'Shaughnessy, Executive Director of Trail Mix, at the Lena Point Trailhead. Ryan introduced his project leaders and staff and provided a comprehensive safety discussion including tools, wildlife, and flora to be avoided (Devil's Club and Cow Parsnip). Next, Ryan led the group on a walk towards Lena Point while pointing out the work areas, issues with the trail, his plans and stretch goals. Ryan described the three projects for the day and asked the volunteers to select tasks according to their interests and abilities. Project tasks included gravel shoveling, gravel transportation by wheelbarrow and bucket, spreading and tamping gravel, trail reconstruction, turnpike installation, drainage, trail demolition and rerouting, stump removal, and revegetation. Volunteers rotated as needed and desired. At the end of the day, the team participated in a debrief led by TM crew leader Duncan Campbell.

Project 1 - Gravel loading, transport and trail coverage





On days 3 and 4, June 29th and 30th, the group met up with the TM crew in the morning, did the safety talk and introductions and were reminded about the flora hazards. Volunteers grouped in three groups again, now also including transporting the remaining gravel to a new location where the trail ascended, making it easier to move gravel uphill to the demolition site. Also, larger size rocks were collected from the forest and beach and buckets were moved uphill using a bucket brigade at times. Because of the hazards of moving rock buckets up to the demolition size, two additional demolition areas were identified where old trail and planking was removed, trail retreaded and improved by using rocks and gravel. This significantly reduced the hazards and sped up the transport uphill.

Project 2 – Improvement of wet and muddy uphill slope



Project 3 – Demolition, reroute, revegetation





On the afternoon of day 4, June 30th, the group visited the Mendenhall Glacier where they hiked and watched a film about the land, the history and the Tlingit culture. The trip leaders met with the USDA Forest Service representatives at the Mendenhall visitor center to discuss 2022 plans and initiatives. In prior years, the volunteers worked in the Mendenhall area but for 2021, the Forest Service was not able to authorize work due to COVID-19 restrictions.

ConservationVIP® leaders met with Barbara Miranda, Director, Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area and Tristan Fluharty, District Ranger, Juneau Ranger District, USDA Forest Service. Barbara shared about the [Land and Resource Management Plan](#) which is intended to be implemented over the next decade. She suggested that for 2022, they could be ready for and use the assistance of volunteers with the Moraine Ecology trail which they would like to open to groups. Also, the tree removal on the small island frequented by terns is an option but this work would need to occur earlier (April) or later in the year. She suggested a follow-up with Mike Dilger, Resource Planner, in August 2021.



July 1st (day 5) was the last day for the volunteers in Juneau and working on the Lena Point Trail. Again, the group participated in the morning introduction and briefing and split up in three groups and worked on moving gravel uphill, now extending into the stretch-goal section Ryan had mentioned on day one. The ~27,000 lbs of gravel was exhausted and TM crew leaders arranged for a new load by mid-morning. Both teams worked hard to move another fourth of this load with wheelbarrows ~591 feet. Brushing, revegetation and camouflaging with moss continued to finalize the improved section of the trail.

Over the course of the project, the group used shovels, pulaskis, McLeods, grub hoes, loppers, rock bars, corona saw, buckets and wheelbarrows. A best guess estimate is that the teams moved gravel 100+ times in wheelbarrows and carried many, many more buckets weighing ~20 lbs. each. According to Trail Mix staff, the team far exceeded the expectations. The multi-generational groups enjoyed working together, personal stories

were shared, and laughter was heard along the trail, and “magically” the trail was transformed.



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, each year hundreds of people from around the world 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 by ferry in the afternoon of July 2nd, the volunteers walked from the ferry terminal to the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Visitor Center located in downtown Skagway. They were warmly welcomed by the staff at the visitor center including John Hinrichs (Trail Maintenance Worker Supervisor) and Felipe (Flip) Mendez. Next, the group drove to the Chilkoot Outpost, about 9 miles from Skagway. Chilkoot Outpost is a rustic cabin location which is a few miles from the work location. For this year, due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety precautions, the entire facility was reserved for just the group of ConservationVIP® volunteers. Due to limited ferry availability and the 4th of July holiday, the group worked two days with the NPS and spent four nights at Chilkoot Outpost. Here, delicious breakfasts and dinners were provided while lunch was picked up in Skagway from the Glacial Coffeehouse.



Chilkoot Trail Outpost

On July 3rd, day 7 of the trip, Flip and Catherine Stewart (aka Cat), trail crew leaders for the NPS, met the group at the Chilkoot Outpost Retreat Center. Introductions were made and Flip and Cat explained about the work, tools and safety. The group then proceeded to the Taiya River where they were rafted across to the raft take-out. From there they hiked about half a mile to the work location. The task for the group for the two days was to make ~560 feet of new trail including the temporary trail to the borrow pit for transportation of materials. Cutting new trail required cutting in to the ground using a

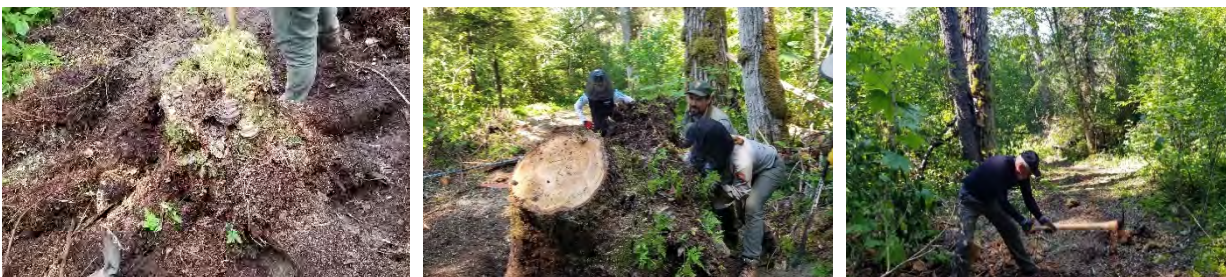
specific method that results in “organic carpet” removal which is used to eventually cover the old trail. The cut was general 6” deep and required the use of Pulaski and McLeod tools, loppers for cutting roots, and strong cutting and pulling skills. The team divided into three groups. One group cut new trail, and worked on treading, grading and finetuning. One group excavated and moved sand from the borrow pit to newly cut trail, while the third group removed three large tree stumps while digging and using rigging tools and cutting new trail. The goal of this project was to reduce the hazard of the fast-flowing river for the Chilkoot trail hikers.



After introductions at Chilkoot Trail Outpost, we rafted to the project site and received project work instructions.







On day 8, the 4th of July, five members of the group hiked the 3.5-mile Lower Dewey Trail and met up with the rest of the group in Skagway where they experienced a very local “once in a lifetime” 4th of July celebration, including the annual Parade and the infamous (and world Guinness record) egg toss.



In the afternoon, the volunteers were driven to White Pass and the border with Canada, stopping along the way to read historical markers and enjoy the beautiful scenery.



On day 9, July 5th, the team rafted across the river and then hiked with the NPS trail crew the Chilkoot Trail up to the Beaver Pond area. They learned more about the history and viewed trail improvements and the newly constructed boardwalk. The team then continued working on the new trail, completing cutting the trail all the way to the end and ensuring all organics were removed. Approximately two thirds of the trail was now covered with the mineral soil and ready to go. The third and largest tree stump was uncovered and rigged out and pushed to the side by the volunteers to finish off the day.



The NPS staff, Flip and Cat, were happy with the work performed and complimented the team on their efforts. The volunteers were equally satisfied and happy. They persevered despite the mosquitoes!

The team awaited a nice surprise. At the end of the work day, instead of rafting across the river, they were floated down the river just past the Chilkoot Outpost. Experienced rafting guides, Josette and John, of the Alaska Mountain Guides Climbing School, volunteered their services as a thank you to the volunteers. Beautiful weather allowed for a very pleasant trip with views of the mountain ranges and forests.



This was a special trip. Not only was this the first trip for ConservationVIP® since COVID-19 concerns had shut down operations in February 2020. It was also special for the University of Alaska, Chilkoot Outpost and the crews of TM and NPS. Large cruise ships had not yet started returning to Southeast Alaska, allowing for a unique experience in Juneau and Skagway, perhaps never to be experienced again. The weather was exceptional with no rain. Mosquitoes were plentiful but did not distract from the work at hand. The group of volunteers was exceptional, positive, easy-going and hardworking with common interests and experiences at heart. This led to the accomplishment of much more work than expected in a very short time; they truly exemplified the ConservationVIP® slogan,

“ordinary people performing extraordinary volunteer services”

