



Alaska Volunteer Trip

Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park

June 19 – June 30, 2022



Executive Summary

Nine 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 the [U.S. Forest Service](https://www.usfs.gov) (USFS) of the Tongass National Forest, Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (Juneau Ranger District), in Juneau and the [National Park Service](https://www.nps.gov) (NPS) in Skagway. USFS and NPS leaders had well thought out and challenging work plans laid out with variation in work including a working day with the [Skagway Traditional Council](https://www.skagwaytraditionalcouncil.org) (STC). In Juneau, on the West and East Glacier trails in the Mendenhall Recreation area, the group improved 950' of trail including tread improvement and brushing, followed by the distribution of 24,000 lb of gravel. They also helped set-up a picnic/fire ring platform near Point Louisa at the Auke Recreation area, once a village site for the Auke Tlingit Natives, using five tons of rock and sand from the low tide beach area. In Skagway, in the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, they brushed, removed moss from bridges along the Chilkoot trail, the Dyea townsite, the historic cemetery and the Lost Lake Trail, ~2 miles. They cut and removed organic mats and roots to prepare 115' for a new accessible ramp, and they

helped remove invasive reed canary grass in ten 42-gallon bags from the banks of Pullen Creek to save the subsistence salmon run of the STC.

In both locations, the groups were led and guided by experienced USFS, NPS and STC staff. Tools and materials were provided by all agencies. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed 220 hours in Juneau and 240 hours in Skagway for a total of 460 hours. Tools used included shovels, Pulaskis, McLeods, loppers, rock bar, hand saws and clippers, buckets, and wheelbarrows.

Tongass National Forest, 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 five hundred 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.

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 residents. The popular West and East Glacier Trails are a part of the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area. Overhanging alder, spruce and other vegetation hampers hiker and biker trail use in the summer and cross-country skiing in winter. Frequent use of these trails as well as rain and snow require ongoing maintenance.

In Juneau, the group stayed in three dormitory suites at John Pugh Hall (JPH) owned by the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). Each dormitory suite had two rooms with two beds, a bathroom and a common area with refrigerator and microwave. Each morning, the group met for breakfast at 8:00 a.m. in the cafeteria across from JPH. They also received their bagged lunches here. The volunteers also had access to the common, fully equipped, kitchen and laundry area.



Sunday 19 June – after arriving at UAS at 3:00 p.m. and settling in the dormitory suites, the group met on the fourth floor for an orientation while overlooking the Mendenhall Glacier. They then ate their first night's dinner in the cafeteria and went for a short walk around the campus overlooking Auke Lake.

Monday 20 June – after breakfast, the group met their crew leaders, Destiny, and Shauna, of the USFS at the

West Glacier Trailhead. This is a well-traveled moderate trail, especially by local hikers and mountain bikers. The group shared introductions, talked about purpose, and reviewed bear and tool safety. They were also joined by Alana, a volunteer employed at the Mendenhall Visitor Center. The group then headed up the trail, ~2 miles with some elevation gain. The group made tread improvements of 50' feet of trail by layering it with golf sized rocks from other locations and then resurfaced 400' of trail by moving 9,000 lb of gravel dropped by helicopter using 1,000 lb super sacks. Additionally, larger size rocks were used to improve trail edge stability and draining. At the end of the workday, the group hiked 10 minutes up the trail to view the Mendenhall Glacier, Nugget Falls, and the Mendenhall Lake. After showers and some rest and relaxation, the group departed to Douglas Island for dinner at the Island Pub. They made a stop at the bird viewing location on Glacier Highway.



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER

Tuesday 21 June – the group met Destiny of the USFS at the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center parking lot. The goal was to work on the East Glacier Trail, also in need of trail improvements due to heavy use by locals, visitors, and cruise ship groups. After a one-mile hike in, Destiny provided the plan for the day and invited volunteers to participate in the tool safety talk. The group then proceeded to remove rocks, clear organics, transported and tamped gravel with the rock bar, Pulaski, shovels, buckets, and the McLeod. They completed 220' of trail and moved 5,000 lb of gravel. Most of the day it rained and it was cool, but this did not faze the volunteers in their completion of the work. The group stashed their tools and then hiked down to the cars. Dinner was at The Hangar on the Wharf in downtown Juneau, a location in the Historic Merchants Wharf which served as an aircraft hangar for many of the float plane operators that eventually merged to become Alaska Airlines.



Gravel, Super Sacks and Brush



Wednesday 22 June – another wet and cloudy day but the forecast for the trip looked promising. The group met Destiny and Shauna at the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center and hiked up the East Glacier Trail about ½ mile to the place where they stashed tools the prior day. The plan of the day was to continue improving trail, removing rocks first and then to finish it with moving gravel from the five 1,000 lb super sacks. By now, the volunteers knew the job and they quickly jumped to their favorite places and, like prior days, implemented their bucket brigade process. By lunch time, the five super sacks were emptied across 150' of trail and a lot faster than anticipated. The goal was to break a bit earlier that afternoon to allow for some learning at the visitor center and a walk to Nugget Falls.





Treading and Tamping



5000 LBS



0 LBS!

Not only did they accomplish this, they also were able to complete the distribution of another 5,000 lb of gravel over 180' of trail! Through teamwork and camaraderie (each time a sack was emptied, loud cheers were heard along the brigade line), a group of people can accomplish amazing work.

*Raising the Roof*

That evening, the group enjoyed a Salmon dinner at the unique Salmon Bake restaurant located near a natural salmon-spawning creek to the entrance of the Wagner Mine at Salmon Creek Falls.

Thursday 23 June – this was the last day with the Juneau trail crew. The group met Destiny and Shauna at the Auke Bay Recreation Area. In addition, their leader and our planning contact, Pete Schneider, was present as well as three USFS trail crew members. The plan was to build a 15'x15' platform with fire ring. This included removing small trees and brush from the area with chainsaw and weed whacker, hauling rocks from the tidal zone as well as sand to fill over the rocks. It was a beautiful day and place to work with a 180-degree view over the water and sightings of Dall's porpoises. As usual, the group quickly picked up buckets, a wheelbarrow and worked alongside the USFS crew.





By midday, the platform was completed, and a metal fire pit was brought in. This was also the end of our work with USFS and especially with Destiny and Shauna. One of our group members, Claire, made a beautiful watercolor thank you card signed by the team and presented it to the two women who continued to share their bright smiles they showed us all week. The group enjoyed lunch near Louisa Point. For the rest of the afternoon, they cleaned up and did laundry in preparation for the trail work in Skagway. Dinner was in the Auke Bay area, in walking distance from UAS, followed by an ice cream treat and a short walk along the Auke Bay fishing port.

2022 was the first year since 2019 working with USFS and at the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation area. The upbeat style and leadership of Destiny and Shauna as well as the rest of the USFS crew, was enjoyed by the group. At the same time, the small and mighty volunteer group completed significant more work than was expected during the four days (including rain and cool weather). It was a great partnership and ConservationVIP® is looking forward to bringing the next group of volunteers in 2023 to help support USFS in this beautiful area of Alaska.

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.



Friday – 24 June – an early day for the group. A 4:45 a.m. departure from UAS to the Auke Bay Ferry for a 5:00 a.m. arrival and check-in with the boat departing at 7:00 a.m. The ferry ride was enjoyable and the weather beautiful allowing for many good pictures and some wildlife viewing. Upon arrival in Skagway, the group walked to the NPS visitor center while the leaders confirmed and paid lunch orders at the Glacial Coffeehouse. The group then visited the [Chilkoot Trail Center](#) where they watched two short movies that all hikers must

attend: bear safety and the Chilkoot Trail. From here they proceeded to the Chilkoot Outpost, received the keys to their cabins and then met for their first dinner at the lodge.

Saturday – 25 June – this was the group's first day working in the Klondike Gold Rush National Historic Park and on the actual Chilkoot Trail. It was a wonderful day with blue skies and temperatures in the 70's. Becky Shaffer, acting Facilities Manager of NPS, led the team. The work included removal of 1,000 lb of woody debris from the Chilkoot trailhead, brushing woody debris and devil's club from the trail shoulders on Saintly Hill intermittently from Mile 0.0 to Mile 1.53, and moss removal on two trail bridges.



This year, the group was not able to raft across the river and, as a result, they had the opportunity to hike in via today's official trailhead. The up and downhill is locally referred to as Saintly Hill (one is a Saint to cross it) because of the rocky, rooty and steep up and down section in the first mile. The group did well, carrying loppers, handsaws, and clippers on this hot day. Lunch was taken at the bridge near the reroute section that the 2021 ConservationVIP® volunteer group completed. This new trail showed the results of quality trail implementation and maintenance. Becky also pointed out another section along the trail that needs to be rerouted due to river erosion.

*Before**After*

After lunch, the group hiked to the boardwalk to learn about the implementation of this area and the work involved. There were two significant beaver dams, and it was quite amazing to walk over this long stretch of boardwalk surrounded by the dams and water. On the way back, the group continued brushing and bridge cleaning where needed. It was a good day and, although the start of the trail was not what the “stampedeers” at the time took, it helped the group to imagine the efforts to bring at least a 2,000 lb of supplies and living essentials.

Becky also shared with the group about the Indigenous groups and how the gold rush negatively impacted them and their lands. We learned about the efforts underway to respect their cultures with regards to the Chilkoot Trail which was a vital trade route between coastal and Interior Indigenous groups such as a Tlingit and the Tagish.

Sunday – 26 June – today was a day off for the group. After breakfast, the group went to the Dyea flats and drove all the way to the end, parked the cars, and took a walk on the flats near the low tide. They checked out a small waterfall and discovered some



bear tracks. The group also spent some time higher up in the meadows where beautiful wild iris and other wildflowers were in full bloom. Some walked across the bridge for a cup of coffee at the AlaskaX dog mushing facility. In the meantime, the White Pass train departure had been moved up due to a Norwegian cruise liner not coming to port because of an iceberg collision up North. Our volunteers would later learn about this on news media as well. The group enjoyed a lunch at the Bonanza Bar & Grill and then

departed on the [White Pass Summit Excursion](#). A magnificent ride on this beautiful day; conditions could not have been better. The cabin was not full, and everyone had a window seat, and they were also able to use the outside platform. The views were spectacular, snow, pristine mountain lakes and waterfalls, so much to take in. After a few last-minute errands in town, the group returned to Chilkoot for dinner and a couple of friendly yet challenging games of Codenames.



Monday – 27 June – this morning, the group was asked to meet the NPS crew at 10:00 a.m. at the Chilkoot trailhead where they would prepare 115' of trail for an accessible ramp by removing organic mats and roots. This ramp is adjacent to the implementation of a large parking lot to support the Chilkoot Trailhead which is often a busy location for departing hikers as well as the drop point for groups of visitors who hike part of the trail to then return by raft. Contractors were working to finalize the lot as well as the bathroom facility. The goal was to complete everything before 15 July because of the boreal toads' breeding season. We learned that boreal toads are important members of the ecosystem in Southeast Alaska. They play a major role in nutrient cycling, insect population control and the support of predator communities. Their skins are more permeable to the environment than other species' and because of this, they are more susceptible to the harmful effects of UV radiation, water contaminants, and changes in water levels and temperatures.

Because of the later start, the group took advantage of visiting the nearby Dyea townsite for some education. With the onset of the gold rush, Dyea grew rapidly from a small settlement of native packers and trading post into one of the largest towns in Alaska. Here, the Klondiker could purchase forgotten supplies, post letters, get a hot meal and a dry bunk, or seek moral (and otherwise) distractions. Eventually traffic was

diverted away with the White Pass and Yukon Route railroad from Skagway to Bennett in 1899. The town has been replaced by a forest, but remnants of the town can still be found here, and information panels and street signs guide the visitor. One can view the Taiya River from here, as well as wildlife including bear and birds.

At 10:00 a.m. the group met the NPS crew. This included not only Becky, but the trail crew leader Cat who we met in prior years as well as Ian and Cowboy. Additionally, we were joined by two archeologists who would observe our work removing organics and assess changes in sand color to confirm gold rush layering.

After introductions, tool safety discussions, and training on how to remove the organics using the “mat” approach which includes using the Pulaski to dig rectangles shapes, followed by the use of a Mcleod to peel away and “roll the mat” to be used in other areas to generate growth. After removing the “mats,” the job is often not done, roots and more inorganics can be present and until the inorganic is cleared, one continues downward. Done incorrectly, the trail will not last and is often “bouncy” and, eventually, will need to be reworked.



It was a hot day, but the group kept on working and the task was completed just after lunch. Part of the group then walked ~150 feet to the Dyea Campground through the forest and brushed. The other part of the group drove to the campground and worked with Cowboy to split the wood and fill the structure with firewood for the campground for the upcoming Canada Day and 4th of July Holiday. The group went into action and was able to complete two cords of wood!



Tuesday – 28 June – today the NPS crew met the group at 8:30 a.m. at the Chilkoot Lodge. It was a full crew including Cat, Flip, Ian, Cowboy, and Becky. Cat and Flip worked with our groups in previous years and they always look forward to a week with the volunteers. They find them fun to work with and appreciate the amount of work that is produced. The group connected quickly, and stories and jokes were shared. They then departed to the Dyea townsite where they brushed along the area roads, about one mile of trail using handsaws, loppers, and clippers. Close to the river, in a section, where visitors may not enter due to river erosion, the group received a special presentation from the archeologists who were urgently working to document artifacts in an area along the river that is quickly eroding.

The group then departed to the historic Dyea Slide Cemetery where many of the 1898 avalanche victims were buried. They removed brush from the sides and back of the headstones, cleaned the stones and wood with wet brushes, and cleaned one bridge.



The group proceeded to the Lost Lake Trail where they removed downed trees and brush on the first ¼ mile of

the trail. Next, the group met Ranger Kelly Curtin at the Slide Cemetery where she gave a 30-minute educational Gold Rush overview including historic pictures and interesting data and facts. This was very much enjoyed by the group.



Before dinner, at Chilkoot, the group received a 30-minute presentation from Elaine Furbish, the Park's biologist. Elaine briefly reviewed history and glaciation as well as recent focus and initiatives and the opportunity for ongoing learning about the cultural and natural resources. The group was enamored by Elaine's insight, her passion, and

ability to give light to a quite complicated topic. They walked away with information they would not have learned had they been a “typical” pass-through visitor.

The evening was concluded with dinner and a few games of Codenames. The evenings were beautiful, and some took walks to the bridge at the Taiya River or to the Dyea Campground overlooking the fast-flowing river and Dyea flats. Beauty beyond words.



Wednesday – 29 June – this was the eighth and last day of trail work for the group. After breakfast, the group met outside in the campfire area and participated in an open dialogue and feedback session about their experiences and reflecting on their expectations. One-word descriptions and favorable comments were received, and, in turn, the leaders thanked the group for their consistent hard work, attitudes and flexibility which significantly contributed to the success of the trip.

Today, the last workday, the group was invited by NPS and the STC to work with them along the Pullen Creek in Skagway. The Skagway Village does business as STC and is a federally recognized Tribal Government for Skagway Tlingit & Haida Indians, Alaska Natives & American Indians located in the STC service area. Their mission is “to nurture, educate and protect our tribal members by preserving cultural heritage, natural resources, improving partnerships and economic stability, while upholding tribal sovereignty.” Becky of NPS also joined informally and the group met Reuben Cash, the Environmental Coordinator, and his assistant, Colton, at 10:00 a.m. at the site. Liability forms were signed, introductions made, and then Reuben proceeded to talk about the initiative to preserve this salmon treat by removing the invasive reed canary grass. The group received trash bags and went to their individual sections along the stream and started to gingerly pull the grass from the ground ensuring to pull rhizomes to prevent



recurrence. In total the group removed 107 lb and cleared 8,170 sq ft near the stream bank. The work was rewarding knowing that continued maintenance can be successful in the eventual eradication of this invasive grass.



After putting the bags in Reuben's car and saying goodbye to Reuben and Colton, the group did some last day shopping and then departed for the lodge.

At 6:00 p.m., Cat, Flip, Cowboy, and Becky of NPS joined for the surf and turf dinner at the lodge. Becky, the acting Facilities Manager, spoke a few words and handed out beautiful NPS certificates which were also signed by the Park's acting superintendent, and describing the work completed during the week. Additionally, the group received a Klondike t-shirt. The presentation, the gift and especially the certificate were much appreciated by the group. The ConservationVIP® leaders then stood up and thanked the NPS leaders and crew for their partnership and time to



organize the variety of projects for the group. Also, the Chilkoot lodge staff was asked to come out for a big thank you for all their hard work and support during the week. Next, the NPS crew was challenged to a couple of healthy games of Codenames. The evening was finished outside by the campfire where the volunteers presented unexpected and thoughtfully painted thank you cards and themed t-shirts to the ConservationVIP® leaders.

Thursday – 30 June – this was the return day via catamaran to Juneau where the trip ends. After an early breakfast at the lodge, the group departed at 7:00 a.m., picked up lunches from the Glacial Coffeehouse and then parked cars at the Catamaran. They boarded the family run Catamaran and departed at 8:00 a.m. It was overcast but still a wonderful trip with several wildlife sightings including a juvenile humpback whale, bald eagles, and sealions lounging on the rocks. The Catamaran brought the group to Auke Bay where they were shuttled by bus to the

airport and/or the hotels of their choice. Last goodbyes were exchanged and everyone went on their way.



A child's drawing on a yellow background. The text "Thank you..." is written in red. The drawing includes a purple and yellow structure, green trees, a brown butterfly, a yellow hammer, a purple hammer, a yellow saw, a purple heart, and a yellow box.

