



Alaska Volunteer Trip
Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest and
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
June 11 – June 22, 2023



Executive Summary

Nine Conservation Volunteers International Program ([ConservationVIP®](https://conservationvip.org)) volunteers, including two trip leaders, traveled from all over the United States and Ireland 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](#) (NPS) in the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway (KGRNHP). USFS and NPS leaders had well thought out and challenging work plans laid out with variation in work.

In **Juneau**, the group improved ~650' of trail on the Mendenhall East Glacier trail and the Peterson Lake trail. This included the spreading of 5,000 lb of gravel on the East Glacier trail and significant, wet, rocky and rooty drainage work in both areas, brushing and relocating rocks to improve drainage and recreation activities. Additionally, they transplanted 112 seagrasses in the Lena Bay Recreation Area to reduce erosion in a used recreation area near a salmon stream. The group worked four days in Juneau for a total of 247 hours.

In **Skagway**, in the KGRNHP, the work included: brushed of 2 miles of trail, brushed at the campground and Dyea Slide Cemetery locations to improve walking paths and preserve the cemetery; split, stacked and filled the campground's 3 cord firewood shed; spread 20 cubic yards (32,000 lb) of wet gravel material to construct 150' of trail tread for the new accessible ramp in the Chilkoot Trailhead Parking Lot; restored 6 campsites' deteriorating picnic tables; pulled six 42-gallon bags of invasive weeds and dandelion; direct seeded a large area of native plants at the main Chilkoot Trailhead sign. The group worked four days in Skagway for a total of 247 hours.

In both locations, the groups were led and guided by experienced USFS and NPS personnel. USFS in Juneau also partnered with [Trail Mix Inc.](#) Tools and materials were provided by all agencies. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed a total of **494 hours** equally divided among Juneau and Skagway during the 8 days of trail work. These hours exclude trip planning and pre- and post-trip volunteer hours by the leaders. Tools used included shovels, Pulaskis, McLeods, loppers, rock bar, hand saws and clippers, shovels, 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 water provides a beautiful backdrop for glacier-carved fjords 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.

The 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 four 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 shared area with refrigerator and microwave. Each morning, the group met for breakfast at 7:30 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 11 June – after arriving at UAS after 3:00 p.m. and settling in the dormitory suites, the group met for introductions/orientation while overlooking the Mendenhall Glacier. Following the orientation, the group had their first dinner together.

Monday 12 June – after breakfast, the group met their crew leader, Alex Pesci, of the USFS at the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center parking lot. The goal was to work on a first section of the East Glacier Trail that needed trail improvements due to heavy

use by locals, visitors, and cruise ship groups. Following introductions/tool safety discussion at the trailhead, the group hiked to the work site. At the site, Alex reviewed the plan, which included improving very wet and muddy sections by working on the drainage, removing roots and rocks on the trail and in the drainage, and by layering



gravel on the trail and tamping it down. The rest of the trail required removing mud and organics as well as layering of gravel. Overall, the group worked on 400' and covered 200' with 5,000 lb of gravel from five super sacks which had been transported via helicopter. At the end of the workday, they hiked out and stopped at a nice viewpoint where Pete Schneider, who is the Recreation Program Manager of USFS and leader of the crew, provided an overview of the Mendenhall Glacier and glaciers in general. The group hiked the tools to the work truck and then spent time visiting the beautiful visitor center, watching an informative movie, and hiking the trail to Nugget Falls and various other viewpoints. The evening included dinner at the lovely, local Island Pub on Douglas Island. On the way, they made a stop at the bird viewing location on Glacier Highway.

Tuesday 13 June – following breakfast, the group met Alex at the Peterson Lake Trailhead, which is off Glacier Highway and North of Auke Bay. The plan was to work in this area for two days. They would be joined by the crew from Trail Mix Inc who are now also partners of the USFS.

The Peterson Lake Trail is 4.3 miles long. It begins at Glacier Highway mile 23.4 and ends at Peterson Lake Cabin. There are muddy sections throughout this trail and some slippery planks. The first two miles follow on the alignment of an old mining tram that was built around 1900. After the trail goes through the muskegs, the trail diverges from the mining tram and continues through the forest. Here the trail is eroded and there are a lot of exposed roots and rocks. The last half mile of the trail runs along Peterson Lake and is occasionally flooded when the lake level is high. The trail is used by hikers, mountain bikers, XC skiing and snowshoeing. The trail is named after John Peterson who prospected during his spare time and made significant discoveries of gold in a valley ~24 miles north of Juneau. A placer claim is staked on a creek that now bears his name.



Upon arrival at the parking area, the group was greeted by a bear feeding on vegetation! They observed the bear for some time before it slowly wandered off. The specific goals for the day included improving drainage, root/rock removal to eliminate tripping hazards and reducing the width of the trail as well as brushing. There were many spots that had standing water and mud. The group was able to improve approx. 250 ft. of the trail, a great accomplishment given the heavy work

required in the mud. Tough and challenging work but extremely rewarding as progress was made. Another bear greeted the group upon return to the parking lot! On the way back, the group visited the [National Shrine of Saint Therese](#). After showers, some group members departed early to walk around downtown Juneau where they met the rest of the group for dinner at The Hangar on the Wharf restaurant which is 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.



Wednesday 14 June – following breakfast, the group met at the Peterson Lake Trailhead to continue the work projects from the previous day. The work included again significant drainage work, removing roots, rocks and reducing the width of the trail. In addition, clearing of devil's club, salmon, and blueberry bushes to open both sides of the trail. This was then followed by Trail Mix Inc crew who used weedwhackers to remove ground cover. A busy, tough but satisfying day. The group enjoyed working with both USFS and Trail Mix Inc personnel. It is amazing to see what can be done when teams and individuals work together. It is magical and satisfying.





The Road Out or End of the Road had piqued volunteers' curiosity and after work the group decided to explore this part of the area. Upon arriving at the end of the road, they hiked $\frac{1}{2}$ mile through forest to the water's edge. The weather had cleared up, blue skies, lupine and beautiful views of the Inland Passage. They saw a large porcupine on the trail and a bear cub and deer with fawn along the road. The group agreed that the trip was well worth it despite the 15 minutes they had to take showers or put on a clean shirt before heading out to evening dinner.



For dinner, the group went to the unique Salmon Bake restaurant located near a natural salmon-spawning creek to the entrance of the Wagner Mine at Salmon Creek Falls. The buffet was plentiful, and volunteers took advantage of several servings, dessert, and roasted marshmallows. Well-deserved after a long day of challenging work and hiking. Little did they know that the “fluorescent dandelion” would follow them to Skagway.



Thursday 15 June – this was the last day working in Juneau and the group met at the Lena Point Recreation Area. Alex and Pete Schneider greeted them. Pete provided an extensive review of the importance of the project, which is to minimize impact to the stream which is used by salmon during the July period and high tide to spawn. John Hudson, Restoration Biologist of the [Watershed Coalition](#), was present and assisted in directing the project and providing oversight. In addition, USFS staff were installing wood posts to create a fence to guide the public to follow a specific path to the beach/water to minimize sand dune erosion. The work scope was to dig up and replant sea grasses near the stream to prevent erosion. Overall, the group moved about 112 seagrasses, digging them with roots out of the hard sand and gravel, carrying them to the new area where part of the group dug holes, again in hard sand and gravel, followed by pruning and watering from the stream. The group then joined for lunch, said their goodbyes, and thank yous and presented Alex with a ConservationVIP® cap and signed notecard.

The group then returned to UAS to do laundry, pack, rest and prepare for an early ferry departure to Skagway. For dinner, they met at the nearby Forbidden Peak Brewery where they enjoyed refreshments as well as wonderful (and new) menu items. After dinner, the group walked to Auke Bay Café where they enjoyed milkshakes and ice cream.

Overall, the time in Juneau was perfect, no rain during work hours, wildlife they had hoped to see, and few mosquitoes while working and residing in beautiful locations.



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

The KGRNHP, 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 16 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 although the weather was cloudy/wet, there were still plenty of opportunities to take in the beautiful scenery.



Upon arrival in Skagway, the group walked to the NPS visitor center where they met Becky Shaffer, acting Facilities Manager of NPS, and Crew member Cat Stewart. Becky and Cat had organized a movie-viewing in the

NPS theater with a large screen. It provided the group with the first of many opportunities to learn more about the infamous history of this region. Next, the group visited the [Chilkoot Trail Center](#) where they watched two short movies that all hikers must attend: Bear Safety and Hiking the Chilkoot Trail. Well-informed, they proceeded to the beautiful Chilkoot Outpost, received the keys to their cabins and met for their first dinner at the lodge. After dinner, some ventured out to explore the road to the Taiya river locations right and left of the lodge. A bear and cub were spotted across the river.

Saturday 17 June – this was the group's first day working in the KGRNHP. They met Becky at the lodge at 8:00 a.m. and the rest of the NPS members, Cat, Josh and the new trail crew leader, Clayton, at the start of the Chilkoot Trail. The work consisted of brushing woody debris and devil's club from the trail shoulders on Saintly Hill, mile 0.0 to Mile 1.53.



The up and down hill is locally referred to as Saintly Hill (one is a Saint to cross it) as well as Satan's hill, because of the rocky, large roots and steep up and down section in the first mile. The group did well, carrying loppers, handsaws, and clippers. Lunch was at the location where the bridge had been washed out from a flash flood and falling trees in October 2022. The remains of the bridge are a short distance away (still in the water), demonstrating the force Mother Nature can unleash. The group also inspected the work the 2021 volunteers completed which was a reroute of the trail away from the river. The trail is still in undamaged shape and demonstrates the importance of removal of organic materials and roots/rocks before inorganic sand is distributed.



After lunch near the river, the group continued brushing. 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 2,000 lb of supplies and living essentials in what often took 40 round trips.

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.

After the workday, the group visited the historic Dyea Townsite and Slide Cemetery for education regarding the history and demise. 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, 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



After dinner, the group was invited to join the locals for the Saturday evening Summer Solstice event put on by Juneau Elks USA. Live music, a beer garden, and games. It was said that the whole town was in attendance. What an experience!

Sunday 18 June – today was a rest day. After breakfast, the group went to the Dyea flats and drove all the way to the end, parked, and walked on the flats near the low tide enjoying the calm and early morning sounds and smells. The group also spent some time higher up in the meadows where beautiful wild iris and other wildflowers were in full bloom.



The group then left for Skagway and had lunch at the local Glacial Coffeehouse which is the same place that prepares their lunches. They then departed for a noon

White Pass

Summit

Excursion.

A magnificent ride on this beautiful day; conditions could not have been better.

The views were spectacular,

snow, glaciers, pristine mountain lakes and waterfalls. So much to take in. Upon return to town, the group was given time to shop/explore the local stores and then returned to Chilkoot for dinner.



Monday 19 June – this morning, the group met the NPS crew at 8:30 am at the Chilkoot trailhead parking lot. This 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.

The work plan and results for the next 3 days included installing 20 cubic yards of gravel material by hand to construct 150 linear feet of trail tread for a new accessible ramp in the Chilkoot Trailhead Parking Lot, splitting and stacking two, possibly three cords of cottonwood and spruce firewood to restock the NPS Campground supply which was completely depleted, cleaning and brushing gravesites in the historic Dyea Slide Cemetery, restoring 6 campsites in the campground to working condition by removing deteriorated picnic table planks and installing new fir planks, brushing woody debris and devil's club from the trail shoulders of the ½ mile campground footpath, hand pulling six 42-gallon bags of invasive weeds and dandelion from 400 square feet of ground at the trailhead, and direct seeding of native plants to establish a new planting area at the future area of the main Chilkoot Trailhead sign.

As always, all work in the parking area must be completed by July 15th due to the Boreal toads' breeding season. Boreal toads are important members of the ecosystem in Southeast Alaska. They play a significant role in nutrient cycling, insect population control and the support of predator communities. Their skin is 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.

The volunteers selected projects and split up into three teams joined by 5 NPS members, Becky, Clayton, Cat, Josh, and Ian.





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Tuesday 20 June – Elaine Furbish, the Park's biologist met the volunteers at 8:30 a.m. at the Chilkoot Lodge and provided a 30-minute presentation reviewing the region's history and glaciation as well as current initiatives. She also discussed the challenges due to increased tourism, climate change and invasive plants, and shared positive initiatives that are now at work. Juliana, an intern working with Elaine, discussed a specific invasive plant (dandelion) and the issues caused as those spread. Part of the goal today would be the removal of as much of the fluorescent and blooming dandelion as possible. The volunteers had an opportunity to choose their work including wood splitting, dandelion removal, and planting native vegetation. The group joined together for lunch on the Taiya River which was followed by a 30 minute off-trail hike to the edge of the Taiya River to see an eagle's nest. Upon arrival they were greeted by an eagle soaring overhead. Following dinner, they hiked to the impressive Reid Falls and the Gold Rush Cemetery located just outside of town. The day was celebrated with ice cream in town.



Wednesday 21 June – this was the eighth and last day of trail work for the group. The group met the NPS staff (Cat, with Flip now joining) at the Chilkoot Trailhead. The goals for the morning work were to continue planting native seeds to repopulate plants at an

area close to the parking lot. Other members of the group worked to finish filling the camping firewood storage shed, and finish brushing at some of the more remote camp sites, trim and cut back plants/bushes around the graves at the historic Dyea Slide Cemetery.

Following the group lunch, the group met Jonathan Flood, PhD of the NPS; an archeologist, at the site of the sunken [Canada](#) at Nahku Bay. One can still see evidence at low tide. She is the earliest known documented archeological example of a "Downeaster." Her long trim hull with square stern, billet head, and three masts, all square rigged, exemplified the classic look of merchant vessels of the mid-19th and early 20th centuries. She is also the most easily accessible Klondike era shipwreck in Alaska.

The group was then transported to town to tour the [Historic Moore Homestead](#). Per the NPS information, "in 1887, Captain Moore first visited the quiet valley that the local Tlingit Natives call 'Shghagwei,' which means rugged or wind place. Due to the numbers of prospectors working in Alaska and the Yukon, Moore predicted that there would be a major gold strike and foresaw the importance of this valley as a [gateway to the interior gold fields](#)."

Next, they met Dave Andrews of NPS who conducted a very interesting tour of several of the historic buildings in the [historic district of Skagway](#). Armed with so much new and interesting experiences and knowledge, the group was then transported to the launching point for a surprise river rafting trip which was suggested by NPS personnel and donated by Cris Siegel, the owner of [Skagway Float Tours](#) who thanked them for the work the group had done and the importance of it.

At 6:30 p.m., Cat, Flip, Josh, and Becky of NPS joined the group for dinner at the lodge. Becky spoke a few words and presented beautiful NPS certificates and Klondike and NPS patches, recognizing each team member, and describing the work completed during the week. Additionally, the group members were able to choose from a selection of NPS volunteer items including jackets, sweaters, backpacks, pins, books, and journals. Susan from ConservationVIP® thanked the NPS leaders and crew for their partnership and time to organize the variety of projects for the group. After dinner, the volunteers and leaders met to review the following day's departure events and most of all to thank the volunteers for choosing ConservationVIP® to travel to and work in Alaska, their efforts to ensure a safe and fun environment with more work completed than the agencies had expected. Danny Humphrey, who had joined the group on a ConservationVIP® scholarship, shared his experiences and read the beautiful poem "Prayer for the Great Family" by Gary Snyder (text at end of this report).

Thursday 22 June – this was the return day via the Alaska Fjordlines catamaran to Juneau where the trip ends. After breakfast at the lodge, the group departed at 7:00 a.m. They boarded the family run catamaran and departed at 8:00 a.m. It was overcast

but still a wonderful trip with more wildlife sightings including humpback whales, bald eagles, sea lions, and harper seals and pups. The catamaran brought the group to Auke Bay where they were shuttled by bus to the airport and/or hotels of their choice. Last goodbyes and hugs were exchanged, and everyone went on their way.

We thank our volunteers for choosing ConservationVIP® for their adventure and volunteer work. We also thank our partners in Alaska for hosting us and making the experiences “a trip of a lifetime.” USFS, NPS, Enterprise Car Rental, AMHS ferry, Alaska Fjord lines, UAS, Chilkoot Lodge, Glacial Coffee House, Alaska Adventures, Skagway Float Tours went over and above to accommodate and make the trip special.

Prayer for the Great Family

By Gary Snyder after a Mohawk Prayer

Gratitude to Mother Earth, sailing through night and day—
and to her soil: rich, rare and sweet
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Plants, the sun-facing, light-changing leaf
and fine root-hairs; standing still through wind
and rain; their dance is in the flowering spiral grain
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Air, bearing the soaring Swift and silent
Owl at dawn. Breath of our song
clear spirit breeze
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Wild Beings, our brothers, teaching secrets,
freedoms, and ways; who share with us their milk;
self-complete, brave and aware
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to Water: clouds, lakes, rivers, glaciers;
holding or releasing; streaming through all
our bodies salty seas
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Sun: blinding pulsing light through
trunks of trees, through mists, warming caves where
bears and snakes sleep— he who wakes us—
in our minds so be it.

Gratitude to the Great Sky
who holds billions of stars— and goes yet beyond that—
beyond all powers, and thoughts
and yet is within us—
Grandfather Space.
The Mind is his Wife.
so be it.