



Alaska Volunteer Trip
Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest and
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
June 9 – June 19, 2024



Executive Summary

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

In **Juneau**, the group helped improve 1670' of trail including the spur trail from the Mendenhall East Glacier trail to AJ Falls, a section of the Nugget Falls trail, and the historic Treadwell Ditch Trail on Douglas Island. They brushed the 0.9m Nugget Falls and photo point spur trail that included clipping, lopping, and sawing of brush and

branches within 6' wide and 8' height. The group worked four days in Juneau for a total of 270 hours.

In **Skagway**, in the KGRNHP, the work included brushing of ~3 miles of Chilkoot trail, campground trail, the campground and parking lot, the Dyea Slide Cemetery, the Dyea historic townsite and the entrance to the Lost Lake trail improving walking paths and preserving history. They also helped split, stack, and fill the Chilkoot campground firewood shed with 1.25 cords of firewood and pulled 80 lbs. of horsetail and dandelion to enable the seeding and replantation of 275 seeds/plants at the new Chilkoot parking lot. The group worked three days in Skagway for a total of 242 hours.

In both locations, the groups were led and guided by experienced USFS and NPS personnel. USFS in Juneau also partnered with a senior group of trail workers who spent the last 8 years improving the ~18-mile historic Treadwell Ditch Trail. For insurance purposes the group is "an arm" under [Trail Mix Inc.](#) Tools and materials were provided by all agencies. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed **512 hours** in Juneau and Skagway excluding trip planning and pre- and post-trip volunteer hours by the leaders. Tools used included shovels, Pulaskis, McLeods, loppers, rock bar, hand saws, clippers, buckets, tampers, 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 Banfield Hall owned by the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS). Each dormitory suite had two rooms with two beds, a desk and closet, a bathroom with a toilet, shower and two sinks and a shared area with refrigerator. Each morning, the group met for breakfast at 8:00 a.m. in the

cafeteria which was a pleasant ten-minute walk from their dorms. They also received their bagged lunches here. The volunteers also had access to the common, fully equipped kitchen and laundry area at Banfield hall.

Sunday 9 June – after arriving at UAS after 3:00 p.m. and settling in the dormitory suites, the group met for introductions/orientation outside the cafeteria while overlooking the Mendenhall Glacier. Following the orientation, the group had their first dinner together.



Monday 10 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 the short trail to popular AJ Falls which was off the East Glacier Trail and in need of improvement 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. On the way in, they stopped at the visitor center and Alex provided a brief overview of the Mendenhall Glacier and its receding history. They also stopped at the Mendenhall Glacier overlook for a group picture.



At the site, Alex reviewed the plan, which included removing debris and improving wet and muddy sections by removing roots and rocks, and by layering sand and gravel from the stream on the trail and tamping it down. The work was finished by moving moss patches and rocks in off trail areas where debris and sand/gravel was removed. The group included additional USFS workers. Overall, they worked on 200' of trail and made a significant improvement to this well-traveled spur trail to AJ Falls. Before departure, Pete Schneider, the Recreation Program Manager of USFS and leader of the crew, stopped by to check-in with his crew and the trip leaders and we would see him later in the week again when hiking up the Treadwell Ditch trail. The group hiked the tools to

the work truck and then departed to the dorms for showers and a rest. The evening included dinner at the lovely local Island Pub on Douglas Island. On the way, they made a short, rainy, stop at the bird viewing location on Glacier Highway and walked to a viewpoint overlooking the [Gastineau Channel](#) and the town of Juneau.

AJ Falls, Mendenhall Glacier before volunteer project



AJ Falls, Mendenhall Glacier after volunteers

Tuesday 11 June – following breakfast, the group met USFS Alex and Sam at the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center parking lot. The plan for the day was to do much-needed brushing along the ~0.9m trail to Nugget Falls and the spur trail to the photo point. After lunch, there would be a 20' trail improvement project on a short, down-sloped section close to Nugget Falls to cover visible and pointy rocks by transporting sand from the shoreline. This was a tough job due to the heavy mud and distance from shoreline to the work site. At times, visitors to Nugget Falls joined in with the bucket brigade to help out. The volunteers also received many “thank yous” along the way.



Leaders in action lopping and sawing Nugget Falls trail





Before and After Nugget Falls Improvement



After showers, the group departed early to visit the Sealaska Heritage Center with store and exhibit. The wood [carving](#) in and outside the building is exceptional as demonstrated in the video. The group was given a 30 min complimentary introduction and overview at the exhibit in recognition for their service.



They met up for dinner at The Hangar on the Wharf restaurant which is in the Historic Merchants Wharf, and which served as an aircraft hangar for many of the float plane operators that eventually merged to become Alaska Airlines.

After dinner, the group was up for some more adventure, and they continued on Glacier Highway towards the End of the Road. There were several black bear viewings along the way. They also stopped at beautiful Eagle Beach state recreation area around 9 p.m. to see the start of the sunset. This is a beautiful area with views of the Lynn Canal, the Chilkat (basket of many fish) and Juneau mountains. A special end to a special day with special friends.



Wednesday 12 June – following breakfast, the group met the USFS trail crew and Pete Schneider at the District Office at 9 a.m. and then followed their two cars to Douglas Island and up Eaglecrest Road to the pullout. Pete introduced himself at the trailhead and talked about the history of the [Treadwell Gold Mine](#) and the [Treadwell Ditch trail](#). They then walked with tools the 1.5-mile trail to the work area where they met Bill and several other trail workers. Another short overview of the history was provided to the group as well as an overview of the work. The group had worked the last eight years on improving the trail and resurfacing the old trail and were at the last 1900'. They had not expected to see such a large group of fit workers and were pleased and impressed with the work completed by the end of the day. Similarly, the volunteers were inspired by the fitness of the group of “retired” workers and they thoroughly enjoyed the type of work that needed to be done, i.e., resurfacing the old trail, removing organics, while ensuring a 3' width and hauling the organics of the trail, followed by tamping. The process included three steps: digging and removing rocks and organics, raking to ensure roots and rocks were removed, and tamping. At the end of the day, the group stored the tools and hiked out.



USFS, Treadwell Ditch crew and ConservationVIP volunteers

Some of the volunteers were interested in making a side trip to the Treadwell Gold Mine, while others preferred an immediate hot shower and some rest. The parking lot at the trailhead was full so they decided to access Sandy Beach below. Some refer to it as Sandy Beach, but the official name is [Savikko Park](#). The volunteers were able to view some of the structures and information about the Treadwell Gold Mine before heading



back via the beautiful beach for showers and 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 but satisfying work and hiking.



Thursday 13 June – this was the last day working in Juneau and the group met Alex, Nick, and Sam of USFS at the pullout on Eagle Crest road to continue to work on the Treadwell Ditch Trail. They hiked to the area where the tools were stored and started working where they left off the prior afternoon. The group enjoyed the work, working in teams on their sections doing the three-step process and then leap frogging to the front. They could clearly see how they made a difference. Some also participated in more complex sections requiring large rock and root removal.

The group gathered at 12:30 p.m. and then hiked out and drove to False Outer Point on the west side of Douglas Island for lunch. It was a peaceful, quiet, and beautiful setting overlooking the water and several small islands and rocks.



The group then returned to UAS to do laundry, pack, rest and prepare for an early ferry departure to Skagway. For dinner, they walked to the nearby Forbidden Peak Brewery where they enjoyed refreshments as well as nice menu items, something for everyone. After dinner, some of the group walked to Auke Bay Café where they enjoyed huckleberry ice cream. Another day with perfect weather for work and dining.



Overall, the time in Juneau was perfect, minimal rain during work hours, wildlife they had hoped to see, only a few mosquitoes while exploring beautiful locations. They enjoyed working with the USFS and Treadwell Ditch trail volunteers and enjoyed talking with and receiving many thank yous from passersby on the Mendenhall Glacier trails.

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

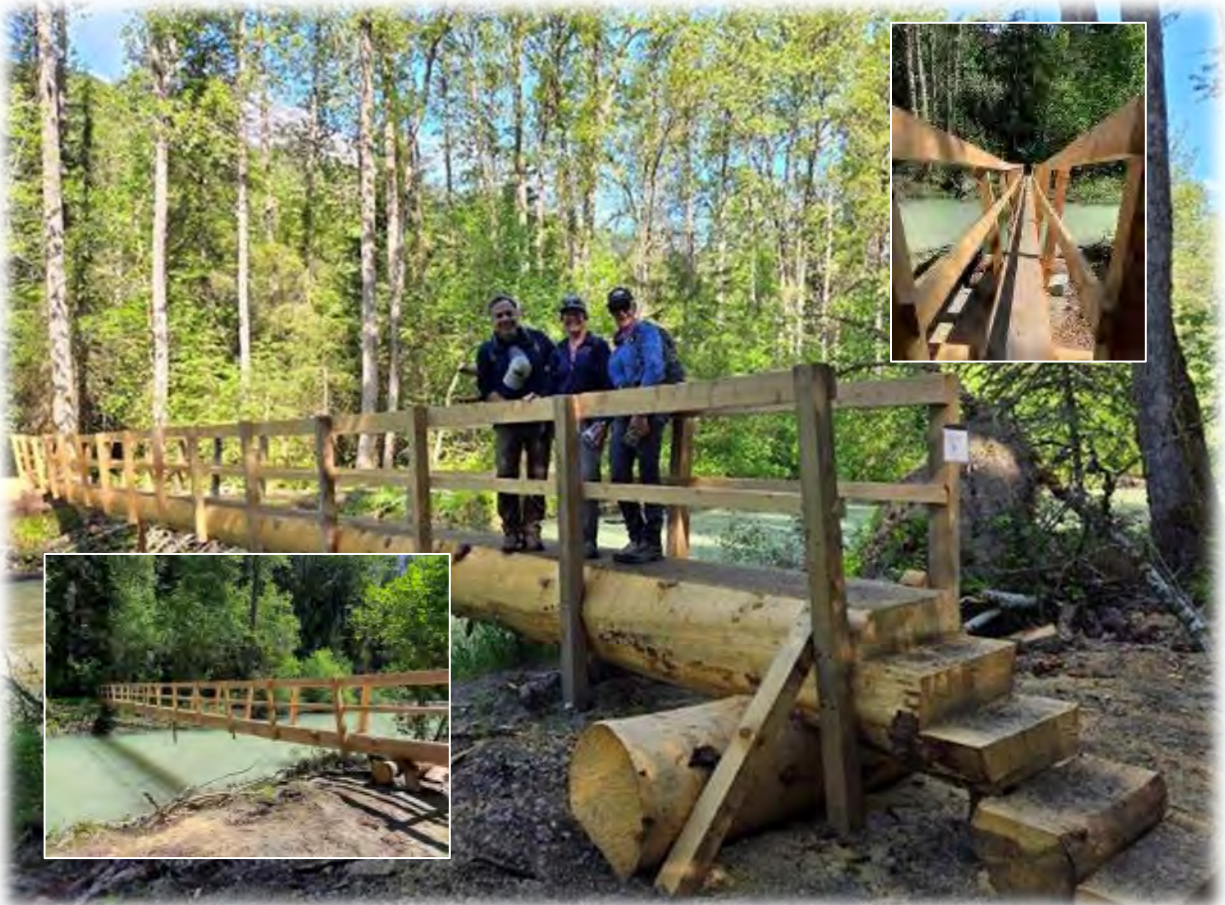
The KGRNHP, headquartered in Skagway, Alaska commemorates the history of the 1890's Gold Rush to the gold fields in the Yukon Territory. Dyea was then a bustling city but is now only a deserted town site after the railroad was constructed departing from the competing town of Skagway in 1899. Dyea still 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 14 June – an early day for the group. A 5:45 a.m. departure from UAS to the Auke Bay Ferry for a 6:00 a.m. arrival and boarding of the boat departing at 7:00 a.m. The ferry ride was enjoyable and although the weather was overcast, 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 stored luggage and then continued on to the [Chilkoot Trail Center](#) where they watched a short movie that all hikers must attend: Bear Safety. Well-informed about bears, they proceeded to the beautiful Chilkoot Outpost, met the new owners, received the keys to

their cabins and met for their first dinner at the lodge. In the evening, they took a short ride to Dyea Flats and enjoyed the views, meadow, wildflowers, and bird songs.

Saturday 15 June – this was the first volunteer project day. The group met Cat (trail leader) and Clayton (trail crew leader) at the lodge at 8:30 a.m. The plan was to hike in with tools over Sainthly Hill (one is a Saint to cross it because of the rocky, large roots and a steep up and down section in the first mile) and end at the Hosford old cabin which is ~3.5 miles and almost the entire section of the trail that is now open. From here they would brush on the way back. The second washed out bridge was replaced a few weeks ago and the group marveled at the installation work and stories shared by the crew. It seemed impossible but the strong, experienced, and resourceful crew were able to make it happen. What an accomplishment.



The group did well, carrying loppers, handsaws, and clippers and eventually met up at the old Hosford cabin. They stopped for a brief snack and then headed back, clipping, brushing, and sawing anything within 6' wide and 8' high. During lunch, the crew shared more stories about the October 2022 flash flood, falling trees and impact to the trail. The remains of the large metal bridge are still visible 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.



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 them imagine the efforts to bring at least 2,000 lb. of supplies and living essentials in what often took 40 round trips.

During their time in Skagway, they also learned about the Tlingit and Tagish and how the gold rush negatively impacted them and their lands and the current efforts underway to respect their cultures with regards to the Chilkoot Trail which was a vital trade route between the interior and the coast.



Following another delicious dinner, the group hiked to the impressive Reid Falls and the Gold Rush Cemetery located just outside of town. Here they found the graves of town legends Frank Reid and “Soapy” Smith. On the return to the lodge, they stopped at a viewpoint overlooking the small town of Skagway on a platform that was constructed during World War II by the U.S. military.



Reid Falls and Gold Rush Cemetery

Sunday 16 June – today was a rest day. After breakfast, some of 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 including seal sightings. The group also spent some time at the entrance of the meadows where beautiful wild iris and other wildflowers were in bloom. They stopped at the AlaskaX facility, and the manager allowed them to see a husky mom and her puppies for just a short time. They then opened the store for our group to purchase souvenirs and t-shirts.





At 10 a.m. they picked up the rest of the group and left for Skagway where they had lunch at the local Glacial Coffeehouse which is the same place that prepares their delicious sandwiches. They then departed for a noon [White Pass Summit Excursion](#). A magnificent ride on this beautiful, blue-sky 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 17 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 plan and results for the next two days included brushing the entrance of the Chilkoot trail, the 0.3m Dyea OHV trail to the Chilkoot campground, the large, new trailhead parking lot, the slide cemetery, the Lost Lake trail entrance, and the Chilkoot campground. Additionally, it included removing horsetail, dandelion from the Chilkoot trailhead grounds near the new and beautiful trailhead sign. This included preparing, seeding, and transplanting 275 flora including beach pea, berry, columbine, and lupine. The volunteers selected projects and started working in their respective areas. Michelle (work lead of the preservation group) and Sam of NPS also joined.

Cat had arranged for a speaker at lunch, Jennifer Larson representing Geographic Information Systems (GSI) for the NPS. Jennifer spoke about the area we were standing in at the Chilkoot trailhead including the Boreal toads. She also showed her equipment and spoke about location intelligence and how powerful the tools are to help those in the field to connect previously unrelated information and open avenues of scientific inquiry and study.



Before and After Removal and Planting Chilkoot Trailhead



In prior years, our groups were informed about the Boreal toads when the parking area was being developed. All construction work in the parking area had to 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.

Later in the afternoon, the groups departed in two cars to the Slide Cemetery where they brushed under the oversight of Michelle and from there, they continued to the



Uncovering the Chilkoot Parking Lot Stop sign

Lost Lake trail entrance where they cleaned up the trail and overhanging branches. Our volunteers were here last in 2022 and no other crew had done maintenance since then. Upon return to the lodge, the groups had a short amount of time for rest before leaving for a complimentary raft trip donated by Cris Siegel, the owner of [Skagway Float Tours](#) and in appreciation of the work done by the volunteers. What a special treat!!!



After the evening dinner, Max and Susan thanked the volunteers for all their work in Juneau and Skagway and asked each volunteer what their highlight was and what could be improved. The highlights included the bucket brigade process on day one in Juneau enabling great teamwork to feel part of the group, the evening unexpected and local adventures, and seeing projects complete from beginning to end, working with the Treadwell Ditch trail crew, and the Chilkoot trail experience.

Information was shared about the benefits of ConservationVIP travel such as the non-profit status and potential tax write off, all-inclusive including leaders/guides, and the opportunity for donations (without administrative cost). The tools overall were good and sharp and in Skagway this was partially due to a donation from a prior ConservationVIP volunteer for the loppers. Some thoughts about daily written itineraries, better dorm pillows, and improved tool briefings were also shared. Leaders stressed the benefit of leaving online reviews and word-of-mouth to help other volunteers with their decision to take the Alaska trip.

Tuesday 18 June – this was the seventh and last day of trail work for the group. The group met the NPS staff (Cat, Flip, and Sam) at the Chilkoot Campground at 8:30 a.m. The goals for the day were to replenish the firewood storage shed and brushing the Chilkoot campsite. Volunteers selected their preferences and started with the work. Around lunch time, Sam and Flip were called to remove a large log obstructing the Chilkoot trail 2 miles in. The firewood crew finished the cutting of logs and without Flip on the chain saw, they were unable to proceed further and to beat last year's crew record. Satisfied with what they had completed in half a day, they joined the rest of the group at the historic Dyea townsite to help with brushing.



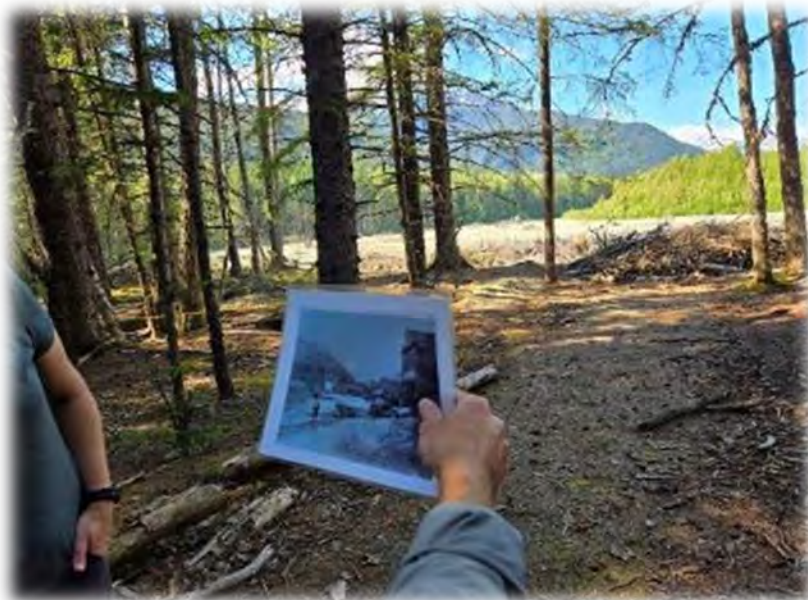
At 3 p.m., the group met Jonathan Flood, PhD of the NPS; an archeologist, at the entrance of the Dyea townsite. Like last year at Nahku Bay, Jonathan was an engaging and passionate storyteller.

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 bears and birds.

Jonathan shared pictures, poems and newspapers from that time and took the group through the streets and to structures showing pictures and evidence of a time past. Time flew by. At 4:45 p.m. the group returned to Chilkoot and started packing and preparing for dinner while the leaders went to Skagway to fill up the cars. Once again, a delicious dinner was served by the Chilkoot Lodge crew and Cat and Clayton joined the group as well. Cat brought a delicious cake with the ConservationVIP logo on top. How thoughtful!



After dinner, the group moved to the outside fireplace and started making smores with the special tools provided by the lodge. Some more thank you words were shared by the leaders in appreciation of the work done by the volunteers. A special Klondike patch was presented to our youngest volunteer, Nina, who courageously had joined her mother on this trip and who worked hard and was a joy to be around. Most called it an early night to finish packing and some rest before the 6:45 a.m. departure to the Alaskan Fjordlines terminal.



Wednesday 19 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 6:45 a.m. Leaders dropped the volunteers and luggage, returned the cars to Avis, and walked back to meet the team. They boarded the family-run catamaran and departed at 8:00 a.m. It was gorgeous weather and a wonderful trip with more wildlife sightings including humpback whales, bald eagles, sea lions, and harbor seals and pups. Captain Ketch did an excellent job sharing his knowledge and Jessica assisted with coffee, breakfast, and passenger needs. 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. Without their dedication and commitment, the trip would not be successful and would not benefit the government agencies to justify hosting groups. Repeatedly, our groups have shown their ability and willingness to work hard to meet and exceed the goals that are set by the agencies.

We also thank our partners in Alaska for hosting us and making the experiences “a trip of a lifetime.” USFS, NPS, AMHS ferry, Alaska Fjord lines, UAS, Chilkoot Lodge, Glacial Coffee House, Alaska Adventures, and Skagway Float Tours went over and above to accommodate and make the trip special. **Thank you!**

Until we meet again!!

