



Alaska Volunteer Trip
Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest and
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park
June 8 – June 18, 2025



Executive Summary

Nine Conservation Volunteers International Program ([ConservationVIP®](https://conservationvip.org)) volunteers, including two trip leaders, traveled from all over the United States and The United Kingdom 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 distribute 13,000 pounds of gravel (~800 1/4th filled 5-gallon buckets) from helicopter dropped super sacks on the top of the East Glacier Loop Trail and the Moraine Ecology (ME) Trail covering about 1000 feet of trail total. They also trimmed overhanging brush on about 500' of trail and improved ~8 drainage areas on the ME trail. At the ME viewpoint, they helped clear 150 sq feet of small trees and brush and put lake rocks and gravel on the upper terrace. The group worked 3.5 days in Juneau for a total of 293 hours including orientation and education.

In **Skagway**, in the KGRNHP, the group supported rerouting ~900' of trail on the historic Chilkoot trail as a preventive action due to the encroaching Taiya River. The work included completing a footbridge of thirty feet length and four feet width by moving and installing forty-five planks weighing twenty-four pounds each as well as clearing a pre-marked trail by removing dense devils club, ferns, small trees, and roots, followed by removing remaining organic soil and exposing inorganic grey silt. The group was able to help complete 60% of the trail reroute. The group worked 2.5 days in Skagway for a total of 195 hours including orientation and education.

In both locations, the groups were led and guided by experienced USFS and NPS personnel. Tools and materials were provided by the agencies. ConservationVIP® volunteers contributed **488 hours** in Juneau and Skagway excluding trip planning and pre- and post-trip volunteer hours by the leaders. The tools used included shovels, Pulaskis, McLeods, pick mattock, loppers, rock bar, weed whips, hand saws, clippers, buckets, tampers, drill, and cannycom buggy.

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 are 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 bused 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 housing suites owned by the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) at 4300 University Drive. Each suite had two rooms with two beds, a desk and closet, a bathroom with a toilet, shower and two sinks as well as living room and kitchen area. Each morning, the group met for breakfast at ~8:00 a.m. in the cafeteria which was a pleasant ten-minute walk from their housing. They also received their bagged lunches here. The volunteers also had access to the complimentary laundry facility on the last day of their stay.

Sunday 8 June – after arriving at UAS after 3:00 p.m. and settling in the housing suites, the group met for introductions/orientation followed by a delicious Santa Fe Chicken and vegetarian dinner at the cafeteria.



Monday 9 June – after breakfast, the group met their crew leader, Alex Pesci, of the USFS at the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center parking lot, along with his colleague Nick and interns



Mitch and Aden. Their supervisor, Matt, also joined briefly to welcome the team.

Following introductions, Alex led a comprehensive tool, risk, and safety talk, and distributed tools and hard hats. The group then hiked ~1.5 miles with 600 feet elevation gain along the East Glacier Trail, carrying tools to a designated worksite. At this location, eleven super sacks—each weighing roughly one thousand pounds and containing about ten cubic feet of gravel—had been dropped by helicopter. The objective for the day was to distribute gravel

across previously prepped rocky and rooty uneven sections of this heavily used trail to mitigate tripping hazards for hikers. Using a bucket brigade system, the team successfully emptied 5 super sacks, distributing ~50 cubic feet of gravel. This involved hauling and spreading about 300 five-gallon buckets, each filled to one-quarter capacity. The group completed their loop by hiking out along the East Glacier Trail, covering a total of 3.2 miles and 680 feet of elevation gain over the course of the day. Despite intermittent rain, the day was highly productive, and the efforts were warmly appreciated by the USFS trail crew.

In the evening, the group celebrated their accomplishments with a delicious salmon spread, salad and pizza dinner at Island Pub on Douglas Island and overlooking the [Gastineau Channel](#) and the town of Juneau.

East Glacier Trail before volunteer project**East Glacier Trail after volunteer project**

Tuesday 10 June – After breakfast, the group reconvened with Alex and Mitch from the USFS as well as Sam who would be with them for the next few days. The plan was to continue trail improvement efforts on the East Glacier Trail by spreading the remaining gravel from the supersacks and reducing tripping hazards along the route. Following a one-mile hike again with 600 feet elevation gain, the team got to work. By late morning, they had emptied and spread four supersacks of gravel! After lunch, energized by their progress, they pushed to complete the final two sacks. In total, the group processed 360 five-gallon buckets, distributing about 60 cubic feet of gravel across the trail. Over the course of two days, the group improved 800 feet of trail by adding travel to rocky, uneven sections prone to tripping hazards. The weather was dry, with a mix of sun and clouds—ideal conditions for the work. Everyone contributed great energy and was proud of the accomplishments.

On the return to campus, the group was treated to a memorable wildlife sighting: a black bear and her two cubs grazing on dandelions and grass alongside the road. Later that afternoon, they headed into Juneau to visit the Sealaska Heritage Institute Museum and shop. The wood [carving](#) in and outside the building is exceptional as demonstrated in the video.



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 was another black bear viewing along the way. They also stopped at the beautiful Eagle Beach

state recreation area with views of the Lynn Canal, the Chilkat (basket of many fish) and Juneau mountains. A special end to a special day with a special and hardworking team.

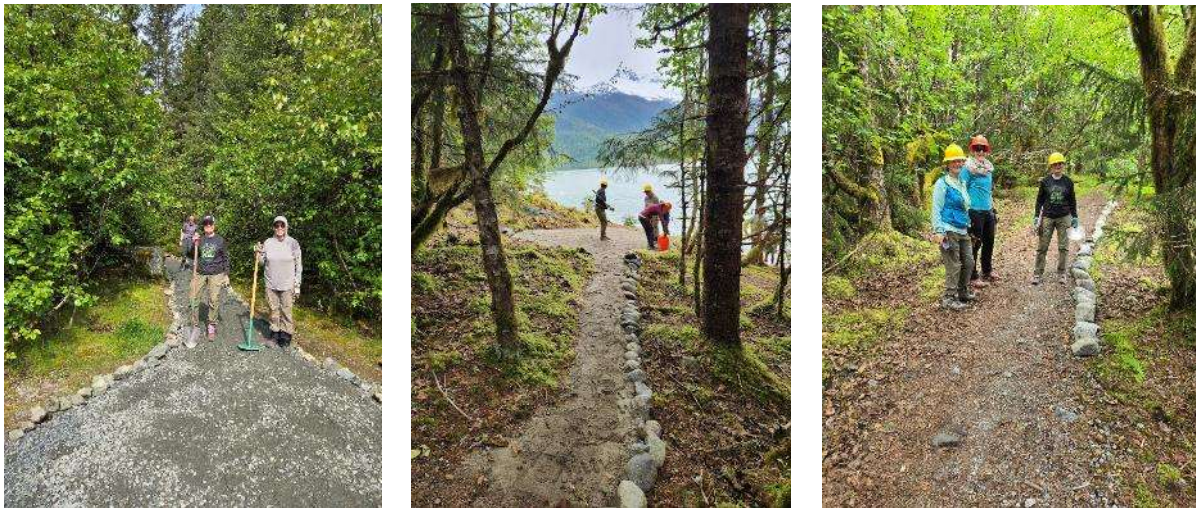
Wednesday 11 June – following breakfast, the group met Alex, Sam, and Mitch at the Mendenhall Glacier bus parking lot to begin the day's project on the Moraine Ecology (ME) trail. This heavily used trail, especially by Gastineau tour groups, had been flagged for improvement at both the entrance and the viewpoint overlooking Mendenhall Lake, Nugget Falls and the glacier.

In the morning, the team focused on enhancing the trail entrance by improving drainage, leveling the surface, and placing ~2000 pounds of gravel and rock. Their efforts covered about 250' of trail. They also cut the overhanging brush on the walkway from the road parking lot to the trail. The group enjoyed lunch at the scenic viewpoint, with stunning views of Mendenhall Glacier, Nugget Falls, and the surrounding mountains.

Moraine Ecology Trail before volunteer project



Moraine Ecology Trail after volunteer project



In the afternoon, some team members continued much needed lopping while others moved ~150 square feet of brush and debris—cut earlier by Sam and Mitch—to reopen and restore the viewpoint. Throughout the day, the team received many sincere thank-yous from Gastineau tour guides and visitors who appreciated the improvements.

After completing the project, the group visited the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and hiked to the spectacular Nugget Falls. For dinner, the group went to the unique Gold Creek 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 and dessert. Well-deserved after a long day of challenging but satisfying work and hiking.



Thursday 12 June – on their last workday in Juneau, the group met Alex, Nick, Sam, and Mitch at the Mendenhall Glacier parking lot. Before heading out, the team celebrated Sam's birthday by singing Happy Birthday and presenting him with delicious pastries shared by all.

They then returned to the ME Trail to complete restoration work on the upper terrace—placing gravel and rocks to make the area safer and more accessible for visitors. The group admired the transformation and got an added treat: spotting fresh icebergs from the prior day glacier calving which they heard while hiking in. They were even able to touch a few pieces along the shore. Next, the group continued the one-mile loop trail towards the parking lot while they improved several drainages.

Before departing, they thanked the USFS crew for their leadership, guidance, and friendship, and presented them with a card. The trail crew warmly expressed their appreciation for the volunteers' hard work and dedication. They then drove about 20 minutes to the peaceful Shrine of St. Therese where they had lunch and spotted a few marmots.

The group returned to UAS to do laundry, pack, rest and prepare for an early ferry departure to Skagway. For dinner, they went to the nearby Forbidden Peak Brewery where they enjoyed refreshments as well as nice items on the menu, something for everyone. They sat together and enjoyed laughter and stories and looked forward to the next adventure. On to Skagway ...

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 trail crew 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 13 June – an early day for the group. A 5:30 a.m. departure from UAS to the Auke Bay Ferry for a 6:00 a.m. 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 and observe seals, eagles, sea lions and orcas. Upon arrival in Skagway, the leaders picked up the cars and then shuttled the group to the [Chilkoot Trail Center](#) where they watched two short movies about the Hiking the Chilkoot trail and Bear Safety. Well-informed, they proceeded to the beautiful Chilkoot Outpost where the leaders distributed their cabin keys. They met at 6:00 p.m. for their first delicious dinner at the lodge.



In the evening, some took a short ride to get introduced to the Dyea Flats where they enjoyed the views, meadow, and start of many wildflowers.

Saturday 14 June – the group began their first volunteer workday in Skagway by meeting Clayton, the NPS trail crew leader, at the Chilkoot Trail parking lot at 8 a.m. As they started hiking in, excitement was high—just across the bridge near the trailhead, they spotted a brown-colored black bear with a cub, calmly walking and resting by the roadside. Along the trail, several fresh piles of bear scat added to the sense of wilderness adventure.

After a one-mile hike over the 260' rocky and rooty Saintly Hill, the team arrived at the site of a planned reroute of the Chilkoot Trail, which currently runs too close to the Taiya River. The Park Service is taking pro-active steps to move the trail farther from the river's edge to preserve long-term access for hikers and tourists.



At the worksite, Clayton briefed the group on safety and the day's projects. One team of four volunteers focused on helping complete a 30-foot wooden bridge. The bridge was built using yellow cedar—a heavy, exceptionally durable wood from trees that can be over a thousand years old. Clayton showed the group the tight grain of a cedar plank, revealing the age and strength of the material. The crew worked under his supervision to carefully install forty-five pre-cut cedar planks, each weighing about twenty-four pounds, on top of stringers already in place. By day's end, the bridge measured thirty feet long, four feet wide, and stood twenty inches tall—sturdy and ready for future trail users.

The remaining five volunteers focused on the reroute section, flagged earlier by the NPS. Their task was to brush and clear about nine hundred feet of dense vegetation, including thick devil's club, alder, ferns, and other brush. Using loppers, hand saws and clippers, a rake and McLeod as well as a weed whip, the crew worked hard to carve a corridor 6 feet wide and 8 feet high—preparing the way for the next phase: removing organic material to expose the inorganic sand base for the new trail tread.

After a full and productive day, the group enjoyed another relaxing dinner at the lodge, reviewing their hard-earned accomplishments and hearing highlights and new learnings from the day. Spirits were high as they looked forward to a well-deserved rest day, with several excursions planned and time to explore the charming town of Skagway.

During the workdays, Clayton shared stories about the October 2022 flash flood, falling trees and impact to the trail and showed the remains of the large metal bridge that 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.

Sunday 15 June – today was a rest day. The group began the morning with a peaceful visit to the Dyea Flats, where they enjoyed the open views and quiet natural beauty of the estuary. They stopped for coffee at the AlaskaX dogsledding store before exploring the historic Dyea townsite and nearby archaeological areas that hint at the Gold Rush era settlement that once thrived there.



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. As they completed their walk through the quiet townsite, they encountered another bear walking quietly in one of the side streets. A wild bear, a beautiful sight to see...

The morning concluded with a reflective walk through the Slide Cemetery, the resting place of many who perished during the avalanche of 1898.

After a brief stop at the lodge, the group headed into Skagway for a free afternoon. Volunteers explored the historic downtown, had lunch at local restaurants of their choice, browsed the shops, and visited the NPS Visitor Center to learn more about the area's storied past.



On the return trip, they made a final stop at Reid Falls—tucked behind the Gold Rush Cemetery—where they viewed the dramatic waterfall and visited the graves of Frank Reid and Jefferson “Soapy” Smith, two legendary figures of Skagway’s frontier days.

It was a full and enriching rest day, offering both relaxation and deeper connection to the cultural and natural history of the region.

Monday 16 June – after breakfast, the group was driven to the Taiya River drop-off point, where they met the Chilkat raft crew for a short float across the river arranged by their leaders. From the landing, they hiked about one mile to reach the work site. At the trailhead, they reunited with Clayton, who introduced the group to the next phase of the project.

Joining the group for the day were four archaeologists from the NPS, who observed the work as part of the park’s stewardship requirements for protecting historic and cultural artifacts along the trail.

The day’s task was physically demanding, digging down approximately six inches to reach the inorganic sand base and remove the overlying organic material—thick with roots, moss, and forest duff. Clayton demonstrated effective techniques using Pulaskis and pick mattocks, and the volunteers quickly got to work. The trail bed was dense with root systems, making progress challenging, but the group stayed focused and steady, gradually revealing the future trail surface.

By early afternoon, increasing wind and a forecast of rain prompted the crew to wrap up early and begin the hike back out. Despite the shortened workday, the group made solid progress and left the site in good shape.

After dinner, some volunteers took a final walk in the meadow and nearby spots for a quiet farewell to the beautiful surroundings. With full hearts and tired feet, they turned in for the night, ready for their final workday with the NPS team.

Tuesday 17 June – this was the seventh and last day of trail work in Alaska. The group met for a 7:00 a.m. coffee and trip feedback meeting. The leaders thanked the group for helping make the trip successful by keeping self and others safe, their attitudes and for getting a significant amount of work done. They then asked for input about what was good and what could be better to improve the trip for future years. They received

thumbs up on lodging, transportation, food, activities, work, and tools as well as positive suggestions for the gear list, trip difficulty ratings and insurance. It was a positive and interactive session appreciated by the leaders. The leaders also briefed the group on the upcoming thank you and tax letter and the importance of providing the online review.

After breakfast, the group was ferried once again across the Taiya River by the Chilkat raft crew, followed by a one-mile hike to continue work on the Chilkoot Trail reroute. They picked up where they left off, digging through root-laden soils to expose the silt-based inorganic layer needed to build a sustainable trail surface.

They were joined not only by Clayton, but also by four additional NPS employees who rolled up their sleeves and helped with the effort. The collaboration added fresh energy and helped the team continue making great progress.



By lunchtime, the group had completed a substantial portion of the flagged route, according to Clayton, approximately 60%.

One group enjoyed their break at the worksite, while the other hiked up to the beaver pond and bridge area for lunch with peaceful views of the boardwalk and wetlands.

Half of the group of volunteers hiked back to the lodge for showers and packing ahead of the next day's departure. The beaver pond group had an unexpected treat—on their return near Saintly Hill, they were invited to raft down the Taiya River with a small Chilkat rafting group. It was a fun, scenic float that passed by the lodge and added a spontaneous thrill to the day.

Chilkoot Trail reroute before volunteer project**Chilkoot Trail reroute after volunteer project**

At 5 p.m., the volunteers boarded the White Pass & Yukon Route train, enjoying a 2.5-hour ride up to 3,000 feet in British Columbia before looping back into Alaska. No passports were needed, and with clear blue skies and dramatic alpine views, it was a fitting reward after nine days of effort.





Dinner at Skagway Brewing Company provided a final chance to share stories and laughter. As they packed up back at the lodge, the group reflected on their accomplishment in Skagway: they had helped complete about 60% of the flagged trail reroute, a significant contribution to the Chilkoot trail.

Wednesday 18 June – this was the return day via the Alaska Fjordlines catamaran via Lynn Canal 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 Glen did an excellent job sharing his knowledge and Rio 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. The 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, Enterprise and Avis, and Chilkat Rafting went over and above to accommodate and make the trip special. **Thank you!**

Ocean – Southeast Alaska connects with people on an emotional level. The world as it was created still exists here. The tide pulses twice a day as if the earth takes two long, slow breaths and pushes aside the sea, moving it farther from shore then bringing it back again. Tides and currents circulate marine nutrients and cold water, both necessary for rich ocean life.

Air – the sky is never empty here. Ravens, eagles, hummingbirds, sapsuckers, hawks, swallows, sparrows, geese, cranes, ducks, swans. The air is never birdless. Watch for their movements to learn the business of the natural world.

Land – In some places, land belongs to people. Here, people belong to the land. Like the landscape, Southeast Alaskans are as strong and resilient as the giant spruce and hemlock trees that they live among. Green needles persist year-round on the long boughs. Mossy carpets cushion softness and color beneath the trees. Like their forest surroundings, they are steadfast. (source JuneauTravel)

THANK YOU, Alaska 2025 ConservationVIP Volunteers!!

