

Alaska Volunteer Trip Report Juneau Ranger District, Tongass National Forest and Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park June 7 - 17, 2026



Alaska Volunteer Trip Report, June 2026

Executive Summary

Southeast Alaska's glacier-carved fjords and temperate rainforest set the stage for the Conservation Volunteers International Program (ConservationVIP®) Alaska Volunteer Trip. In June 2026, the group included seven conservation travelers and two volunteer trip leaders. Guided by trusted partners, they contributed to significant public lands stewardship projects in two iconic landscapes: the Tongass National Forest, Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (Juneau Ranger District) in Juneau and the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park in Skagway.

Overview of the Conservation Projects

In **Juneau**, the group contributed to projects at the historic Powerline Trail, Cultural Point Louisa, and trails within the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area. Key accomplishments included constructing the foundation of a new 400-foot trail, moving and placing approximately 43,000 pounds of large gravel and beach rock, removing five illegal fire sites, and completing trail brushing and debris removal. In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the ConservationVIP group contributed **243 service hours** during the four days in Juneau.

In **Skagway**, the ConservationVIP group contributed to projects on the Chilkoot Trail, and at Patterson-McDermott Cabin replica site, Slide Cemetery, and Chilkoot Campground. Key accomplishments included light brushing and cutting 6 miles of trail corridor, maintaining campsites, debarking approximately 320 lineal feet of spruce logs, brushing and cleaning a large headstone at the cemetery, replacing old wood on picnic tables, and cutting and storing one-half cord of firewood for campground visitor use. In partnership with the National Park Service (NPS), the group contributed **180 service hours** during the three days in Skagway.

At each location, experienced USFS or NPS personnel provided leadership and guidance. The agencies also provided tools and materials. The ConservationVIP group volunteered a total of **423 hours** in Juneau and Skagway, not including the time spent on pre-trip planning and trip preparation and post-trip hours by the leaders. The tools used included shovels, Pulaskis, McLeods, loppers, rock bar, hand and tree saws, clippers, buckets, and two mechanical wheelbarrows.

Tongass National Forest, Juneau, AK

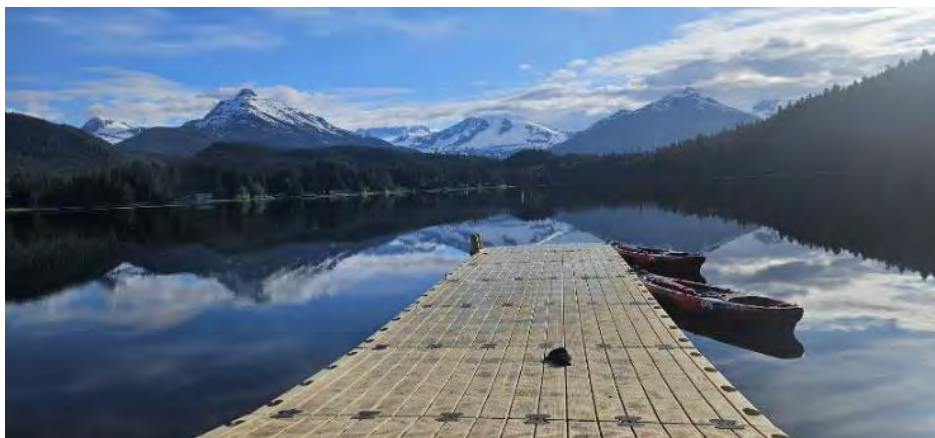
Why Trails and Trail Maintenance Matter:

In Southeast Alaska, where glaciers, rainforest, and ocean meet, trails are essential for connecting people to places while protecting the surrounding ecosystem. Ongoing stewardship ensures these heavily visited areas remain safe, resilient, and accessible for future generations. Southeast Alaska extends from the southern tip of the Prince of Wales Island, 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. USFS has played an important management role in Southeast Alaska's history. The Tongass National Forest, the largest national forest in the United States, encompasses more than 90 percent of Southeast Alaska.

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. Summer visitors include friends and relatives of local residents, 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 ConservationVIP travelers stayed in four housing suites at 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 around 8:00 a.m. in the UAS cafeteria, which was a pleasant twenty-minute walk from their housing. They received their bagged lunches here and they had access to the complimentary laundry facility on the last day of their stay.



Sunday 7 June – Arrival and Orientation

All seven travelers arrived safely in Juneau as scheduled and joined the two leaders for orientation at UAS. Following orientation, they enjoyed a shrimp pesto pasta and salad dinner at the UAS Lakeside Grill overlooking beautiful Auke Lake before walking back to their lodging.

The 2026 Alaska team consisted of seven travelers and two leaders. Five of the seven travelers were new to a ConservationVIP trip, having learned about the program through online searches or referrals. Everyone was enthusiastic about the upcoming trail stewardship projects, learning opportunities, and exploration of Southeast Alaska.

Monday 8 June – Historic Powerline Trail, Mendenhall Glacier

Following breakfast at UAS the group departed for the USFS headquarters near the Mendenhall Glacier. There, they met Recreation Management Specialist Matthew (Matt) Adams, who welcomed them and provided an overview of the week's planned projects and stewardship goals. Matt also conducted a comprehensive safety briefing covering tool use and safety, and wildlife safety procedures. Hard hats and ear protection were

provided, while the travelers supplied their own gloves and safety glasses. They also met staff members Sam, Nick, and intern James. ConservationVIP had partnered with Sam and Nick on previous Alaska projects, and trip leaders appreciated reconnecting with familiar crew members.

After loading tools and equipment, the group traveled to the trailhead of the historic Powerline Trail. The trail was originally constructed to provide access to electrical transmission infrastructure serving the Mendenhall Valley. Now, the trail is a popular recreation corridor offering a quieter route to the Mendenhall Glacier trail system while passing several historic remnants of the area's early development.

The ConservationVIP group performed trail restoration activities along approximately 2 miles of trail corridor. The projects focused on cleanup of extensive tree-cutting debris left from previous chainsaw operations conducted by a different crew. The group cleared and redistributed cut logs, branches, and woody material away from the trail corridor and visitor sightlines. This improved both trail conditions and aesthetics. The activity required significant physical effort because they moved large quantities of wood debris into adjacent forested areas.

The group enjoyed lunch with views of the Mendenhall Glacier, Nugget Falls, and surrounding mountains. Weather conditions were favorable throughout the day, allowing the team to complete substantial progress on the assigned section. Before departing for UAS later in the day, they spent free time at the Mendenhall Glacier visitor center, and various trails and viewpoints.





In the late afternoon, the group traveled to Douglas Island for dinner at the popular local Island Pub. Several participants later walked to the nearby historic Treadwell Mine site and Sandy Beach, where they enjoyed views across the Gastineau Channel toward downtown Juneau while learning about the area's mining history.

Tuesday 9 June – Point Louisa (Auke Village) Trail Construction

Following breakfast, the group departed to meet USFS staff members Sam, Nick, and interns James and Chad at the Point Louisa trailhead near Auke Village. Pete Schneider, Recreation Staff Officer for the Juneau Ranger District, and Matt also joined throughout most of the day.



Point Louisa is a scenic coastal area overlooking Lynn Canal and has long been used by local residents and visitors for recreation. Portions of the surrounding forest may contain archaeological and cultural resources associated with the Indigenous Tlingit people. To help protect these sensitive areas while improving visitor access, USFS is constructing a new trail that will guide visitors to Point Louisa while reducing off-trail travel through the forest.

The primary objective of the project at Point Louisa was to complete a foundation of 400 feet of new trail. Some travelers gathered baseball-sized rocks from the beach and hauled them in buckets to the project area, while others cleared vegetation along the future trail corridor through brushing and lopping. Later in the day, the group shoveled gravel which had been delivered into a mechanical wheelbarrow (Canycom), transported it to the work site, and spread and raked the material to begin construction of the trail tread foundation.



The ConservationVIP group enjoyed both the project and lunch overlooking Lynn Canal. Blue skies were sunny with exceptional views of the surrounding mountains and coastline. The favorable weather contributed to a productive and enjoyable day of trail improvement.

Following the project, the group traveled into downtown Juneau for dinner. On the trip, they visited the Sealaska Heritage Institute Museum and nearby shops. The travelers

appreciated the museum's exhibits highlighting the history, culture, and artistic traditions of Southeast Alaska Native peoples.

Dinner was at The Hangar on the Wharf, located in the historic Merchants Wharf complex. The building once served as a floatplane hangar and reflects Juneau's long aviation history.

To conclude the day, leaders offered an optional drive toward the "End of the Road" along Glacier Highway, stopping at Eagle Beach State Recreation Area to enjoy views of Lynn Canal and the surrounding mountains. Along the drive, they were rewarded with a black bear sighting as the animal climbed uphill into the forest, providing a memorable ending to another successful day in Southeast Alaska.

Wednesday 10 June – Point Louisa Trail Construction Continues

Following breakfast, the group departed to meet Sam, Nick, and James at the Point Louisa trailhead. The primary objective for the day was to continue construction of the new trail foundation. The group continued to collect and place both beach-collected rock and material previously delivered to the site. The delivered rock totaled about 24,000 pounds, while an estimated 19,000 pounds of rock collected from the beach was incorporated into the trail tread. Travelers joined efforts to transport, sort, and place the rock.

Once the foundation rock had been distributed, participants collected large, heavy rocks from the beach and positioned them along the edges of the trail. These rocks serve as barriers to help retain the smaller trail material and better define the route. In the adjacent meadow area, several participants cut sections of sod and transplanted them along portions of the trail edge, providing an additional natural barrier intended to help contain trail material and discourage off-trail travel.



With two Canycoms operating throughout the day, some participants loaded rock into the machines while others transported and unloaded material at various locations along the trail. The well-coordinated effort and team engagement resulted in significant progress despite the large and heavy volume of material being moved.



In addition to trail construction, the group removed five illegal fire sites discovered within the project area, helping restore the site and reduce future impacts to the landscape.

The day concluded with dinner at the Gold Creek Salmon Bake, where participants enjoyed a buffet featuring Alaska Sockeye salmon and ribs while also exploring the site's mining heritage exhibits and historic setting.



Thursday 11 June – Point Louisa and Dredge Lake area

Today marked the conclusion of stewardship with USFS. Participants divided into two teams to complete final trail improvement projects at several locations around Juneau.

One team, led by Nick of USFS, returned to Point Louisa to complete the foundation of the new 400-foot trail. Their day involved strenuous physical labor, but participants were rewarded by seeing the completion of the foundation of the 400-foot trail. While a final layer of small gravel remains to be completed at Point Louisa, the trail already provides visitors with a clearly defined route that will help protect adjacent areas of potential cultural and archaeological significance.



Before and After Photos of Point Louisa 400-foot trail foundation construction



The second team, led by Sam of USFS, focused on corridor clearing and brushing projects on several local trail systems. The locations included the Dredge Lake, Moose Lake, Dike, River, and Pit Trails.

Using loppers and hand saws, the team removed overgrown vegetation to improve access and visibility for both hikers and cyclists who use these popular recreation routes.



After completing the activities in both areas, everyone reunited for lunch at the Skater’s Cabin Picnic Shelter, where they enjoyed another spectacular view of the Mendenhall Glacier. U.S. Forest Service leadership, Pete and Matt, also joined the group. During lunch, participants thanked USFS for their ongoing support, partnership, and hospitality throughout the week. In return, USFS staff expressed their appreciation for the ConservationVIP team’s commitment and dedication, noting that they had exceeded their expectations and made a significant contribution to local trail stewardship efforts.



Following lunch, the group prepared for the next phase of the Alaska Volunteer Trip, conservation experiences in Skagway. They did laundry and other personal tasks before gathering in the early evening at Forbidden Peak Brewery near UAS where they enjoyed the final Juneau farewell dinner. They celebrated a successful week of stewardship and partnership in Juneau before traveling by ferry to Skagway.

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 1890s 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 with a departure 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 1890s climbed that route to get to the upper lakes and Yukon River that would hopefully lead them to Klondike gold.

Friday 12 June – Travel to Skagway

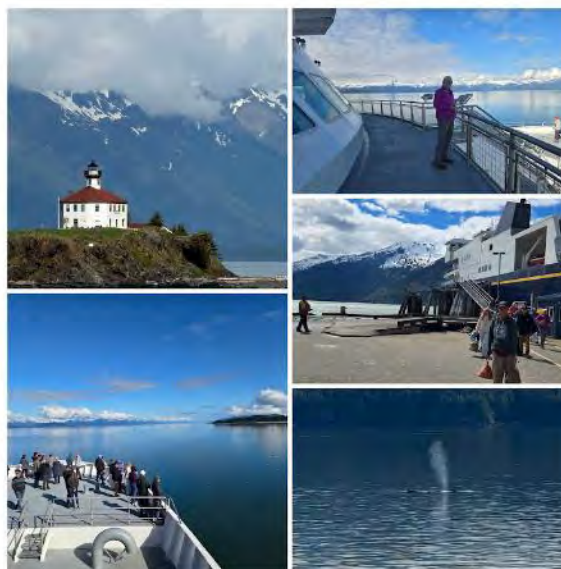
The day began early as participants completed checkout procedures and cleaned their dormitory accommodations at UAS. They met in the parking lot at 5:30 a.m. and departed by Uber for the Alaska Marine Highway ferry terminal. The ferry departed at 7:00 a.m. for the journey north to Skagway.



Weather conditions were favorable throughout the voyage, with mostly clear skies providing

excellent views of Southeast Alaska's coastal scenery. During the crossing, the travelers observed several humpback whales and multiple Dall's porpoises, adding to the memorable travel experience.

Upon arrival in Skagway and after picking up the vehicles for transportation, the leaders drove to the NPS Chilkoot Trail Permit Center. There, Ranger Riley provided two educational video orientations to the historic Chilkoot Trail and bear safety information. The training was particularly relevant, as the group already encountered a bear in Juneau and would experience several additional bear sightings during their time in the Skagway area.



Following the orientation, the group traveled to the Chilkoot Trail Outpost Lodge, where hosts Cortny and Claire welcomed participants and assisted with settling into the accommodations. The evening meal featured delicious salmon chowder, salad, and a lemon dessert.

Taking advantage of the evening's clear skies, the leaders offered a short, optional trip to the Dyea Flats area, an important location associated with the Klondike Gold Rush. Along the route, participants observed a large black bear feeding near the roadside and later encountered a second black bear. After a long day of travel, wildlife viewing, and orientation activities, the group returned to the lodge for the evening and prepared for the upcoming days in Skagway.

Saturday 13 June – Chilkoot Trail Stewardship

Following breakfast, the group met with Cat, the National Park Service trail crew leader. After introductions and a safety talk, the group began its first stewardship day in Skagway and on the historic Chilkoot Trail. The day's project focused on brushing and trail corridor maintenance along sections of the Chilkoot National Historic Trail.

Using loppers, hand saws, and a tree-trimming saw, they removed encroaching vegetation along approximately 6 miles of trail corridor. The route included the steep climb up and down Sainthly Hill, gaining about 450 feet in elevation over rocky, root-filled trail, while offering impressive views of the surrounding forest.

The group enjoyed lunch at the end of the Beaver Pond boardwalk and took a short walk to see the Hosford Sawmill. The remains of the former sawmill offer insight into the area's logging history, which followed the Indigenous trade and Klondike Gold Rush eras. They also observed wolf scat identified by Cat along the trail.



The project provided an opportunity to learn more about the history of the Chilkoot Trail and its importance during the Klondike Gold Rush, while contributing to the ongoing stewardship efforts that keep the trail accessible for hikers each year. This support also allows NPS personnel to focus resources on backcountry projects. Following the day's activities, everyone returned to the Chilkoot Trail Outpost, where they enjoyed a hearty dinner and relaxed after their first day of stewardship activities in Skagway.

Sunday 14 June – Skagway Exploration Day

Following breakfast, the group enjoyed a rest day exploring several historic and scenic sites in the Skagway area. The morning began with an optional visit to the Dyea Flats during low tide, where participants walked along the expansive tidal flats and observed the surrounding coastal landscape, waterfalls, and wildlife habitat.



They also visited the historic Dyea townsite, once a major gateway to the Klondike Gold Rush, followed by a stop at the Dyea Cemetery, where many early settlers and stampeders are buried.

Afterward, participants traveled into Skagway for lunch and personal free time. Travelers spent the afternoon exploring town, shopping, and taking optional hikes. The day included a visit to the historic

Gold Rush Cemetery and nearby Lower Reid Falls, where participants learned more about Skagway's Gold Rush history while enjoying one of the area's natural attractions.

Returning to their lodging in the evening, the group enjoyed another excellent dinner prepared by hosts Cortny and Claire. The meal included a fresh fruit salad, a spinach dish, a potato dish, and chicken pot pie, followed by delicious fruit cookies for dessert.

The day provided a relaxing blend of local history, scenery, and exploration.



Monday 15 June – Patterson-McDermott Cabin Support and Taiya River Float

Following breakfast, the group met National Park Service leader Jesse Bales (Chief of Facility Management in Sitka), as well as local staff Buck and Eli who are part of the preparations for the reconstruction of the historic Patterson-McDermott Cabin. The

Patterson-McDermott Cabin is the last original standing cabin from the Klondike Gold Rush era. The reconstruction project will incorporate some of the original cabin logs along with newly harvested and prepared spruce logs sourced from the local area.

Using drawknives and peaveys, participants removed bark from six large spruce logs, ~320 lineal feet. NPS provided instruction on traditional log-building techniques and explained the detailed process involved in reconstructing the historic cabin, including specialized training received by preservation staff.

Although the logs being debarked were later determined to be unsuitable for use in the cabin reconstruction project because of their size, the effort was not wasted. The logs were prepared for removal from the site and future use in other NPS projects within the Skagway area. By the end of the day, the group had fully debarked all six logs, ~320 lineal feet, helping prepare materials for ongoing historic preservation and resource management efforts.



Additional efforts included raking and disposing of the bark using supersacks, turning the logs, as well as moving them to and from the location.

The group finished ahead of schedule and received appreciation from NPS staff. The Facility Manager, Corey Tole, also joined to introduce himself and to thank the travelers for their stewardship efforts.

Tired, but satisfied with the completion of the project, the group returned to the lodge for a quick change of clothes.



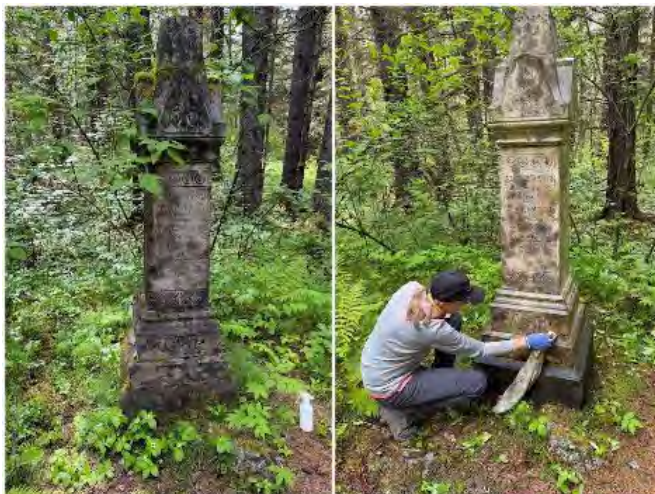
The group then departed to enjoy an interpretive float trip down a section of the Taiya River, guided by Cris, the owner of Skagway Float Tours. The outing was provided as a gesture of appreciation for the stewardship efforts on the Chilkoot trail which is used for the Hike and Float tours they offer. Chris's dogs Casper and Lucy also joined the float, adding a welcome and memorable touch to the experience. The day concluded with yet another delicious dinner at the Chilkoot Trail Outpost.



Tuesday 16 June – Slide Cemetery and Chilkoot Campground Projects

Following breakfast, the group met NPS staff members Cat and Rory for a day of stewardship projects in Dyea. They started at the historic Slide Cemetery, where they divided into teams.

One team carefully cleaned a tall marble and granite headstone using water, brushes, and scouring pads to improve their appearance while preserving the historic character of the site. Other team members focused on brushing vegetation from the parking area, entrance corridor, and selected sections within the cemetery grounds, improving visitor access and visibility.



They then traveled to the Chilkoot Trail parking area and began maintenance along the approximately one-half mile trail leading to the Chilkoot Campground. Using loppers, hand saws, and clippers, participants removed encroaching vegetation from the trail corridor to improve access and visibility.



Upon reaching the campground, the group enjoyed lunch. After lunch, they broke up into 3 teams.

One team repaired campground infrastructure by replacing several old planks on picnic tables.

The second team walked the entire campground, clearing brush around campsites, tidying fire rings and visitor-use areas, and collecting litter.

The third team processed a little over half a cord of firewood using a wood splitter and stocked the woodshed for use by campground visitors.

The day's activities helped improve visitor facilities, enhance campground appearance, and support ongoing preservation efforts at both the historic Slide Cemetery and the Chilkoot Campground. Through these projects, the ConservationVIP group contributed directly to the stewardship of important cultural and recreational resources while helping prepare facilities for the busy summer visitor season.



At 5 p.m., the group boarded the White Pass & Yukon Route train, enjoying a 2.5-hour interpretative ride with a 3,000 feet elevation gain into British Columbia before looping back into Alaska and enjoying the beautiful surroundings, including waterfalls, mountains, and snow.

Dinner at the Skagway Brewing Company provided a final chance to share stories and laughter. The leaders thanked the ConservationVIP travelers for their

contributions, teamwork and partnership and conducted an exit review to allow travelers to share what they enjoyed as well as provide suggestions for improvement.

Wednesday 17 June – Return Voyage to Juneau and Departure

Following an early breakfast at Chilkoot Trail Outpost, the group boarded the Alaska Fjordlines catamaran for the return voyage from Skagway to Auke Bay near Juneau. Captain Ketch, assisted by Marny and Rio, provided informative narration throughout the journey on the region's history, geography, and wildlife.

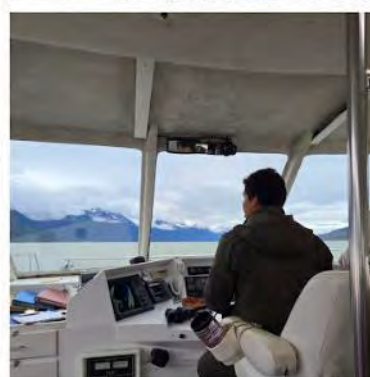
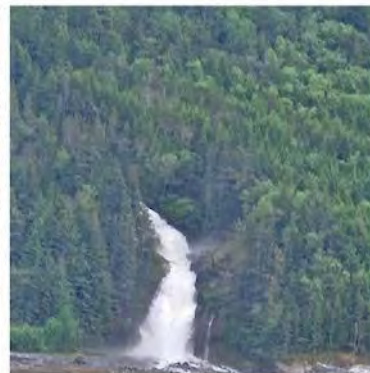
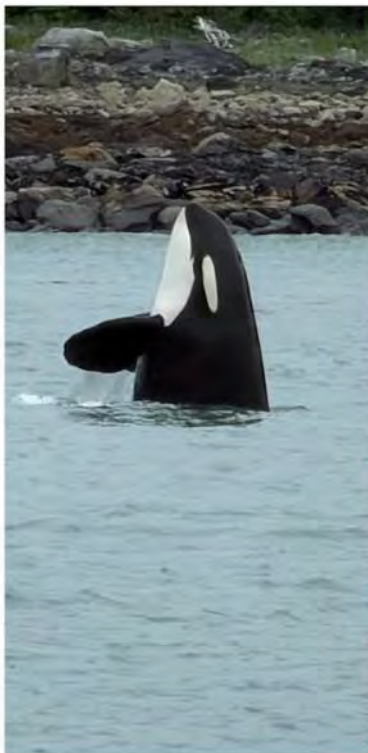
They experienced exceptional wildlife viewing along the route, including Dall's porpoises, Steller sea lions, harbor seals, bald eagles, humpback whales, and marbled murrelets. The vessel passed the Benjamin Island sea lion haul-out and offered clear views of the Chilkat Mountain Range near Haines

The highlight of the voyage occurred near Shelter Island, where a pod of about 12 orcas including calves was observed across multiple locations. One whale was seen spyhopping, briefly rising vertically out of the water in apparent curiosity, creating a memorable final wildlife encounter of the trip.

Upon arrival in Auke Bay, the travelers said their farewells before continuing on to their respective destinations. Some departed for the airport and flights home, while others continued traveling within Alaska for additional activities and exploration.

Thank you!

ConservationVIP wishes to express our sincere thanks to our public land partners, U.S. Forest Service in Juneau and National Park Service in Skagway, for their leadership, guidance, and collaboration that made this trip possible. We also extend appreciation to our valued service partners and local businesses, including UAS lodging and dining, Chilkoot Trail Outpost, Glacial Coffeehouse, Gold Creek Salmon Bake, Skagway Float



Tours, Alaska Fjordlines, Alaska Marine Highway System, White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, and the restaurants and businesses that supported the group, often going above and beyond in service and hospitality.

To all the remarkable travelers on this year's conservation trip, **THANK YOU**. Your significant effort, cheerful outlook, flexibility, curiosity, kindness, and willingness to step outside your comfort zone made this journey what it was. You gave your time, energy, and talents in service to Alaska's public lands, and in doing so helped create an experience that was meaningful not only for the places we visited, but for one another. It was a privilege to share this journey with you, and we hope the memories, friendships, and spirit of stewardship remain with you for many years to come.

*We came as strangers and left as friends,
With stories, memories, laughter, and
accomplishments shared.
We explored Alaska not simply as travelers,
But as stewards, giving back to the places
that welcomed us.
The trails, historic sites, and public lands
we served will remain for future
generations,
While the friendships, experiences, and
sense of wonder we found here will travel
home with each of us.*



“Experience extraordinary places, not as a tourist, but as a steward”