

# Seward-Girdwood Iditarod National Historic Trail Project Proposal

November 2002

## Location

The Seward-Girdwood Iditarod National Historic Trail is comprised of a network of Primary Routes, Connecting Trails, and heritage sites located in an approximately 120 mile long corridor through the Chugach Mountains between Seward and Girdwood, Alaska (refer to attached maps).

## Background

The National Trails Act, as amended in 1978, designated the Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) from Seward to Nome, Alaska, across multiple federal, state, municipal and private lands.

### NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL TERMINOLOGY

**NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL:** Congressionally designated route or trail system and associated heritage resources. National Historic Trails can be characterized as loosely defined corridors comprised of the following three components, which may or may not all be present and/or in the same location:

1. Congressionally designated route;
2. Route or sites where history actually occurred;
3. Associated trail or interpretive facilities managed for recreation use or enjoyment.

**COMPREHENSIVE MANAGEMENT PLAN:** Congressionally mandated report for each NHT identifying route locations; significant natural, historic and cultural resources; trail management objectives; anticipated cooperative agreements; uniform trail marking procedures; and identification of access needs to the trail and acquisition needs for significant sites or segments.

**PRIMARY ROUTE:** Route identified as the main travel way of a National Historic Trail.

**CONNECTING OR CONNECTING TRAIL:** Routes identified as parallel, alternate or adjoining travel ways to the Primary Route and part of a National Historic Trail.

The Bureau of Land Management, identified as the Trail Administrator for the INHT, led an extensive multi-agency/partner effort to develop the Iditarod National Historic Trail Seward to Nome Route Comprehensive Management Plan (Comprehensive Plan), published in 1986. The Comprehensive Plan provides guidelines for the protection, development and management of the Primary Route and Connecting Trails and for associated heritage resources along the entire length of the INHT.

The Comprehensive Plan also identified individual agency responsibilities for completing the subsequent planning and analysis necessary to determine the specific location, uses, development and management of the INHT Primary Route, Connecting Trails and associated heritage resources and sites on lands managed by each agency.

In concert with the Chugach National Forest Management Plan revised in 2002, Forest Service employees and partners invested a considerable amount of time and expertise completing preliminary field inventories and feasibility assessments as a foundation for project planning and analysis. These efforts resulted in the identification and verification of route locations, heritage resources, associated recreation, and interpretative opportunities.

## Current Status

Conclusions from field reconnaissance and from review of existing management and development plans and literature are as follows:

Numerous trails have been constructed in the past for various reasons along the general Seward-Girdwood route, but not necessarily associated with the designated INHT.

The 1986 Comprehensive Plan established a common guide for the INHT trails and sites, recommending potential management actions for the protection of historic remnants and artifacts for public use and enjoyment.

The Seward-Girdwood Primary Route and Connector Trails identified in the Comprehensive Plan cross a variety of land ownerships, with the majority being located on Chugach National Forest land.

Since 1986, several trail segments have been planned, constructed or reconstructed along the Seward-Girdwood INHT route by various federal, state, or other entities, primarily near or through the communities of Seward and Girdwood, based on the Comprehensive Plan recommendations.

Numerous heritage resource sites exist along routes within the project area. These sites, both historic and prehistoric, vary in age and condition, and present a range of management opportunities.

Several advisory councils, advocacy groups, and potential partners have assisted in conceptual planning and route location for segments of the Seward-Girdwood INHT. These include, but are not limited to, the Iditarod Trail Blazers, Girdwood Board of Supervisors, Trail Committees in Girdwood and Kenai Peninsula Borough, TRAAK Board, National Park Service and state agency employees.

The proposed trails and facilities cross the majority of vegetation types, age classes, and habitats on the Chugach National Forest, offering excellent opportunities to see many of the fish and wildlife species that occur. The proposed routes and facilities do not cross through existing or potential

habitat of any threatened or endangered species. They do however cross through existing or potential habitat of Management Indicator and Species of Special Interest as listed in the forest plan.

The Revised Chugach National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2002) establishes direction for all natural, cultural and recreation resource management, protection and development activities on Chugach National Forest land.

These conclusions helped shape objectives of the Seward-Girdwood INHT Project, shown below as our “Purpose and Need.”

### **Purpose and Need**

The intent of this project is to:

Validate, refine, and implement selected Comprehensive Plan recommendations within the Chugach National Forest Boundary and connecting Seward to Girdwood at Crow Pass Trail.

Identify existing and proposed INHT trail segments stemming from the Comprehensive Plan, crossing various land ownerships and connecting Seward with Girdwood.

Facilitate a coordinated approach for completing route selection and obtaining permanent easements; identifying managed trail uses; preserving and interpreting heritage resources; constructing or reconstructing INHT trail, recreation and support facilities; and identifying and incorporating appropriate economic development opportunities.

Develop and manage the INHT in concert with associated legislation, guidelines and plans identified for and by adjacent landowners and managers.

## Proposed Activities

Activities to accomplish the Purpose and Need are summarized below:

**Routes:** Identify, secure permanent easements, develop and manage a continuous INHT pathway, and associated trails, connecting Seward with Girdwood to Crow Pass Trail:

The majority of the Seward-Girdwood trail route would be designed and actively managed for hiker/pedestrian and bicycle use (53 miles hike, 49 miles hike and bike), and approximately 18 miles would also be managed for horse use.

INHT winter trail routes would be identified and managed to provide approximately 55 miles of snowmobile and 70 miles of cross-country ski opportunities. Some of these uses share the same trail.

Other trail uses would be allowed, unless prohibited by legal “forest order”. Prohibited trail uses, as identified in the Revised Chugach Land and Resource Management Plan, would include closure to motorized trail uses in specific areas and for specified seasons.

Identify, develop, and manage access trails to provide logical INHT connections from main access points (approximately 12 miles, primarily existing trail).

Trail Classes range from Class 2 to Class 5 (see definitions, this page).

This proposal includes approximately 57 miles of trail reconstruction, 74 miles of new trail construction, (13 miles of winter trail bridges and clearing only) the construction of 38 trail bridges (over 20’ span), and at least 50 minor bridges and boardwalks.

Existing easements will be used or new ones established for approximately 38 miles of trail across state lands, 5 miles of trail across Municipality of Anchorage lands (managed by the Heritage Land Bank), 1.5 miles of trail across private lands, and 0.6 miles of trail across Kenai Borough lands. The remainder of trail is on Chugach National Forest land.

**Heritage Resources:** Identify, evaluate, and implement appropriate protection, preservation and management of selected heritage resources on Chugach National Forest land.

Proposed activities for heritage resources include:

**Primary Management (Level 1):** Sites proposed for Primary Management on National Forest land include:

- **Bruhn Ray Mine:** Interpretive signing of the original site, and of buildings now owned by and located at the Hope Historical Museum. Archaeological testing of the original building locations at the camp site to determine eligibility of the site for the

### FOREST SERVICE TRAIL MANAGEMENT DEFINITIONS

**TRAIL CLASS\*** The prescribed scale of trail development, representing the intended design and management standards of the trail.

**Trail Class 1:** Primitive/Undeveloped. Intermittent tread with native surface; obstacles common; minimal constructed features; typically Primitive Setting.

**Trail Class 2:** Simple/Minor Development. Narrow and rough tread with native materials; occasional obstacles; limited constructed features; typically Semi-Primitive setting.

**Trail Class 3:** Developed/Improved. Obvious and continuous tread, typically with native materials; obstacles infrequent obstacles; trail structures and bridges may be common; typically Semi-Primitive to Roded Natural Setting.

**Trail Class 4:** Highly Developed. Wide and relatively smooth tread with native or imported materials, which may be hardened; few obstacles; grades typically < 12%; trail structures and bridges frequent and substantial; typically Roded Natural to Rural Setting.

**Trail Class 5:** Fully Developed. Tread width generally accommodates two-directional travel, commonly hardened with asphalt or other imported material; no obstacles, grades typically < 8%; trail structures frequent or continuous; typically Rural to Urban setting.

**MANAGED USE:** The mode(s) of travel that are actively managed and appropriate, considering the design and management of the trail. Note: Managed Use is not the same as “allowed use”, which represents a much wider set of uses.

**PROHIBITED USE:** Mode of travel prohibited by official legal order.

\* Forest Service Trail Class Matrix available in project file.

National Register of Historic Places, and nomination if warranted.

**Canyon Creek Wing Dam:** Construction of a viewing landing, access paths and fencing to provide safe viewing of the dam remains. Interpretive signing. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

**White's Roadhouse:** Clean up any hazardous materials remaining at the site. Stabilization and restoration of the two historic buildings on the site, for adaptive reuse as a winter warming shelter. Construction of access trails to the site. Interpretive signing. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

**Manitoba Cabin:** Stabilization and restoration of the cabin for adaptive reuse for public recreation and interpretive education programs. Interpretive signing. Complete eligibility determination for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and nominate if warranted.

**Hope Guard Station:** Stabilization and restoration of historic structures at the site interpretive signing. Nomination to the

Interpretive signing. Nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

**Lauritsen Cabin:** Interpretive signing, and the completion of an active management plan for the cabin's adaptive reuse for public recreation and interpretive education programs.

**Primrose Mine:** Stabilization and restoration of the one remaining standing structure. Interpretive signing of the site. Archaeological testing of other building locations to aid in nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

**Secondary Management (Level 2):** Sites proposed for Secondary Management on National Forest land include, but are not limited to: Anderson's Camp, Falls Creek Mine, Crown Point Mine, Michaelson Mining Camp, 20-Mile River Saw Mill, and Wibel Mining Camp.

**Minimum Management (Level 3):** Sites proposed for Minimum Management on National Forest land include, but are not limited to: Dahl Mining Community, Griset's Roadhouse, Hirshey's Camp, Johnson Springs Cabin, Lakeside Roadhouse, Old Mail Camp, Oyotu (Passage Canal), Saxton Camp (Wilson's Camp), Snoring Inn, and Trail River Campground Ruins.

**Interpretive Materials:** Development and installation of interpretive and informational signing is proposed at 34 INHT access trailheads, and at 7 Level 1 and several Level 2 heritage resource sites. A project interpretation plan would be developed to ensure integrated themes and consistency in design and quality.

**Associated Facilities:** The following ancillary activities are also proposed in conjunction with this project:

Construction of four new trailheads. Three are recommended to be included in DOT highway reconstruction projects at Snow River (MP18), Twentymile Valley (MP82), and Girdwood

**HISTORIC SITE MANAGEMENT CATEGORIES**  
INHT Comprehensive Plan

**Level 1: Recommended for Priority Management.** Sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This includes, but is not limited to: determinations of eligibility and nominations to the National Register of Historic Places; and active preservation in the form of interpretation, stabilization, restoration, and adaptive use where feasible and appropriate.

**Level 2: Recommended for Secondary Management.** Sites potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This includes, but is not limited to: determinations of eligibility and nominations to the National Register of Historic Places; and preservation in the form of interpretation, stabilization, restoration or reconstruction as funds and resources are available.

**Level 3: Recommended for Minimum Management.** Sites likely not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This includes, but is not limited to: determinations of eligibility for possible nominations to the National Register of Historic Places; interpretation, as funds and resources are available, and adequate protection.

National Register of Historic Places.

**Gilpatrick's Mining Camp:** Stabilization and restoration of historic structures at the site.

West (MP90). We are recommending that each of these trailheads include parking for approximately 20 vehicles, vault toilets, and interpretive and informational signs. The other new trailhead would be at MP3.9 Crow Creek Road as recommended by the “Girdwood-Iditarod Trail Route Study”, for up to 12 vehicles. No structures would be constructed at this site, and it would not be used in the winter due to avalanche hazards.

Reconstruction of two existing trailheads at Victor Creek (MP19.5) and at Vagt Lake (MP25.5), both planned as part of DOT’s MP18-25.5 highway reconstruction project. The parking lots would be expanded to include parking for approximately 15 vehicles, interpretive and informational signs and vault toilets.

Installation of vault toilets at 4 trailheads: Nash Road, Bear Lake Road, Kenai Peninsula Welcome Sign, and Ingram Creek. Easements will be sought for these four sites.

### **Details of Proposed Activities**

To facilitate planning, the project has been divided into “areas” and route segments, which are identified on the attached Project Overview Map. Individual Area Summary Sheets and Maps, which provide additional details by area and segment, follow the Overview Map.

### **Decision to be Made**

The decision to be made is whether or not to develop and manage the INHT trails, heritage sites, and associated facilities and if so:

Which routes will be developed and managed to serve as the INHT? What will be the prescribed Trail Class and Managed Use for each trail segment?

How will the heritage sites located on National Forest land and acquired rights of way associated with the project be managed? For any sites that will be

managed at Primary Management Level 1, how will public use of the site be managed?

What associated facilities, including trailheads and parking areas, will be developed and managed as part of this project? What will be the location, major components and capacities of these facilities?

### **What We Want From You**

After reviewing this information, please take time to give us your feedback on our proposal. Use the enclosed form, call, or send us an e-mail. We will be considering your comments to develop alternatives, design resource protection measures, and analyze the potential effects of these actions in a draft Environmental Assessment.

Submit your comments to either the Glacier or Seward Ranger District. All comments received will be considered, and it is not necessary to send duplicate or separate comments to each district:

Alison Rein, Recreation Planner  
Glacier Ranger District  
P.O. Box 129  
Girdwood, AK 99587-0129  
Phone: 907-754-2329  
e-mail: [arein@fs.fed.us](mailto:arein@fs.fed.us)

or

Pat O’Leary, Recreation Planner  
Seward Ranger District  
P.O. Box 390  
Seward, AK 99664-0390  
Phone: 907-224-4109  
e-mail: [poleary@fs.fed.us](mailto:poleary@fs.fed.us)

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COMMENT FORM  
for the  
PROPOSED  
SEWARD-GIRDWOOD IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL PROJECT

After reviewing the enclosed project proposal, take a moment to write down your thoughts, issues, ideas, or any information you may have relevant to this project. Please be as specific as possible. That way we can consider ways to modify our proposal to address your comments. If you have any questions about this proposal, please don't hesitate to call (907-754-2329), write, e-mail or visit (e-mail address is [arein@fs.fed.us](mailto:arein@fs.fed.us) ). Please return this form or call in your comments by December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me the Environmental Assessment and summary.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me the summary only.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please remove my name from your mailing list for this project.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please continue to send me information on this project, but note the following address changes:

From:

TO: Girdwood Ranger District  
ATTN: Alison Rein  
P.O. Box 129  
Girdwood, AK 99587-0129

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After reviewing the enclosed project proposal, take a moment to write down your thoughts, issues, ideas, or any information you may have relevant to this project. Please be as specific as possible. That way we can consider ways to modify our proposal to address your comments. If you have any questions about this proposal, please don't hesitate to call (907-224-4109), write, e-mail (e-mail address is [poleary@fs.fed.us](mailto:poleary@fs.fed.us)) or visit. Please return this form or call in your comments by December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Please return this form or call in your comments

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me the Environmental Assessment and summary.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me the summary only.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please remove my name from your mailing list for this project.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please continue to send me information on this project, but note the following address changes:

Fold in thirds, staple or tape and affix postage

From:

TO: Seward Ranger District  
ATTN: Pat O'Leary  
P.O. Box 390  
Seward, AK 99664-0390