



File Code: 1950-1

Date: JUN 05 2003

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is a copy of the Seward to Girdwood Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) Environmental Assessment (EA) for your review and comment. This EA describes a variety of ways of reestablishing and managing a continuous INHT pathway, and associated trails that connects Seward with Girdwood to Crow Pass trail. Additional maps and information are located on the website: www.fs.fed.us/r10/Chugach/news_releases/iditarod.html. This document analyzes the no action and three action alternatives. The no action alternative would continue the current situation. The action alternatives include the proposed action and two others that address key issues.

Through public scoping two key issues were identified. The first issue concerns the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), which allows snowmachine use for traditional activities in a "Conservation System Unit" (CSU). Under provisions of ANILCA, routes designated as the Iditarod National Historic Trail become a CSU. As a CSU, Section 1110 applies. The Seward-Girdwood INHT trail routes shall permit snowmachines for traditional activities during periods of adequate snow cover. Since the proposed trail crosses areas with nonmotorized prescriptions in the Chugach National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), there is an inherent conflict between ANILCA Section 1110 and the Forest Plan. There are two ways to resolve this conflict: 1) amend the Forest Plan to add a trail corridor, which is open to snowmachine use; or 2) maintain the snowmachine closures, which would require hearings as per ANILCA Section 1110.

The other key issue pertains to motorized and nonmotorized recreation, particularly during the winter. This issue deals with the potential for user conflicts between motorized and nonmotorized recreation and it includes the displacement, disruption, and/or negative effects on user experiences, as well as potential safety issues. Concerns were expressed that the proposal did not provide an equitable distribution between motorized and nonmotorized recreation trail use. The majority of concerns raised pertained to winter motorized/nonmotorized uses.

The alternatives are summarized below:

Alternative 1 (No Action): The no action alternative would continue the current situation.

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action): A continuous INHT pathway and access trails would be developed and managed, connecting Seward with Girdwood to Crow Pass trail. Actively managed and allowed uses on these routes would provide for a mix of motorized and nonmotorized trail opportunities according to Forest Plan direction. Approximately 156 miles of trail would be managed as part of the INHT. This analysis includes the construction of five trailheads and the reconstruction of three trailheads, which would be conducted by either the State or the Forest Service.

Alternative 3: This alternative was developed to address the issue of ANILCA and allowing snowmachines for traditional activities. Under this alternative a continuous INHT pathway, access trails, and associated trails would be developed and managed, connecting Seward with Girdwood to Crow Pass trail. All trails would be open to winter snowmachine use, where feasible. Approximately 136 miles of trail would be managed as part of the INHT. This analysis includes the construction of five trailheads and



the reconstruction of two trailheads, which would be conducted by either the State or the Forest Service. This alternative incorporates opportunities identified through scoping by proposing to construct four new cabins, add one additional spur trail, and construct wider bridges at Turnagain Pass to accommodate large groomers for snowmachine and ski trails.

Alternative 4: This alternative was developed to address concerns related to motorized and nonmotorized trail use while also addressing the issue of ANILCA and allowing snowmachines for traditional activities. Under this alternative a continuous INHT pathway, access trails, and associated trails would be developed and managed, connecting Seward with Girdwood to Crow Pass trail. One through-route would be open to use by snowmachines. Motorized use on remaining areas would follow existing Forest Plan direction. Approximately 186 miles of trail would be managed as part of the INHT. This analysis includes the construction of five trailheads and the reconstruction of three trailheads, which would be conducted by either the State or the Forest Service. This alternative also incorporates opportunities identified through scoping by proposing to construct six new cabins, use fords over Granite Creek in lieu of bridges, construct a footbridge at Moose Pass to provide access to the INHT, and add six additional routes. Four of the six additional routes are included to provide an alternate but comparable winter motorized route around areas closed to motorized use.

The public review and comment period for this EA will close 30 days after the publication of this public notice in the Anchorage Daily News, the newspaper of record. The publication date is anticipated to be June 9, 2003. Please include the following information with your comments:

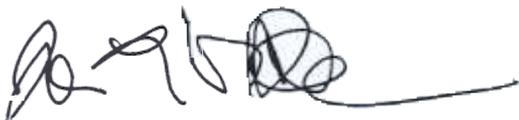
- 1) Name, Address, and (if possible) telephone number;
- 2) Title of the document(s) on which comment is being submitted;
- 3) Specific facts or comments along with supporting reasons that the person believes the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.

As Forest Supervisor, I am the official responsible for the decision.

Please send written comments to: Jaime Schmidt, Chugach National Forest, and 3301 C Street, Suite 300, Anchorage, Alaska 99507. For additional information or copies of this EA, call Alison Rein at 907-783-3242, Pat O'Leary at 907-224-3374, or Jaime Schmidt at 907-743-9500.

I am excited about our agency's opportunity to participate in the reestablishment of this portion of the Iditarod National Historic Trail. I appreciate your continued interest in the Chugach National Forest and constructive comments on this project.

Sincerely,



JOE L. MEADE
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures