



Tongass National Forest

News Release

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Tongass National Forest celebrates winter trail use, ARRA improvements

JUNEAU, AK—Hordes of Juneauites are grabbing their skis, snowshoes, and grippers and heading to their favorite Tongass National Forest trail this winter. The 16th Annual National Winter Trails Day, on January 8, saw high numbers of recreationists celebrating the outdoors on the Tongass.

And this year, locals had even more to enjoy. Thanks to funds provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA, an extensive series of trails near Mendenhall Lake became an interconnected system now more capable of supporting a variety of winter recreation activities such as cross-country skiing.

One of the key ARRA improvements responsible for this increased usability is a locally fabricated stone stairway about a third of a mile south of the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor's Center, at the site of the old powerhouse.

The stairs, which consist of 24 custom concrete slabs molded on the leading edge to blend in with the natural landscape, is important for two reasons. First, their manufacture by Juneau-based Alaska Concrete Casting preserves the spirit of ARRA, which was intended by Congress to mobilize community workforces and boost local economies.

Second, this single feature creates an essential link between the Trail of Time, Powerline, and Under Thunder Trails, ultimately connecting these popular and formerly separate routes to each other and a multitude of other trails that wind through public lands in the area.

Previously, trying to cross between these trails involved negotiating a steep and treacherous jumble of boulders and slick bedrock, a feat particularly ill-advised during winter months. But as Forest Service District Recreation Program Manager Ed Grossman explains, "this stairway is the element that ties the whole system together."

While hikers immediately began taking advantage of this new connection when installation wrapped up in October, snowy conditions in Juneau soon revealed increased opportunities for winter users as well.

The enhanced trails system, which includes not only the stairs but also brushed and resurfaced pathways with improved access points, is especially suited for cross-country skiers. Jack Kreinheder, Trail

Mix board member who also grooms trails for the Nordic Ski Club of Juneau, says that “having longer continuous stretches of wide trails makes grooming (for classic and skate skiing) worthwhile.”

Grossman adds, “the level and quality of winter recreation on the trails on the east side of Mendenhall Lake simply was not possible before all the ARRA-funded improvements.” When coupled with the City of Juneau’s Under Thunder Trail, “over one mile of trail suitable for grooming has been added to the system.”

That means that this winter Juneau recreationists have all the more reason to get out and celebrate their National Forest winter trails throughout the season.

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