

Proposed Seward-Girdwood Iditarod National Historic Trail Project

As a resident of Alaska since 1948, I would like to submit the following comments regarding this project.

I feel it is incumbent upon the Forest Service to consider the historic nature of the original Iditarod trail when making any decision that affects the proposal to reestablish this trail from Seward northwards. It is equally important to consider the modern day usage of the portions of the trail that exist today.

By even considering the notion that portions of the trail should be closed to one user group and dedicated to the exclusive use of another user group is to go against the historic nature of the trail as well as the modern day usage. Please consider the numerous sporting events that currently use the trail and consider also the tremendous loss to the people of Alaska if portions of that trail were closed to certain user groups. I think it would be a monumental shame and a permanent black eye for the Forest Service if the new Iditarod Trail is not a through-trail for all user groups.

Having traveled the trail from Wasilla to Rohn River I can attest to the varied use of the trail by all groups from hikers and skiers to snowmachiners and buffalo hunters.

I would like to suggest that if the proposed trail crosses areas that currently are closed to motorized use, that a special use corridor be established in those areas that would allow motorized use **ON THE TRAIL ONLY**. I have seen this work in the areas outside Yellowstone Park where hundreds of miles are maintained privately for the use of everyone. In areas where these trails cross private or otherwise restricted areas, the trails are posted with signs that prohibit motorized vehicles from leaving the trail itself.

If it is deemed that this is not feasible in certain areas, than an alternate route that is open to motorized use should be established. This is only fair. Especially if public funds are used in the planning, constructing and maintenance of such trails.

I do not think that the Lost Lake trail is a viable or reasonable alternate route out of Seward because of its difficult access. This is not a trail available to the average rider during most of the conditions seen in winter. For this reason I will not endorse any of the options offered thus far, but encourage the Forest Service to look at the maps again and find a more reasonable route out of Seward.

I think it is also important to keep in mind that there is a larger picture here than the portions of the trail that would cross Forest Service land. This is not just a Forest Service project to make more land available to the public for recreational uses. As an aside, I would like to compliment the Forest Service on its pending plans to use its part in this project to plan additional trailheads and public use cabins.

I would also suggest that the Forest Service, in making its final decision, consider the real opportunity for winter tourism and economic boon to the eastern Kenai Peninsula should this be a through-trail open to the motorized user. As a former business owner in Moose Pass I know first hand the economic impact advantages of motorized users over non-motorized. I urge you to consider the benefit to all the hotels, restaurants, B&Bs and other businesses that motorized users bring.

I would also like you to consider the many sporting events currently operated on the existing trail and to consider what a shame it would be if the eastern Peninsula were left out of participation in similar events because portions of the trail were closed to motorized users, or the alternate routes were not viable trails.

I would like to stress that public lands be available for public use. It is not the mission of the Forest Service to restrict the Forest so as to create private playgrounds for special interest groups. If public funds are used to plan, construct and maintain trails, then those trails should be multiple use in nature.

The quiet rights groups maintain there is a conflict between motorized and non-motorized users in the Forest. Perhaps this is because there actually are few areas in the Chugach that are accessible. The Forest Service can do much to alleviate this claimed conflict by providing more access so as to disperse the concentrations of motorized users.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Jeanne Follett