



New Statute Enables Sale of Official Alaska State Park Merchandise



(L-R) Ryan Thomas (DPOR), Niki Acevedo (DPOR), Darcy Harris (DPOR), Meg Anderson (DPOR), Emily Angel (DPOR), Jamie Walker (DPOR), DPOR Director Ben Ellis, DNR Dep. Commissioner Ed Fogels, Alaska Governor Bill Walker, Courtney Sanborn (DNR), DNR Commissioner Marty Rutherford, Matt Wedeking (DPOR), John Crowther (DNR), Luke Randall (DPOR)

Official Alaska State Park merchandise will soon be available in select retail stores and online after Gov. Bill Walker signed a bill last week allowing the division to sell products to help support parks' operational expenses.

SB101 was sponsored by the governor and managed by Sen. Click Bishop of Fairbanks and Rep. Cathy Munoz of Juneau. The new statute directs that, to the extent practicable, Alaska State Parks only sell merchandise manufactured in the United States, and procured from either an Alaskan bidder or an organization that employs prisoners.

"This is a huge step that will allow the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation to become more self-sustainable and rely less on unrestricted general fund for park operations," said Ben Ellis, DPOR director. "It will provide the division with one more tool in creating a diverse funding matrix in managing the largest state park system in the nation."

The first products to be sold will be three different commemorative t-shirts recognizing the bill signing with artwork on the front promoting Alaska State Parks, the Official Gear of Alaska State Parks logo on a sleeve, and the governor's signature below. Specific merchandise for Chugach State Parks will soon follow. As the program grows, other state-park-themed merchandise will be introduced. In addition to apparel, sets of blank notecards and holiday cards with Alaska State Park themes will be available.

The new official gear and products will be available beginning Sept. 20 through an Alaska State Park online store, as well as in retail stores that have not yet been identified. Watch the Alaska State Parks Facebook page for more details.



Governor Bill Walker signs SB 101 into law.



Governor Bill Walker gives DPOR Publication Specialist Meg Anderson a pen used in the signing ceremony for SB 101. Meg was instrumental in developing the official gear and product logos for Alaska State Parks merchandise as well as some of the t-shirt designs to be sold beginning Sept. 20.



Alaska State Parks Field Operations Manager Claire LeClair Retires



DPOR Director Ben Ellis, DNR Dep. Commissioner Ed Fogels, and retiring Parks Field Operations Manager Claire LeClair at Claire's retirement party



Chugach Ranger Kurt Hensel and retiring Parks Field Operations Manager Claire LeClair

Field Operations Manager Claire LeClair retired in mid-June after many years of service to Alaska State Parks. She began her career with the division as a Natural Resource Tech I in May, 1983, stationed in Delta Junction. She then took a position as a Ranger I in Delta Junction and continued to work there seasonally until October 1990. "The best part about being a ranger was taking care of special places and working outdoors," said Claire.

Then Claire took a position as a Ranger II in Kodiak and began working there in January 1991. "It was a big jump from a seasonal Ranger I to a Ranger II position," said Claire. "I got to make decisions and move things in a direction I saw fit and work in a community of people who really appreciated the work my staff and I did. I got a lot of feedback. People in Kodiak really cared about the parks. They were a very supportive group of park appreciators. This position was that sweet spot between being challenging and being in a place where people really appreciated your work. It was very rewarding." In July, 1999, she resigned to start a family.

In 2009, after nearly 40 years in the works, the South Denali project started to move forward rapidly. "Early on, this project was envisioned as a partnership between the Mat-Su Borough, the National Park Service, and Alaska State Parks," said Claire. "The reason that the division established the [Natural Resource Specialist III] position was to provide internal and external coordination for the South Denali project. The coordination between the entities involved was a full-time job in and of itself." Claire returned to Alaska State Parks in July, 2009, to meet this need.

Former Parks Director James King announced that Claire was hired as the division's Chief of Operations/Deputy Director in July, 2009, and said, "During her time with the division Claire has gained a reputation for bringing people together to solve problems and getting things done. I have confidence that Claire will use those valuable skills to help lead the division into the future..."

Claire leaves the field operation of Alaska State Parks in the hands of Matt Wedeking after two weeks of working side by side. While Alaska State Parks is sad to see Claire go, we have full confidence that Matt will carry the division forward as we move toward increasing the financial sustainability of the state park system while maintaining public services within the parks.

Alaska State Parks wishes you all the best, Claire. May your retirement be fun and fulfilling!



Claire's retirement party



Claire LeClair receives a certificate from Office of History & Archaeology Richard Vander Hoek



Ranger Claire LeClair had vision



Ranger Claire LeClair always made work fun



Ranger Claire LeClair

Happy Trails!



Northern News



Northern Area Citizen Advisory Board members get the State of Alaska State Parks address from Parks Director Ben Ellis (at the end of the table).



The northern area trail crew closed this bridge during their annual trail assessments. The bridge is part of the two-mile loop trail at Granite Tors trailhead in Chena River State Recreation Area. A grant request will be submitted to replace the wooden structure with a fiberglass bridge.



Midnight Sun ATV co-owner Peter Vredenburg fills in a mud hole on the backside of Twin Bears Mountain. Midnight Sun ATV Tours volunteered to help Alaska State Parks maintain the Compeau Trail in Chena River State Recreation Area. Partnerships like this are a tremendous help to Alaska State Parks and much appreciated.



Fairbanks DNR employees received swift water rescue training last month. Ranger Dane Happ put his training to use over Memorial Day weekend when he deployed a throw bag and pulled a canoer, who had capsized in the Chena River, to safety.



The boat launch at Fielding Lake State Recreation Site jacked up this spring. Park staff are leveling the concrete planks to get through the summer and will request funding through the Department of Fish and Game for a more permanent fix.

Boating Safety Life Jacket Celebrations

Safe Boating Week—a national event that raises awareness of the diverse styles of life jackets—took place during the last week of May. It was kicked off with Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day and the “Life Jacket Celebration,” an Anchorage event that celebrated the importance of wearing a life jacket. The “Life Jacket Celebration” included a life jacket fashion show presented by Fur Rendezvous Princess Joley Hodgson, Miss Alaska Jr. High Victoriah Haakenson, Fur Rendezvous Princess Emma Halsey, and Miss Alaska Teen USA Nneamaka Isolokwu.

Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day also had an impact statewide on social media with people sharing photos of outdoor enthusiasts wearing their life jackets doing different activities.

“This event helps inform the public of the importance of wearing a life jacket when boating, even on a warm sunny day,” said Kelli Toth with the Alaska Office of Boating Safety. “It reminds people that Alaska’s water is cold. It doesn’t matter how strong of a swimmer or experienced boater you are, wearing a life jacket correctly can make all the difference in the event of an unexpected fall overboard or a capsize. Not all life jackets are created equally and this event offers the chance to share those important differences so that boaters can make informed decisions.”

The Alaska Office of Boating Safety thanks the U.S. Coast Guard, the Alaska Department of Public Safety, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, the pageant princesses, KTUU Channel 2 News, and Visit Alaska for their participation.



(L-R) Fur Rendezvous Princess Joley Hodgson, Miss Alaska Jr. High Victoriah Haakenson, Visit Anchorage Splash C. Otter, Fur Rendezvous Princess Emma Halsey, and Miss Alaska Teen USA Nneamaka Isolokwu



Alaska Department of Public Safety Headquarters



Above: Juneau DNR crew

Below: Alaskan’s joined in Anchorage to raise awareness of boating safety on “Wear Your Life Jacket to Work Day.”



Governor Bill Walker supporting life jacket wear. Nice paddling vest, Governor!



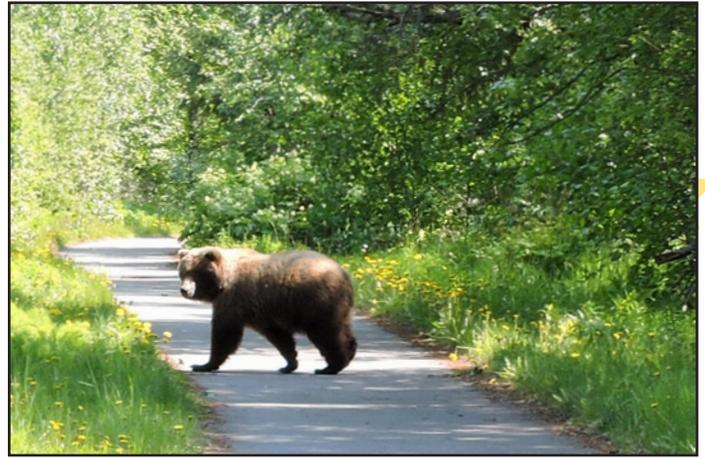
Dad demonstrates life jacket wear, double the safety with these cuties!



Chugach Chronicle



Chugach State Park staff recently replaced an old wooden deck at Yudithu Public-Use Cabin along Eklutna Lake with synthetic materials that will last much longer.



Chugach State Park volunteers Linda and Craig Outwater were driving an ATV and spotted this brown bear on the Bird to Gird bike path. It wasn't afraid and luckily it wasn't interested in them, either. The bear continued eating for several minutes before meandering off the trail.



Park Specialist Blaine Smith of Chugach State Park presents "Physics and Trail Work" at the Alaska Trails Conference.



Park Specialist Blaine Smith and Natural Resource Technician Joe Hall of Chugach State Park attended the statewide Alaska Trails Conference. They presented the second annual Trails Olympics in which teams compete to create trail structures in a relay race. A wildlife encounter added to the challenge.

Kokanee Remote Cabin

The Kokanee Remote Cabin was recently completed and is located on the Southwest shore of Eklutna Lake in Chugach State Park. The cabin is small and rustic with no electricity or running water. It can sleep up to eight people and contains a woodstove, but visitors will need to bring their own wood. Pets are welcome, but pet owners are responsible for their pet's behavior and waste.

The new cabin is located 3.75 miles up Eklutna Lake from the put-in near the parking lot. To get there, park users must paddle four miles across Eklutna Lake or travel across the lake when it is frozen. There is no trail or road access to the cabin. It is tucked away in the woods, but visitors will be able to see it poking through the trees on the southwest side of the lake once they are near enough. A gravel trail leads from the beach to the cabin.

For more information or to make online reservations, visit www.alaskastateparks.org. Reservations can also be made in person at the Public Information Center offices located in Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Juneau or at the nearest Alaska State Park office.



Kokanee Remote Cabin

Joys of Camping

By SEAN ULMAN, *Fiction and Poetry Writer*

We took our 10 week-old baby camping at Captain Cook State Park in mid-May.

It was our first visit to this tranquil, timber-fertile seaside rec area.

I've always relished first looks at new destinations, but with pure-parent eyes that consider a child's clean view, I'm seeing more things enhanced in bright lights.

I've also been reflecting back to childhood memories. The passage of time has sped up, but I find myself perpetually slowing things down, simplifying. Fresh clarities, where the sugar of life's sweetness bubbles up, have surfaced.

For example, the treasured tradition of camping.

Pulling into the campground at Captain Cook State Park marked somewhat of a euphoric epiphany.

Green screens of leafy trees and flowering bushes carved up spacious sites. The oceanic backyard rolled and crashed soothing percussions. Kids, that I imagined had become friends at the campground, explored on bicycles. Parents lounged in folding chairs. Meaty aromas of suppers prepared on camp stoves mingled with fire-ring wood-smoke. Brush-bumpered paths, to the shore or forested hollows, beckoned.

Driving through to choose our home for the night we liked each site more than the previous.

We were there less than a day, but the experience was rich.

A morning birding walk at the Stormy Lake boat launch, loaded with the fluty music of various species, was capped with my first look at a Northern Waterthrush. We didn't detect the Blackpoll Warbler, another first or life bird for me. But I learned that that wet habitat is stocked come breeding season.

So a stirring first visit to another new destination on the Kenai Peninsula may be replaced by a refreshing return to Captain Cook State Park.

Southeast Area Ranger Attends World Ranger Congress

Last month, Ranger Kevin Murphy attended the eighth World Ranger Congress held in Estes Park Colorado. It was the first time this event was ever held in the U.S., a choice intended to honor the National Park Service's 100th anniversary this year. Over 350 rangers from 62 countries attended, including new ranger associations from Mongolia, Russia, and Israel, to name a few.

Ranger Murphy, who joined the International Ranger Federation in 2013 said, "I attended the World Ranger Congress three years ago and was blown away by the comradery and the international flavor. I like learning how people in other countries do things. It's very humbling. The rangers in Africa dealing with poachers work extremely hard, dealing with very dangerous situations, and don't get paid all that much. They are almost like a military force. On the other hand, the rangers from Australia have jobs very similar to those of U.S. rangers, but are unarmed. They do a lot of public outreach and protect the public, but are not in constant danger and are paid fairly well."

The conference invocation was delivered by Ranger Ravis Henry McQuade, a Navaho working in Canyon De Chelly National Monument. Ranger McQuade welcomed everyone to his traditional homeland in his own language. Then Ranger Shelton Johnson, of Ken Burns fame, told his story of growing up in Detroit then becoming one of Yosemite Park's first African American rangers. That night Ranger Shelton performed his Buffalo Soldier skit. The Buffalo Soldiers were an African American regiment of the U.S. Army dispatched to Yosemite in 1891 to protect the first state park in California. The Buffalo Soldiers, who helped shape park management as we know it today, were the official stewards of the park until 1913.

"It could have ended [that first day] and it would have been worth every penny," said Ranger Murphy.

The next day NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis, told of his history with the agency, beginning 40 years ago as a seasonal interpretive ranger. Today he oversees 22,000 employees, a \$3 billion budget, and over 400 park units. He is recognized as a world leader in cultural and natural resource management.

"While not everyone spoke the same language, everyone spoke 'ranger,'" said Ranger Murphy. "The speakers, among whom were Terry Tempest Williams and Harvey Locke, reminded us why we all became park rangers in the first place. It was very encouraging."



Rangers from 62 countries attend the 8th World Ranger Congress in Estes Park, Colorado

Ranger Roundup



Farewell to Ranger Mary Kowalczyk who retired from 29 years of service with Alaska State Parks. Mary did an excellent job managing the Ketchikan units and especially Totem Bight State Historical Park, which receives over 30,000 visitors a year and is one of the premier historical sites in Alaska.



Ranger Tom Anthony gives a Boating Safety presentation at the Salmon Celebration in May. The Salmon Celebration is coordinated by the Alaska Department of Fish & Game and held at Johnson Lake State Recreation Area each spring. This year, more than 900 kids from the Kenai Peninsula Borough School District attended. Kenai Area Alaska State Parks staffed a Boating Safety station to teach kids about this important topic.



Last month, Southeast Area Superintendent Mike Eberhardt and Maintenance Chief Doug Drexel traveled to Ketchikan to repair and maintain the totem poles at Totem Bight State Historical Park.

Halibut Cove Dock Replacement



In May, the dock at Halibut Cove Lagoon in Kachemak Bay State Park was upgraded with new galvanized piles, an extended gangway section, and two refurbished floats to replace the previous system, which had outlived its intended useful life. The City of Homer worked closely with Alaska State Parks to provide two used floats from the Homer docks that were modified to fit the new Halibut Cove dock design.

Third Annual Camp and Clean

The Design and Construction team spent a weekend at Johnson Lake State Recreation Area for this year's Camp and Clean event. The crew's primary task was to remove green plastic straw blanket from campsites that were reclaimed in 2013. The straw blanket, required for erosion control, failed to photo-degrade as intended. It was unsightly and drew complaints from campers and dog owners who stated their pets were tripping in it. Unfortunately, vegetation had already rooted through the straw blanket, so it took quite an effort to remove without tearing up the new growth. Nonetheless, the task was completed with only minimal impacts to the established vegetation.

After the team finished tearing out the straw blanket at Johnson Lake, they moved on to the Kasilof River State Recreation Site for a second task. Root wads and stabilizing vegetation were recently installed along the riverbank to protect the bank and improve salmon habitat. To help ensure the success of the overall project by keeping people out and giving the vegetation a chance to thrive, the Design and Construction team volunteered to install pedestrian fencing around the restoration area. The green fencing will be removed once the vegetation is established and the bank sufficiently stabilized.

It was rainy, windy, sunny, and calm all in one busy weekend. The team rounded out the event by roasting reindeer sausages over the camp fire and relaxing at the group campsite near the edge of Johnson Lake.



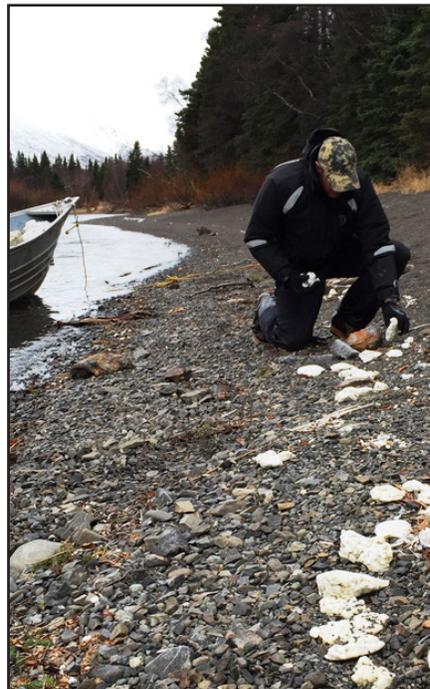
Design and Construction's Camp and Clean team put up new pedestrian fencing at Kasilof River SRS to give new vegetation a chance to get established so it can protect the riverbank and improve salmon habitat.



(L-R) Volunteer Camp Host Deb Streets and the Design and Construction Camp and Clean crew (Roxane Risse, Ethan Miranda, Rys Miranda, Audrey Miranda, Emily Angel, Luke Randall, Chet Fehrmann, Joseph Raynor, and Kathleen Raynor) pose with a pile of plastic straw blanket they removed from the Johnson Lake SRA campsites.



Early April, a state trooper assisted Ranger Ali Eskelin with plastic foam cleanup on the Agulowak River. The trooper volunteered his time to assist with the clean-up and filled his boat with plastic foam debris.



Tedious and necessary work continues even as plastic foam pieces become smaller and smaller.

Unexpected Spring Clean-up Project

Southwest Alaska's early break up revealed a cleanup priority on the shores of the Aleknagik Natives Limited Conservation Easement within Wood-Tikchik State Park. A floating dock deteriorated and large portions of unencapsulated plastic foam were swept down the Agulowak River. Large pieces broke down into smaller and smaller fragments that washed ashore on the river bank and at the outlet of Lake Aleknagik. During the initial clean up, small pieces continually washed out of the beach sand with each step. Cleanup will be an ongoing project and highlights the potential long-term environmental impacts of using plastic foam for dock flotation.