



Where There's Smoke, There's Fire



View of the smoke from Potter Section House Wayside



Incident Command Transfer Briefing – McHugh Wayside



Early stages of the fire near the McHugh Creek Wayside.

Things got a little hot in Chugach State Park. Late on a Saturday evening in mid-July, Chugach's McHugh Creek Wayside Volunteer Host Mike DeCenso reported observing smoke in the park. A suspected illegal campfire had uncontrollably spread, exacerbated by the preceding warm weather and offshore air flow over the McHugh Creek drainage that gave rise to very dry conditions.

The fire suppression efforts by the Division of Forestry were hampered for the next couple of days by strong northerly and up drainage winds. The steep terrain incurred heavy fallout on the Seward Highway, which caused traffic stoppages and a spot fire across the highway and exhausted initial attack forces. Other challenges included intense media interest, established fire lines not holding, and long traffic delays impeding logistical support to responders.

Substantial aerial assets were brought to assist the firefighting efforts, with helicopters dropping buckets of water from Turnagain Arm and tanker aircraft applying fire retardant. Extensive preparations were also made for the two threatened communities of Rainbow and Potter Valley. At the height of operations, more than 200 firefighters were engaged in the effort.

By the end of the week, Mother Nature elected to moderate weather conditions and provided much needed rain, essentially turning the tide in favor of the firefighters. After that, it was time to begin mopping up and demobilizing.

Significant damage to approximately a quarter mile portion of the McHugh-Rabbit Lake Trail was left in the aftermath of the fire. The trail will remain closed due to unstable soils and the potential for the burnt slope above to sluff large volumes of material. Additionally, there is about a half-mile section of the Turnagain Arm Trail, just south of the McHugh Creek Bridge, that is burned over; however, this portion is open to the public.



Those who love Alaska State Parks can now buy official park-themed merchandise to help fund park operations throughout the state. The apparel and greeting cards are debuting this weekend at the Make It Alaskan Festival.

The current product line includes three styles of a limited edition t-shirt promoting Alaska State Parks with Governor Walker's signature on the sleeve, as well as various colors and styles of t-shirts and hoodies promoting Chugach State Park.

In addition to the apparel, blank greeting cards with stunning photographs taken in some of the most iconic Alaska State Parks on the covers, as well as a series of Alaska State Park holiday cards with an Alaskan twist.

Eventually, the product line will include all of the most popular state park units in Alaska. Proceeds will directly support Alaska State Parks operations budget.

An online store at <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/> is underway and should be available the first part of October.

Remember to look for the Official Alaska State Park Gear logo!

2016 Calamity Triathlon

In late July, the 2016 Calamity Triathlon got started at Totem Bight State Historical Park after having been postponed a week due to weather. This triathlon was reinstated last year on a new course after taking a decade-long hiatus.

The course consists of a three-mile paddle from Totem Bight SHP, around Danger Island, and out to Refuge Cove State Recreation Site. There, the 5k run back to Totem Bight SHP begins, followed by an eight-mile bike ride from Totem Bight SHP to the finish line at the end of North Tongass Highway near Settlers Cove State Recreation Site. Money raised by this race helps fund Friends of Alaska State Parks, Ketchikan.

The weather was perfect for the race, with just a bit of rain to cool the participants down. Jared Gross crossed the finish line first, finishing in 1:20:31—nearly five minutes faster than the previous year's fastest time.

"My body was starting to go lactic at the end for sure there but when I saw the clock (at the finish line), it was great, being in the lead. It keeps you motivated," Gross said, according to an article by Joe Sturzl published in the Ketchikan Daily News on Aug. 1, 2016.

Neil Kinunen (1:21:35) and Bill Elberson (1:24:42) finished second and third in the men's solo division.

First-time triathlete Amanda Davidshofer (1:22:56) came in third overall and placed first in the women's solo division.

Amanda was quoted in the Ketchikan Daily News saying, "I didn't put my running shoes where I thought we were ending, so I ran in my kayak boots. This logistically was challenging because you need all of your equipment at different points. You also need to realize that if everything isn't perfect, it will be OK. I probably would have gone a little faster if I had my running shoes but at that point, I just decided to embrace it and have fun with it."

Sarah Cool (1:29:53) placed second in the female solo division, followed by Tena Weakley (1:50:07).

Team Eats Too Much (Tristan Dahl, Chuck Haberbush, and Chris Comstock) won the men's team course and set the record for it at 1:20:46. Drew Mathews, Jessica Mathews, and Hunter Mathews made up the only mixed-gender division team of the race and finished in 1:23:50. Jackson, 13, was the only competitor in the youth division to finish.



Terra Weakley, front, and other athletes begin the 2016 Calamity Triathlon at Totem Bight State Historical Park. *Photo by Taylor Balkom, Ketchikan Daily News*



The 2016 Calamity Triathlon gets underway at Totem Bight SHP.



Competitors setting out from Totem Bight SHP for the 2016 Calamity Triathlon



Jared Gross celebrates as he wins the 2016 Calamity Triathlon on Saturday at the end of North Tongass Highway. *Photo by Taylor Balkom, Ketchikan Daily News*

ACC Earns Accolades for Work at Totem Bight State Historical Park

It has been a great summer season at Totem Bight State Historical Park's Visitor Information Center in Ketchikan for visitors and staff alike. This is due in great part to Alaska Conservation Corps Kaile Hutton, the main staff person for the center. She has been extremely helpful, and is always friendly and courteous to every person who comes into the Visitor Information Center. Her warm, accommodating manner has been and continues to be exemplary, earning her several accolades from the public.



ACC Kaile Hutton

Wood-Tikchik Volunteer Removes Airplane Wing from Beach



Marty steps off Alaska State Parks' super cub at Nishlik Lake within Wood-Tikchik State Park. He and his wife, Annette, have volunteered in several areas with Alaska State Parks, including Kachemak Bay, Haines, and Wood-Tikchik. Marty enjoyed his excursion to the northernmost lake in the park, offering to stay a month next season and cut up the rest of the aircraft parts into small pieces for removal.



Volunteer Marty Cordano works hard to remove part of a metal aircraft wing buried in the beach on Nishlik Lake within Wood-Tikchik State Park. Marty is also a skilled photographer so there certainly was no ulterior motive.

Celebrating Judge Wickersham's Birthday



In honor of Judge James Wickersham's birthday in August, the Juneau Garden Club planted a maple tree in the yard of his Juneau home. They then celebrated with Alaska State Parks employees and guests with cake. Attendees included DNR staff, Juneau Garden Club members, and the public.



Judge James Wickersham's birthday cake



Adam Kackstetter and Ed Buyarski plant the maple tree



Juneau Garden Club members Elfrida Nord, Ed Buyarski, Val Hillyer, and Rachel Barth water the newly planted maple tree celebrating Judge Wickersham's birthday.

Northern News



Park Specialist Jackie Cheek demonstrates her boating skills on Harding Lake. Now that she successfully completed her Boat Operator Certification, she won't have to wear her bathing suit to put out channel markers and swimming area buoys.



Thanks to a partnership with the Division of Forestry, Alaska State Parks is able to grade park roads using Forestry's grader (above). Forestry also gave Parks a culvert they had acquired from the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. Park maintenance workers are scrambling to get washed-out river access roads in the Chena River State Recreation Area open for moose season.



Parks Director Ben Ellis, Superintendent Brooks Ludwig, and contractor George Sandlin pose for pictures after successfully moving the signal corps building. The building, which is over one hundred years old, was in imminent danger of being washed away by the Tanana River.



Northern Area Maintenance worker Doug Avara loads the Sutter Trail Dozer for tread work on the Compeau Trail in Chena River SRA.



Harding Lake Area volunteers Scott Pleasants, Kyle Chapman, and Jennifer Bishop pose with their Golden Days River Regatta trophy for "The Least Seaworthy." Somehow, despite the lack of seaworthiness, or rather because of it, their raft still won an award! The volunteers made the raft out of recycled garbage from the park units they worked at.



Scott Pleasants and Jennifer Bishop take their award-winning raft out on the water.

Tonsina Creek Bridge Extension

Seward crews have been working on the much-needed bridge extension project for the north fork of Tonsina Creek this summer. In early May, Kenai River staff offered their support by hauling materials up the north fork of Tonsina Creek to the bridge.

The Kenai River staff helped this project become a reality. Natural Resource Technician Dave Soldivini, Ranger Jacques Kosto, Ranger Jack Ransom, and Park Specialist Andy Bacon tackled this project launching an 18-foot flat bottom G3 and loading a landing craft with other materials at Lowell Point beach. All of the materials, including three 24-foot pressure-treated beams, weighing about three hundred pounds each, were hauled over lumpy seas over to Tonsina Beach.

Once staff arrived at the mouth of Tonsina Creek, they secured their vessels to a dead tree and took a breather. Park staff stretched their backs and shoulders as they prepared to tackle those three hundred pounders. Then they huffed and grunted while they muscled those materials up the bank and stowed them for the summer.

Early this fall, Andy and his Alaska Conservation Corps helper continued working on the bridge extension project. The 24-foot section of bridge in need of repair has been scabbed together over the years to keep people moving across the creek and towards the rest of the Caines Head trail system.

Andy can be credited with completing the majority of this project on his own with the help of a lost dog in the area, which kept him company most days and helped hikers head in the right direction. Andy named the dog Stella and made sure it was well cared for. Way to go keeping Andy on task, Stella!



Bridge extension over the north fork of Tonsina Creek



Seward area Park Specialist Andy Bacon works on the extension of the bridge over the north fork of Tonsina Creek.



Red Shirt Lake Trail before...

...and after improvements

New Boardwalk for Redshirt Lake Trail

With grants from the Willow Running Club and Friends of State Parks, Mat-Su, 160 feet of wetland-spanning plank walk was replaced on the popular Willow Trail with the Nancy Lake State Recreation Area. Summer volunteers Will Robinson and Adam Isenberg contributed 200 hours assisting Park Specialist Vic Stanculescu making great improvements to the trail.



Volunteers Will Robinson and Adam Isenberg working on Red Shirt Lake Trail.



Park Specialist Vic Stanculescu

Kenai Area Visit



DNR Commissioner Andy Mack listens to Parks Director Ben Ellis describe the Bings Landing capital improvement project which began this summer and will develop additional parking and improve access to a fishing area along the Kenai River. (R-L) Deputy Commissioner Ed Fogels, Project Engineer Edgar Tinajero (D&C), and ACC Doug Montini (D&C) look on.



District Ranger Jacques Kosto shows the commissioner a habitat violation on the Kenai River.



Commissioner Andy Mack on the middle section of the Kenai River

Welcome Aboard, Annie Grenier

Annie Grenier joined the team in 2013 as a student intern while completing her bachelor's degree in outdoor studies with a concentration in education at Alaska Pacific University. She is an avid paddler with hundreds of miles logged on the Yukon River, Prince William Sound, and many other Alaskan waters. Her responsibilities within the Kids Don't Float education program include organizing volunteers to assist with the increasing demand of pool sessions and traveling to remote locations to deliver boating safety programs for both children and adults. Annie is an enthusiastic instructor who is versatile in effectively teaching pre-kindergarten through high school students. We are fortunate to have a crewmember as talented and passionate for boating safety as Ms. Grenier.



Annie Grenier

Boy Scout Troop 152 Deploys to Fort Abercrombie SHP

In mid-August, Boy Scout troop 152 volunteered at Fort Abercrombie SHP to assist with the battle to reclaim a searchlight bunker from the forces of nature. Armed with loppers, shovels, and wheelbarrows, the project crew assisted Alaska Conservation Corps Rodney Sutton and Natural Resource Technician Jared Conrad with removing brush and dirt that had accumulated and grown over the WWII fortification, invading and overtaking it.

Troop 152 started by removing the dirt that had settled into the door and window openings over the years, improving the access trail to the bunker, and exposing the concrete apron and searchlight wheel guide tracks in front of the bunker. They made a huge amount of progress getting the shelter restoration effort started. They got more done before lunch than expected from a group this size for the entire day!

Everyone seemed enthusiastic about the project and seeing the progress throughout the day. After they were done working for the day, park staff gave them a tour of the military museum and showed them the newly restored searchlight that will eventually be housed in the bunker they worked on. Thank you, Troop 152! Mission accomplished.



The Troop 152 project crew included members of the Hollow Legs Patrol and the Black Hats Patrol. Hollow Legs Patrol: Aaron Hack, Ethan Hack, Lochlan Quiner, Petie Devere, Max Demello, Pierce Peterson, Jimmy Freeman, and Connor Smith. Black Hats Patrol: Brenden Boehme, Joey Freeman, Jessiah James, Boden Quiner, Liam Quiner, Samuel Roberts, Danny Rodriguez, and Talon Wicker. Troop Leaders: Doug Roberts, Cody Wicker, Matt Quiner, and John McDonald



Searchlight bunker after Troop 152's work.



Troop 152 hard at work



Searchlight bunker before



Troop 152 explores the Kodiak Military History Museum after finishing their work for the day.

