

**Wildlife Restoration MULTI-YEAR GRANT
INTERIM PERFORMANCE REPORT**

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
DIVISION OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
PO Box 115526
Juneau, AK 99811-5526

**Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Wildlife Restoration Grant**

GRANT NUMBER: AKW-D-4-2019

PROJECT NUMBER: P 1.0

PROJECT TITLE: Improving Hunting and Wildlife Viewing Access in Game Management
Subunit 13E: Curry Ridge to Kesugi Ridge Trail Connector Project

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE: March 1, 2019 through December 31, 2022

PERFORMANCE YEAR: October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021

REPORT DUE DATE: March 29, 2021

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Katie Sechrist
ADF&G, Division of Wildlife Conservation
333 Raspberry Road
Anchorage, AK
Phone: (907) 267-2541
Email: katie.sechrist@alaska.gov

COOPERATORS:

Wes Hoskins
Mat-Su Trails and Parks Foundation
PO Box 652
Palmer, AK 99645
Phone: (907) 746-8757
E-Mail: whoskins@matsutrails.org

Stuart Leidner
Alaska State Parks, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation
7278 East Bogard Road
Wasilla, AK 99654
Phone: (907) 745-8935
E-Mail: stuart.leidner@alaska.gov

Authorities: 2 CFR 200.328
2 CFR 200.301
50 CFR 80.90

I. PROGRESS ON PROJECT OBJECTIVES DURING PERFORMANCE YEAR

OBJECTIVE 1: Locate the trail route as much as possible on sustainable tread and avoid wetlands where possible.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Surveying was completed at the end of September 2020 and 15 miles trail were scouted and mapped, and approximately 2 miles were staked for construction near the Curry Lookout. The 2021 construction season started in June. While the trail crew worked on the staked segment the principles with Interior Trails walked north and staked ahead of the crew. 2/3rds of the new trail was staked out and is aligned on high, dry rocky ridges. Route marking was necessary where trail tread was not constructed and over 40 cairns were built during the 2021 construction season.

OBJECTIVE 2: Route the trail with positive control points that highlight high-probability wildlife viewing opportunities, such as wetlands, ponds, obvious game trails, or the historic Curry overlook while avoiding known bear denning sites, sites requiring expensive bridge crossings, and fall-line sections > 20 ft.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The trail was routed near many lakes and wetlands but not so close as to affect drainage or get too near animals accessing the lakes. The new trail uses the Curry Ridge Lookout as a control point. No major bridge crossings were required.

OBJECTIVE 3: Brush back alder thicket corridors to 8-12 feet wide for minimal future maintenance and close-contact bear avoidance.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Where applicable the alder was brushed back over 12 feet wide to decrease need for near term maintenance and lesson chance for surprise bear encounters. The 2021 construction season didn't require much brushing as the trail was located mostly outside of thick alder stands.

OBJECTIVE 4: Install elevated boardwalk (treated lumber only) to cross wetlands or potential future wet areas (poorly drained soils), if unavoidable.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: 3,947 linear feet of boardwalk was installed over wetlands. The boardwalk consists of 6x6 treated lumber set in the ground with 2x6 roughhewn spruce boards milled in Fairbanks. Carriage bolts were the main fasteners used.

OBJECTIVE 5: Identify locations for potential campsites: tent platforms, box toilets, water source, non-visually obtrusive.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: The crew stayed at 3 separate base camps. These camps were selected for minimum impact and the crew only walked on either trail that was going to be permanently constructed, or would be naturally repaired once the crew was gone. In addition, the camps were selected at areas that backpackers would be using in the future, thus attempting to keep recreational impacts narrowed to specific locations. Temporary camp structures included 7 personal tents; 2 latrine tents, and a communal food prep and gear storage area located within a bear fence.

II. SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED ON PROJECT TO DATE

Despite consistently rainy weather and poor building conditions for the second half of the season, the production rates and percentage of work accomplished was commensurate to what we believed could be achieved this year. The season total was ~51,555²/9.75 miles, or ~65%

completion. It is likely that the final trail may be a bit longer than the originally projected 15 miles because of some changing layout decisions based on evaluation of construction techniques thus far, and so the total left for 2022 season may be slightly more than 35%. Interior Trails believes they are set up well for the 2022 season and most of the trail crew members have expressed interest in returning.

III. SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT REPORTS AND/OR AMENDMENTS

Grant amendment #1 was submitted on October 1, 2021 requesting that the project be extended one year until December 31, 2022. The request was due to a delay in implementing the project due to staff changes that lead to the loss of the first season of work (summer 2019). This amendment was approved on December 16, 2021.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

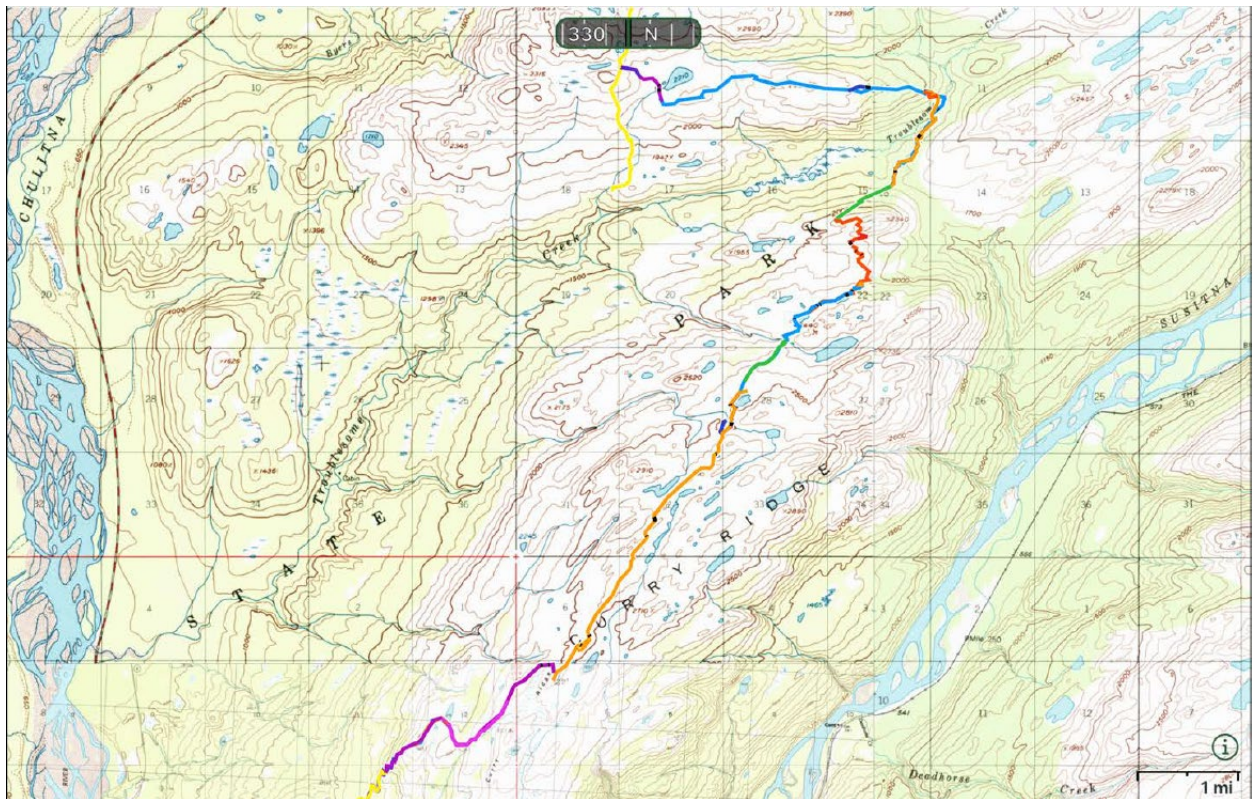


Figure 1.–Map of Curry Ridge to Kesugi Ridge trail connector route overview.

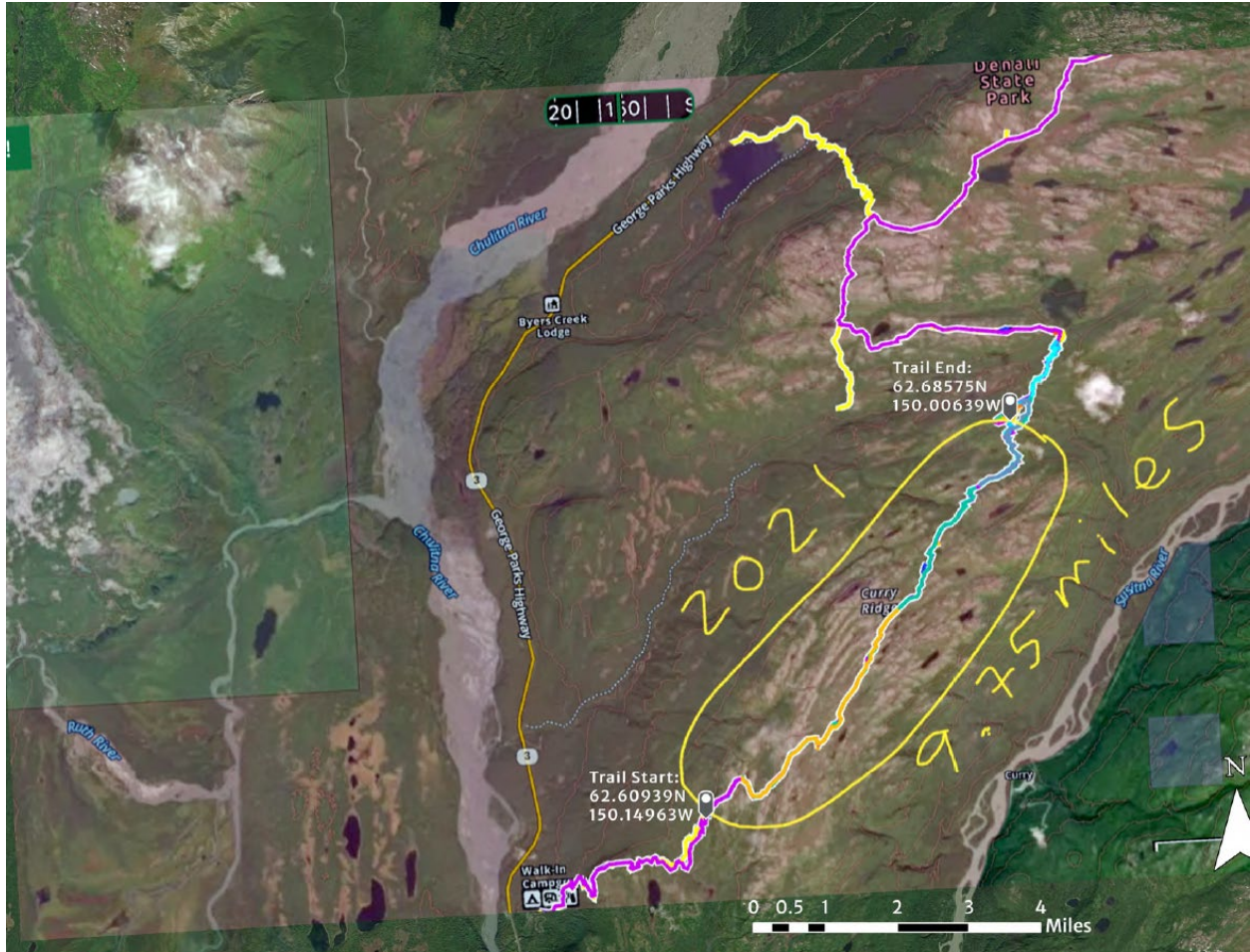


Figure 2.–Map of Curry Ridge to Kesugi Ridge trail connector route constructed summer 2021.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THIS PROJECT

At this time we would like to recommend the project continue during the 2022 construction pending approval.

Prepared by: Katie Sechrist, ADF&G DWC

Wes Hoskins, MSTPF

Date: January 5, 2022

Appendix A.—Inseason progress reports from Interior Trails.

Curry to K'esugi Connector Project Progress Report: June 1-19

- June 3—5: Camp #1 is established on Curry Ridge, with ~5000 lbs of camp gear, tools, and lumber flown in by helicopter with Talkeetna Air Taxi. Camp layout includes 7 personal tents; 2 latrine tents; and a communal area for food prep, meals & gear storage inside a bear fence. The site has pin-flagged trails throughout to concentrate traffic and minimize site impacts.



- June 9-16: First 8-day hitch with 6-person crew. Finished Class 2 trail includes 1975' of bench cut, 4174' of route marking (with 7 cairns), and 320' of running plank constructed, for a total of 6469' or approximately 7% of the total trail. All distances were captured with a measuring wheel.

Bench cut in alder (before and after) and in tundra:



Appendix A.–Page 2 of 7.

Route marking in alpine/rocky areas (brushed tread with cairns)



Running Plank crossing wetlands:



- Lumber ordered and prepped for flying in to Hitch #2, which will run from June 23—31.



We are very pleased with the crew, the camp, and the progress made thus far and look forward to adding further mileage in the upcoming weeks.

Appendix A.—Page 3 of 7.

Curry to K'esugi Connector Project Progress Report: June 20—July 20

- June 23—30: 2nd 8-day hitch with 6-person crew. Finished Class 2 trail includes 318' of bench cut, 12,095' of brushing/route marking (with 14 cairns), and 678' of running plank constructed, for a total of 13,091' or approximately 16.5% of the total trail (79,200'). All distances were captured with a measuring wheel.



Camp 1

- July 7—14: 3rd 8-day hitch with 6-person crew. Finished Class 2 trail includes 165' of bench cut, 9567' of route marking (with 9 cairns), and 320' of running plank constructed, for a total of 10,052' or approximately 12.5% of the total trail. All distances were captured with a measuring wheel.



Running plank with bench cut to cairn

Cairn with brushed/scratched in trail

Appendix A.–Page 4 of 7.



Tight flagging for construction.



Crew setting running plank

- Midway through Hitch #3 we moved to Camp #2 further north on the route; 5 helicopter loads of camp gear, tools, and lumber were flown with Talkeetna Air Taxi. Camp #2 layout includes 7 personal tents; 2 latrine tents; and a communal area for food prep, meals & gear storage inside a bear fence. The site has pin-flagged trails throughout to concentrate traffic and minimize site impacts.



Moving Camp #1 to Camp #2



Trail at start of project, with funder sign

We continue to be on target with production rates and percentage of work accomplished (~36% of total trail). We were very pleased with our minimized impact upon leaving Camp #1. It should be well set up for the public to use. It is highly recommended that State Parks build a latrine at this site in anticipation of heavy use.

Curry to K'esugi Connector Project Progress Report: July 21—Aug. 17

- July 21—28: 4th 8-day hitch with 6-person crew. Finished Class 2 trail includes 818' of bench cut, 7943' of brushing/route marking (with 3 cairns), and 229' of running plank constructed, for a total of 8990' or approximately 11.3% of the total trail. All distances were captured with a measuring wheel.



Step-and-run plank walk w/ crush



Brush/scratched tread with cairns

- Aug. 5--11: 5th hitch (7 days) with 6-person crew. Finished Class 2 trail includes 1136' of bench cut, including 15 stairs & one creek crossing, with a Griphoist high-line assist; and 1782' of brushing/route marking (with 1 cairn) for a total of 2918' or approximately 3.7% of the total trail. All distances were captured with a measuring wheel.



Brushing & bench cut



Rock Crossing w/ box crib rock steps

- Hitches #4 & #5 were both out of Camp #2. This portion of the trail included significant technical sections of rock work and a river crossing. We continue to be on target with production rates and percentage of work accomplished (~51% of total trail) with 2 hitches remaining. We will move to Camp #3 midway through Hitch #6 and remain there for the duration of the season.

Curry to K'esugi Connector Project Progress Report: Aug. 18—Sept. 8

- August 18—25: 6th 8-day hitch with 6-person crew. Moved from Camp #2 to Camp #3 midway through the hitch. Finished Class 2 trail includes 606' of bench cut, 5372' of brushing/route marking (with 2 cairns), and 110' of running plank constructed, for a total of 6088' or approximately 7.7% of the total trail. All distances were captured with a measuring wheel. Christine & Gabe also hiked the finished trail from Camp #3 to the beginning of this season's work below Camp 1, to assess how constructed tread and structures were holding up during the torrential rains. A few sections will require additional work next year to address previously non-existent wet spots, but overall the trail is in excellent condition especially for how recently it was completed.



Bench cut in alder thicket w/ crush



Running plank in wetland

- Sept. 1-8: 7th 8 day hitch with 6-person crew. Final hitch of the season, out of Camp 3. Finished Class 2 trail included 912' of bench cut, 2785' of brushing/route marking (with 2 cairns), and 250' of running plank, for a total of 3947' or approximately 5% of the total trail. All distances were captured with a measuring wheel.



Bench cut with turns



Alpine bench with crush

Appendix A.–Page 7 of 7.

- In addition to construction, the crew also spent time with MSTPF director Wes Hoskins and photographer Tim Leach to develop media content for the project. Despite consistently rainy weather and poor building conditions for the second half of the season, we were pleased with production rates and percentage of work accomplished. The season total was ~51,555'/9.75 miles, or ~65% completion. It is likely that the final trail may be a bit longer than the originally projected 15 miles because of some changing layout decisions based on evaluation of construction techniques thus far, and so the total left for 2022 season may be more than 35%. Regardless, we feel we are well set up for next season. A majority of the crew indicates the desire to return in 2022.
- Fall/Winter 2021/2022: This winter, we will analyze this season's costs for materials, helicopter transport, labor and design/consulting, as well as actual production rates compared to projections. This data from this season's work will help us plan for the construction season in 2022. It is our high hope that despite significantly higher costs for lumber and transport than anticipated, we can still provide some level of trail connectivity within the original budget.



Hiking tools out of the last hitch.



Final night in camp for 2021