



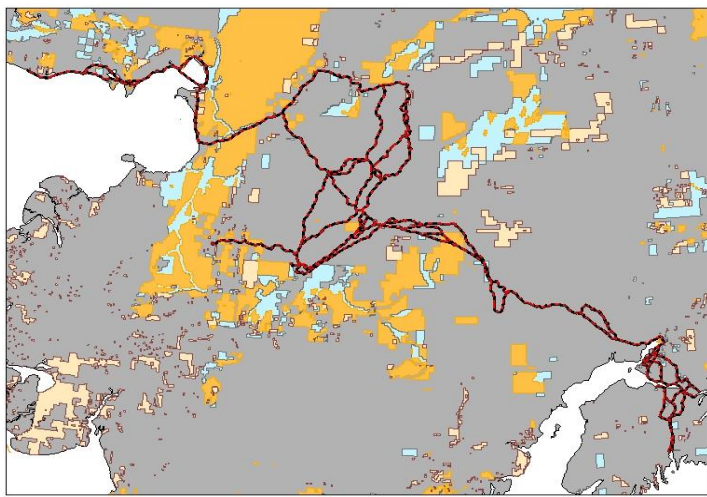
## *FY15 National Trail Administrators Report* BLM Anchorage Field Office



BLM

### Overview

The Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) spans 2,400 miles of winter and summer trails between Seward and Nome, Alaska, of which 1,500 miles are identified in the Trail Management Plan for active use and management. Most of the Historic Trail is located on public State of Alaska lands (50%), public easements across private Native lands (30%), and federal Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service and Fish & Wildlife Service lands (20%). BLM lands are shown in orange on the map of the Trail system below.



The **Bureau of Land Management** is the federal *Trail Administrator* of the entire Iditarod NHT system, with BLM's Anchorage Field Office (AFO) handling this job since the Trail was designated in 1977.

National Trail Administration duties span the breadth of the entire system, often

outside of the boundaries of BLM-managed lands, primarily in the development or service of cooperative partnerships with other parties. BLM is the lead federal agency for trail-wide planning and management, uniform trail marking, public outreach and education, and capacity building with regional and local trail "friends" groups. BLM plays a critical role in identifying and leveraging potential sources of federal and non-federal funds accessible to non-federal partners.

Along with National Trail Administration duties, BLM directly manages and maintains 90 miles of the Trail and five public shelter cabins, which are part of the **National Landscape Conservation System** managed by BLM.

Anchorage Field Office

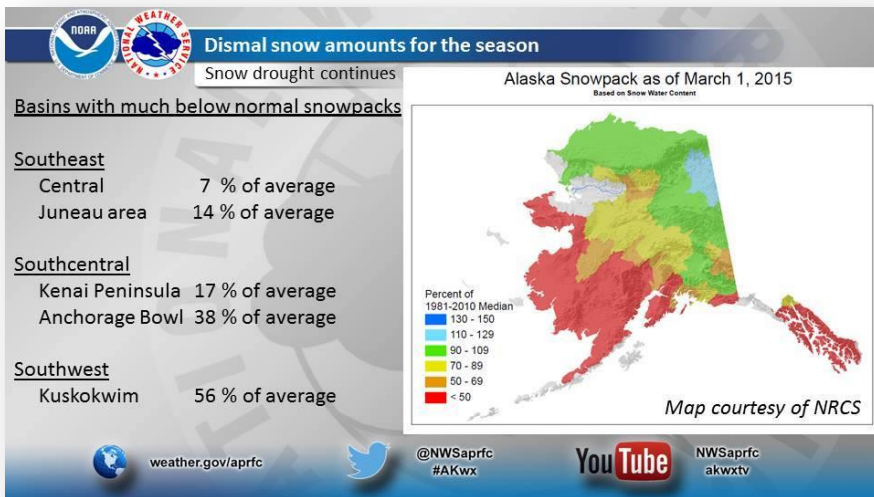


## Partner Iditarod Race Committee Puts Federal and State Grants to Work to Fix 15 miles of Burnt Over Trail

After a number of mushers experienced broken legs and other injuries on a burnt over section of the Trail in 2014, the Iditarod Sled Dog Race Committee put together a complex logistics operation to rehabilitate the route. Working with an oil field ice road building company, the Race Committee mobilized a C130 Hercules aircraft to ship in tons of equipment and fuel in late fall 2014. A four person crew used a miniature excavator and a skid steer with a mulcher attached to smooth the trail treadway and remove adjacent fire killed trees that would inevitably block the Trail. The entire project took place on State lands under permit with the AK DNR. Project work took three weeks on the ground, and cost approximately a quarter million dollars (not including donations).



The final trail tread is a compacted mix of wood chips and native soil.



## Record Warmth and Low Snow Plague Iditarod Trail-Based Events

The winter of 2015 set all-time records for the lowest amount of snow ever recorded in Alaska, along with record-breaking high temperatures. The 500 miles of Trail between Anchorage and the Yukon River was virtually snow free, and normally frozen travel surfaces (rivers and swamps) were covered with liquid water.

For only the second time in the past 43 years, the Iditarod Sled Dog Race route was moved to Fairbanks, bypassing all of Southcentral Alaska (except for a ceremonial start in Anchorage). Nevertheless, two other annual trail-based competitive events permitted by BLM, the Iron Dog and Iditarod Trail Invitational Ultramarathon, made do with conditions more typically found in fall.



## **BLM Sponsors or Co-Sponsors Large (and Small) Public Outreach Events**

In the face of driving rain, gusty winds, and sheets of slick ice, BLM Anchorage Field Office provided a safe public venue for the Iditarod Sled Dog Race that retraces the old Iditarod Trail and brings mushing back to the forefront of Alaskan life. Crews worked hard to provide to provide safe footing for the 3,000 visitors who came to BLM’s urban-wildland facility over a 6 hour period to see mushers off on their way to Nome. BLM provides parking for 300 cars, shuttle buses to connect pedestrian trails and encourage people to enjoy the trails at the facility, and opens the Campbell Creek Science Center for hot drinks and a place to learn about the old trail.



In July, BLM joined its partner the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance for the Anchorage City “Tent City” Celebration, which commemorated the founding of the city on the Iditarod Trail 100 years ago. Over 200 visitors stopped at the Roadhouse Tent.



BLM provided technical information and interviews to a Japanese film crew visiting Alaska as part of a documentary project on Jujiro Wada, a famous Iditarod musher who is known as the ‘Samurai Musher’ in Japan.

## Trail Safety Waymarking Signing Project Continues

In cooperation with the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance and local partners, BLM developed a sign plan for, ordered, and shipped 104 trail safety waymarking signs that will be installed on two trail segments totaling 220 miles. Also during one of the few weeks with snow cover, BLM installed waymark signing on a heavily used 25 mile National Conservation Land segment between Unalakleet and Old Woman.



## Sixth Year of Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom! (ITREC!) Completed

April saw the 'graduation' of 12 Alaskan teachers from the 100 hour ITREC! curriculum development program in Nome, and a new program got underway for another dozen teachers in August. BLM Campbell Creek Science Center provides staff support, along with Chugach National Forest, Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, Alaska Geographic and consultants. The program is organized by the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, with grant funding from BLM.



## Historic Iditarod Towns Saved From Wildfire; Fires Burn Over 40 Miles of Trail

The low-snow record winter of 2015 set the stage for one of the biggest wildfire years in recorded Alaskan history, and without the quick response of state and federal interagency wildfire authorities, two historic towns central to the Iditarod National Historic Trail would have been lost to fire. In two days in late June a series of storms resulted in 14,000 recorded lightning strikes across Alaska and the ignition of 100 major fires, many of them on or near the Iditarod NHT.



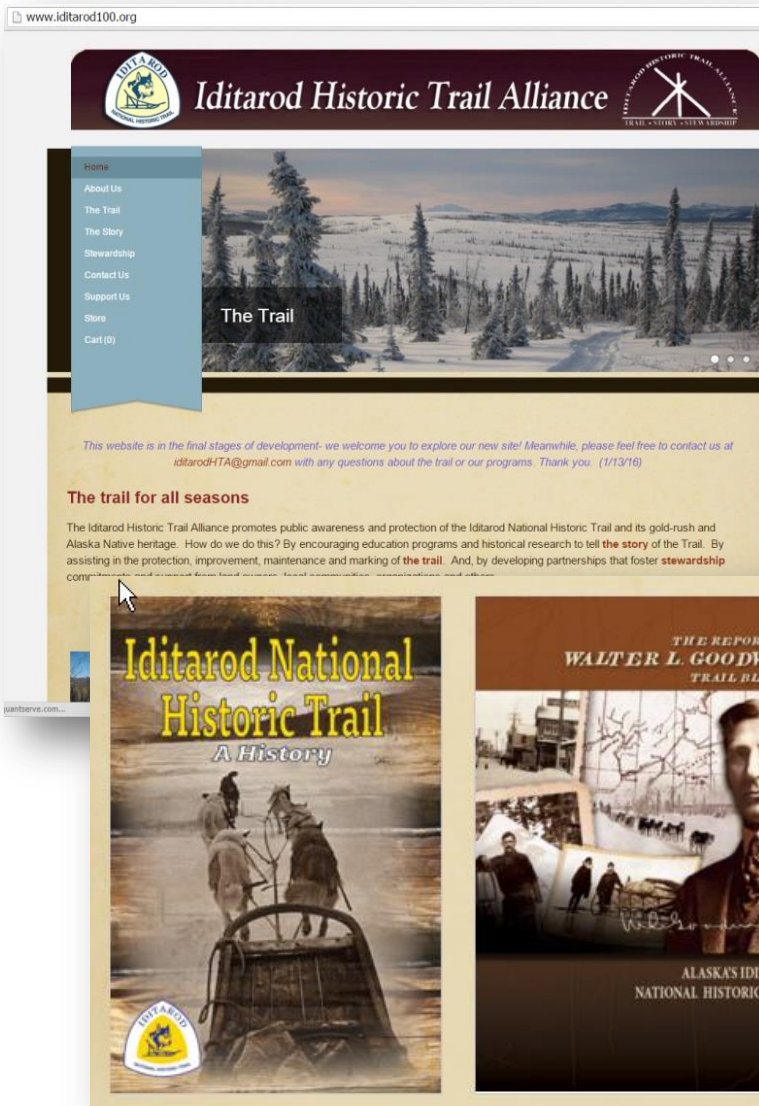
With the historic ghost towns of Iditarod and Flat both in immediate danger of being lost to the quickly advancing fires, the Alaska Division of Forestry and Alaska Fire Service decided to deploy valuable resources in terms of smokejumpers first to the Iditarod townsite, and later to Flat, for initial attack. Smokejumpers were soon followed by a Type II fire crew, brought all the way from Kentucky to supplement Alaska's stretched thin resources.

Because fire lines don't work in the wet tundra of interior Alaska, the crews set "back-fires" between the historic towns and the advancing walls of flames, to starve the fires of fuel. As seen to the right, this tactic ultimately saved the towns of Iditarod and Flat.



The fires would have also burnt BLM's Tripod Flat Public Shelter Cabin on the Iditarod NHT, if the structure had not been directly protected by Alaska Fire Service smokejumper crews. Even with active protection efforts, the fire surrounded the cabin to within 200 feet.

Altogether four different fires burnt over approximately 40 miles of the trail, and destroyed approximately 120 trail marking tripods, 400 trail marking reflectors, and seven waymarking signs. BLM has applied for Emergency Stabilization and Repair (ESR) wildfire funds to provide for trail stabilization and repair; work will begin in winter 2016.



## Interpretive Media Products Developed and Launched

BLM partner Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance completed an extensive upgrade to their website <http://www.iditarod100.org>. The Alliance and BLM also partnered to develop and launch an online story map on a 400 mile journey by a miner across the trail in 1920 (<http://www.iditarod100.org/story-map.html>)

With support from BLM, the Alliance completed a new book on the opening of the trail, along with completed edits and began distribution of the first ever DVD on the history of the Trail.

Both are being made available at outlets along the Trail, and being provided to ITREC! teachers and trailside communities.

## BLM Land Planning Underway for the Iditarod NHT

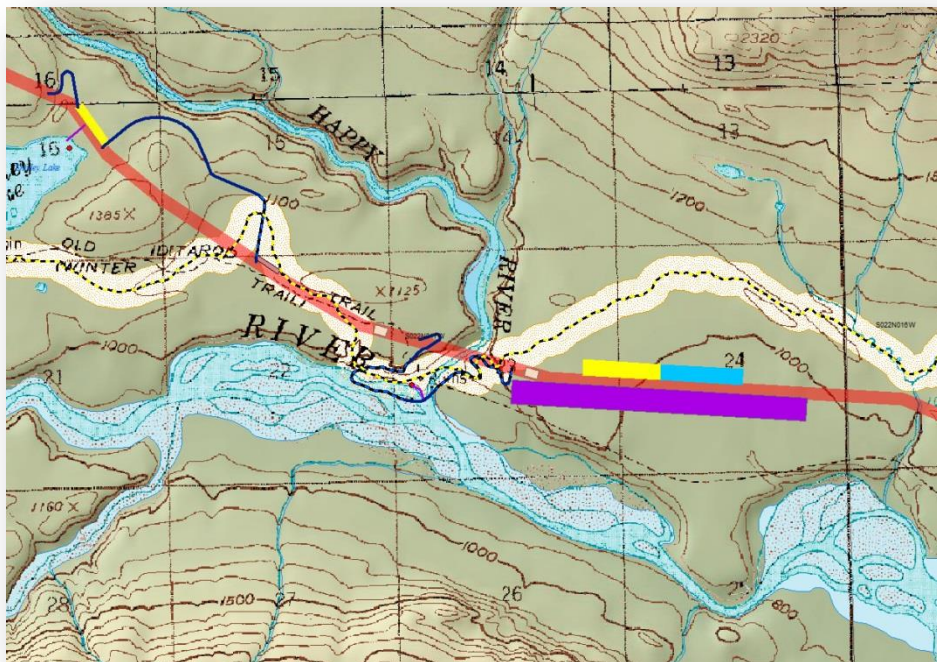
Work continues of the Bering Sea-Western Interior (BSWI) Resource Management Plan (BLM's version of a land use plan). The plan is the first ever for 10 million acres of BLM lands between the Alaska Range and the Bering Sea, and includes all of units the Iditarod NHT managed as National Conservation Lands (NCL's) by BLM. Slated for public release of a draft in 2017, the plan includes alternatives that provide a range of measures to maintain the character and setting of the Iditarod NHT and surrounding landscapes. The range of alternatives are based on BLM's new policy guidance for the management of National Trails on BLM lands.



## Impact Analysis Continues on Gas Pipeline Proposed to Overlay Trail

As part of analysis and review of components of a draft EIS for a proposed gas pipeline that would directly impact 30 miles of the Trail on State lands, BLM determined that the patent language for the transfer of the

land to the State includes a reversionary clause stating "the grant is subject to...a 400 foot easement for the Iditarod NHT, reserved under the authority of the National Trails System Act". The lands subject to the clause include the segments of the Trail most directly impacted by the pipeline (20 miles), as a 150 foot wide construction ROW would be cleared on top of the Trail, along with multiple side roads, gravel pits, airfields, and construction camps (detail shown at left)



intersecting or occupying the Trail. The Draft EIS for the project is currently open for public review and comment at <http://donlingoldeis.com>.

For more information on BLM's Iditarod National Historic Trail program, see <http://www.blm.gov/ak> or contact the Trail Administrator, Kevin Keeler at (907) 267-1246 or [kkeeler@blm.gov](mailto:kkeeler@blm.gov)

