



Alaska

Fiscal Year 2025: Trail Administrator Report

# Iditarod National Historic Trail





# Overview

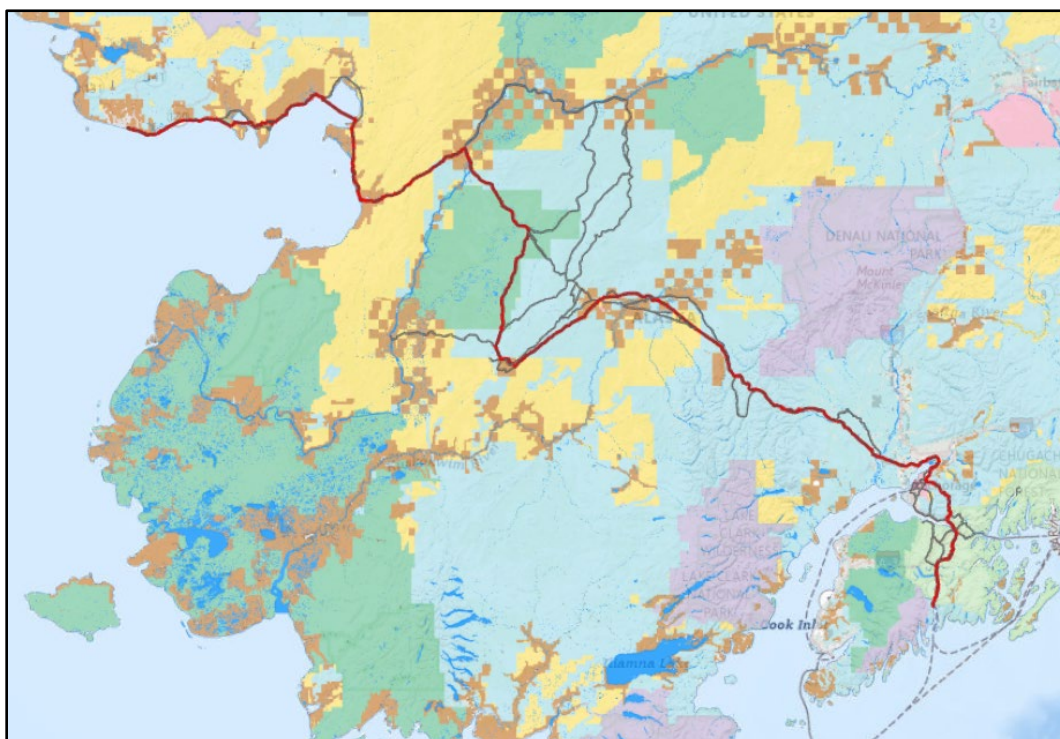
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*"Nowhere in the National Trail System is there such an extensive landscape, so demanding of durability and skill during its winter season of travel. On the Iditarod, today's adventurer can duplicate the experience and challenge of yesteryear."*

*-Senate Report 95-1034, 1978*

The Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) celebrates a 2,000+ mile system of winter routes that first connected Native villages and later opened Alaska to the last great American gold rush. Designated by Congress in 1978, the Iditarod is the only winter trail in the National Trail System, as well as the only National Historic Trail celebrating the indispensable role played by 'man's best friend' in the settlement of Alaska. In fact, the name Iditarod, above all in National and International recognition, symbolizes the dramatic, long-distance sled dog race that has taken place on portions of the INHT each March since 1973.

Today, most of the trail is located on remote public lands primarily managed by the State of Alaska and federal agencies. Spanning from Seward to Nome, dozens of managing agencies, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and others work to promote the preservation, enjoyment, use and appreciation of this vast trail network. The Bureau of Land Management, as the trail's assigned Administrator, coordinates cooperative management of the trail and serves as the primary point of contact for matters involving the entire trail. This report provides details of some of the work and projects accomplished between October 2024 and September 2025 (fiscal year 2025) in support of the INHT.



*Map of the Iditarod National Historic Trail, including the primary route from Seward to Nome depicted in red.*

# Trail Administration

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## Staff Transitions

Long-time INHT Trail Administrator Kevin Keeler retired from federal service at the end of 2024 and other key senior staff who provided trail support moved on in the winter/spring of 2025. Robin Lewis came on board to serve as the new INHT Trail Administrator having spent over a decade in recreation management, conservation planning, and community engagement in roles at the field and headquarters level for both the BLM and National Park Service. Anchorage Field Office Outdoor Recreation Planner, Stolf Short, and Archeologist, Jenny Blanchard, provided crucial support to the INHT through this period of change.



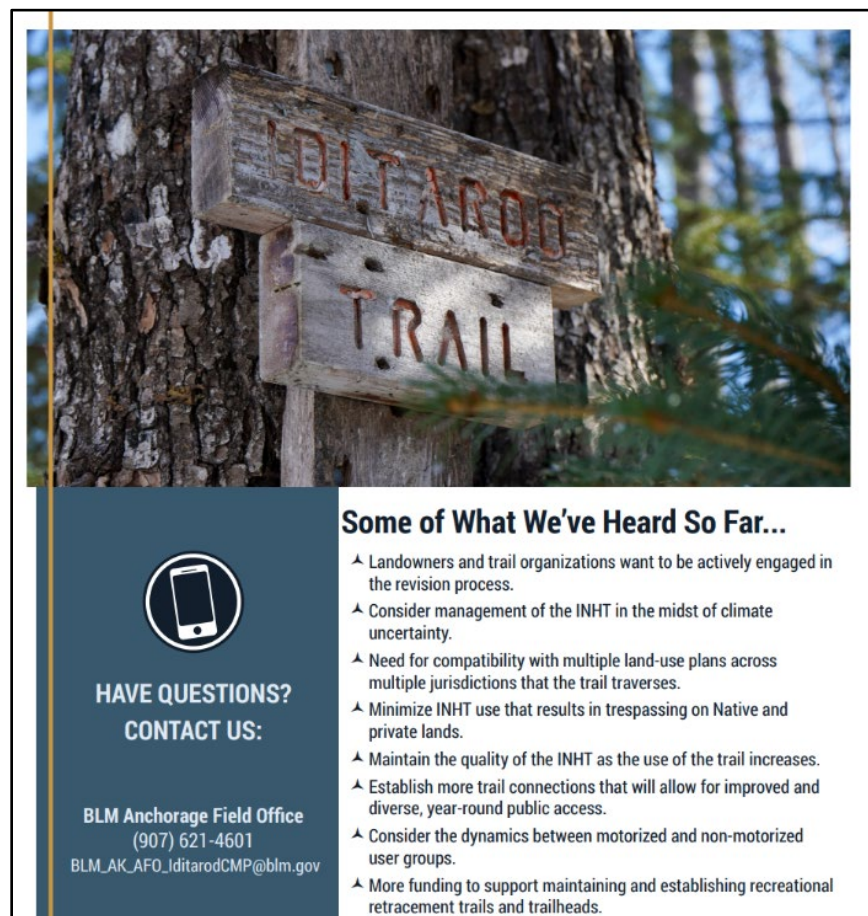
*New INHT Administrator, Robin Lewis, and BLM INHT Manager, Stolf Short, along with other BLM staff enjoying an off-work adventure on the Crow Pass section of the INHT in June 2025.*

## Comprehensive Plan Revision

All National Trails are required by the National Trails System Act to have a Comprehensive Plan (CP) in place to serve as a common guide for the trail's many stakeholders. The INHT's CP was completed in 1986, making it nearly 40 years old. BLM secured a contract to update the CP and began that effort in early 2025. Between February and July, BLM



hosted seven meetings with managing agencies and partners that ranged from providing an overview of the planning process and progressed into interactive components that allowed participants to voice their input to guide the CP revision. Interested parties also had the opportunity to provide information via written feedback, a feedback form and through one-on-one meetings, as requested. Invitations were sent to 178 individuals including representatives of 11 agencies (including the State of Alaska, United States Forest Service, and others), five Alaska Native Corporations, 28 Alaska Native Village Corporations, and 28 Federally Recognized Tribes. Partners who support management of the INHT were invited to attend as well. Meeting attendance ranged from 7 to 42 participants and formed a foundational basis for informing the revision.



*A screenshot of a summer newsletter shared with stakeholders involved in the INHT comprehensive plan revision process.*

## **WestSu Access Road**

BLM, as the INHT Administrator, has been engaged by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on the West Susitna Road Access Project as a consulting party and will continue to provide input on this project with the goal of helping to safeguard trail resources and recreational user access.

# Bureau of Land Management

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## BLM Shelter Cabin Maintenance

BLM INHT managers monitored and maintained the agency's shelter cabins. They undertook a substantial project on the Foothills Cabin to improve its foundation, reconstruct the deck and stairs to tie into the new foundation, and move the outhouse.



*BLM staff pose in front of the Foothills Shelter Cabin after long days repairing the cabin ahead of the 2026 winter use season.*

## Rohn Cabin Historic Nomination

The BLM nominated the Rohn CCC Cabin and Airstrip to the National Register of Historic Places in 2025 and is awaiting review from the State Historic Preservation Office.

## Freedom 250-Iditarod Race Ceremonial Start

Planning began for the 2026 Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race® Ceremonial Start, which traditionally ends at the BLM's Campbell Tract Facility in Anchorage. This event was identified as a "signature event" for BLM as part of Freedom 250, a nationwide celebration of America's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday. The F250 tie-in for this year's event provides a fantastic opportunity to leverage additional attention to tell the story of Alaska, dog mushing, the race, and the INHT.



# United States Forest Service

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## INHT Southern Trek Buildout

2025 was likely the busiest year in Southern Trek development in at least 15 years. Contracted work from recent Congressionally-directed spending projects hit their stride and the first chunks of new Southern Trek in many years were completed, including trail and bridge work on the Moose Pass Trail. In partnership with the National Forest Foundation (NFF), construction of the Turnagain Pass Trail in the Ingram Creek area began in late summer. When finished, it will be about five miles long. USFS entered into a partnership with the Denali Commission for the rest of the Congressionally-funded buildout work. Remaining funds have been routed to them, allowing them to support the forest's partnership with NFF while providing increased flexibility and leveraging availability of other funds.



*A spectacular view of Kenai Lake from a newly constructed portion of Moose Pass Trail.*

The USFS Trails Crews on the Seward and Glacier Ranger Districts conducted a variety of routine maintenance projects up and down the Southern Trek. With severely reduced staffing in 2025, less work was accomplished than is typical, but the INHT was prioritized with what limited capacity there was for in-house trail work.

## Outreach and Education

USFS developed an online StoryMap product to consolidate public information on the INHT Southern Trek in one location. Seward Ranger District Staff partnered with Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area to install a series of new directional signs along the trail. Additionally new trailhead signs were installed at Primrose Campground and Meridian Lake and Johnson South Trailheads.

# Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance

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The Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance (Alliance) works to protect, preserve, and promote the INHT. As a 501©3 nonprofit, the Alliance accomplishes its mission by encouraging education programs and historical research to tell the story of the Trail; by assisting in the protection, improvement, maintenance and marking of the trail; and by developing partnerships that foster stewardship commitments and support from landowners, local communities, organizations and others.

Accomplishments in 2025 include:

- Betsi Oliver joined the Alliance in March 2025 as the organization's first-ever Executive Director after 27 years as an all-volunteer organization.
- In 2025, the Alliance supported much-needed work on the INHT, including maintenance, wayfinding signage, safety improvements, recreation improvements, and safety cabin upkeep & maintenance.
- The Alliance shares the history of the Iditarod Trail with the public, educates youth, and increases appreciation among trail users through community programs, educational & promotional materials, and trailside signage. Public and youth presentations in 2025 included:
  - Thirty scouts in Anchorage learned about National Trails and Iditarod Trail history with executive director Betsi Oliver.
  - Alliance Board member presented Iditarod Trail history to the K-5 students at Bear Valley Elementary School, Anchorage.
  - Alliance Board member presented programs to the public in Nome for two weeks during the Iditarod Dog Sled Race at the Carrie M. McLain Museum.
  - The Nome Kennel Club presented its history, among a series of presentations about the history of mushing in Alaska, at the Alaska Historical Society Annual Conference in Fairbanks. The Alliance distributed historical materials at the conference.
- The Alliance brings together local volunteer groups, land management agencies, Alaska communities along the trail, and supporters nationwide to be stewards of Iditarod National Historic Trail. In 2025, the Alliance launched its *Golden Tripod Stewardship Award* to recognize citizen contributors to the success of the INHT. The first ever recipient, Aaron Burmeister, was awarded for the recovery work he organized after Typhoon Merbok damaged significant portions of the trail in 2022.

# Chugach State Park

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Trail construction contractor Interior Trails LLC completed a 1-mile reroute on the northern end of the Crow Pass Trail, which follows closely a portion of historic route of the INHT within Chugach State Park. Leaving from the Eagle River Nature Center, the reroute is just under a half-mile up the trail from Echo Bend. It was rerouted to bypass a badly degraded section that is vulnerable to erosion and beaver activity, and is periodically inundated during high water. The new route climbs gently onto the bedrock ridges above the valley, with incredible views of Eagle River and surrounding alpine terrain. From the Eagle River Nature Center, hiking out and back to The Perch area via the reroute is about a 9-mile round trip.



*The trail professionals with Interior Trails LLC who made the Crow Pass reroute a reality.*

## Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson

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Northern Land Use Research Alaska (NLURA) is working on a Department of Defense Legacy grant through the National Preservation Institute to research the history and location of the Iditarod and associated roadhouses on Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson (JBER). In 2025, NLURA began by doing a deep dive into archives and putting together information that could be used to identify trail segments and structures that they will examine in 2026.



# Iditarod Race Events

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The INHT has a rich history, but in this modern era it is known for its prominent race events. Annually, the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race®, the Iron Dog snowmobile race, and the Iditarod Trail Invitational human-powered race utilize portions of the INHT for their races across Alaska. The sled dog and snowmobile races have made use of the trail for racing purposes since the early 1970s. The human-powered race began using the trail in the 1980s.

Due to a lack of snow in 2025, the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race® altered their typical race route to journey from Fairbanks to Nome. This change led their 33 racers to journey along the Yukon River to Unalakleet before continuing along the traditional race route from Unalakleet to Nome.

The Iron Dog, with 71 competitors, and Iditarod Trail Invitational, with 93 contestants, utilized portions of the trail from Willow to Nome. With participants and viewers from various countries, these long-distance competitive events place an international spotlight on this unique and historic resource.



*A dog musher zooms by in the night on the Iditarod between Kaltag and Unalakleet.*