



# COVID-19 Conservation Corps

## 2020 Impact Report



**TRAIL MIX, INC.**

Trail and crew photos by Meg Roussos and Carolyn Auwaerter

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# Wayfinder

# COVID-19 Conservation Corps

*An investment in  
our local workforce,  
outdoor recreation infrastructure,  
and economic resilience  
during the COVID-19 pandemic.*



A CCC crew member hauls gravel in a Canycom along the Horse Tram trail.

# Boy Howdy!

The trail work season of 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, took shape unlike any season we've experienced before. As we adapted to social distancing and life during a pandemic, our community faced another devastating reality: the cancellation of cruise ships and upending of the visitor industry would not bode well for employment and the local economy.

Early on in the year, we recognized Trail Mix's unique opportunity to help add jobs to our local economy while maintaining social distance guidelines. This prompted a partnership with the City and Borough of Juneau to create the COVID-19 Conservation Corps (CCC). The primary purpose for the program was to combat unemployment, prevent homelessness, and provide job skills training which Trail Mix achieved by employing more than 30 additional crew members who were financially impacted by the pandemic.

The added benefits of the CCC were no less significant, as it allowed Trail Mix to keep up with increasing trail maintenance needs due to a record-setting year of rain and use, and to add value to a dear community resource—our trails. Juneau's outdoor economy has immensely benefited from programs like the CCC, which open doors for local participants to both learn about public lands and consider new careers. This report takes a look at the lasting infrastructure from past outdoor work programs in Juneau's history, and the far-reaching social, economic, and infrastructural impacts of funding a modern-day outdoor jobs program.

I am proud of the work that our crews achieved in as safe and responsible manner as possible during the pandemic and I am grateful and encouraged to live in a community with such a rich appreciation for trails! Trail Mix has demonstrated that largely impactful work can be borne from cross-sector partnerships and with sufficient funding for trails programs. Imagine the economic benefits that would come from increased trail funding and outdoor workforce programs across Alaska. We could transform our local and state economies and become a national leader in the outdoor recreation sector by continuing to invest in sustainable outdoor recreation infrastructure today.

A driving motivation in our work is to create trails that are safe, accessible, and welcoming for all. Trail Mix is privileged to serve the community and play a role in taking care of the land. As we live, work, and recreate on these lands, we acknowledge the Áak'w and T'aakú Kwáans as the original caretakers of Lingít Aaní and we strive to honor their continued stewardship.

I am so excited to share the story and results of the COVID Conservation Corps with you in this report and to continue our work together on Juneau's world class trail system.

**Thank you,**

Ryan O'Shaugnessy  
Executive Director



# The seed for the COVID-19 Conservation Corps was planted at a convening of the Juneau Economic Stabilization Taskforce in Spring 2020.

Summoned by the City and Borough of Juneau Assembly in April, the Taskforce consisted of members from the local civic, financial, and business sectors and provided advice about programs that would respond to the economic stress created by the pandemic.

The group gathered to brainstorm solutions to the unsettling reality that the 2020 tourist season wasn't going to happen.

This would be devastating for many local residents, who rely on the tourism season for work. Data gathered in April<sup>1</sup> showed that 1,771 people in Juneau's workforce reported being unemployed in Juneau, in addition to an unquantified number of people considered underemployed, unable to meet their living expenses with their current income. Just as Alaska was seeing a 637% increase in unemployment claims statewide, the rate of unemployment within the Juneau Borough had increased by 800%— from 4.2% in April 2019 to 10.9% in April 2020.<sup>2</sup>

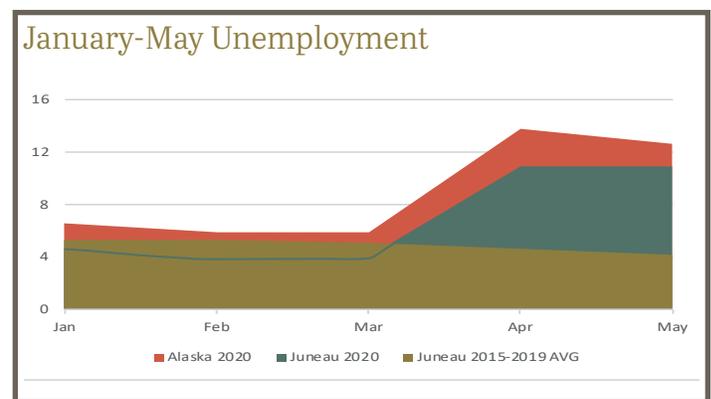
With nearly two thousand people already not working and the cancellation of the 2020 tourism season likely to only exacerbate the crisis, the Task Force considered how federal relief funds from the COVID Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) passed by Congress in March could address this. One idea proposed was to retrain people who were out of work and engage local employers to ensure there were jobs for this new workforce once they had been trained. This model for providing quick employment came hand-in-hand with the opportunity to train people with skills needed to join growing sectors of the economy, in partnership with employers in these sectors. Outdoor recreation is a growing and multidimensional industry, providing jobs in the field, in the lab, on the road, in the office and everywhere in between.<sup>3</sup>

Bruce Botelho, a former Assembly member serving on the Task Force, introduced the idea of the COVID-19 Conservation Corps, taking inspiration from the lasting infrastructure that was created in the 1930s by the Juneau Civilian Conservation Corps, which will be referred to in this report as the JCCC. Such a program would provide the local workforce with on-the-job skills training, simultaneously fulfilling the requirements of the CARES Act to employ people whose work was impacted by the pandemic, while also contributing to long-term advancements in Juneau's workforce development and outdoor recreation sector.

Botelho first brought the idea of creating an outdoor work program to the US Forest Service Juneau Ranger District and Alaska State Parks, but while both agencies thought the idea sounded promising, they did not have the capacity to participate on such short notice. Next, he reached out to Trail Mix, Inc., Eaglecrest Ski Area, and George Schaaf, Director of the City and Borough of Juneau Parks and Recreation Department (Parks & Rec), all of whom enthusiastically agreed that they could administer such a program and were ready with shovel-ready projects on which to spend CARES Act funds.

Together, this group along with Municipal Attorney Rob Palmer and CBJ Finance Director Jeff Rodgers, crafted a draft ordinance to present before the Task Force. All thirteen members of the Task Force agreed to recommend the Juneau Outdoor Service Program (JOS Program) as it was initially known, to the CBJ Assembly as a pilot employment project. In June, the Assembly unanimously approved one million dollars to fund the JOS Program, rechristened the COVID-19 Conservation Corps (CCC), with administration by three entities: Trail Mix, Inc., Eaglecrest Ski Area, and CBJ Parks & Rec.

One of the stipulations of the CARES Act funding required the primary beneficiaries of the program to be unemployed



live.laborstats.alaska.gov

## Nonprofit Partners

*Juneau Nordic Ski Club*

*Southeast Alaska Independent Living*

*Juneau Snowmobile Club*

## Agency Partners

*Alaska State Parks*

*US Forest Service, Juneau Ranger District*

## Private Landowner

# 3

established relationship of trail maintenance collaboration between Parks & Rec and Trail Mix helped the program come together with greater ease.

The partners involved in the COVID-19 Conservation Corps knew that their own adaptation would have to come together within a matter of months and on a grander scale—60 members across multiple crews and worksites at once. The season was also structured similarly to a typical trail work season, but with greater emphasis on training for technical and conceptual trail knowledge.

The program was careful to ensure that employment and productivity did not come at the cost of an increased risk of spreading COVID-19. By its very nature, trail work takes place outdoors and with the modifications previously mentioned, could adhere to the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control easily. The COVID-19 Conservation Corps trail crews lived in their own homes, brought their own food to worksites, wore masks and maintained six feet of distance among themselves. Throughout the eight-month season, only one crew member contracted the virus, but with strict adherence to safety protocols and a pre-emptive halt to fieldwork until all crew members could be tested, there was no spread within Trail Mix or to the community.

Adapting for the 2020 season made Trail Mix's programming different that a regular year, but CARES funds allowed for a larger workforce to work a longer season. As a result, Trail Mix crews put more than 19,000 hours into the Juneau Trail System, which was nearly double the amount of hours that would be met in a typical season. In the following sections, we review how investments in trails lead to big impacts for our economy and our community.

or underemployed due to the pandemic. This was not an obstacle, given that a high percentage of the local workforce fell into those categories when the tourism season was canceled. In fact, the program attracted many unemployed workers from the tourism industry who were used to working outdoors as guides or on the docks all day, a strong foundation for trail work. Trail Mix mostly screened applicants for a willingness to learn as the CCC provided training and certification opportunities as part of the job. While the federally approved purpose of the CCC was to train and employ impacted workers during the pandemic, the benefits of the program were much farther reaching.

The Task Force screened several assistance programs throughout the spring and summer that would disperse CARES Act funds to businesses and vulnerable populations. The CCC was unique among the proposals because the funds had the added benefit of creating lasting infrastructure and developing human capital while also boosting the economy in the short term. "Nothing is remotely comparable," Botelho said, "Money had the direct effect of employing people while also ending up with a very gratifying product." It was also the only program that elicited letters and emails of praise from the public. "This was the most popular program the Task Force came up with," said Botelho. No one had to be convinced of how a program of this sort would benefit the community for years to come. Even prior to the CCC, Trail Mix had a reputation for doing great work on the Juneau Trail System and the precedent of the JCCC also created a foundation for the CCC to be well-received. National news outlets highlighted the CCC for being the first emergency response program of its kind since the JCCC was enacted by the New Deal. CBJ Parks & Rec Director, George Schaaf said he received calls from people around the country asking, 'how are you doing this?' Schaaf said the previously

# 2

# 1



# Investments in local trails have resounding impacts for our community and economy, not just in times of hardship, but also in times of prosperity.

Our trails are a valuable public resource. They bring life to neighborhoods by connecting people, attract visitors while also supporting the tourism industry. They also inspire us to protect and care for the special ecosystem of Southeast Alaska.

In a stunning pocket of the Tongass National Rainforest, over 140 trails<sup>4</sup> etch the landscape. These trails vary from road-side access to backcountry treks, through wetlands, across rivers, and up to mountain peaks. Trail building and maintenance is an efficient use of money because each incremental investment enhances the experiences of a variety of specific trail user groups.

Across the state, Alaskans are pushing for further development of outdoor recreation infrastructure. In 2019 the outdoor recreation sector contributed to 3.9% of statewide GDP, as compared to the national average of 2.1%.<sup>5</sup> Alaska is positioned to be the most attractive outdoor recreation destination in the United States, with its diversity of climates, landscapes, and intact natural ecosystems. Alaska Trails is a nonprofit that supports trail projects and programs across the state and whose advocacy for the Alaska Long Trail is propped up by the idea that Alaska is missing a significant opportunity to gain revenue from its outdoor resources.

Alaska's economy has long relied on the extraction and depletion of resources, but the outdoor recreation sector can maximize its contribution to a more sustainable Alaskan economy by bolstering outdoor infrastructure and attracting tourists from outside, as well as encouraging in-state travelers to experience the state's vast and diverse environment.

The University of Alaska Center for Economic Development found that the outdoor recreation sector accounts for 38,100 direct, indirect and induced jobs, and \$3.2 billion in annual participant spending (this excludes equipment purchases and travel less than 20 miles).<sup>6</sup> It's clear how trails factor into this: not only are trails part of a larger visitor experience that allow access to beautiful destinations like cabins, views, and harvesting grounds— trails are an experience in and of themselves.

Where does the COVID-19 Conservation Corps fit into the outdoor recreation sector and the larger economy? At a glance, the CCC doubled the capacity for trail work that

would take place during a typical season. CBJ's Parks and Recreation Department's annual budget includes \$40,000 for general trail brushing and maintenance costs, which is delegated to Trail Mix. In addition, Parks & Rec receives an allocation from CBJ's fund for Capital Improvement Projects (CIP), sustained by local sales taxes. In a typical year, Parks & Rec's proposed CIP budget for trail projects reaches about \$250,000. However, the CIP allocation for trails is usually only for \$100,000. This budget gap is not due to a lack of community support. In fact, the 2019 Parks and Recreation Master Plan survey found that trails are the most widely used recreation infrastructure in the Juneau Borough.<sup>7</sup> However, the largest obstacle for keeping up with trail maintenance is securing enough funding. The 1993 Juneau Trails Plan



discourages a “band-aid” approach to trail maintenance, pointing out that if trail maintenance is deferred, some trails will eventually become unsafe or unusable.<sup>8</sup> Whereas major maintenance helps to solve immediate problems and help limit future maintenance costs. The CCC demonstrated how a substantial investment in trails directly and immediately benefits the conditions of trails and trail users with lasting infrastructure.

With a \$460,000 grant from the City and Borough of Juneau, Trail Mix efficiently orchestrated a program that recruited, trained, and mobilized trail crews to complete new infrastructure and deferred maintenance projects in a six month time-span.

Workforce development was a key component. All crew members received training at the beginning of the program, acquiring valuable skills such as carpentry, first aid, and landscape engineering that can be applied to a variety of trades such as construction, guiding, planning and more. Crew leaders were selected based on previous experience, skill level, and leadership. Elias Antaya is one such individual. Antaya was raised on local trails and when COVID postponed the recent college-graduate’s plans, he returned home to the trails— this time leading a Trail Mix crew. He described his experience in a leadership role as formative, and beneficial in propelling him towards his future career goals. “I learned to be confident in myself as a decision maker under pressure” he said, “and to take responsibility for not just me but my whole crew.” Antaya plans to pursue a career with the National Parks Service or Forest Service and says this job has given him the necessary experience to get there. For Trail Mix Executive Director, Ryan O’Shaughnessy, it is gratifying to see local

crew members benefit from working with Trail Mix, and he anticipates having returning crew members in the coming work seasons.

CBJ Parks & Rec director, George Schaaf, further emphasized the importance of workforce development for the outdoor recreation sector. With many years of experience working with the USFS, Schaaf understands that many federal grants are geared toward workforce development and youth, because these opportunities open doors to both learn about public lands and consider new careers. Although these programs may not produce as much as a professional crew that has been recruited from elsewhere, the process holds greater promise. “It’s not about output, it’s about outcome— the possibility that your crew member could continue to work for you or end up in Congress, advocating for your program. There’s value, even if you’re unable to quantify it.” As with other outdoor leadership programs across the country, the CCC consisted of a more diverse workforce than the program it was modeled after. The crews included community members of color, women and non-binary identifying members, and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community. In addition to increasing the human capital of the crews and incorporating a variety of strengths, a diverse pool of employees increases the likelihood that the \$240,000 of wages that Trail Mix paid to its 31 crew members, was dispersed more widely throughout the community.

Outdoor recreation is a national pastime that has sustained an enthusiastic following across generations. More people participate in outdoor recreation activities than attend major league sports events in the US and participation continues to grow and engage a more diverse demographic each year.<sup>9</sup> Municipalities that invest in their outdoor assets

## How the CCC Benefits the Juneau Economy

Trail Mix reinvested the grant funding into the community by distributing **\$252,150 in paychecks to local employees** and investing in workforce development. The CCC supported small businesses by purchasing supplies and sourcing labor locally.

CCC crew members were employed and trained by Trail Mix. They developed technical and soft skills that are applicable to a variety of jobs such as carpentry, Wilderness First Aid, leadership and teamwork.



The stunning Juneau Trail System attracts tourists, who spend money locally for lodging, transport, retail and other experiences. **In 2017, 15,859 visitors used local trails as part of a guided group.**<sup>19</sup> Good trail infrastructure and a variety of trail types attracts a larger pool of visitors who will use the trails.

Access to outdoor recreation is a major draw to call this land home. In a typical year, **89% of CBJ residents report using the trails,**<sup>20</sup> and anecdotal evidence suggests that trails were used more frequently during the pandemic. CCC crews maintained the safety and accessibility of our trails in the face of this surge in foot, wheel, and ski traffic.

draw employers and employees who seek a balance between work and play, which outdoors access provides. Homeowners report that proximity to walking, jogging, and biking trails has a positive impact on the general quality of life in their neighborhood and on the ability to sell their homes.<sup>10</sup> Likewise access to trails is a top priority for many home-buyers.<sup>11</sup> The beauty of Southeast Alaska can be a major factor in someone's decision to make this region their home, and trails are a significant highlight for providing access. Many residents appreciated the trail improvements carried out by the CCC enough to reach out with unsolicited praise for the program's outcomes.

The benefits of having accessible green corridors pay out in many ways. Living in close proximity to trails has been correlated with increased use,<sup>12</sup> and to that end, improved mental and physical health outcomes for users.<sup>13 14</sup> Investments in outdoor infrastructure and programming are correlated with reduced crime rates, improved educational outcomes for students from elementary through post-secondary school, lower health care costs and strengthened social connections.<sup>15</sup>

Access to outdoor infrastructure also influences where we choose to travel and spend money. In Juneau, where tourism is an economic pillar, each improved trail provides another attraction for tourists. Visitors that use trails spend more money on rentals, meals, lodging, and souvenirs.<sup>16</sup> Other cities with developed trail systems have found that trail users tend to stay longer and even return to recreate on the same trails again. Businesses operating in Southeast Alaska ranked recreational opportunities as the second greatest benefit to their business, because tourists are drawn to the region for those experiences.<sup>17</sup> Maintaining a wide variety of trails increases the options for outdoor recreation opportunities, which attracts a more diverse group of visitors and allows for a greater variety of businesses to thrive. Developing trails that "work" for us contributes to a more sustainable economy and highlights the beauty of Haa Aaní.<sup>18</sup>

**\$27.12**

**Average hourly wage for crew members by end of season**

*\*including taxes*



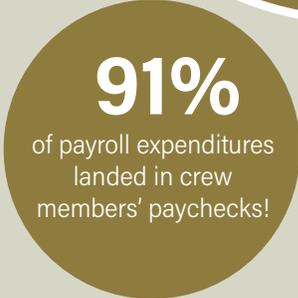
**\$16,275**

**Average total wages for crew members who worked a full season (700+ hours)**

*\*excluding taxes and admin costs*

**\$18,106**

**Money spent on job training programs and certification fees**



**Payroll**  
 Wages  
**Non-payroll**  
 Local Resources

“

I have been thrilled by the significant improvements to Juneau's trails during this pandemic. Thanks to the hard physical work of the CCC team, we can now use and explore the Horse Tram Trail any time we like. It has been a wonderful antidote to the sheltering place restrictions, an alternative that is safe. The good humor and welcoming comments from the trail team were extraordinary actually. We hope that this work will continue, that more of Juneau's legendary and all important trails will continue, strengthening the health and well being of our community!

”

- Annie C. Juneau resident of 39 years

“

The work this past year on our local Juneau trails has been just wonderful, the brightest spot in the whole dreary year of 2020. It reminds me of the great public works that happened during the Depression, when so many good people went to work and left lasting legacies to our country. The trails have been where we Juneau people have gone to stay healthy and stay sane in this trying time. Thanks to all the people who have made it happen.

”

- Dave H. Juneau resident of 40 years

“

My pup, Coho, and I get out to hike regularly and the Perseverance trail system has some of our favorite trails. I was so pleased with the upgrades to the Red Mill and Granite Creek trails. Now we can enjoy sturdy, well drained trails on the rainiest of days. Shout-out to the hardworking CCC Crews! We appreciate the care you put into our trail system!

”

- Sarah M. Juneau resident of 2 years



*Rather than seeing nature as a commodity to be extracted, our economy and quality of life can benefit from the appreciation of nature with trails as an avenue for the transition and community partnerships as a driver.*

# Imagine your favorite trail.

Imagine the way you interact with it, the ecosystem that surrounds you, the emotions this space evokes for you, and the connection you feel to the past. What would you name this trail?

Trails, like any ecologically-distinct landscape features or “ecotope,”<sup>21</sup> hold much significance for people. The value that we place in ecotopes inspire us to care for those spaces. For the Tlingit people, land stewardship is embodied in cultural practice and is synonymous with language preservation and sovereignty.

The Tlingit have lived upon Haa Aaní, Our Land, since time immemorial, harvesting resources for survival while forging a deep and extensive knowledge base of the local ecosystem and geomorphology of the land.

Indigenous languages are formed from the sounds of a place and are intrinsically linked to the land. For the Tlingit people, speaking the languages reinforces a long-held reverence for the environment. Oral histories passed between generations of Tlingit people demonstrate the ways in which the original people acted on place-based knowledge to traverse paths and waterways to live sustainably and prosper. These genres of place<sup>22</sup> are braided with survival information, preserved in traditional Tlingit place names.<sup>23</sup> For example, Nex'w X'aayí, *cloudberry point* (Lena Point), indicates where there is an abundance of berries for picking, and Kaxdigoowu Héen Dei, *going back clear water trail* (Montana Creek), indicates where good drinking water can be found.<sup>24</sup> Traditional place names also signify how indigenous people see themselves reflected in the environment.

When Russian, Spanish, French, and British surveyors and explorers ventured to the inside passage in the eighteenth century, the footprint of Tlingit settlements was light. The methods of cultivation, harvest, and environmental engineering practiced by the Indigenous people were grounded in traditional values and left few long-term impacts.<sup>25</sup> The Tlingit had used foot trails leading through the densely vegetated terrain to access prime hunting, fishing, and harvesting sites for millennia; however, many of the first “trails” in the region were waterways navigated with canoes.<sup>26</sup>

This all changed for the Aak'w Kwáan and T'aakū Kwáan, when a British prospector, Joe Juneau, was led to gold in the mountains above the Gastineau Channel. From 1880 to 1890, a town dubbed “Juneau” sprang up around a lucrative gold mine in a place that was first known by Tlingit people as Dzantik'i Héeni, *precious water for the starry flounder*.<sup>27</sup> By 1910, the “gold-belt backcountry” was crawling with miners trails.

Today, most of the maintained recreation trails in the Juneau Trail System follow routes originally used for industrial or hydraulic infrastructure, as these were the first paths that had been substantially cleared through the thick rainforest.<sup>28</sup> These lasting landmarks have altered areas of the landscape in a way that is completely contrary to an Indigenous style of land use.

As mines boomed and then went bust, these paths took on other uses as active industry faded from those sites. One of the earliest written accounts of organized recreational activity describes the formation of the Juneau Hiking Club in 1930. The club was composed of residents and seasonal teachers who met weekly to hike during the winter. After a few years, people began to ski, and in 1935, the Juneau Ski Club formed.

By this time in the Depression era, the Federal employment program known as the Civilian Conservation Corps (JCCC) already had established work crews in Alaska, including a crew based out of Dzantik'i Héeni (Juneau). The development of trails and outdoor recreation infrastructure was a high priority for the program, and this small group of skiing enthusiasts benefited greatly. Among the projects of the 1930s CCC crew was a ski jump on "Jump Hill" near Cordova Street, a ski tow<sup>29</sup> (a toboggan with a motor bolted to it) to service the two meadows along the Douglas Ski Trail, as well as two cabins along the same trail,<sup>30</sup> later named the Dan Moller Trail for the CCC crew's construction foreman. These cabins were very popular with the skiing community for overnight outings.

Alaska was decades away from statehood when the CCC was established in 1933, but the national fervor for Westward expansion put a spotlight on Alaska and the millions of acres deemed "available" for development. The aim was to fund rural conservation and forestry projects using locally sourced labor when possible. However in Alaska, much of the labor was imported, because the CCC would not permit Alaska Natives eligibility to participate until 1939.<sup>31</sup>

Much of the 1930s CCC crew's projects took place on Xutsnoowú (Admiralty Island), the ancestral homelands of the Wooshkeetaan. In 1933, three crews totaling 23 men started work on the Admiralty Island canoe route. The route would provide east-to-west connectivity across the island through a series of freshwater lakes and paralleled by a network of trails. Within the first year, 1934, CCC crews



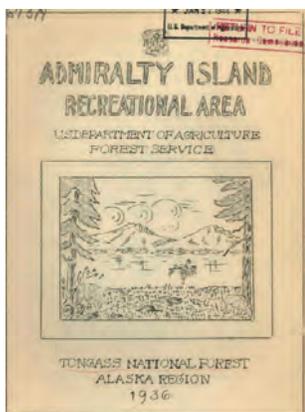
Right: Generations of Tlingit culturebearers gather during a three-day canoe journey from Klawock to Juneau for Celebration 2014. Waterways are considered to be the first trails in the region (Image by Mark Kelley for Sealaska).

had erected four cabins, and in the second year, with 130 members, the crews built more shelters, laid more trails and installed a dam at the outlet of Beaver Lake to make it navigable to Lake Alexander. By 1936, the JCCC members there numbered 245. There were over 30 miles of trail, two boat portages, a bear-watching tower at Pack Creek, and seven shelters including the Big Shaheen Cabin with a seaplane mooring float.<sup>32</sup>

All this new infrastructure provided a major draw for the visitor industry. Unfortunately, when the program lapsed in 1937, much of the infrastructure fell into disrepair before maintenance picked up again in the 1950s by local organizations, and later the USFS.

The cabins on Xutsnoowú (Admiralty Isl.) built by JCCC crews are long-standing markers of a moment in US history. The "conservation" aspect of the Civilian Conservation Corps was part of the Roosevelt administration's vision to steward America's vast holdings of public lands, though it turned a blind eye to the ways that the land had always been taken care of, and in fact taken from, Indigenous peoples.

Projects by the JCCC sought to permanently preserve this 'pristine wilderness' in ways that allowed for specific approved uses. Evidence of JCCC projects can be found all over Haa Aaní, from remnant structures to infrastructure that is continually used and maintained. That model of stewardship is unlike Tlingit methods of habitat manipulation that are responsive to environmental factors and vary according to the seasons. While this legacy of colonization is



Far Left: A 1936 pamphlet published by the USFS touts the recreational "attractions" of Admiralty Island, made accessible to visitors by trails, portages, and shelters.

Left: The Beaver Lake dam was built by the CCC in 1936 as part of the Admiralty Island Canoe Route and is now listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The photo captures Charles Mobley at the site in 1992 (USFS).

being discussed more widely now, the impact of this concept of conservation reverberates today.

Some CCC structures that might be familiar to Juneau Borough residents include the 5th Street stairs in downtown, the Mosquito totem pole by the Governor's Mansion, and many shelters and cabins outside of town including the trail shelter at Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, picnic shelters at Auk Recreation Area, Dan Moller Cabin, Skaters Cabin, the Potlatch lodge at the Scout Camp, and Peterson Prairie Cabin (Peterson Lake Cabin).

As the draw of "remote" recreation has increased over the last few decades, cabins and trails are in higher demand. Safe, accessible trails and well-maintained facilities are a high priority for federal, state, and local agencies, though the existing funding stream is not adequate to address all projects in a timely manner, and many are tacked onto the end of a "deferred maintenance" list.

The creation of a modern-day trail work employment program with federal emergency funding helped overcome funding barriers and catch up on trail maintenance priorities. As an organization, Trail Mix was humbled and inspired by the crew members that came together under the trying circumstances of the pandemic, from a diversity of backgrounds, and at different stages of their lives, to work towards a common goal: to make our trails more safe and accessible for all.

Trail Mix is privileged to serve the community and play a role in taking care of the land. We understand that assertions of stewardship are contingent on constant demonstration, and that is why our work strives to uplift other, equally important forms of stewardship. We recognize indigenous language revitalization and land sovereignty as acts of stewardship and believe that it is important to insure access to traditional uses of the land. Trail Mix recognizes that systems of white supremacy and colonization continue in the outdoors today and we have a duty to change that. There are many ways to care for and connect to the land, and we are always learning more about how best to act on this responsibility.



*Above: Shaheen log cabin, was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1935. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995 and rehabilitated in 2011. The cabin is still rented for recreational stays.*

# Learning the Ropes

Trail Mix provided a series of trainings for the CCC crew members. The topics covered by local and national experts included useful skills such as proper use of equipment, first aid, and trail engineering.

Master trail builder and long-time Alaskan, Mike Shields, engaged crew members in a course developed in partnership with Alaska Trails that focuses on the technical aspects of sustainable trail design. Crew members gained an understanding of the role that details such as soil type and trail grade play in forestry engineering. Crews also learned how to move heavy objects using mechanical advantage, practicing techniques such as rigging, block and tackle, and come-alongs. This was particularly useful for limiting close contact between crew members on the trails to mitigate COVID-19 spread.

Crew members learned proper hand-tool technique from Trail Mix staff — from the favored polaski to the classic spade. They quickly became familiar with operating *and* repairing “trail-scale” mechanical equipment such as Canycoms and impactors for hauling materials in and out of worksites. Local US Forest Service Ranger, Peter Cross, trained crews in chainsaw safety and techniques for felling trees and more.

Another component of CCC training was a 40-hour Wilderness Advanced First Aid (WAFA) training from instructors with the internationally recognized NOLS wilderness school. Crew members not only practiced assessing emergency situations and addressing common injuries and illnesses, but received advanced instruction in how to stabilize, treat, and make evacuation decisions for patients in backcountry environments. Leadership was a strong focus in this training, and a general theme in the CCC crew environment.



*A crew member demonstrates correct log-chopping form in the tools training.*



Clockwise from top left: 1) Crew members familiarize themselves with different soil types. 2) Trail Mix employee, Duncan, demonstrates how to sharpen a polaski. 3) Rigging and Ropework Workshop. 4) A CCC crew member learns to use a wench tool in the Rigging and Ropework course led by Mike Shields. 5) Mike Shields provides technical knowledge regarding trail grade, tread, and drainage in the Trail Design and Layout course. 6) Peter Cross demonstrates how to fell a tree.

# CCC Worksites

**A** Ch'eet Taayi  
Murrelet Fat  
Cowee Creek, Echo Cove

**B** Eagle Beach  
Eeyák'w  
Small Rapids

**F** Nex'w Xaayi  
Cloudberry Point  
Lena Point

**F** Áak'w  
Little Lake  
Auke Lake

ÁAK'W

Til'héeni  
Dog Salmon Creek  
Salmon Creek

**I**  
**J** Dzantik'i Héeni  
Precious Water for  
the Starry Flounder  
Juneau

T'AAKU

Shikaagi Noow  
Thick-Walled Fort  
Outer Point

Koosh  
Oozing Sore  
Thane

Sayéik  
Spirit Helper  
Douglas

- A. Point Bridget Trail
- B. Equestrian Trail
- C. Horse Tram Trail
- D. Eagle Valley Center (EVC)  
Cabin Trail
- E. EVC Challenge Course
- F. Auke Bay Elementary
- G. Anne Coleman Beach  
Access
- H. Under Thunder Trail
- I. Granite Creek Trail
- J. Red Mill Trail

## Legend

-  Improved Tread
-  New Construction
-  Brushing
-  Drainage
-  Rerouted Path

 64 Drains Installed on  
Red Mill Trail

 326 Feet of Planking  
Installed

 3.8 Total Miles Brushed  
and Grubbed

 600 Tons of Gravel Laid  
on Horse Tram Trail

\* This map does not represent official or legal boundaries of the Kwaans or clans named.

# ‡ Equestrian Trail

The Equestrian Trail served as the field training setting for the CCC crew members during their introductory CCC training with Trail Mix staff and crew leaders. Crews rerouted small sections which incorporated tool selection, clearing brush and logs, cutting trail, grading a drain, and planting new vegetation along the trail. Crews also created a second drain and fixed mud pits by sourcing local material and a bucket train.



# ‡ Anne Coleman Beach Access

This trail covers a short distance on a narrow strip of public land and leads to a beach with a view of Áak'w Tá, *Back of Little Lake* (Auke Bay) and the Chilkat Mountains. The beach, itself, is an intertidal zone with a rich ecosystem, viewable at high tide. Crews redirected drains to clear the trail of water, then shoveled, raked and tamped gravel along the gravel tread.



# † Horse Tram Trail

The Horse Tram Trail project began in 2017 with planning and permitting. In 2019, crews started putting in groundwork, clearing vegetation. At the start of the 2020 season, a crew created an outline for the trail from Boy Scout Beach to Amalga Harbor. This was followed by many wet weeks of intense physical labor preparing the ground by clearing out logs, rocks, and vegetative matter- also called “grubbing.” A second crew of 12 CCC members and volunteers laid and compacted gravel on 1.5 miles of the trail, from Boy Scout Beach to the Eagle Valley Center.



CCC Crew members lay new gravel on top of tarp to prevent the smaller gravel grain from getting washed out.

# † Eagle Valley Center Challenge Course

1. Tear out rotted boardwalk



Trail Mix assisted Southeast Alaska Independent Living (SAIL) to upgrade the paths throughout the Challenge Course at the Eagle Valley Center to make the course more accessible. Wider paths and compact tread were key for allowing people with mobility devices to navigate the challenge course. A trail crew led the transformation by dismantling slippery, old boardwalk that had grown into the muskeg and trimming brush. They laid new, wider gravel paths between the features of the course and constructed turnpikes to secure the gravel in boggy sections of the trail.

2. Clear path for new tread



3. Smooth new gravel tread!



# ‡ Granite Creek Trail

This locally adored trail descends into It'ji Shaanáx, *Sparkling Valley* (Perseverance Valley/Granite Creek Basin), carved by glaciers long ago and now intercepted by a clear stream and towering waterfalls. Improvements to the trail included removing old boardwalk that had become hazardous and building new boardwalks that allow for gradual navigation of the incline. Other areas of the trail required laying new gravel, creating drainage ditches, and clearing brush.



# ‡ Red Mill Trail

Red Mill Trail, originally built in the 1890s to access a gold ore processing mill, runs parallel Dzántik'i Héeni (Gold Creek) for one mile, and branches off to the Glory Hole overlook. At one time, there was a small town situated around the Mill, however the path faded into the trees after the town and mill were abandoned and the trail itself wasn't assembled until the turn of the century when James King, Trail Mix director at the time and Colby Shibler decided to resurrect the old trail.

By 2020, the trail was in bad need for drainage to reduce flooding. In some segments, the path itself seemed like a creek before trail improvement efforts. The crew had to dismantle the existing boardwalk and reroute the trail, which entailed removing obstacles and old drainage. They rerouted areas of the trail, bolstering the tread with rocks and turnpikes, and installed 64 drains. The last step in the process of a major reroute is "re-vegging" or restoring the plants around the trail.



1940s "Gold Canyon Trail"



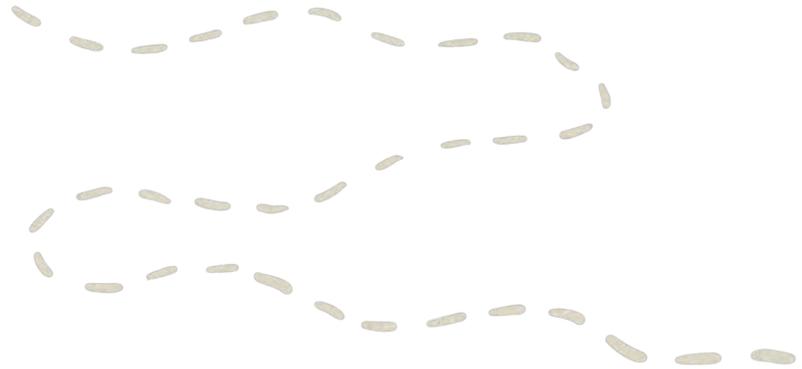
Before



After



## Catching up with the Crew



Elias Antaya

Leading a CCC crew was a job that I was excited to wake up for and spend ten hours a day on. My crew members would agree that it is the best job we've ever had. I loved hiking out each morning in a beautiful setting and working hard with my crew to make the most sustainable and minimally invasive trail possible.

Improving trails that I've used throughout my life while growing up in Juneau, and knowing how much the community values what we do. I take pride in that.

I learned how to envision and design a trail where there previously was none and to use the resources on hand to work with nature, instead of against it. We often laughed at the impossibility of the task we would be expected to perform with minimal equipment in the driving rain and snow, but we always toughed it out and completed what we set out to do. I learned the art of compromise- with my own expectations, other people, and inanimate objects. The work reinforced for me just how small I am in the world, but how my work can amplify far beyond myself.

The CCC has prepared me to pursue my goal of working as a wilderness ranger or trail crew member for the National Parks and/or Forest Service. I learned to confidently make decisions under pressure, to make tough calls when necessary and take responsibility for myself and my crew. I realized that leading is a lot of subtle coaxing and encouraging, rather than just showing and telling. I started to recognize strengths in others and provide opportunities for them to recognize those strengths so that we could work cohesively as a team.

Words of advice for future trail crew members:

Bring two pairs of socks and three pairs of gloves,  
Never leave home without a srench.  
Bring two lunches.

## Kim Ramos

“ Collaboration, clear communication, and laughter can make or break a team.

Without a doubt the best part about working on a CCC crew was developing meaningful friendships with the members of my crew. We all had such different backgrounds and life experiences, and I am so thankful to have learned from them. We also discovered we are all really good at talking in silly accents and not taking ourselves too seriously.

Being able to work outside in the forest with my crew had such a positive impact on my mental health and really provided a respite from the incredibly difficult year that was 2020. Shoveling gravel in the pouring rain can be a daunting task but with the support of my trail crew we were able to laugh through the hard times.

”



### Words of advice for future trail crew members:

1. Wear good rain gear
2. Stretch every day
3. Bring extra snacks!

Also, don't be discouraged if you feel like your body is going to fall apart after week one. It will get easier and you will get stronger!

## Ambrose Bucy

“ I really enjoyed seeing transformations take place on a trail. It's such a cool feeling looking back on a path that you built that used to just be a big mud pit and being able to see the direct positive impact you and your crew had on it.

I learned about building boardwalks, rerouting water off of trails, how to properly use machinery. I got to work with and problem-solve with a crew of dedicated and inspiring people everyday. It made everything feel a little more normal in such a stressful and confusing time. I know these skills will continue to come in handy for many of the things I'll pursue in the future.

Looking back it just feels like a lot of little highlights that came together into an *overall good time*.

”



### Words of advice for future trail crew members:

Bring the right clothes- this will make or break your day. Definitely good rain gear, warm clothes, rubber boots, and insulated rubber gloves.

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**Thank you!**

**We have endless gratitude for the people that made the vision for this program possible. Thank you to our crew members, our organizational and agency partners, and all those in the community that showed their support.**

*Trail Mix, Inc. is a local nonprofit dedicated to developing and maintaining the Juneau Trail System. It is our mission to steward a safe and enjoyable trail system by bringing people and resources together for trail improvements and activities. As part of this work, we prioritize community partnerships, opportunities for individuals to get involved in our work, and creating natural corridors that are accessible to as many users as possible.*



Trail Mix recognizes the stewardship of the Áak'w and T'aakū Kwáans on whose land we live, work, and recreate. We strive to honor Lingít place names in this report and in our work. We welcome and appreciate feedback as we continue to learn.

*[www.trailmixinc.org](http://www.trailmixinc.org)*

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