

## PROGRESS REPORT

Project Number (collocation code): 10795020

Project Title: Kanatak Trail Brushing Project

Period of performance: \_\_ June 7-July 31, 2011\_\_\_\_\_

**July 17, 2011**

### **Final Kanatak Report**



The Kanatak Trail is a route used for thousands of years to travel between the Pacific Ocean and Becharof Lake's southernmost end (Island Arm), en route to the Bering Sea. Located in Becharof National Wildlife Refuge, the route has fallen into disuse as the nearby communities have emptied of inhabitants. The Refuge has no designated recreational trails. The Kanatak Trail project was envisioned as a way to revive the history of

the area while providing visitors with a destination for hiking.

Some urgency was felt about accomplishing this project, as the key informant, Paul Boskoffsky, is in his 70s. He is still fit enough to hike the trail, and provided lots of historical background and personal perspective. Staff felt it was important to tackle the trail project while Paul could still be an integral part of the process.

A Recreational Trails Program grant was applied for through the Alaska State Division of Parks and Recreation in the fall of 2010. The \$21,568 grant was awarded in 2011.



The Refuge's plan was to hire a youth work crew through the Student Conservation Association to clear brush from the trail using hand tools. It was hoped that local youth could be persuaded to join the crew; but commercial fishing and family subsistence responsibilities have, in the past, prevented local youth from participating in similar summer work projects. Despite recruiting efforts by Refuge staff, this proved again to be the case. SCA was selected to provide a crew because they recruit nationally, so plans would not fall through.

The crew SCA provided was an experienced one. One of the two crew leaders had lived



in Naknek, was on an SCA crew in Katmai, and knew the region. All of the youth had been on at least one other SCA crew before, and at least one had been in Alaska previously. Refuge staff were very pleased with the quality of the crew.

Additional volunteers came forward to assist in the project as word began to spread via locally posted notices, Alaska radio news programs, and the Refuge

website. It was decided to form an initial crew to set up a field camp at Ruth Lake, located mid-way along the route, and to use this opportunity to begin flagging the trail, so when the SCA crew arrived, they would be able to go right to work.

Ken Fawcett of Oregon flew to Fairbanks to attend a required bear and firearms safety course so that he and Bill Beattie of Idaho could assist in establishing a field camp and in flagging the trail route. Ken and Bill, who had camped in the Kanatak Trail area 6 years earlier, paid their own way to King Salmon just to be part of the project.



Jack Trout of Oklahoma volunteered to work for the Refuge for part of the summer, and was recruited into the project's initial phase as well. Paul Boskoffsky was a key participant, agreeing to accompany the first group into the field and help locate the trail and landmarks, as well as talking to each crew about the history of Kanatak.

Tom Prang was hired by the Refuge in a short-term position as an archeologist, at the request of the State Historic Preservation Office, and proved invaluable throughout the project.



This initial crew, accompanied by Visitor Services Manager Julia Pinnix, chartered an Otter to fly to Ruth Lake in two trips on June 1, delivering the initial crew and the equipment for the field camp. During a three day stay, a

Weatherport was set up as a primary shelter, an electrified bear fence was erected, and the trail was located and flagged from Ruth Lake to the Kanatak Pass. 70 mile per hour winds provided challenges that led to modifications to improve the safety and security of the camp.



The SCA crew arrived in King Salmon June 5. A three day training program, including bear and firearms safety and a presentation by Paul Boskoffsky, was run by Refuge staff. On June 9, the crew flew to camp in a Refuge plane and a chartered Otter, joined by Tom Prang. Tom assisted the crew in establishing their camp and in getting a clear picture of their task, as well as in locating and flagging more trail sections.

The SCA crew was in the field until June 30. During that time, Tom was able to join them twice



more to help them with locating trail sections. The crew leaders also assisted Tom in locating and recording cultural features. The crew was resupplied once (not all of their food arrived on schedule) and received occasional deliveries of mail and extra



equipment and supplies as Refuge planes were available and able to reach Ruth Lake. They installed an outhouse built for them in King Salmon and flown out in sections. The crew checked in at least once daily for weather updates and to talk over any issues that arose.

During the 21 days the SCA crew were in the field, they cleared brush from the entire section of trail between the mouth of Ruth Lake where it empties into Island Arm, and the

Kanatak Pass. They were conscientious about not disturbing the ground, using loppers, saws, and hatchets to cut off alder and willow close to the surface rather than uprooting brush. With Paul and Tom's guidance, they carefully followed the primary route, rerouting segments where swampy conditions precluded hiking. They hiked over to Kanatak, using a GPS to mark the route and making notes



about problems or confusing areas. All of this work was done under extremely challenging weather conditions.

On June 30, the crew and most of the field camp equipment was pulled out via three chartered Beavers. On July 3, they gave a public presentation at the Refuge office, followed by a



potluck at which they were recognized for their outstanding efforts. On July 4, the crew dispersed to their homes or work commitments.

Another SCA crew working on a national trails inventory project arrived on July 4 and went into the field July 5 to hike the Kanatak Trail. They ran into some trouble route-finding on the Kanatak side, where no clearing had been done. They returned to King Salmon July 7.



1 Photo by Letha Pease, SCA

Tom Prang and Julia Pinnix made another trip to Ruth Lake on July 12 to examine the reported route issues and to complete the



archeology fieldwork portion of the project. A Refuge plane dropped them off, along with Biologist Dom Watts, who was working on small mammal and pollinator studies. In addition to the cultural features Tom had previously

located, an additional dimension was added with the discovery of a large, much older area of use near Ruth Lake, as well as additional house sites across Ruth River and also upstream of Fish Village at the mouth of the river. Sections of 20<sup>th</sup> century road were located and mapped. An eroding midden was examined near the village of Kanatak.



The eastern portion of the Kanatak Trail was hiked and recorded. Confusing intersections were marked to indicate the correct route, and the entire trail from Kanatak to Fish Village was tracked on GPS and landmarks photographed.

This final crew completed the closure of the field camp, packing out nearly all the remaining equipment on a chartered Beaver on July 15. A cache of metal and other heavy items was left for later pickup by Refuge planes. Only the outhouse will remain in place for public use. Signs have been ordered to place at either end of the trail, but the company is delayed in receiving the material; so signs will have to be installed at a later date.



This project has been successful in meeting its goals: clearing brush from the historic trail, awakening public interest, involving youth, and gathering cultural history and information about the area. The Visitor Services Manager will produce maps, flyers, and other interpretive materials for the Refuge website and the King



Salmon Visitor Center. Tom Prang will submit a full archeology report to Regional Archeologist Debbie Corbett. A plan for maintaining the trail will be completed and implemented.

Ideas for continued work on the Kanatak side of the trail are under discussion at the Refuge. An application for National Recreation Trail designation is also under way.

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Preparer's Signature

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Julia Pinnix  
Printed Name

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July 19, 2011  
Date