



Parks and Recreation Committee Agenda

Tuesday, June 9, 2026, 12:00 PM
Harrigan Centennial Hall, 330 Harbor Drive

Members: Chair Candace Rutledge, Vice Chair Steve Black,
Brandon Marx, Katherine Prussian, Manoj Battar, Ben Hughey
Assembly Liaison: Kevin Mosher

I. CALL TO ORDER

II. ROLL CALL

III. AGENDA CHANGES

IV. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items OFF the agenda – not to exceed 3 minutes)*

V. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. May 12, 2026

VI. REPORTS

Chair:

Members:

City Staff:

Assembly Liaison:

Other(s):

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

B. Approval of Commercial Recreation Land Use Permits – requests not in 2026 Land Use Plan

a. Northern Dream Alaska Yacht Charters

C. Discussion/Direction Regarding Revision of SGC 8.05.032 Off-leash Areas and SGC 8.05.033 Off-leash Area Rules

D. Discussion of the Draft Sitka Marine Trails Design Narrative

IX. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items ON or OFF the agenda – not to exceed 3 minutes)*

X. ADJOURNMENT



Parks and Recreation Committee Agenda

Tuesday, May 12, 2026, 12:00 PM
Harrigan Centennial Hall, 330 Harbor Drive

Members: Chair - Candace Rutledge, Vice Chair – Steve Black, Ben Hughey
Brandon Marx, Katherine Prussian, Manoj Battar
Assembly Liaison: Kevin Mosher

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Rutledge called the meeting to order at approximately 12:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: Candace Rutledge, Ben Hughey, Steve Black, Manoj Battar, Brandon Marx, and Katherine Prussian (arrived 12:16 p.m.)

Absent:

Assembly Liaison:

Staff Present: Parks and Recreation Coordinator Kevin Knox, Grounds Maintenance Supervisor Kent Smith, and Deputy Municipal Clerk Holley Bayne

Others: None.

III. AGENDA CHANGES

None.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 14, 2026

Black moved to approve the April 14, 2026, meeting minutes. Motion passed 5-0.

V. REPORTS

Chair: None.

Members: None.

City Staff: Knox provided an overview of current and upcoming Parks and Recreation programs and noted that the Senior Center is temporarily closed due to maintenance. Smith provided an update on current summer projects and reported staffing is at full capacity.

Assembly Liaison: None.

Other(s): Sitka Trail Works - Hughey reported on the upcoming Trail Master Summit and a chainsaw certification course. He also provided updates on upcoming trail projects at Mosquito Cove and Indian River.

VI. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items OFF the agenda - not to exceed 3 minutes)*

None.

VII. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

B. Approval of Commercial Recreation Land Use Permits – requests not in 2026 Land Use Plan

a. Alaskan Luxury Cruises

Committee members discussed visit length, expected usage, and total group size.

Hughey moved to recommend approval of the commercial recreational land use permit as requested by Alaskan Luxury Cruises and hereby make the required determinations regarding this use as listed in SGC 14.10.030(B)(1-3). Motion passed 6-0 by a roll call vote.

b. Sitka Van Tours

Members discussed concerns about maximum capacity at Thimbleberry.

Marx moved to propose the condition of approval that Sitka Van Tours use falls below the approved limits for the Indian River and Thimbleberry land use areas. Motion passed 6-0 by a roll call vote.

Marx moved to recommend approval of the commercial recreational land use permit requested by Sitka Van Tours subject to the proposed condition of approval and hereby make the required determinations regarding this use as listed in SGC 14.10.030(B)(1-3). Motion passed 6-0 by a roll call vote.

c. Alaskan Outlaw Adventures

Members noted that approval of this operator would bring the number of operators in the Baranof Warm Springs area close to the maximum allowable level.

Hughey moved to recommend approval of the commercial recreational land use permit as requested by Alaskan Outlaw Adventures and hereby make the required determinations regarding this use as listed in SGC 14.10.030(B)(1-3). Motion passed 6-0 by a roll call vote.

C. Update on Parks and Recreation Master Plan RFQ and Appoint members to the Sitka Recreation Foundation Work Group

Knox explained an RFQ was issued for a new Master Plan and SRF selected a consultant, with scope and contract negotiations ongoing. Barb Morse emphasized engagement with the Parks & Recreation Committee, and outlined anticipated work including virtual meetings, community surveys, and public meetings. Prussian and Battar volunteered to join the work group.

IX. PERSONS TO BE HEARD *(For items ON or OFF the agenda – not to exceed 3 minutes)*

None.

X. ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting would be June 9, at noon in Harrigan Centennial Hall. Hearing no objection, Chair Rutledge called the meeting to adjournment at 12:45 PM.

Attest:

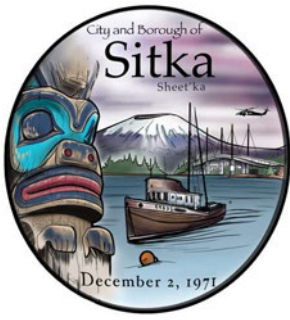
Holley Bayne, Deputy Municipal Clerk

DRAFT

ITEM B

Approval of Commercial Recreation Land Use Permits – requests not in 2026 Land Use Plan

- a. Northern Dream Alaska Yacht Charters**



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMITTEE COMMERCIAL RECREATIONAL LAND USE PERMIT PROCEDURE & MOTION SHEET

Business: Northern Dream Alaska Yacht Charters
Contact: James Stiebritz

I. Chair Introduces Item

II. Applicant Comments & Questions from Committee Members

III. Public Comment

IV. Committee Discussion/Deliberation

V. Possible Motions

- A. Conditions of Approval: SGC 14.10.030(C) states, “*A permit may contain conditions reasonably required for the protection and use of the area for which the permit is granted, including limitations as to time, area, equipment, user loading, traffic, parking, discharges, noise, and other factors.*” If the Committee would like to propose conditions of approval, this motion would be made prior to recommending permit approval:

“I move to propose the following conditions of approval: ___”

- B. Recommending Permit Approval: SGC 14.10.030(B) states, “*The administrator may issue a permit for commercial recreational activities on city and borough lands that are recommended by the parks and recreation committee after public hearing and notice, subject to such conditions as the administrator may impose and only upon a determination that the use as proposed:*
- 1. Will not pollute or degrade the environment, resources, facilities, or atmosphere of the area; and*
 - 2. Will not endanger the public health, safety, and welfare; and*
 - 3. Will not significantly interfere with the use and enjoyment of the area by other members of the public.”*

If the Committee would like to recommend approval of the permit:

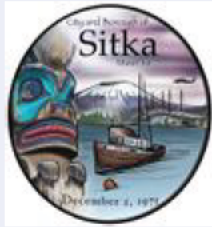
“I move to recommend approval of the commercial recreational land use permit as requested by Northern Dream Alaska Yacht Charters [subject to the proposed conditions of approval] and hereby make the required determinations regarding this use as listed in SGC 14.10.030(B)(1-3). “

- C. Recommending Permit Denial: SGC 14.10.030(D) states, “*The administrator may deny a proposed use upon a written determination that the use, alone or in combination with other uses, would cause an unreasonable level of environmental degradation, or other disturbance to the area. In making such determination, the administrator shall consider the nature and extent of the use, the number of users, and the impacts likely to result from the use, including traffic, noise, public access, loading, the availability of parking and other factors.*” If the Committee would like to recommend denial of the permit:

“ I move to recommend denial of the commercial recreational land use permit as requested by Custom Alaska Cruises because the Committee could not make the following determinations that the use as proposed:

<i>Will not pollute or degrade the environment, resources, facilities, or atmosphere of the area</i>	<i>because:</i>	
<i>Will not endanger the public health, safety, and welfare</i>	<i>because:</i>	
<i>Will not significantly interfere with the use and enjoyment of the area by other members of the public</i>	<i>because:</i>	

*Note: A recommendation of denial can be based on not being able to make one or more of the required determinations under SGC 14.10.030(B)(1-3). The motion and basis of recommended denial only needs to include rationale regarding the one or more required determinations that could not be made.



Commercial Recreational Land Use Permit Application

As required by Sitka General Code 14.10 No person may conduct commercial recreational activities on city and borough of Sitka lands subject to this title except as authorized by a permit issued by the municipal staff as designated by the administrator.

APPLICANT INFORMATION

Business Name northern Dream Alaska Yacht charters LLC

Primary Contact James Stiebritz

Address [REDACTED]

Phone Number [REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

DETAILS OF TOUR OR GUIDED ACTIVITY

Season Start Date Thursday, June 13, 2024

Season End Date Monday, August 31, 2026

Commercial Allocations: For each area, the commercial carrying capacity is indicated in the far left column next to the area name, denoted as (maximum client group size/maximum groups per week). For each area at which you would like to request commercial recreational use, check the "Area of use" box. Additionally, provide your maximum proposed group size (clients only, not including guides) for each area; may not exceed commercial carrying capacity maximum group size. For groups per week, provide your estimated number of groups per week based on a season average that will use each area. Enter an estimated total client number using each area in the far right column.

	Area of use	Group Size	Groups per week	Total Clients
Cross Trail North (12/26)				
Cross Trail South (8/23)				
Gavan Hill Access (7/19)				
Indian River (7/23)				
Thimbleberry/Heart Lake (14/24)				

	Area of use	Group Size	Groups per week	Total Clients
Herring Cove/Beaver Lake (7/18)				
Herring Cove Beach (6/24)				
Blue Lake Road (12/26)				
Blue Lake (6/20)				
Green Lake Road (8/26)				
Green Lake (6/20)				
Swan Lake (6/16)				
Eagle Beach ("Back Beach") (6/18)				
Sitka Sound Islands (6/18)				
Baranof Warm Springs (6/18)	✓	6	.3	54
Goddard Hot Springs (6/14)				
Other (please list area below)				

Details of tour or guided activity: Fully describe tour or activity in each area, including guided activity, outfitting resources provided, typical areas of use, etc.

Northern Dream Alaska yacht charters does a 7 day cruise with 6 guests out of Juneau Ak. one of our traditional stops along the way has been Baranoff hot springs. we have been visiting Baranoff for the last 10 years. Last year was the 1st time I observed a permit notice. sorry for my tardy application but the winter got away from me with other projects. I have become friends with several of the cabin owners who often times give me a shopping list and I bring fresh supplies to them

Please include the following information and attachments with your application.

Certificate of Insurance (City & Borough of Sitka named as additionally insured)

Safety & Operating plan

Additional documentation (as needed/if applicable):
 Copy of permit(s) from other agencies for use of joint-jurisdiction areas. If use of Baranof Warm Springs or Goddard Hot Springs is requested, attach copy of bathing instructions/etiquette provided to clients.

APPLICANT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Commercial Use Regulations:

- Applications and permits issued under [SGC 14.10](#) COMMERCIAL RECREATIONAL USE OF

MUNICIPAL LANDS AND FACILITIES

- Guidance provided by the [2026 Commercial Recreational Land Use Plan](#)
- Permits shall expire on December 31st of each calendar year.
- Permits are valid only for the dates, times, activities, and areas specified.
- Permits are not automatically renewable. Issuance of a permit shall not entitle any priority or preferential consideration for subsequent, new, or additional permits for the same area or for related uses.
- Permit Fees will be invoiced after January 4, 2026 application closure.

Upon acceptance of a permit, all permittees shall execute an instrument under the terms of which the permittee shall agree to indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the City and Borough of Sitka from any and all claims for injury or damage to persons or property suffered in connection with the permittee's activities unless such injury or damage is caused by the gross negligence of the City and Borough of Sitka.

I certify that the business/operator(s) are registered with the CBS Sales Tax Office, unless specifically exempt from collecting and remitting sales taxes for sales outside of City and Borough of Sitka jurisdiction, and have no outstanding judgements to the City and Borough of Sitka.

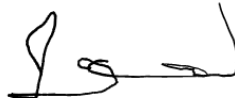
Terms and Conditions

Accepted

Date

Wednesday, May 27, 2026

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized name, possibly "J. [unclear]".

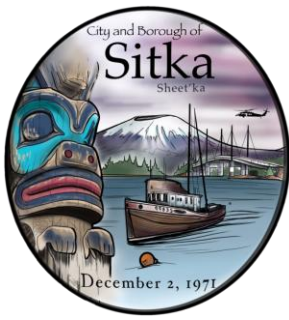
Northern Dream Alaska charters LLC

Safety and operating plan

1. A guide will escort guests at all times while hiking above the boardwalk.
2. The guide will pack a can of bear spray
3. The guide will supply at least 1 other guest with bear spray and explain how to use.
4. The guide will explain what do if you encounter a bear.
5. The guide will pack out any garbage created on the excursion.
6. The guide will assist guests on any slippery rocks while entering the hot springs.
7. The guide and guests agree not to disturb the environment or remove any thing.
8. Respect the land owners at Warm Springs bay
9. The guide will carry a 2 way radio for emergencies.
10. The guide will carry 1st aid kit.

ITEM C

**Discussion/Direction Regarding Revision of SGC 8.05.032 Off-leash Areas and SGC
8.05.033 Off-leash Area Rules**



CITY AND BOROUGH OF SITKA

A COAST GUARD CITY

MEMORANDUM

To: Parks and Recreation Committee Members
From: Connor Dunlap, Maintenance Superintendent
Date: May 28, 2026
Subject: Review of Sitka General Code: Off-Leash Area Designations

Background

Per SGC 8.05.032, multiple sports fields are designated as “off-leash areas”, including Vilandre, Keet Gooshi Heen, and Kimsham Field One (now ‘C’).

In recent years, there has been significant and growing public pressure from residents, youth sports organizations, and community stakeholders to make changes regarding those designations. The city has received a substantial volume of complaints urging a complete reversal of the current off-leash designations on our sports fields, with many advocates calling for strict prohibition of dogs. The primary concern cited is the ongoing challenge of field sanitation, specifically, the unsanitary, hazardous, and recurring presence of dog feces on the fields.

Sitka General Code provides two mechanisms to address this issue:

- Complete Removal of Designations (SGC 8.05.033C): “If the off-leash areas are not used responsibly by dog owners, the assembly at the recommendation of the parks and recreation committee, parks and recreation manager and administrator may strike the ball fields as off-leash areas.”
- Implementation of Additional Rules (SGC 8.05.033B): “The Parks and Recreation Committee may recommend additional rules for off-leash areas, which are subject to the approval of the parks and recreation manager and the administrator, without requiring assembly approval.”

The goal in bringing this issue forward to the Parks and Recreation Committee is not to penalize responsible pet owners, nor is it to ignore the recreational needs of local dog owners. However, our highest priority must be the safety, health, and operational readiness of our public infrastructure.

Though initiating this conversation, the committee is charged with evaluating and weighing potential solutions, including:

- Identify alternative fenced areas to designate for off-leash use.
- Seasonal restrictions to separate athletic use from the off-leash use.
- Complete redesignation of the sports fields.
- Stricter enforcement mechanisms and penalties.

Note: Field enforcement and compliance checks are severely limited by the fact that the city currently employs only one Animal Control Officer. This staffing limitation makes consistent monitoring of multiple sports fields impractical, heavily impacting the feasibility of solutions that rely strictly on increased patrol or ticketing.

The pertinent sections of code and current ACO fee schedule are available on the following pages.

§ 8.05.032. Off-leash areas.

All dogs may be off-leash in the following designated “off-leash areas”; provided, that the keeper and/or custodian is actively engaged with the dog and has competent voice control:

- A. Land more than one-quarter mile from the Sitka road system;
- B. Land along the Indian River Trail;
- C. Land along Green Lake Road;
- D. The area beside or beyond the Jarvis Street Animal Shelter;
- E. The area behind the Sitka High School parking lot;
- F. Land along the Sitka Cross Trail;
- G. Vilandre, Keet Gooshi Heen and Kimsham Field One during times when the sport fields are not scheduled or in use for sports or school activities or when in use by students or players; and
- H. Dog parks.
(S.G.C. 8.04.032; Ord. 02-1656 § 4(A), 2002; Ord. 07-23 § 4, 2007; Ord. 13-19 § 4, 2013)

§ 8.05.033. Off-leash area rules.

- A. The following rules shall be followed by all keepers and/or custodians that use the off-leash areas with their dogs, and shall be posted at fenced off-leash areas:
 - 1. Sports fields designated for off-leash use are open during hours specified on posted signs;
 - 2. Sports fields designated for off-leash use are closed when players or students are present for games, sports or other activities; practice; tournaments and field preparations;
 - 3. Keepers and/or custodians must promptly vacate the sports field whenever unscheduled use by players or students occurs. Sports use by students or players has the priority;
 - 4. Objectionable and dangerous dogs, as defined under SGC §§ 8.05.080 and 8.05.081, and female dogs in heat are prohibited;
 - 5. Dogs shall be leashed upon entering and leaving the fenced sports fields designated for off-leash use;
 - 6. Keepers and/or custodians shall keep their dogs in sight and under “competent voice control” at all times as defined under SGC § 8.05.010;
 - 7. Keepers and/or custodians shall remain with their dogs within the fenced off-

leash area or sports field;

8. Keepers and/or custodians shall clean up and remove any dog's feces left by their dog or be subject to fines or prohibitions;
 9. Holes dug by dogs must be filled by the keeper and/or custodian;
 10. Keepers and/or custodians shall be responsible for all actions of their dogs; and
 11. Aggressive or unruly dogs are not allowed.
- B. The parks and recreation committee may recommend additional rules for off-leash areas, which are subject to the approval of the parks and recreation manager and the administrator, without requiring assembly approval. Additional rules will be posted.
- C. If the off-leash areas are not used responsibly by dog owners, the assembly at the recommendation of the parks and recreation committee, parks and recreation manager and administrator may strike the ball fields as off-leash areas.
- D. Sports fields designated for off-leash use are closed to dog owners when players or students are present for games, sports or other activities and during practices, tournaments and field preparations or as posted at the ballfields. Hours and rules will be posted on signs at each sports field where dog off-leash is permitted.
- E. Any keeper and/or custodian of a dog who violates any rule in this section is subject to the penalties in SGC § 8.05.210 in addition to any penalties under SGC § 14.05.050(H), the administrator or his designee may prohibit any keeper and/or custodian and their dog from using the off-leash area who violates any of the rules of this section.

(S.G.C. 8.04.033; Ord. 13-19 § 4, 2013)

§ 14.05.050. Conditions for use of park and recreation facilities.

- A. A person may not use or occupy a city and borough of Sitka park facility that is managed on a fee and reservation basis without first obtaining a permit from the city and borough of Sitka and paying the required fee. Each day of unauthorized use is a separate offense subject to a \$50.00 fine.
- B. Permittee must have permit and the fee receipt in possession while using the city and borough of Sitka public use facility as directed by the city and borough of Sitka parks and recreation coordinator.
- C. Dogs and other pets must be on a leash around developed facilities, with the exception of the Goddard Hot Springs area and the Tom Young Memorial Cabin and off-leash areas designated in SGC § 8.05.032. Pets are to be under control at all times. Pet owners are required to clean up after pets.
- D. No discharge of firearms, unless in defense of life, is allowed within a half-mile of a developed facility.

- E. It is unlawful to cut standing or live trees. Only dead and down wood can be used for fires.
- F. Littering is prohibited by SGC § 10.45.010(H).
- G. Notwithstanding any other provisions of this section, no dog is allowed on the following designated sports fields or municipal playgrounds except off-leash areas listed in SGC § 8.05.032, except service dogs with the dog keeper and/or custodian. “Service dogs” is defined by SGC § 8.05.010 or state and federal laws. Designated sports fields and municipal playgrounds where non-service dogs will not be allowed include the following:
 - 1. Moller Park fenced ball field;
 - 2. Lower Moller and Kimsham (Krueger) Multiuse Fields;
 - 3. Sports fields at Kimsham Recreational Complex except fenced Kimsham Field “D”, Baranof, Vilandre and Keet Gooshi Heen ball fields as listed as “off-leash areas” under SGC § 8.05.032; and
 - 4. Municipal playgrounds to include Crescent Harbor Park and Moller Park East and West.
- H. Designated areas listed in subsection G of this section will be posted with signs regarding the ban on non-service dogs and fines. In addition to applicable fines or charges for violating other code provisions, including defecation or off-leash offenses, fines for violating subsection G of this section are as follows:
 - 1. Three hundred dollars for violating subsection (G)(1) of this section, Moller Park fenced ball field;
 - 2. One hundred dollars for designated areas in subsections (G)(2) and (G)(4) of this section; and
 - 3. One hundred dollars for a non-service dog on fenced Kimsham Field One, Baranof, Vilandre and Keet Gooshi Heen ball fields as listed as “off-leash areas” during scheduled sports events, school activities or when the area is in use by students or players.

(S.G.C. 23.30.020; Ord. 05-13 § 4, 2005; Ord. 12-42 § 4, 2012; Ord. 13-18 § 4, 2013; Ord. 25-06 § 4, 2025)

FINE SCHEDULE FOR ANIMAL CONTROL OFFENSES

SGC 8.05.210

A defendant charged with one of the offenses below may dispose of the charges as provided in AS 12.25.195-.230, without court appearance, by paying the fine amount listed in the fine schedule below, plus the applicable state surcharge required by AS 12.55.039 and AS 29.25.074.

Ordinance	Offense Description	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th and subsequent offenses
8.05.020	Licensing	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.030	Failure to display	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.031(A)	Running at Large	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.031(C)	Dog in open truck	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$400
8.05.033(A)(1)-(A)(11)	Off-leash area rules	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.060	Dog Impound Fees	\$50	\$100	\$150	\$300
8.05.060	Cat Impound Fees	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.060	Kennel Fee Daily	\$10			
8.05.070	Dog in season	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$400
8.05.080(A)	Objectionable dog – barking	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.080(B)	Objectionable dog – defecate, dig or damage property	\$25	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.080(C)	Objectionable dog – snap, chase, menace	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.080(D)	Objectionable dog – disturb wildlife	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.080(E)	Objectionable – other animal running at large	\$25	\$50	\$100	\$300
8.05.080(F)	Objectionable dog – bite	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.081	Potentially dangerous and dangerous dogs	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.084	On-premises confinement	\$50	MCA		
8.05.085	Off-premises confinement	\$50	MCA		
8.05.086	Notification of change of status	\$50	MCA		
8.05.087	Signs for potentially or dangerous dog	\$50	MCA		
8.05.088	Dangerous tag displayed	\$50	MCA		
8.05.092	Sanitary disposal requirements	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.093	Use of dog park	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.100	Immunization for rabies	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.110	Dead animals	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.160	Keeper of domestic animal in public building	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
8.05.170	Owner of public building	\$50	\$100	\$200	\$400
14.05.050 (G)(1)	Moller Park fenced ball field	\$300	\$350	\$400	\$500
14.05.050 (G)(2)	Lower Moller and Kimsham (Krueger) Multiuse Fields	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$500
14.05.050 (G)(3)	Sports fields at Kimsham Rec Center	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$500
14.05.050 (G)(4)	Municipal playgrounds	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$500

If the offense is not listed on this table, then a court appearance is mandatory.

Effective Date: October 28, 2015.

ITEM D

Discussion of the Draft Sitka Marine Trails Design Narrative

Sitka Marine Trails Design Narrative

2026

DRAFT



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TABLE OF ACRONYMS

Alaska Department of Fish and Game ADF&G
Alaska Department of Natural Resources AK DNR
City and Borough of Sitka CBS
Land Use Designations LUDs
National Environmental Policy Act NEPA
National Historic Preservation Act NHPA
State Historic Preservation Office/Officer SHPO
Sheet'ká Kwáan Sitka Tribe of Alaska STA
Special Use Permit SUP
Tongass Land Management Plan TLMP
United States Army Corps of Engineers USACE
United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service USDA FS

Project Summary

The Sitka Marine Trail System is a proposed network designed to formalize access to the world-class paddling of Sitka Sound. Developed by Sitka Trail Works and a Citizen Advisory Committee, the project addresses a documented community desire for navigable water routes and low-impact coastal campsites. The system encompasses three primary routes featuring primitive improvements such as leveled tent pads, bear hangs, and navigational markers.

This design narrative is informed by research on comparable marine trail systems, on-the-ground surveys, key stakeholder conversations and public engagement.

By utilizing the water as a natural corridor, the trail provides a cost-effective alternative to traditional land-based trails while dispersing tourism away from high-use areas. The project prioritizes cultural preservation through consultation with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska and adheres to a multi-jurisdictional permitting roadmap involving federal, state, and local agencies. Implementation focuses on educational outreach, water safety, and environmental stewardship via a collaborative maintenance framework with local outfitters. This initiative seeks to foster a deeper connection to the natural and cultural heritage of Lingít Aaní by encouraging personal connection to the spectacular publically-owned coastline.

What is a Marine Trail?

A marine trail is a defined water route or a series of destinations that serves as a trip planning and orientation tool for potential users. These trails enhance access to coastal regions for recreational pursuits such as kayaking and canoeing, as well as for subsistence harvesting. By providing waypoints, maps, and information on local wildlife, habitats, and points of interest, marine trails are designed to encourage outdoor recreation, foster an appreciation of marine ecosystems, and promote responsible waterway use.

Marine Trail Examples

The Maine Islands Trail (est. 1988) and Cascadia Marine Trail (est. 1993) offer two well-known examples of established marine trail systems in the Lower 48. Kachemak Bay Marine Trail in Homer (est. 2012) and the Resurrection Bay Marine Trail in Seward provide closer-to-home case studies of how established routes can benefit locals and visitors alike. By clearly mapping pull-outs, marine trails lower a barrier to accessing public lands and assist paddlers in developing a trip plan.

Why Establish a Marine Trail?

So many Sitkans live next to world class paddling, but haven't explored their backyard waterways. The publishing of a water trail may provide the needed jumping off point for venturing into the lands and waters surrounding Sitka.

Establishing a Marine Trail in Sitka provides an opportunity to help people get outdoors, while directing use to the most suitable locations. A site suitability study was the core of this planning effort to ensure any growth in recreation activity was a net community benefit. Site selection criteria prioritized safety, avoidance of crowding, and the protection of cultural resources.

Why Sitka Sound

Nestled along the Outer Coast, Sitka Sound creates a stunning backdrop for exceptional ocean paddling. For those wanting to explore the labyrinth of islands and rugged coastline, Sitka offers towering cliffs, lush temperate rainforest, endless hidden coves, and pristine beaches. The islands within the Sound offer some protection from the open ocean, making the area often suitable for beginner paddlers. For more experienced folks looking to explore further out, Sitka is an ideal launching point to adventure along the edges of the Sound and beyond up and down the Outer Coast and into the Inside Passage.

Benefits of Marine Trails

Benefit to Locals

Developing a marine trail system will allow locals to more deeply connect with this truly remarkable place they get to call home. It will create opportunities to venture off the road system and onto public lands only accessible by boat. For people with bad knees or other mobility issues, paddling offers a lower impact way to get exercise outdoors.

Many Sitkans are already taking advantage of the beautiful boat-accessible destinations around Sitka Sound, and some nearby beaches are already over-used. The sites of the marine trail were specifically selected to avoid existing popular day use and overnight sites. Minimizing excess traffic to popular sites by using other still highly enjoyable, pristine areas will help manage conservation efforts while keeping those popular sites more available to locals. Fortunately, kayakers can access many sites that are too shallow or rocky for motorcraft to enter.

Dissemination of Knowledge

A formalized marine trail system backed by an organization will create opportunities to educate locals and visitors alike in safety and stewardship best practices as well as share local cultural, societal, and environmental information. This knowledge sharing will be possible through the materials that will supplement the online trail maps as well as by outfitters during guided trips.

Celebration of Tradition

Waterways have always served as means of transport in Southeast Alaska. Reviving an appreciation for paddling provides an opportunity to celebrate traditional Lingít canoe routes and the rich cultural heritage of the people



Photo: Ryan Morse

of the tides. Much of Lingít oral history is woven into coastal placenames, offering another means of connecting locals and visitors with the stories and meaning of Lingít Aani. This draft design narrative does not capture the immense potential for cultural interpretation and education associated with traveling by canoe through Lingít Aani. Further refinements of the marine trail concept could incorporate stories like Salmon Boy in Nakwasina that connect users to the history of the land.

Tourism Dispersal

With the increase in visitors to Sitka in recent years, a marine trails system will aid in dispersal of tourists by “expanding the pie” through increasing the number of accessible recreation options. Doing so will spread the tourists out across more trails with the goal of decreasing the number of people on any one trail. By creating more opportunities for water access, it will also open more opportunities for visitors to immerse themselves in Sitka’s landscape in a meaningful way.

Through the process of seeking to disperse users, we made a conscious effort to not include already high-use Forest Service Cabins specifically along these routes. Icons for these cabins are included on our maps with

the idea that they make excellent reference points. Navigating visitors to these limited cabins does not align with the goals of the project, and we are confident that locals with interest in utilizing these cabins will be able to make cabin reservations and follow these marine trail routes to navigate to them. That being said, we understand these Forest Service cabins are federally owned, and any visitors are welcome to reserve them through the Forest Service.

Financial Sustainability

Trails in the rugged rainforest are costly to develop and maintain, but a trail network over water can be rapidly extended for miles with little additional investment. Marine trails leverage Sitka’s competitive advantage, offering outer coast island hopping found in few other places in the world.

Sitka Sound provides a world-class paddling haven with awe-inspiring scenery, pristine waters, and abundant wildlife.



Project Background

Addressing a Community Need

In 2022, Sitka Trail Works was developing the second edition of the Sitka Trail Plan, compiling extensive public engagement to understand the needs and desires of the community regarding outdoor recreation infrastructure. In a widely distributed public survey, a series of questions were included on water trails. The results highlighted a clear community need: nearly 20% of respondents cited identifying routes as a significant barrier to paddling more, (though below the barriers of weather and boat ownership). More compellingly, 55% said they would paddle more if a water trail existed, and 78% believed Sitka would benefit from one. Given Sitka’s spectacular and unique Outer Coast shoreline and its largely developed road-system coastline, marine trails offer an accessible and achievable way to explore the shore, addressing the route-finding barrier identified by the community.

Following that public support, the 2023 Sitka Trail Plan incorporated marine trails as one of its proposed trail projects. For marine trails, the proposed plan seeks “to increase opportunities for locals and visitors to access low impact recreation with much lower upfront and ongoing public costs” (2023 Sitka Trail Plan, p. 84).



Marine Trails

> Project Description

For thousands of years, Lingít people traveled the waterways of Southeast Alaska, using canoes as their primary mode of transportation. Sitka has the opportunity to celebrate this heritage and reinvigorate the use of human-powered watercraft by establishing marine trails. A marine or water trail is a “stretch of shoreline or ocean that has been mapped out with the intent to create an educational, scenic, and challenging experience for recreational canoeers and kayakers.”²³ While land-based trails are difficult and expensive to build in this mountainous rainforest, dozens of miles of new marine trails could be designated with minimal on-the-ground improvements.

> Public Needs Met

A marine trail network would be to increase access to low impact recreation for locals and visitors with much lower upfront and ongoing public costs. Paddling provides many of the same health and wellness benefits as hiking but is accessible to people with mobility impairments. People with knee pain and families with young children can more easily adventure on the water than on land. When asked what environments they would most like to see new trails in, more respondents to the 2022 General Survey requested trails on the coast than in the alpine, in old growth, or in any other environment. Sitka’s shoreline is spectacular and unique among Southeast Alaska given the position on the outer coast and historic volcanic activity. Knowing what route to take was one of the top

²³ National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program. Water Trail Planning 101

four barriers that survey respondents listed that keep them from paddling more. Most respondents indicated they personally would be likely or very likely to paddle more if there were water trails; more broadly, they indicated Sitka as a whole would benefit from a water trail. Given that most of Sitka’s road-system coastline is developed, marine trails offer an accessible and achievable way to explore the shore.

> Planning & Design

Developing a marine trail system will require a new planning process to develop a vision, determine desired route distances, identify potential landings, design overnight facilities, solicit public feedback, engage land management agencies, and eventually develop promotional materials and maintenance plans. Funding from the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy has been designated to launch this planning process. Given the popularity of boating in Sitka, planners will need to identify underused landing sites that minimize conflict with existing uses.

> Responsible Agency & Participants

Forest Service, City & Borough of Sitka, State of Alaska

> Cost Estimate (not applicable)

Locally Developed Goals

In 2024, Sitka Trail Works convened a citizen advisory committee of knowledgeable local paddlers to consult on the development of a marine trail system proposal.

Committee members agreed that a marine trail offered an opportunity for locals and visitors to access low impact, high return recreation and adopted the guiding principles from the Trail Plan. Those goals ensured that projects prioritized health, equity, economy, capacity and stewardship.

Implementing those goals in the context of a marine trail required adding the following project specific strategies:

1. Minimize conflict by identifying underused sites to disperse users and “expand the pie”
2. Disseminate knowledge to residents and visitors to expand opportunity
3. Showcase Sitka’s natural and cultural landscapes through the traditional means of travel
4. Celebrate Lingít traditional uses of waterways while protecting cultural resources
5. Leverage communications opportunity to educate users on safety and stewardship best practices
6. Create a forum for discussing appropriate commercial use

Goals of the Sitka Trail Plan



Route Selection

Implementing these strategies in the selection of a route for the Marine Trail required the development of a series of site selection criteria that could be quantitatively assessed for each potential location as a way to prioritize sites that provided the greatest value and benefit.

The following attributes were used in establishing a point system, where each site received a 0-5 rating for each attribute. Averages were calculated, with higher scores representing better suitability.

1. Underutilized (Not a site currently frequented by locals or motorized users)
2. Low visibility (Off the beaten track / not exposed to regular motorized traffic)
3. Beach quality for landing
4. Low exposure (Protectedness from ocean swell or predominant wind direction)
5. Easy freshwater access on site
6. Good developability / site potential
7. Probability of bear activity

Beyond the weighted scoring system, two specific factors served as non-negotiable filters for site viability. Cultural resources and agency approval function as go/no go assessments.

Inventory Process

Site Surveys

1. South route survey – June 3rd, 2024
2. Magic Island to Middle Island route survey - June 17th, 2024
3. Inside Taigud site check – April 3rd, 2025
4. North Krestof site check – November 1st, 2024
5. South Krestof site check – November 12th, 2025

Cultural Resources

A list of inventoried sites was shared with the USDA FS Sitka archaeological staff to cross reference with agency data identifying culturally sensitive locations around Sitka. The goal in this process was to ensure sites and corresponding potential routes were not encroaching on known cultural sites so as to mitigate disturbance of these areas.

Sitka Trail Works met with staff of Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) to review the proposed route and shoreline sites for cultural sensitivity. Based on feedback in the meeting, the route was shifted and several sites removed. A list of proposed sites was shared for STA to review in the first draft of the route, and again after public and STA feedback led to a shift in the route.

Other Inventory Process Criteria

Additional criteria were considered beyond the baseline averages for site selection including the following:

1. Cultural sensitivity / USDA Forest Service archeological info
2. Distance from town
3. Site size (group or individual)
4. Tide elevation that the landing can be assessed
5. Max or minimum tide height for landing
6. Terrain aspect of site and sun exposure
7. Other notes on site such as site attractiveness, points of interest, food gathering activities, etc.



Photo by Lee House

Proposed Marine Trail System

Key Components

Physical Trail Development

The Sitka Marine Trail system is primarily a network of safe pull-out sites for people exploring Sitka Sound by watercraft. Some sites will be aimed at providing safe stopovers for breaks while others will have slightly more developed but still primitive tent camp sites. Slight improvements such as clearing brush and leveling tent pads will make currently underutilized sites appealing stopover spots for paddlers.

In the future, if the proposed marine trail system is successful and it is desired by the community, additional site improvements to sites such as constructing shelters could be made. In addition, the community may wish to explore geographic expansion of the trail network. Because site development is minimal, adding additional sites and suggested routes along those sites can be achieved with relatively low effort compared to land trails.

Digital Assets

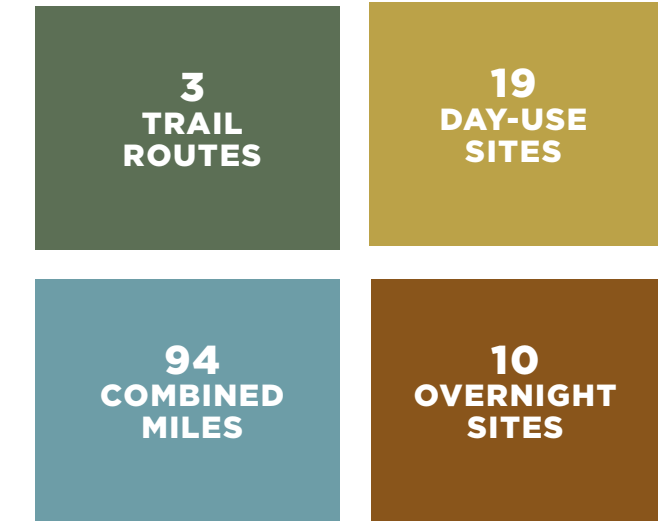
A website with a map of the marine trail will be the primary informational hub for the trail system. The website will house various navigational and educational information like an interactive map, downloadable charts, trip planning information, safety information, suggested itineraries, and additional resources from boating safety organizations and agencies.

Paper Assets

A printed rack card or pocket guide could be produced as a corollary to the website, providing in-person information about the marine trail network to be distributed by partners like the Maritime Heritage Society.

Trail Statistics

The proposed trail network includes the following:



Routes

The proposed Sitka Marine Trail system features three primary routes designed to provide a broad range of access across the diverse environments of Sitka Sound. The suggested routes start from the Japonski Island Boathouse, although launching elsewhere along the road system, e.g. Magic Island or Back Beach, will be more appealing for some users. The world-class paddling of Sitka's unique outer coast offers some more beginner friendly destinations close by, but any excursion comes with risks. Materials accompanying the Marine Trail would strongly encourage paddlers to monitor local weather and tide forecasts closely or use Sitka's professional guiding services to mitigate the inherent risks of open-water navigation.

The Causeway / Exploring WWII Relics Route

Route Length	7 miles
Pullouts	5
Duration	Half day, full day, or Overnight (plenty to explore on the Causeway)
Trail Type	Out-and-back or loop

Experience Level

Beginner/Intermediate: Novice paddlers may consider a trip to Sasedni Landing in Whiting Harbor, taking an out-and-back route to avoid the potential waves that can stack up on the outside of Mahknati Island and the south side of the Causeway. In calm water, making the full loop as a beginner is manageable.

Route Description

Paddle through Sitka's channel, past scenic harbors with sweeping views of the City and into Sitka Sound to reach a man made, World War II causeway with remaining military defense relics (ammunition magazines, lookouts, gun emplacements, and the headquarters command center), beaches, and an island-to-island hiking trail. Before seizure by the US military, the islands were important harvesting sites for Lingit clans.

Caution

In addition to the general cautions provided to all paddlers, hazards noted for users of this route will include: exposure on outside of the Causeway, traffic in the harbor channel, restrictions on airport and USCG base access, cultural sensitivity, WWII bunkhouse risks.

Stopovers

SITE	DAY SITE	OVERNIGHT	FRESH WATER
John Brown's Beach	Ⓜ		Not present
Sasedni Landing (NE side)	Ⓜ	Ⓢ	*Not safe for consumption
Sasedni Landing (SW side)	Ⓜ	Ⓢ	*Not safe for consumption
Makhanati Island (north side)	Ⓜ		*Not safe for consumption
Kirushkin Island (east side)	Ⓜ		*Not safe for consumption

*While remediation of toxic contaminants in the soil along the Causeway occurred in 2016, leftover from military activity, consumption of water and plants from these Islands is not recommended. Bring your own water.



Nakwasina North Route

Route Length	44.6 miles
Pullouts	9
Duration	Half day, full day, or 1-3 overnights for the entire route
Trail Type	Out-and-back or loop

Experience Level

Beginner/Intermediate: Novice paddlers, after checking the direction, intensity and forecast of the wind, could consider either launching from Middle Island and touring the nearby islands, or launching from Starrigavan Bay and heading straight to Nakwasina, avoiding the high traffic in Olga Straits.

Route Description

Starting from the Japonski Island Boathouse or at any point north along the road system, this route weaves between dozens of minor islands toward a circumnavigation of Halleck Island via Nakwasina Passage. Paddlers will cross in and out of waters exposed to the open Sitka Sound with views of Mt. Edgecumbe volcano to the uninhabited beaches and forested old growth of Crow Island. With exposed crossings all less than a mile long, this route offers a relatively protected exploration of Sitka's inland waterways. The full Nakwasina loop overlaps with the Alaska Marine Highway in Olga Strait, a busy thoroughfare for fishing boats, but the route can be easily modified as an out-and-back to avoid those five miles of high traffic. Nakwasina's shores are dotted with rich estuaries, teeming with waterfowl, blacktail deer and brown bears.

Caution

In addition to the general cautions provided to all paddlers, hazards noted for users of this route will include: high traffic in Olga Strait, high volume tourism and cultural sensitivity in Siginaka Islands, private land holdings along the route, locations of higher swell exposure.

Stopovers

SITE	DAY SITE	OVERNIGHT	FRESH WATER
Abalone Island	Ⓜ		Not present
Middle Island Tombolo (South)	Ⓜ	Ⓜ	*Nearby
Crow Island (West beach)	Ⓜ	Ⓜ	Not present
Little Gavanski (South beach)	Ⓜ		Not present
Big Gavanski	Ⓜ		Not present
Eastern Bay	Ⓜ	Ⓜ	Onsite
Olga Point Estuary	Ⓜ	Ⓜ	Onsite
Halleck Island (North shore)	Ⓜ		Onsite
Nakwasina Sound (SE shore)	Ⓜ		*Nearby

*Nearby fresh water indicates a source is within walking distance; paddling is not required.



South Sitka Coastline Route

Route Length	42.6 miles
Pullouts	6
Duration	Half day, full day, or 1-3 overnights for the entire route depending on skill level, weather, and pace.
Trail Type	Out-and-back or loop

Experience Level

Beginner/Intermediate: While the southern portion of this route features constricted passages and exposed stretches, intermediate paddlers can find an excellent overnight destination in the closest campsites at Leeskoffskaia and Sandy Cove if conditions allow for a crossing of Eastern Channel.

Route Description

Weave through islands, across the Eastern Channel, and down along the rugged coastline. Spot lounging sea lions, sea otters and whales as well as river otters, black-tailed deer, brown bears, and mink. This route provides picturesque views of Mt. Edgecumbe volcano, jagged ocean rocks covered in barnacles, and sprawling kelp forests. Watch fishing vessels navigate these waters, harvesting wild Pacific salmon. Mossy open areas make for good camping and exploration inside the treelines and along the beaches at these stopover sites. On clear days, views of the horizon provide a snapshot of the expansive open ocean.

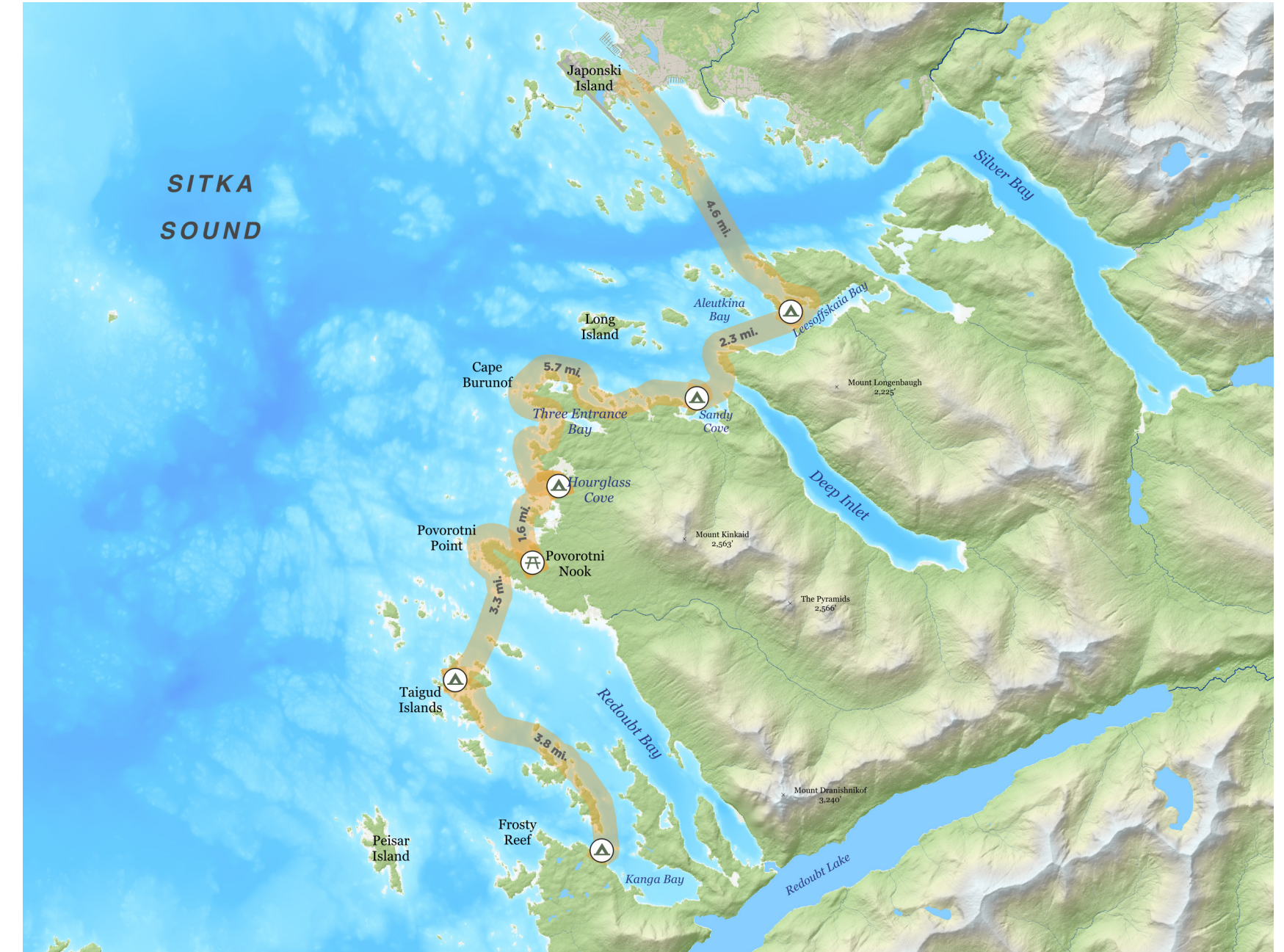
Caution

In addition to the general cautions provided to all paddlers, hazards noted for users of this route will include: high level of weather exposure and vessel traffic, with details on elevated dangers of both in constricted passages.

Stopovers

SITE	DAY SITE	OVERNIGHT	FRESH WATER
Leeskoffskaia Bay (Island at Entrance)	⚓	⚓	Not present
Sandy Cove (East)	⚓	⚓	*Nearby
Hour Glass Cove	⚓	⚓	*Nearby
Povorotni Nook	⚓		*Nearby
Northeast Taigud Island	⚓	⚓	Not present
Kanga Bay	⚓	⚓	Not present

*Nearby fresh water indicates a source is within walking distance; paddling is not required.



Design Standards

The marine trail camping sites will be developed with a rustic, minimalist aesthetic, using native materials whenever possible. Each site will consist of a tent pad, tarp hang, fire ring, and bear hang.

Tent Pad Development

The lack of flat, well-drained ground is a barrier to camping in Sitka Sound, so the primary site improvement would be establishing tent pads.

With a goal of minimal ground disturbance or cutting of roots, a small area will be cleared of brush and leveled. Then a simple tent pad will be constructed by hauling beach logs into a rectangle and filling with beach gravel.



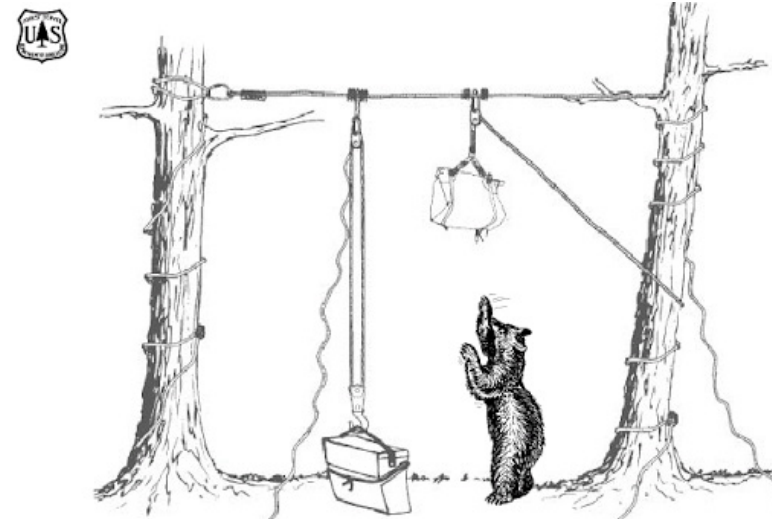
Sketch generated with AI

Tarp Hang

When local trees are well positioned, nylon webbing tree straps will be safely affixed to allow campers an easy tarp hang over camp, bringing their own rope or cord to tie to the permanently established anchor points.

Bear Hang

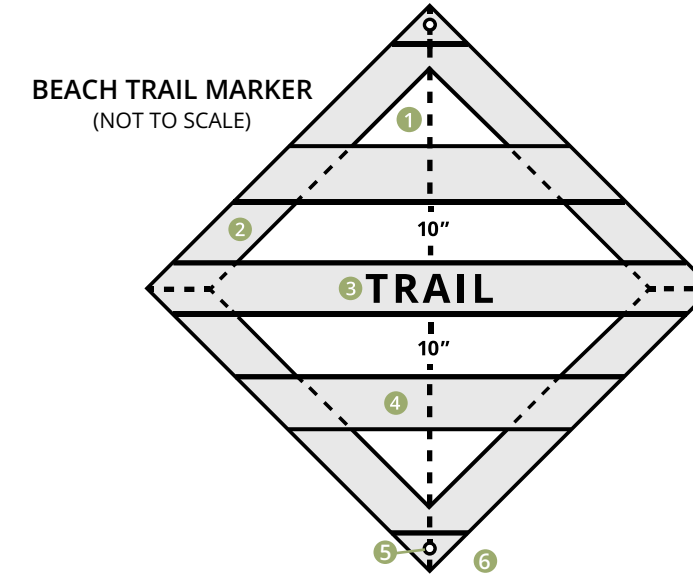
A permanent and easy-to-use bear hang will be an important feature of the primitive camp sites, which users will be required to use. There are a number of ways to create simple rigging with rope, pulleys and carabiners that can be left in a tree for campers to quickly string up their food bag. The particular design of the pulley system may depend on the site's particular tree selection, but the corresponding graphic shows one easy system.



Vachowski, Brian. November 1994. Low-Impact Food Hoists. USDA Forest Service Technology & Development Program. FS-587. [fs.usda.gov/t-d/pubs/pdfpubs/pdf95232809/pdf95232809Pdpi72.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/t-d/pubs/pdfpubs/pdf95232809/pdf95232809Pdpi72.pdf)

Signs (Diamond Pallet in a Tree)

A simple sign created from recycled pallets can be crafted in the shape of a diamond and painted to serve as a navigational guide and site location marker. This design follows the USDA Forest Service design standards for Beach Trail Marker and is found throughout the region, including on the Shelikof Trail on Kruzof Island.



Sign is designed for field construction. Mount on tree or other object at least 6' above ground for good view of water. Paint international orange on white background with black letters.

- 1 ¼ x 4' x 4' Plywood inserted in back. Attached with galvanized nails. Paint white.
- 2 2" x 6" Frame 5' on a side connected with galvanized nails, international orange
- 3 6" Lettering
- 4 1" x 8" Cross strips, international orange
- 5 ¼" Holes for mounting
- 6 2" Corner brace

Signage information borrowed from the USDA Forest Service Region 10 Trails Construction and Maintenance Guide, Chapter X, page 73.

Marine Trails Design and Construction Estimate

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY	LABOR	MATERIALS	COST
Tent Pad					
	Move locally sourced logs and beach gravel. Secure them with rebar.	1	\$560	\$50	\$610
Tarp Hang					
	Treesaver straps	2		\$70	\$70
	2" Pulley	1		\$60	\$60
	Anodized carabiners	2		\$40	\$40
	Rope (60')	1		\$80	\$80
Bear Hang					
	Treesaver straps	2		\$70	\$70
	Anodized carabiners	2		\$120	\$120
	Rope (100')	1		\$100	\$100
Sign					
	Old pallets	2	\$60		\$60
	Nails			\$10	\$10
	Paint	1		\$60	\$60
	Cord to tie to tree			\$15	\$15
Boat Transport					
	Variable				
Totals			\$620	\$675	\$1295

Planning Direction and Permitting

Implementing the Sitka Marine Trail System requires a multi-jurisdictional approach. The project area spans Federal, State, and Municipal lands, each with distinct regulatory hurdles. Below is the step-by-step process for each land manager and regulatory agency.



Federal: Tongass National Forest Service (USDA FS)

Most upland sites fall within the Tongass National Forest. The 2016 Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) dictates what is allowed based on Land Use Designations (LUDs). However, the Forest is currently undergoing a Plan revision process that will alter the following management approach.

Anticipated LUDs: Most coastal sites are likely Semi-Remote Recreation or Old-Growth Habitat. Both generally allow for primitive recreation and low-impact campsites.

NEPA Process

1. **Level of Review:** This project likely qualifies for a Categorical Exclusion (CE) under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(1) (construction/reconstruction of low-impact trails) or (e)(20) (restoring/rehabilitating sites).
2. **Scoping:** The USDA FS will conduct a 30-day public scoping period to identify "extraordinary circumstances" (e.g., T&E species, sensitive watersheds).

3. Avenues for Completion:

- **In-House:** Lower cost, but subject to USDA FS staff availability (typically 6–18 months).
- **Contracted:** Sitka Trail Works (STW) hires a consultant to write the CE document; USDA FS reviews and signs. Faster but higher upfront cost.

NHPA (Section 106)

1. **Survey:** A cultural resource survey of each proposed campsite is required to identify archaeological or historic sites.
2. **Consultation:** USDA FS consults with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Sitka Tribe of Alaska.
3. **Timeline:** Usually concurrent with NEPA; 30-day SHPO review period per finding.

Federal Nexus: If federal funding is received for construction, all sites will have to undergo NEPA and NHPA review.



Photo by Lione Clare



State: Alaska Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

Alaska DNR manages the Fort Rousseau WWII Causeway State Historic Park and the intertidal zone along the entire coast. Accessing campsites from the water involves crossing state tidelands.

Intertidal Access: Non-commercial use of tidelands is a "Generally Allowed Use" (11 AAC 96.020). Personal camping is allowed for up to 14 days without a permit.

Permitting for Improvements: A Land Use Permit is required if any structures are placed in the intertidal zone (e.g., a primitive landing ramp or signs) or in the State Park.

Step 1. Submit a Land Use Application to the DNR Southeast Regional Office.

Step 2. DNR conducts an agency and public notice period.

- **Archaeological Clearance:** Because the Causeway is a Historic Park, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) must approve any ground-disturbing activity (like staking a bear hang or leveling a pad) to ensure it doesn't damage hidden WWII infrastructure or indigenous cultural sites.
- **Toxin Monitoring:** Since parts of the park are still under monitoring for toxins (specifically the intertidal zones near Virublennoi), reviewing the proposal with DEC and the Army Corps of Engineers will ensure proposed campsites are in "cleared" zones.

Step 3. Final Consistency Review with the Northern Southeast Area Plan.

Permitting for Beach Gravel: Approval from AK DNR will also be required to use beach gravel, which is proposed as the fill material for tent pads. Improvements to sites located on CBS-managed lands will require a path of multi-committee review and Assembly approval. Development on municipal lands is governed by SGC Title 23 (Parks and Recreation).

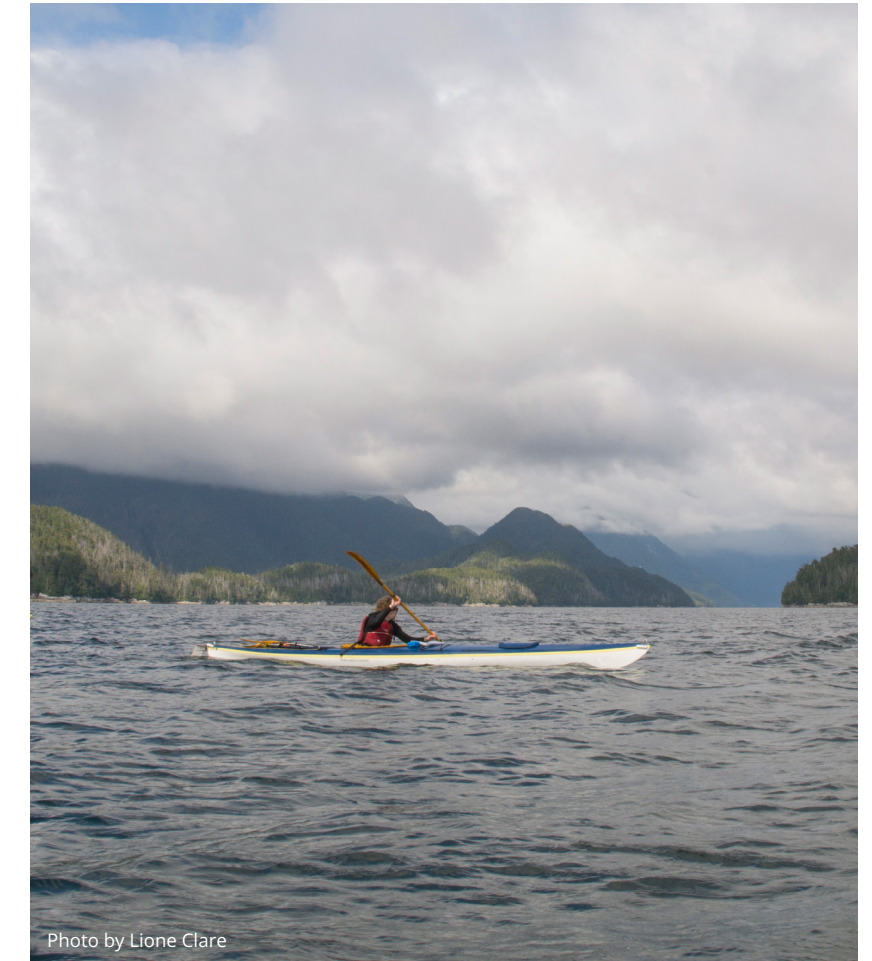


Photo by Lione Clare



Municipal:
City and Borough
of Sitka (CBS)

Staff Review: The proposal will first be discussed with staff leadership in the Planning, Parks & Rec, and Public Works departments.

Parks & Recreation Committee Review: The proposal will then be presented to the Committee for a formal recommendation. Review focuses on community alignment and the mitigation of potential conflicts with existing motorized watercraft users.

Planning & Zoning: Most coastal municipal parcels are zoned Public (P). Primitive improvements are generally compatible; however, a Site Plan Review or Conditional Use Permit (CUP) may be required if the Planning Department determines the improvements constitute significant site alterations.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): Final project authorization by the Municipal Assembly will likely be contingent upon an MOU between CBS and Sitka Trail Works. This document could define maintenance responsibilities, liability coverage, and removal protocols.



Photo by Lione Clare



Technical Regulatory Agency:
US Army Corps
of Engineers (USACE)

Technical permits are required for specific environmental triggers regardless of land ownership.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE): Section 404/10 Permits: Any placement of "fill" or structures in navigable waters requires a Nationwide Permit (NWP) 42 for recreational facilities. A Pre-Construction Notification (PCN) must be submitted to verify minimal environmental impact. It is unlikely that any of the proposed site improvements would require a NWP.



Technical Regulatory Agency:
Alaska Department
of Fish & Game (ADF&G)

Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Fish Habitat Permit (Title 16): Sites located near anadromous (salmon) streams require review by the ADF&G Habitat Section. This ensures construction does not interfere with spawning or fish passage. The majority of proposed sites avoid streams and no construction is proposed in the immediate riparian zone.

Overview

AGENCY	JURISDICTION	REQUIRED ACTION
USDA FS	Uplands (Tongass)	NEPA (Categorical Exclusion) + NHPA Section 106
AK DNR	Tidelands & Causeway	Special Use Permit (SUP) & Land Use Permit
CBS	Municipal Land	Parks & Rec Recommendation; Assembly MOU
USACE	Navigable Waters/Fill	Nationwide Permit likely not required
ADF&G	Anadromous Streams	Fish Habitat Permit likely not required



Photo by Lione Clare

Safety & User Management

Paddling safety was a primary concern voiced during the public engagement process. Fortunately, if the track record of other Alaskan marine trails is applicable, the actual risk may be lower than perceived. In the last 15 years, the Alaska DNR Office of Boating Safety has reported zero fatalities on the Kachemak Bay Water Trail and Resurrection Bay Marine Trails. However, the Office reported two kayak fatalities in that time period in Sitka, both attributed to a combination of drinking, poor conditions, and a lack of a PFD.

While the cold and volatile waters of Sitka Sound do exhibit objective hazards, risk to users is primarily a question of decision-making and behavior. While merely anecdotal, the fact that Sitka, without a marine trail, has had more kayak fatalities than Seward in the last 15 years, suggests that the educational outreach paired with establishing a marine trail could actually reduce community risk.

Establishing a marine trail in Sitka will require a corollary effort in public outreach and education to ensure that any new paddlers are armed with the necessary skills and knowledge. Fortunately, a community of water safety educators is growing in Sitka. Experienced local paddlers and long-time Sitkans have joined the US Coast Guard's Auxiliary Paddlecraft (AUXPAD) program to promote water safety. AUXPAD aims to reduce accidents by educating users on safety equipment and situational awareness through on-water and on-shore outreach. The launch and growth of several local kayak guiding companies in recent years means that Sitka now hosts an impressive number of American Canoe Association certified instructors per capita. Local kayak guides have already begun supporting paddling safety education through public outreach and training events. And the locally-based Alaska Marine Safety Education Association (AMSEA) remains the most prolific and robust

educational institution, providing regular trainings open to the public. In addition, the Alaska DNR Office of Boating Safety has offered to provide their curriculum through local training.

Safety

A marine trail initiative in Sitka offers an opportunity to raise awareness about the risks and opportunities of open water paddling. A new "trail" will precipitate public interest, which can be channeled into a variety of educational and training programs, online and in person.

An official website of the marine trail website can serve as a hub, but will not be the exclusive source of information. The website can include links to definitive sources on cold water immersion, safety equipment, trip planning and navigation, weather and tides. The website can ensure all visitors to the site are aware of the risks they face when embarking on the marine trail. A detailed disclaimer with a checklist of necessary skills and equipment can deter unprepared users from attempting ill-advised trips. But ultimately, a marine trail is about promoting inclusive use of the outdoors, so users would be directed to resources, trainings, and community opportunities to grow the skills they need to safely navigate these beautiful waters. The website and literature can also provide an easily accessible list of local guides to encourage less prepared people to recreate with professionals.

The following sample safety disclaimer and checklist could exist as a pop-up box on the website with required approval for users to access the navigational trails webpage.

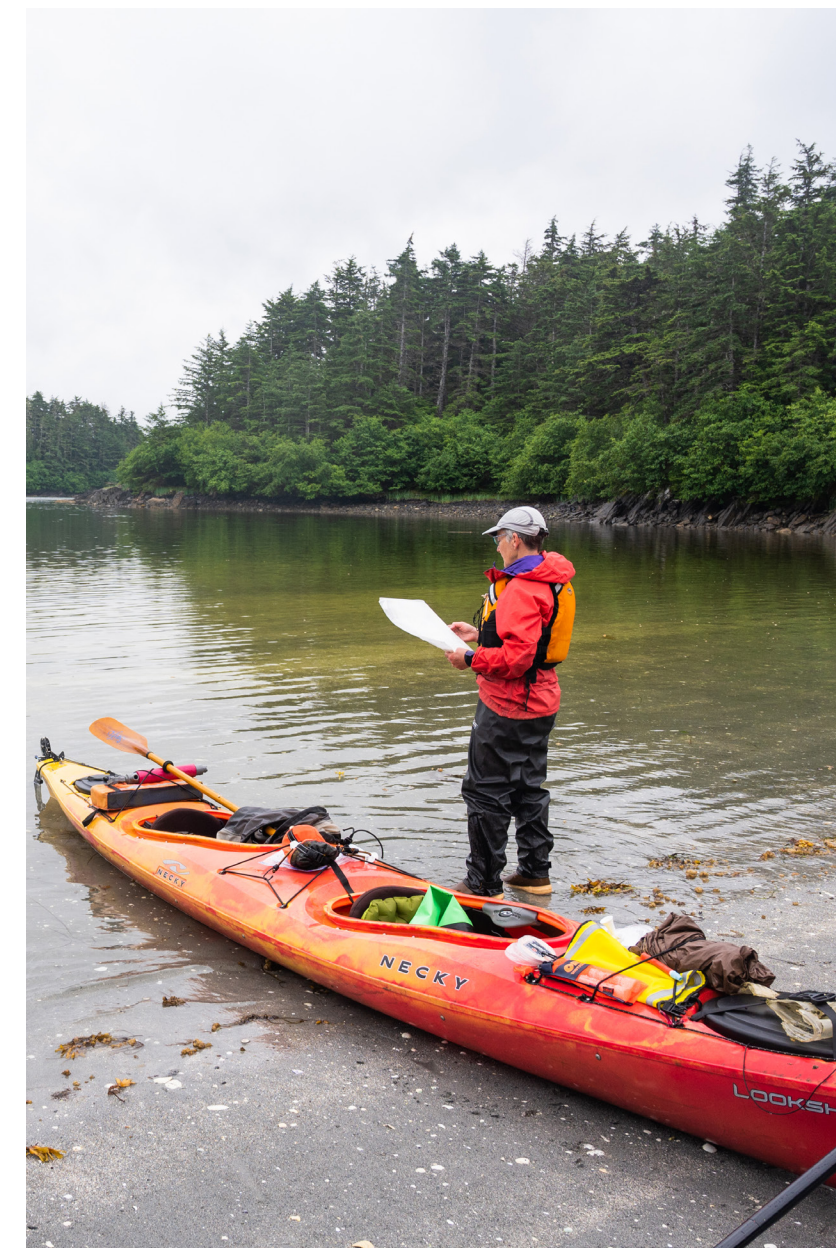
SAFETY DISCLAIMER

Local knowledge and cold water boating safety is not optional. Paddlers are responsible for their own safety. First time users and inexperienced boaters should consider hiring a guide to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. Sitka Sound is remote; rescues can take hours or days. Paddlers are responsible for their own safety. You must be prepared, diligent, and adaptable. Ensure you have the appropriate level of skill, experience, and equipment for your trip. When in doubt, do not go.

- I understand Southeast Alaska waters are cold enough to cause hypothermia in minutes.
- I understand wearing a PFD and being sober while recreating saves lives.
- I have the necessary skills and safety equipment to conduct a self rescue, communicate with responders, administer first aid, and survive a night on shore.
- I have and will continue to check the marine weather forecast and tide tables for the date(s) of my trip.
- I understand I am responsible for my own rescue; help may be hours or days away.

I have read this disclaimer. I understand the risks and know I am responsible for my own safety and the safety of my group on our trip.

For safety questions, contact the State of Alaska Office of Boating Safety at (907) 269-8400. Find information at dnr.alaska.gov/parks/boating/



User Management

In-person and online resources will establish and educate users in marine trail etiquette. A set list of guidelines will live on the website and be shared by outfitters and guides. These protocols should be adaptive, evolving to best manage use of the marine trail, and could include:

Leave No Trace: a well-known program with abundant educational resources and training, featuring seven principles:

1. **Plan Ahead and Prepare:** Research your destination, check weather, and prepare for emergencies to avoid needing to take harmful risks or causing damage.
2. **Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces:** Stick to established routes, and camp on hardened surfaces to avoid damaging vegetation.
3. **Dispose of Waste Properly:** "Pack it in, pack it out." Dispose of all litter, food scraps, and waste. Properly bury human waste in 6-8 inch deep cat holes 200 feet from water and trails.
4. **Leave What You Find:** Preserve the past by examining, but not touching, cultural or historical structures. Leave rocks, plants, and natural objects as you find them.
5. **Minimize Campfire Impacts:** Use a lightweight stove for cooking instead of a fire. If you must have a fire, use established fire rings, keep them small, and burn wood down to ash.
6. **Respect Wildlife:** Observe animals from a distance, never feed them, and store food securely to prevent habitat disruption.
7. **Be Considerate of Other Visitors:** Respect others by keeping noise levels down, and being courteous in interactions.

First Come, First Served: There are no reservations for campsites. This trail system operates on a first come, first served basis. Respect others by only sharing a campsite when necessary during emergencies.

Maintenance

Maintenance of the Sitka Marine Trail sites will be conducted through a collaborative framework involving commercial outfitters, guides, and non-profit stakeholders. The Sitka Kayak Center, an emerging entity established to promote paddling education and environmental stewardship, could serve as a hub of organizing for local guides and paddlers.

Another collaborative tool that could serve to facilitate maintenance would be a formal protocol through the nascent Tourism Best Management Practices (TBMP) program in Sitka. Compliance with these standards would be a prerequisite for commercial entities seeking "Recommended Guide" status on the official marine trails website. Under this system, guides would be required to perform routine site stewardship, including debris removal and minor infrastructure repairs.

Issues requiring specialized equipment or labor will be documented and reported to Sitka Trail Works and/or the Sitka Kayak Center. While field-level maintenance is decentralized to commercial partners, STW and/or SKC would maintain administrative oversight, facilitating biannual coordination meetings and scheduled work parties for large-scale projects.

Long-term site integrity would be further supported by the Sitka Kayak Center's development of "Adopt-a-Site" and "Trail Ambassador" programs. These systems will assign specific maintenance blocks to vested parties, including local outfitters and frequent trail users, ensuring a consistent monitoring and repair cycle.

Public Engagement Planning Phase

Meetings

A steering committee was assembled in 2024 composed of local boaters, kayakers, guides, and land managers. The group held five formal, all-member meetings in the first year. The collective pooled their local knowledge and identified possible sites for the marine trail and devised a series of trail routes.

Meeting Dates

Meeting 1, 3/21/24 at the Sitka Public Library

Meeting 2, 4/22/24 at the Sitka Public Library

Meeting 3, 10/02/24 at the Sitka Public Library

Meeting 4, 10/30/24 at the Sitka Public Library

Meeting 5, 12/12/24 at the Sitka Public Library

A series of one-on-one meetings were held with other stakeholders in the community to inform them of the project and gather feedback and additional information and suggestions.

Steering Committee members met with the USDA Forest Service, Sitka Ranger District to review site selections and cross reference them with federal land management concerns including archaeological and cultural sensitivities.

A meeting with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska helped identify a number of cultural sensitivities and site selection issues. This collaboration allowed for adjustment of routes and sites to ensure cultural sensitivity concerns were properly addressed.

Steering Committee

Meghan Chamberlain – USDA FS, Sitka Ranger District, *Recreation Management Specialist; Certified Kayak Guide*

Lione Clare – Sitka Conservation Society, *Wilderness & Community Engagement Coordinator; Sitka paddler*

Michael Graney – Sitka Wild Coast Kayaks, *Owner, Certified Kayak Guide and Instructor; Sitka Kayak Center, Founder*

Davey Lubin – Sitka Wildlife Adventure, *Owner and Captain*

Roland Wirth – *Sitka paddler*

Mary Goddard – *Sitka paddler*

Charlie Jordan – SEAK Adventure Sitka, *Owner, Certified Kayak Guide and Instructor*

Tony Phillips – *Sitka paddler*

Rebecca Poulson – *Historian; Sitka paddler*

Paul Kortemeier – Adventure Sitka, *General manager, Certified Kayak Instructor and Trip Leader*

Donna Russell – *Sitka paddler*

Xander Allison – Tongass Troll Tours & Taxi, *Owner and Captain*

Public Survey

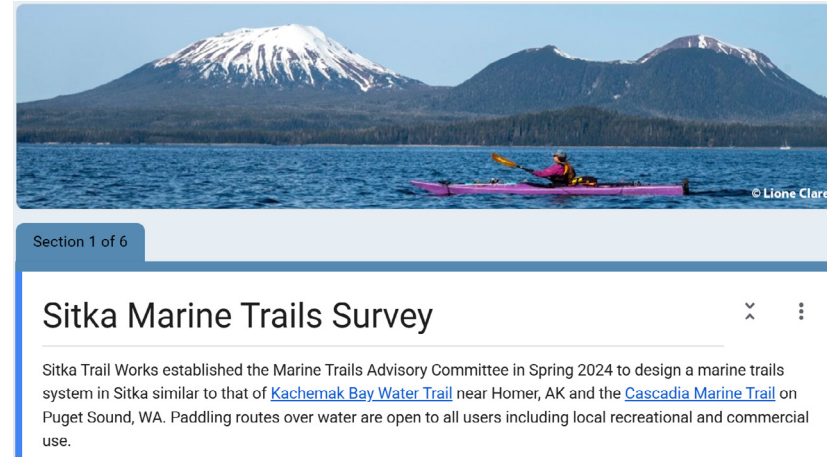
In spring 2025, an online survey and supporting project information¹, including route maps, were developed and made open to the public for 90 days. It was promoted on social media, in newsletters, and by word-of-mouth via Sitka Trail Works and Sitka Conservation Society channels. The survey asked for public feedback on three suggested routes with stopover and camping sites identified. It also asked for general comments on the project.

Almost 50 survey responses were analyzed and compiled into a review for the steering committee and other stakeholders. Follow-up one-on-one meetings took place with individuals from the public who requested more information via the survey. The survey also asked if respondents wanted to be kept up-to-date on the project's development; interested individuals' names and contact information were catalogued for the future.

The majority of responses to the survey were positive (21 of 47), in support of marine trail development. There were 16 comments with negative remarks largely expressing concern for safety and fears of over development and over crowding. Remaining comments were largely neutral.

On the northern route, much of the safety and development concerns were in the crossing to and camping on Kruzof Island. In follow up meetings reviewing the feedback, the advisory committee decided to remove the segment of the route from Middle Island to Kruzof and extending through Krestof Sound to Olga Strait.

¹Supporting Project Information Drive Folder: drive.google.com/drive/folders/1eVKHXhoOTzXKgkbRLBTfowqkqj-z5L1U?usp=drive_link



Conclusion

This design narrative serves as a roadmap for developing a low-impact, high-return infrastructure option to increase local and visitor exploration of Sitka's surrounding public lands and marine ecosystem through paddling. Digital navigation tools and a collective of local guides alongside Sitka Trail Works will work in tandem to maintain stopover sites while fostering a safe, cooperative paddling culture along the Sitka Marine Trails system.

Acknowledgments

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MARINE TRAILS CONTRIBUTORS & SUPPORTERS

Sitka Trail Works Board of Directors: President Mike Jones, Vice President Yeidikook'áa Brady-Howard, Treasurer Brooke Rivera, Secretary Eric Estrada, Lione Clare, Lee House, Matt Groen, Bill Spivey, Colton Holmes

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Sitka Tribe of Alaska: Jeff Feldpautch, Jessica Perkins, Annika Krafcik, Rachel Hartman

USDA Forest Service Sitka Ranger District: Meghan Chamberlain, Amanda Cochran, Becky Peterman, Corrine Ferguson, Chloe De Camara, Raeanna Wood

Alaska State Parks: Preston Kroes, Brad Garasky, SJ Downey

AK DNR Office of Boating Safety: Joe McCullough & Annie Grenier

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Thank you to the hundreds of Sitkans who took time to respond to the survey or otherwise provide feedback and support!

This design narrative was produced by Sitka Trail Works in partnership with Sitka Conservation Society.



Appendix / Inventory of Sites

Site Name	Latitude / Longitude	C = Causeway N = Nakwasina S = South Sitka	Underutilized (not often frequented by locals / motorized users) 0 = Popular camping / picnic 5 = No current use	Low visibility (off the beaten track / minimal regular motorized traffic) 0 = Visible by regular traffic 5 = Remote or hidden	Beach quality for landing 0 = Very difficult 5 = Relative ease	Low exposure (protectedness from ocean swell or predominant wind direction) 0 = Exposed to common swell angle 5 = highly protected	Easy freshwater access on site? 0 = no freshwater access 5 = adjacent perennial stream	Good developability / site potential 0 = no flat ground 5 = existing site or easy to build	Probability of bear activity 1= high bear density 5 = isolated island
Sasedni Island (Main Landing)	57.046988, -135.381348	C	2	3	5	5	0	5	5
Crow Island (West beach)	57.104931, -135.480132	N	5	5	5	4	0	4	4
Little Gavanski (South beach)	57.12337, -135.43261	N	2	2	4	3	0	3	5
Middle Island (Tombolo)	57.09128, -135.46139	N	5	5	4	5	2	5	4
Abalone Island	57.0685296, -135.428385	N	4	3	5	3	0	2	5
Olga Point Estuary	57.2233, -135.537291	N	4	4	4	5	4	3	3
Halleck North (Tombolo)	57.25123, -135.4769	N	4	4	4	4	4	3	2
Nakwasina (SE shore)	57.20665, -135.37855	N	4	3	3	3	3	3	3
Leesoffskaia (Island at Entrance)	57.001157, -135.283571	S	3	3	4	4	1	3	3
Sandy Cove (East)	56.979489, -135.309923	S	3	4	4	5	3	4	3
Hour Glass Cove	56.96483, -135.372616	S	5	5	5	5	3	4	2
Povorotni Nook (North Elbow Cove)	56.948684, -135.382372	S	4	5	5	3	3	4	2
Northeast Taigud Island	56.924575, -135.411210	S	5	5	3	5	0	3	5
Kanga Bay Camp	56.8881, -135.354885	S	5	5	3	5	0	5	4



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