



Director Ben Ellis Says Goodbye to Alaska State Parks



Director Ben Ellis joined Northern Area Superintendent Brooks Ludwig and Ranger Dane Happ for a trip up Angel Creek Valley to do some cabin repairs in January 2015.



Director Ben Ellis and long-term Juneau Area State Parks Citizen Advisory Board member Alice Rarig at the House of Wickersham in 2014



Director Ben Ellis and 2016 Alaska Boating Safety Educator of the Year Kelli Toth

February 2 was Ben Ellis' last day serving as Alaska State Parks' director. Appointed by former Governor Sean Parnell in 2011, Ben served the division for six years, making him the third longest serving Parks director.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources provided the following statement upon Director Ellis' release from state service: "We at DNR are very grateful to Ben for his six years of service as director and his advocacy for Alaska's state parks. Mr. Ellis has been a fine public servant and we wish him well in all of his future endeavors."

The deputy director for Alaska State Parks, Matt Wedeking, is currently acting director.

These changes come at a time in which Ben's expertise and strong advocacy for Alaska State Parks typically shone brightest, during the legislative session.

The division's budget has experienced deep cuts over the past two years, totaling \$749,500. Under Ben, an initiative to raise funds through the sale of Alaska State Parks merchandise was developed and approved during last year's legislative session. Ideally, programs like these, along with slight increases or implementation of park fees, would eventually allow the division to be mostly self-supporting. Since this initiative was approved and implemented, Alaska State Parks has raised \$11,000 from the sale of t-shirts and sweatshirts alone.

Ben's parting words to the division expressed his appreciation for Alaska State Parks employees, "I have had the honor for the last six years to lead the best division in the state. Every one of you are rock stars. I have been blessed knowing you. Thank you!!"

Ben, the Alaska State Parks team wishes you the very best and thank you for championing our state parks!

In 2015, an Arts-in-the-Parks event was held at Bird Creek Campground in Chugach State Park. Attendees to this weekend-long event included families, artists, Lt. Gov. Byron Mallott and his wife Antoinette "Toni" Mallott, organizer Dave Griffin, and Alaska State Parks Director Ben Ellis (far right).



Artist-in-Residence Program at the Ernest Gruening Cabin Exhibit

In 2015, Alaska State Parks kicked off its first-ever Artist-in-Residence program at Ernest Gruening State Historical Park near Juneau. The program runs from June through September, with selected artists from across the state spending up to two weeks each at the Gruening Cabin. This program honors Dorothy Gruening, avid painter and late wife of Ernest Gruening, and Rie Muñoz, renowned late Juneau painter.

As part of the program, resident artists hold public art workshops and other events throughout the summer, providing new opportunities for park visitors to experience and enjoy the spectacular setting and unique history of this park. Each artist also donates a piece of art.

In 2015, its inaugural year, the program hosted seven artists: Puanani Maunu, Jim Leach, Nancy Angelini Crawford, Dianne Anderson, Mark Vinsel, Kurt Jacobson, and Constance Baltuck. Artists who participated in 2016 include: Joan Pardes, Patti Hutchens Jouppi, Bruce Sink, Christine Fortner, Glenda Field, Roy Roys, Naona “Peaches” Wallin, Bob and Sandy Winfree, and Keren Lowell.

A First Friday opening for the Gruening Cabin exhibit was held in February at the Juneau-Douglas City Museum. The exhibit was open for three weeks, ending on Saturday, February 25. In conjunction with this exhibit, Gail Smith and Cathy Muñoz presented a history of Alaska State Parks’ Artist-in-Residence Program. For more information on the Artist-In-Residence program, go to <http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/asp/artistinresidence.htm>.



Winter in Kodiak



Ice skaters on Lake Gertrude in Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park
Photo courtesy of Larry VanDaele



Park visitor Dave Thomas shows off a rainbow trout he caught ice fishing on Lake Gertrude in Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park. Trout of these proportions are rarely caught in this lake. Luckily, this fisher has a photo to back up his story!

Photo courtesy of Wayne Aboussleman

Northern News

The Chena River finally froze up enough for Ranger Dane Happ to break trail into Nugget Creek cabin. Earlier in January, the trail groomer went through the ice trying to get to the cabin and ended up in three feet of water. He had to set up a gin-pole to winch his machine back up onto the shelf ice, but got out of the situation unharmed.

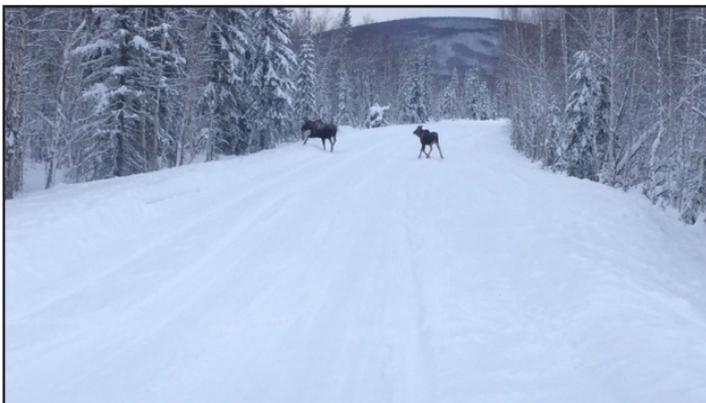


Someone attempted another break-in to the maintenance compound and left their winter mittens in front of the entry gate. The warning signs must have scared the would-be thief so badly that he left his mittens behind!

The Tanana River keeps pounding away at Big Delta State Historical Park. Park staff met on-site with Fish and Game personnel to hammer out details for getting the appropriate permits for the bank stabilization project. The contract will go out to bid soon.



A pair of mallard hens dabble in a warm spring slough at Mile 42, Chena Hot Springs Road last month, two days after -50°F temperatures.



A cow and calf cross the access road to Olmes Pond. Moose activity increased drastically in the area after the cold snap.

Snowmobilers Volunteer at Hatcher Pass to Prepare Trails

In January, several volunteers from the Anchorage Snowmobile Club and Hatcher Pass Snow Riders came out and assisted Ranger Dan Amyot with preparing Hatcher Pass' snowmobile trails for winter use. Each year, numerous volunteers help rangers pack trails and place signage that defines the various snowmobile riding areas. Their assistance can help open trails to snowmobiles sooner as snow conditions improve. Thank you, volunteers!



(L-R) Ranger Dan Amyot and Anchorage Snowmobile Club members Noah Clark, Marc Failing, Andrew Buchanan, and Roger Holland

Winter in Wood-Tikchik



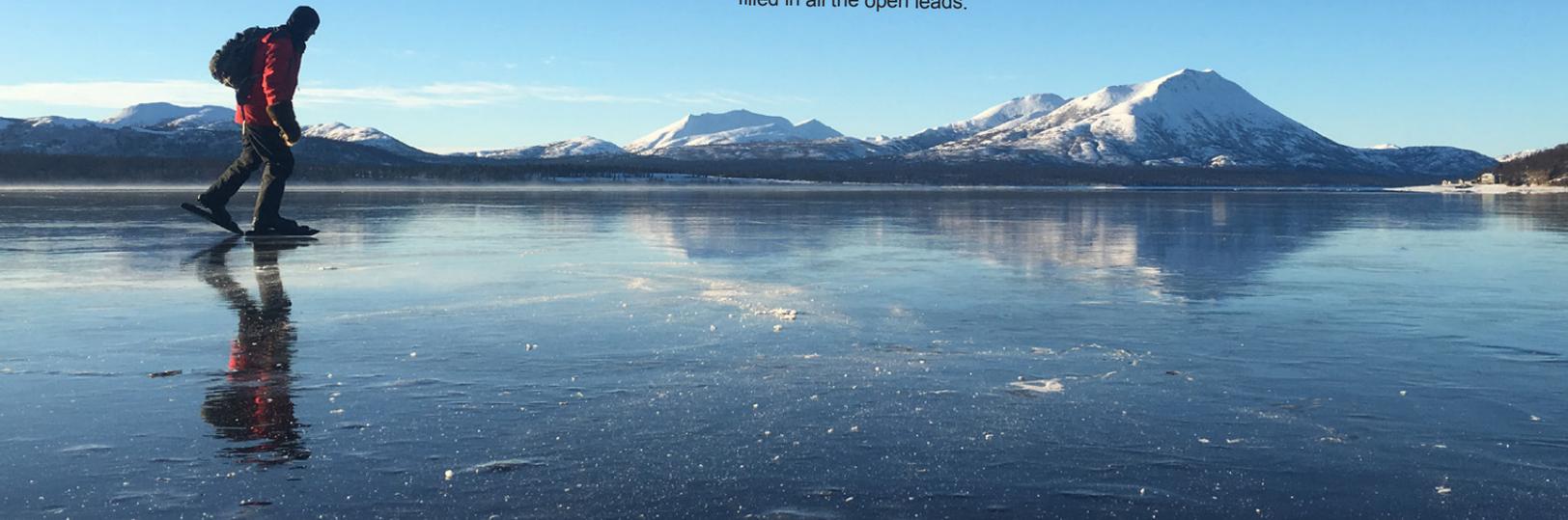
This is the view from the Agulukpak River Ranger Station, which hides in the shadows, perched above the flowing river. The Agulukpak River is called "The Pak" by many locals and connects Lake Nerka, known as "Second Lake," and Lake Beverley, known as "Third Lake." The Pak rarely freezes in the winter due to its fast-flowing shallow waters. The open water provides valuable habitat for animals all year long, but is a hot spot for many critters during winter.

A graphic collage. At the top is a brown bear's head and paws. Below it is a bald eagle in flight. To the right is a yellow sun with a blue Facebook 'f' logo. The text "Get Into" is followed by a blue thumbs-up icon, and "Alaska State Parks" is written below. At the bottom is a stylized mountain range with a green foreground and a small circular logo for Alaska State Parks. A bald eagle's head is visible on the right edge.



An ice skater reaps the rewards of sub-zero temperatures at Lake Aleknagik State Recreation Site in January. The lack of snow in the Dillingham area has provided excellent skating opportunities for those willing to brave the cold.

Nuyakuk Lake is the largest lake in the park and is often the last to freeze due to its sheer size. This year, early January brought cold enough temperatures that ice finally filled in all the open leads.



New Faces Around Parks

New Kodiak Area Ranger

The Kodiak Area is happy to welcome Ben Shryock, who is filling the Park Ranger I position. Ben previously worked as a Kodiak District Alaska State Parks ACC in 2014, and then joined the Kodiak Police Department. Before that, Ben earned a bachelor's degree in Wildlife Sciences from Virginia Tech, worked as a maintenance ranger with Virginia State Parks and as an Alaska Wildlife Trooper technician throughout the Kodiak Archipelago. Ben is an avid outdoorsman. He is excited to join the Alaska State Parks family and start work as a ranger.



New Kodiak Area Park Ranger I Ben Shryock



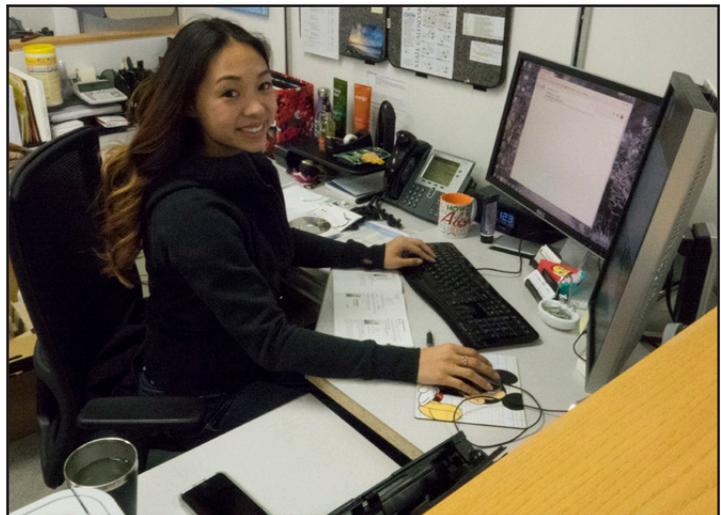
New Chugach/Southwest Area Maintenance Generalist Sub-Journey Jae Howard

New Chugach/Southwest Maintenance Man

Please join Chugach/Southwest Area in welcoming Maintenance Generalist Sub-Journey Jae (pronounced Jay) Howard to the team. Jae immediately went to work demonstrating his capabilities, plowing, sanding, and performing some electrical troubleshooting. Although new to parks, Jae's background includes experience in trucking, landscaping, plumbing, electrical, and HVAC and he is eager to apply his skills for Parks.

New Director's Office Assistant

Alaska State Parks welcomed Maile Guieb as the new Office Assistant II in the Director's office earlier this month. Maile (pronounced Miley) worked for DNR Office of Project Management and Permitting as a student intern for the last four years and just graduated with her engineering degree. We are happy to have her as part of the Alaska State Parks team!



Maile Guieb at her new desk