



Alaska DNR Commissioner Mark Myers Retires



Mark Myers shows off a gold pan, awarded for his work as DNR commissioner.



Division of Mining, Land and Water Director Brent Goodrum awards Mark Myers a challenge coin for his service in the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve.

Alaska Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Mark Myers announced that he is retiring at the end of this month after 18 years of serving Alaska in various capacities within the department. He culminated his career with one year dedicated to serving as the appointed DNR commissioner. Over the course of the year he earned the respect of those who worked alongside him.

Friends and colleagues gathered to thank him for his service to Alaska and wish him well in his endeavors as a retiree. Mary Kay Rickman and Marty Rutherford presented the commissioner with a gold pan honoring his tenure as DNR commissioner. Alaska Division of Mining, Land and Water Director Brent Goodrum gave the commissioner a coin in the tradition of military challenge coins, a token of respect and a nod to the commissioner's time serving with the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve. Attendees expressed great appreciation for his expertise and professionalism during his tenure as commissioner.

Eagle Watch



By CAROL GRISWOLD, *Seward Area State Parks Citizen Advisory Board member*

It's always interesting to watch the resident Bald Eagles at Lowell Point State Recreation Site. On a recent winter afternoon, two eagles flew low over the bay, hunting. One snatched a large codfish from the surface, but it struggled free and splashed back into the water. The other eagle grabbed a murre and stroked powerfully to land on Pinnacle Rock, a prominent park feature and favorite eagle dining table, to have lunch. The wild cries of the magnificent eagles as they hunt and celebrate always thrill me!

First Day Hikes in Alaska State Parks

Delta Junction Area

By CHRISTINE LEMLY, *Delta Junction Trails Association*

The farthest north First Day Hike event, held at Quartz Lake State Recreation Area on January 1, 2016, was a great way to start to the New Year. More than 100 people participated in a day of hiking and winter fun. The weather was amazing and a marked trail, welcoming fire, snacks at Glatfelder Public-Use Cabin, and great company made this event a wonderful kickoff for 2016.

The National Association of State Parks Directors, an organization composed of the directors of the state park systems of all 50 states, sponsors First Day Hikes across the nation. This is an event intended to be fun for the whole family, an invitation to get out and start the New Year experiencing the joys of the outdoors and reconnecting with nature. Outdoor recreation can be delightful any time of year and has been shown to promote mental and physical wellbeing.

The Delta Junction Trails Association would like to say “thank you and happy New Year” to the great group of people from the local community who came out and explored the trail. A special thank you and happy New Year to Boy Scout Troop 56, Delta Junction Trail Association volunteers, and Alaska State Parks for all your help in making the First Day Hike so warming and fun!

The Delta Junction Trails Association hopes this event helped encourage you to fill your New Year with more outdoor hikes and exploration, moving your way toward greater health and happiness.

For more information about the First Day Hikes in all 50 states, please visit www.naspd.org.



Photos courtesy of CHRISTINE LEMLY, *Delta Junction Trails Association*

Participants of the northernmost First Day Hike held at Quartz Lake State Recreation Area enjoyed a New Year's Day packed with winter fun.

Kachemak Bay

Twenty-four people, including volunteers, participated in the Kachemak Bay First Day Hike event on New Year's Day at Eveline State Recreation Area. Park Ranger Jason Okuly led 14 folks on snowshoes around the Eveline trail system and volunteer Martin Schuster, whose family donated the land for Eveline SRA to State Parks, led six skiers on the groomed trails.

A couple of volunteers stayed at the trailhead to set up the shelter, fire, and refreshments. A canopy was prepared for folks to get out of the mixed rain and snow, allowing them to warm up with hot chocolate and hot cider, grilled hotdogs, and a warming fire and maybe dry off a bit. Despite the foul weather, folks seemed to have a great time and Friends of Kachemak Bay State Parks had a few new members sign up.



Skiers and snowshoers prepare to take to the trails in Eveline SRA.

Photos courtesy of WILLY DUNNE, Friends of Kachemak Bay State Park and Citizen Advisory Board member



Kachemak Bay First Day Hike event participants warm up by the fire with hot cocoa and cider.

Skiers and snowshoers participate in the Kachemak Bay First Day Hike.

Northern News



Northern Area park rangers did an overnight trip to Colorado Creek Public-Use Cabin in Chena River State Recreation Area. Park Specialist Brian Charlton joined them for two days of chainsaw work, cutting and brushing several miles of the Colorado Creek Trail corridor.



Maintenance worker Marty Schatz checks out an interpretative panel at the Glatfelder Public-Use Cabin in Quartz Lake State Recreation Area. Marty was clearing trail in preparation for the First Day Hike event put on by the Delta Trails Association.



The view from the Glatfelder Public-Use Cabin allows visitors to glimpse ice fishing shacks dotting the far end of Quartz Lake.



Ice fishing on Birch and Quartz lakes have been excellent this winter. Warmer than normal temperatures and lots of stocked fish have spiked ice hut rentals. As proof of the good fishing, Park Ranger Brad Garasky hauled in a 25-inch, 6.5-pound rainbow while ice fishing at Quartz Lake.



View from Bluff Point, Quartz Lake State Recreation Area

January in Wood-Tikchik

Warm temperatures and low snow accumulation in southwest Alaska has affected winter travel this season. Large areas of open water remain on several lower lakes in Wood-Tikchik State Park. Lake Beverley, Lower Nerka, and Lake Aleknagik had yet to completely freeze in January—an unusual sight for this time of year. The normally popular snowmachine route across Lake Aleknagik is mostly open water. Some snow and ice in the eastern reaches of the park are providing overland travel. Trail conditions are rough, but hearty recreationalists are making due—especially when they get a few inches of fresh snow.



Above: Agulowak River flows into Lake Aleknagik.

Below: Snowmachining Ranger Ali Eskelin enjoys a nice sunset view above Lake Aleknagik. “What an awesome day!” she enthused. “So happy to have a couple inches of fresh powder!”



Above: The piles before replacement

Right: The piles after replacement



Right: The contractor replaces the piles at The Pillars with an 80-ton crane.



The Pillars’ Piles

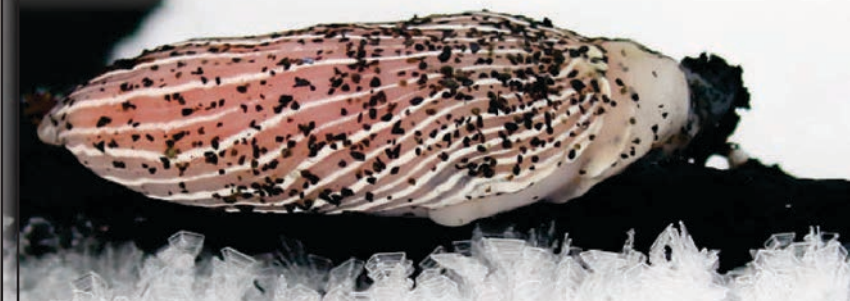
In December, a partnership project between Alaska State Parks and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game replaced the five 30-foot-long piles. These are piles to which Kenai Area State Parks field staff secure their seasonal boat dock along the Kenai River at The Pillars, an ADF&G parcel that Alaska State Parks manages.

Niki Gets Her Five-Year Pin



Director Ben Ellis presents Niki Acevedo with a pin and a certificate of appreciation for her five years of service to the State of Alaska as a full-time, permanent employee. Niki began her career in Alaska State Parks as an ACC intern in mid-2006 and has continued to work for the division in various capacities since then.

Lowell Point Curiosity



By CAROL GRISWOLD, Seward Area State Parks Citizen Advisory Board member

An unusual striped nudibranch (*Armina californica*), or “sea slug,” washed up on Lowell Point State Recreation Site beach after a big winter storm. A four-year-old local resident found it while beach combing with his mom and little sister, and correctly identified it as a nudibranch.

The distinctive, three-inch, brown and white striped mollusk cruises along the sandy ocean bottom where it feeds on orange sea pens, another animal that is rarely seen at this beach. Note the sand stuck to its back for camouflage. One never knows what treasures will be discovered at Lowell Point Beach!

Rolfe Buzzell Retires

Office of History and Archaeology historian Rolfe Buzzell retired in mid-January after working more than 35 years for the State of Alaska. Rolfe was a member of the Archaeological Survey Unit for most of his years with OHA, but during the last years he headed the Navigability and Trails Unit that researched travel, trade, and commerce on Alaska's rivers and overland routes.

He has several publications: *Memories of Old Sunrise*, and coming out this spring, *Gold Rush Wife: The Adventures of Nellie Frost on Turnagain Arm, 1895-1901 As Told to Her Daughter Dorothy Frost*. Many also know Rolfe as a musician who performs with several different groups around Anchorage and at summer festivals. Rolfe plans to continue both researching and writing Alaska history and playing music in a well-earned retirement.



(L-R) Sharon Holland, Rolfe Buzzell, former OHA archaeologist Chuck Holmes, Douglas Haggar (aka Mr. Whitekeys), former OHA historian Rogan Faith, and former state navigability program archaeologist Richard Stern exchange stories at Rolfe's retirement party.



Friends and colleagues wish Rolfe well in retirement.

Ranger Dan Amyot Completes State Parks Leadership School

Last month, ranger Dan Amyot attended his second year of State Parks Leadership School, a two-year program consisting of online, distance education and on-site components. It is sponsored by the National Association of State Parks Directors and the on-site portion of the program is held at the Oglebay Park and Resort in Wheeling, West Virginia.

Because of state travel restrictions and tight budgets this year, Dan applied for and was awarded a Stihl USA, Inc. \$1,000 scholarship to offset costs. Dan was the only park ranger from Alaska attending the largest class on record this year along with 118 fellow students.

During the two years of this training program, Dan participated in course curriculum that included topics specific to park management practices and leadership. These courses were taught by retired and current state park directors from across the country.

Dan also had an opportunity to network and develop relationships with state park rangers and managers from numerous state park systems in the country. Dan successfully completed the two-year program and received a certificate of completion.



Ranger Dan Amyot receives his State Park Leadership School completion certificate from Lewis Ledford, Executive Director of the National Association of State Park Directors.