**KETCHIKAN VOLUNTEER**

***Rescue Squad***

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To: Cathy Tighe, Ketchikan Misty Fjords District Ranger

Subject: Input for the Ward Lake Recreation Area

The Ketchikan Volunteer Rescue Squad (KVRS) was established on November 15, 1950, founded by members of the community to "Serve the Community of Ketchikan". KVRS operates as a non-profit, all volunteer organization formed to conduct wilderness search, rescue and recovery missions in the southeast region of Alaska. Since the beginning, our volunteers have donated thousands of hours to Search and Rescue Operations in the Ketchikan area. Over the years, many operations have occurred on USFS trails in the Ketchikan area. These comments are provided in the context of what KVRS feels would promote additional safety measures on the trail system to the locals and nonlocal visitors that use the trails in the Ward Lake area.

There are several scenarios that result in hikers needing rescue: they lose track of the trail and become lost. Many times, they become very disoriented trying to find the way back to a known pathway. At other times, inexperienced or ill prepared hikers are unprepared for the rigors of the trails on the Tongass, not understanding the distances to cover and how long it will take to cover the distance, or underestimate the amount of elevation required.

KVRS would like to see trail and mapping improvements made to the local trails, particularly the more remote systems like the Perseverance to Carlanna Lake (via Minerva Mountain) trail traverse. These recommendations would include:

* Trail Improvements
  + The traverse trail to Perseverance and then up to Minerva Mountain becomes difficult to follow once the trail reaches the sub-alpine muskeg ecosystem. Well used game trails lend to the confusion as well. Markers are widely spaced and many are in disrepair and/or missing.
  + The current markings of orange diamonds are inadequate to rely on for navigation
  + Trail maintenance is very poor from the lake to the alpine; windblown trees and muddy conditions pose a hazard.
  + Limit the use of stairs as much as possible; wet conditions increase to danger of slip injuries due to the wet wood. Recommend wider switchbacks that take the place of stairs.
  + Limit the use of boardwalks for the same reason. If needed to cross wetlands, then provide a ramp at each end instead of a step. This will limit slips and ease the transportation of patients.
  + Identify and clear areas in strategic locations where helicopters can land to put in rescuers and extricate injured hikers. KVRS would be willing to partner with the USFS in locating these sites.
  + Establish clear walking paths on all trails, avoid roots, steps, and deep-water bars. Maintain >24” clear area in the center of the trail for utilization of a wheeled stokes litter for transporting patients who are unable to walk.
  + Provide wide areas to walk alongside the trail. >3’ on each side in order to make room for litter attendants to walk. These areas don’t require prepared walking surface but at least free of obstacles.
* Improved mapping
  + KVRS would like to see updated, accurate mapping of the local trails. Current GIS layers are often not very specific or accurate. KVRS would be willing to partner with the USFS to remap the trails utilizing survey quality GPS equipment.
* Improved signage/trail information
  + Additional signage at the trailhead that indicates accurate distances and conditions
  + Develop an experience scale that will rate the trail based on length, difficulty traversing, and elevation changes expected and included in the trailhead signage.
  + Install a constant form of mile marker poles, robust enough to handle snow and weather conditions above the alpine.
  + Develop a link to a USFS or KVRS site that GPS files can be downloaded providing route information.
  + GPS waypoints of obvious trail features, mile markers, and other landmarks included in trail information to help inform hikers as GPS and other tracking devices become more common in practice.
  + Information on the use of the KVRS SPOT beacon program to be included at trail heads.
* Improved access in the winter
  + It needs to be acknowledged that despite lack of snow plowing in the winter, the Ward Lake recreation area still gets used. This is a safety concern not just for recreationists, but for potential access and deployment of rescue team members.

KVRS appreciates the opportunity to comment and looks forward to seeing all of the future improvements to be made in this important recreation area.

Sincerely,

Shawn McAllister, Vice President

KVRS