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Comments: The North Tongass Volunteer Fire Department is the primary emergency response group for the Ward Lake area, we routinely respond to injuries on the trail systems located in and around Ward Lake.

The most common call for service is trips and slips as a result of traversing the trail itself. Most require basic life support with the addition of pain management. The most common issue we have is the difficulty in getting a patient transport gurney down the trail to extricate the patient and due to the lack of mile markers it is very difficult to ascertain the location of the patient as most patients cannot estimate distances. North Tongass often relies on the Ketchikan Volunteer Rescue Squad (KVRS) to assist in patient transports when the victim is located well down the trail.

A major future concern is the significant trail usage caused by the tourist industry with the recent addition of the Ward Cove Cruise Ship Dock. We are concerned there may be a significant number of the 450,000 passengers and crew that will not take busses to Ketchikan but seek out the local trails for recreation. We understand most of the trails are either closed or limited to commercial usage, however passengers may very well walk up the road and enter the trail system on their own, posing a significant danger to themselves and traffic on nearby North Tongass Highway.

North Tongass Fire would like to see trail and mapping improvements made to the local trails. These recommendations would include:

***Trail Improvements**

- oLimit the use of stairs and boardwalks 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. If needed to cross wetlands, then provide a ramp at each end of the boardwalk instead of a step. This will limit slips and ease the transportation of patients.

- oAmbulance gurneys needed to transport patients unable to walk require 3 feet of clear packed walking surface. Additional width is needed for gurney attendants to walk

***Signage and Trail Information Improvements**

- oAdditional signage at the trailhead that indicates accurate distances and conditions

- oDevelop an experience scale that will rate the trail based on length, difficulty traversing, and elevation changes expected and included in the trailhead signage.

- oInstall a constant form of mile marker poles, robust enough to handle snow and weather conditions above the alpine.

- oDevelop a link to a USFS or KVRS site that GPS files can be downloaded providing route information that also encourages the use of GPS location equipment.

- oGPS 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.

- oInformation on the use of the KVRS SPOT beacon program to be included at trail heads.

***Improved Access to the Ward Lake area**

- oExtend the information signage to the cruise ship information center.

- oWork with DOT and the Ward Cove Group to develop a plan to allow safe crossing of the North Tongass Hwy, some suggestions are:

- ?Pedestrian tunnel north of Ward Cove Market

- ?Combination of pedestrian bridge/walkway a crossed the Ward Cove Bridge and an elevated pedestrian walkway a crossed North Tongass Highway near old Ward Lake Road.

- ?A combination of a walkway under the Ward Cove Bridge and the construction of a new trail along Ward Creek from the Ward Cove Bridge, connecting with the Ward Lake Trail at the bridge

Thank you for your consideration. . .