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MARCH 2025, VOL.26, NO.6

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Anchorage Nordic Skier

Newsletter Of The Nordic Skiing Association Of Anchorage, Inc.

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AROUND THE BOWL

New course, same fun for 2025 Tour of Anchorage

Due to the challenging weather conditions this winter, NSAA made the decision to change the 2025 Tour of Anchorage course from a point-to-point race to a multiple-lap race held at Kincaid Park, on Sunday, March 2. The race will still consist of the traditional distances of 25k, 40k, and 50k events for both cross country skiing and fat biking.

"We did not make this decision lightly and have been eagerly watching the 10-day forecasts and have been considering all options. We appreciate your understanding and flexibility as we make these changes."

The new course will consist of multiple laps of a 5km loop, with the biking portion taking place on a slightly longer loop. NSAA will continue making snow as long as the weather cooperates.

The NSAA team is committed to making the post-race atmosphere at the Tour of Anchorage festive and fun! We're planning to have a hot tub (circa 2015) on location for racers to relax and soak away their sore muscles. There will also be a beer garden with a variety of local craft brews and food trucks serving up delicious eats. We will have music and entertainment to keep the party going.

Bring your friends, family,and support squads, and join us for a day of racing and celebrate afterwards on Sunday, March 2, 2025! Bib pickup has been condensed to one day: noon-7 p.m. Saturday, March 1, at the Kincaid Park chalet.

Parking will also be limited on race day, so plan accordingly and please consider taking the free shuttles from Dimond High School and Kincaid Elementary. Fatbikers will have reserved parking at the Hercules and Nike lots at Kincaid. Keep an eye out for Tour updates in NSAA's weekly emails and at https://anchoragenordicski.com/events/tour-of-anchorage/.

Congrats to Tristan Bordon for winning the Trek Farley 5 Fatbike Raffle! All proceeds go toward NSAA's commitment to year-round trail maintenance and grooming.

NSAA's Ski 4 Kids was a fast-skiing and fun-having hit at Kincaid Park.

Ski 4 Kids brings out a cheerful crowd of youngsters

Outdoor fun and beaming smiles stole the spotlight at this season's NSAA Ski for Kids event! This fabulous frosty fest in mid-February at Kincaid Park had 350 kiddos hitting the trails! Our Title I schools included the awesome Williwaw Elementary, Lake Hood Elementary, and Spring Hill Elementary, and Whittier Elementary, all joined in the fun from afar.

A massive shoutout to our superstar partners, Anchorage Parks & Recreation and Healthy Futures, who made this event happen! And let's not forget a gigantic thank you to the Banker Law Group for hooking up four lucky champs with shiny new skis! High-fives to our fantastic sponsors: ConocoPhillips Alaska, LaTouche Pediatrics, Continental Subaru, Elsberg Family Foundation, Subway, Skiku, Skogsbarn, Kaladi Brothers Coffee, Great Harvest Bread Company, and Anchorage Nordic Ski Patrol. You all rock for helping schools score new ski gear and keeping our kids active and healthy!

And a big bear hug to our incredible volunteers who sprinkled joy and laughter everywhere, reminding us all to unleash our inner child! Oh, and guess what? The grant period is now open! Check out the grant application at **docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfjX31zcMBrzX1-S5-XWeF0dTsX7Z3qusOyJAaeoTiFTI-WgWQ/viewform?usp=sf_link**.

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during ski season

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Fourth Thursday of the month
6:30 p.m. at NSAA Office Open to all

AROUND THE BOWL

Continued from Page 2

Ski Train hits the tracks for winter wonder on March 22

While there may not be much snow here in Anchorage, there is a bunch of amazing powder up in Curry. So get your tickets and hop aboard the Ski Train for a fun-filled time on Saturday, March 22. Only a few tickets remain, so get them before they sell out: **anchoragenordicski.com/events/ski-train/**.

AMH Anchorage Cup wraps up with skiing action, pizza and celebration

The AMH Anchorage Cup race series wrapped up recently with back-to-back weekends of action at Kincaid Park: the Lekisch Loppet on Feb. 9 and the Sven Johansson Memorial on Feb. 16. What an incredible season we've had! As we close the chapter on this season's races, we want to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who made it possible.

First and foremost, a massive shoutout to our amazing volunteers! Your dedication and hard work truly shone through, even in the face of challenging winter conditions. It's your spirit and commitment that keep our events running smoothly, and we couldn't be more grateful!

A big thank you also goes out to our wonderful sponsors who created a fantastic after-party atmosphere for everyone to enjoy. The snacks were delicious, the prizes were fantastic, and your support never goes unnoticed. We truly appreciate the role you play in making our events successful.

To our fantastic Junior Nordic coaches, thank you for providing race support to our youngest participants! Your guidance and encouragement helped foster a sense of community and competition among the kids, making their experience unforgettable.

AMH Anchorage Cup action wrapped up with racing at Kincaid Park.

Lastly, to all the racers who came out and gave it their all on the trails, you inspire us all! Every sprint, every cheer, and every finish crossed is a testament to the passion and camaraderie that makes our community so special.

This amazing community effort couldn't be done without each and every one of you, and we are so grateful for your support. We can't wait to see you all back next year for more racing, more fun, and more memories. Until then, keep those trails alive and enjoy the rest of the winter season! Find race results and information at **anchoragenordicski.com/races/amh-anchorage-cup/**.

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On the cover: Coach Dave Ward stopped long enough to take this photo of the NSAA Junior Nordic Hawks showing off impressive V1 strides, climbing the groomed Gasline trail between Upper Huffman and Glen Alps. NSAA started grooming the Glen Alps area last month to expand on the skiing opportunities in Southcentral after a winter of low snow.

NSAA JN crews go to the snow

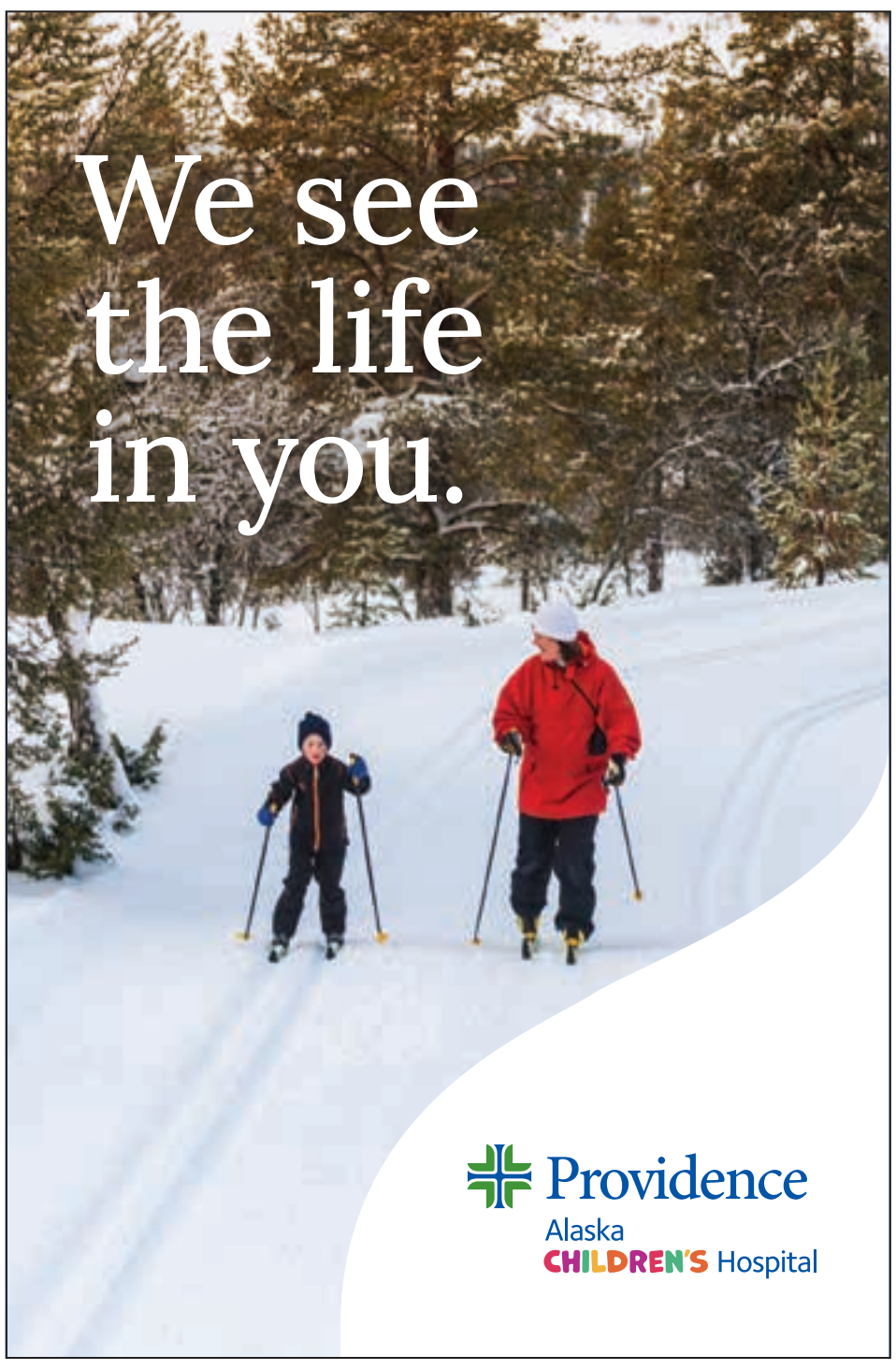
We have been doing our best at NSAA Junior Nordic to keep things fresh and fun, despite the lack of any new snowfall in town. Some groups have been going to Kincaid Park or Glen Alps to ski, while others have been making do with the thin snowpack at Russian Jack and Hillside. Recent highlights include a magical ski under the full moon at Glen Alps and a special joint practice between the Russian Jack Tuesday/Thursday afternoon group and the East High School Ski Team. Thanks to all our coaches and families for their positivity and flexibility!

We will take a Spring Break from March 7-14, then it is two more weeks before the program ends with our End of Season Celebration at Kincaid on Saturday, March 29. All groups will be invited for a morning full of exploration, games, and treats! After the celebration, we will have a gear drop-off at the wax bunker. Everyone should turn in jackets at this time. Families that rented skis can keep them until our final gear drop-off on the last weekend in April.

Learn more at **anchoragenordic-ski.com/programs/junior-nordic/**.

– Art Harmon
NSAA Junior Nordic Sport Director

PHOTOS BY **HOLLY RINEHART**



NSAA at 60

2000-2010: Trail improvements, maintenance, and maintaining excellence

PHOTO BY **JAN HAZEN**

The 2010 U.S. National Championships sprint race at Kincaid Park.

In celebration of NSAA's 60th Anniversary, Alaska Nordic Skier is printing excerpts from On Track!:The Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage by Alice Tower Knapp. Copies can be purchased on the NSAA website, AMH, and Hoarding Marmot.

In the club's fifth decade, the focus was on maintaining what NSAA had built and upgrading the trails to accommodate lower snow years and grooming demands for both classic and skate techniques. While no new ski trail systems were added to the Anchorage Bowl during this time, many improvements to Kincaid Park came to fruition, including a new biathlon range, a snowmaking loop, and a sprint course.

NSAA increased its grooming and maintenance efforts. The PistenBully fleet now included two stationed at Kincaid, one at Hillside, and one that traveled to Bartlett, APU, and middle schools. Summer maintenance included the widening and grading of existing trails, and the clearing of spruce trees decimated by the spruce bark beetle. The grooming crew implemented a two-tiered grooming strategy based on survey data of trail use by members. Heavily used trails were considered first tier and the lesser used trails second tier. Grooming priority was also determined by use patterns and special events. Trails with heavy weekend use like the Tour Trail were prepared for the weekend while the school trails were prepared for weekdays. Grooming for races also took high priority.

Perhaps the biggest addition to the club's yearly operations was when the Anchorage Junior Nordic League became a program of NSAA in 2004-'05, increasing membership and revenues for NSAA.

Improved accountability and recordkeeping under NSAA Executive Director Diane Moxness helped NSAA successfully lobby for support from the Alaska Legislature and corporate donors to buy equipment and to keep NSAA on sound financial footing. NSAA was honored by the Anchorage Convention and Visitors Bureau with a Seymour Award in 2006 for being a stellar community organization.

Biathlon, Ski Jumping, Anchorage Junior Nordic League, and Racing programs continued to thrive. The Ski for Women continued to grow and by 2010 had raised almost $800,000 to support local non-profit agencies that help women and children stop the cycle of domestic abuse. SKAN24 (Ski Kincaid All Night) began, providing a 24-hour ski challenge. The Ski 4 Kids event allied itself with NSAA, giving the club another link toward helping introduce elementary-age kids to skiing.

NSAA's many volunteers stepped up to help put on races, maintain trails, and promote Nordic skiing. In the space of three winters, NSAA hosted five national events: the World Junior Biathlon Team Trials 2008, U.S. Cross Country Junior Olympics 2008, U.S. Nationals 2009, Junior Olympics for Nordic Combined and Ski Jumping 2010, and the U.S. Nationals and Olympic Team Trials 2010.

Find the Nordic Skiing Association of Anchorage on Facebook at — **facebook.com/anchoragenordicski**

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Flying into the future

BY ZAK HAMMILL
Director/Head coach, NSAA Ski Jump & Nordic Combined Program

During the month of January, we kicked off our youngest NSAA Ski Jumping program, the Cubs. This is an introduction program for ski jumpers age 5-7. For seven weeks, we have these young skiers, who certainly bring a whole different energy level to our ski jumping hill! This season we had a whopping 14 Cubs signed up!

Seeing all these new ski jumpers at the hill energizes our coaching staff as well as keeps them on their toes. We start out with a classic name game to meet our new skiers. Some of them have friends already in the program while others know no one. By the end of the program each kid has certainly made a new friend or 13! Once names are established, we get the Cubs running around to warm up. Then, ski jumping will follow the warm-up. It's always a mixed bag of skill levels when you have such a young group, but Anchorage is a ski town and most of the time our Cubs are littler rippers. They might not be tall, but they sure are mighty.

Having kids ranging from 5-16 years old out at the ski jumps shows that our pipeline is strong, and the future is bright. Each individual kid teaches us coaches something different throughout the season, too. Being around these kids throughout the winter season is something special, and so is our Anchorage ski community!

To learn more about the NSAA Ski Jumping and Nordic Combined Program, head to **anchoragenordicski.com/programs/ski-jumping/**.

Natasha Hammill works with some of the Cubs.

Make tracks straight to a skier's door

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This winter has been a low-snow bust to say the least, but NSAA's Operations team has made magic happen and kept people skiing across Southcentral Alaska all winter. This team has created snow and maintained (and steadily expanded) the snowmaking loop at Kincaid Park; they've heading to the hills and groomed new trails for skiers at Glen Alps, where there is lots of snow; and they've scratched up the surfaces, whenever possible, around Eagle River, at Russian Jack, and at Bartlett High School and more. Our community slate of events and programs might not have gone on as usual, but they've gone on the best they could because of the dedication and innovation of this team. Thanks to NSAA Operations team!

PHOTO BY **JOSH NIVA**

STATEWIDE

Schumacher makes history again; secures second World Cup podium

BY LEANN BENTLEY
Stifel U.S. Ski Team

Gus Schumacher turned heads in today's 20k skate in Falun, Sweden, for more reasons than just his cow-print hat. The Alaskan, who secured his first World Cup win almost a year ago, landed his second-career podium with a second-place finish on Feb. 16.

It marks the first time an American man has ever podiumed in a 20k race – notably, Schumacher became the first American man to win a distance race in 2024 in the Stifel Loppet Cup in Minneapolis when he was first in the 10k skate. The last American to win a distance race was Bill Koch in 1983.

Schumacher showcased tactful skiing in a five-lap battle on a ripping-fast course, holding his own against a stacked field. Across the line, the top athletes shattered the 50-minute barrier, making it one of the fastest 20k races of the season. For the young Stifel U.S. Ski Team men, it was Schumacher who delivered a statement performance. Alongside him on the start list were fellow Alaskans Zanden McMullen, Hunter Wonders and Luke Jager, as well as U.S. teammates Kevin Bolger and Walker Hall.

PHOTO COURTESY **U.S. SKI AND SNOWBOARD**
Anchorage's Gus Schumacher warms up with his U.S. teammates before the Tour de Ski in Toblach, Italy, earlier this season. Schumacher recently finished second in the 20k mass start free race in Falun, Sweden, marking the first time a U.S. man ever podiumed in a 20k World Cup event.

From the gun, Schumacher positioned himself at the front, pushing the pace and skiing confidently on his Rossignol skis. He played a smart game, charging the downhills and conserving energy on the climbs, drafting behind key athletes like Sweden's Edvin Anger and Norway's Harald Østberg Amundsen. His strategy paid off, allowing him to stay fresh for the final push and put himself in a fighting position for the podium.

Schumacher sat in fourth place with one lap to go, but as the stakes rose with Norway on each side moving into the finish, he knew he had to dig deep. Into the stadium were four men vying for the top three spots, but with Schumacher's signature no-pole skate, he put himself right behind Paal Goldberg of Norway, the ultimate winner of the day, and secured himself second across the line.

"My goal from the start was to not drift back in the pack, and on a twisty course like this one, it's pretty easy to hold the position upfront, so that ended up being fairly simple," said Schumacher. "I also had good skis that made it easy to move up on the technical downhills where there's more space than uphills. I didn't know I had a podium in the race, but that was for sure where my head was at, which I'm super proud of."

"It feels really good to be back on the podium! I know I can do it, but getting a confirmation right before the World Champs is nice! My body has been feeling really good here and I'm stoked to have capitalized today."

McMullen and Bolger of the Stifel U.S. Ski Team also performed well, staying just off the lead pack for much of the race. McMullen, whose career-

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Alaska Biathlon

47th to 22nd — Germain makes big jump in Germany

Maxime Germain, a West High School grad, took to the course in Oberhof, Germany, with a head of steam and it paid off with an impressive World Cup result. Starting the men's 12.5km pursuit back in bib 47, 2:01.6 off the leader, Germain shot a near-perfect 19 for 20 to finish 22nd overall, a 25-spot jump from his start position.

The biggest mover in the field, Germain posted a personal Top 10 performance to make up 28.8 seconds and finish 1:37.8 behind the pursuit victor Sturla Holm Laegreid of Norway.

Maxime has been racing on the Biathlon World Cup circuit for two years and has his sights on the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games. Maxime trains with the National Guard Biathlon Team, and previously trained with the Anchorage Biathlon Club and Alaska Pacific University Nordic Center.

After the race in Germany, Germain competed in the IBU World Championships in Lenzerheide, Switzerland.

– By Sara Donatello
U.S. Biathlon, Communications Manager

PHOTOS BY **SARA DONATELLO/U.S. BIATHLON**
Maxime Germain warms up before a World Cup event.

Maxime Germain

Houseman, Kam-Magruder compete at World University Games

Alaskan biathletes continue to compete on the international stage this season including Ryan Houseman, a University of Alaska-Anchorage student majoring in kinesiology and minoring in athletic training, who just returned from the World University Games held in Torino, Italy.

"Competing in an international event was an amazing experience!" said Houseman of the 10-day event that brought together university students from around the world to compete in 11 winter sports.

The International University Sports Federation (FIS) World University Games (WUG) are held every other year for winter and summer sports competitions.

"The opening ceremony was well done and fun to watch! Walking through the arena with everyone from the U.S. team was a pretty cool experience," said Houseman, who has skied for seven years and competed in biathlon for five years, training with Anchorage Biathlon Club under Coach Jean Paquet. "WUG was an amazing experience and wouldn't have been possible without the support of friends, family, and so many others."

PHOTO BY **PETER HOUSEMAN**
Ryan Houseman on the course of World University Games.

PHOTO BY **PETER HOUSEMAN**
Biathlete Ryan Houseman competing at 2025 World University Games in Torino, Italy.

Another Alaskan competing in these WUG events was Nordic skier Amae Kam-Magruder.

GUS

Continued from Page 6

best finish came earlier this season in Ruka, Finland, continued to show his growing strength on the World Cup circuit and finished 22nd; Bolger was 23rd. The win of the day ultimately went to Goldberg, who secured his first distance skate race podium, Schumacher second and Norway's Amundsen in third. U.S. athlete Wonders was 55th, Jager 64th and Hall 75th.

With the result, Schumacher moved up to 16th in the overall standings and built momentum heading into the 2025 FIS Nordic World Ski Championships in Trondheim, Norway from Feb. 27 to March 9. Notably, this was his second top-five finish of the season, his first being a fifth-place result in the Skiathlon in Lillehammer.

PHOTO COURTESY **GUS SCHUMACHER**
Is Gus having fun on the World Cup tour? This snowy selfie says it all.

Mat-Su Ski Club

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AROUND THE VALLEY

Hop for joy at the Ski-ster and Annual Meeting Eggstravaganza on April 12

Get excited as we prepare to celebrate the arrival of spring at our annual Ski-ster event on Saturday, April 12! Following a fantastic first-year debut, Ski-ster has quickly become an anticipated tradition for families and trail enthusiasts alike, and we can't wait to welcome you back for this unforgettable event at GPRA.

Ski-Ster is a celebration for all outdoor lovers! Whether you enjoy walking, skiing, or sledding, we invite you to join us for a day filled with fun and community spirit. This year, we're thrilled to introduce a sled derby, where participants of all ages can unleash their creativity by building sleds from cardboard and duct tape. Get ready for friendly competition and plenty of laughter!

Festivities at Skister will include:

• A Pioneer Loop Egg Hunt for kids and adults – there's something for all ages this year!

• Community engagement – make new friends and connect with the MSSC family.

• An exciting sled derby competition – show off your creative side or backside in this silly event for the adventurous!

• Our annual meeting, and new board member election results – hear about what we accomplished and the exciting plans ahead.

• Awards and egg hunt prizes!

We encourage everyone to save the date and invite your friends to join us over in the valley for this fantastic celebration. Stay tuned to our website and social media for more details, and we can't wait to ski you there!

Mat-Su Nordic skiers celebrate a successful Besh Cup season

The Mat-Su Nordic skiers have wrapped up an exhilarating Besh Cup season and continue to enjoy fantastic skiing at GPRA, Archangel Road and Independence Mine.

During the recent wet meltdown that led to avalanches and the closure of the Hatcher Pass Road, we were fortunate to have only three days without access to our well-maintained Nordic ski areas. Remarkably, this occurred during one of the warmest and driest winters we've experienced in a long time! This truly highlights the exceptional skiing opportunities available in the Valley. Additionally, our community's resilience and the favorable weather allowed us to host the final Besh Cup weekend of the season, bringing together skiers from across the state. A heartfelt thank you to all our volunteers for making this possible!

Our Mat-Su Nordic Racing Team made a significant impact at the races, achieving numerous podium finishes and even a few wins. We are proud to announce that seven of our skiers qualified for Team Alaska's Junior National Team: Elliot Sensabaugh, Isela Austin, Amelia Parker, Raven Spangler, Banyan Smyth, Gabe Black, and Weston Sensabaugh. The best part of the season has been witnessing the joy and camaraderie among skiers, parents, and volunteers as we celebrate our sport

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PHOTOS BY **STEPHANIE LAROUSSE**

Check out our area's young skiers (Coral Smyth above) at the recent Besh Cup races.

JJ Parker

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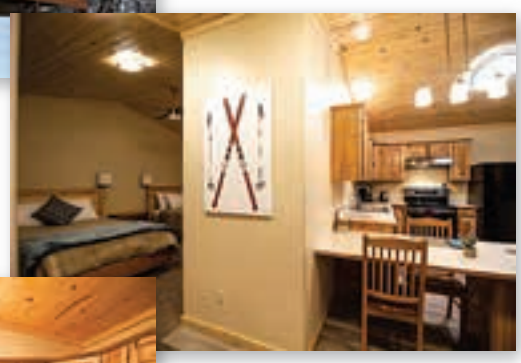

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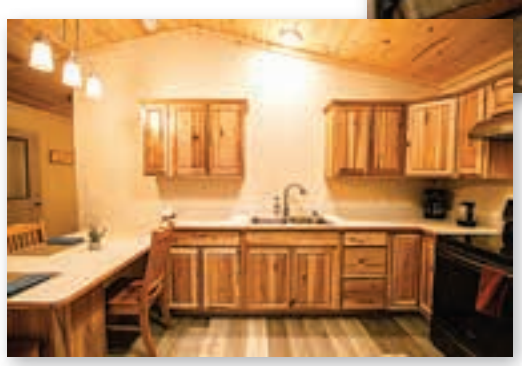

Located at the base of Hatcher Pass, these cabins are in a great location for Alaskans and their visiting friends and family!

PEAK LODGING CABINS located at
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VALLEY

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together. Congratulations to all our racers, and well done to the Mat-Su ski community!

Grooming update: Embracing unusual weather and fresh tracks at Hatcher Pass

What is happening this year with the wacky weather?! Many parts of the Lower 48 have seen more snowfall than Alaska lately, and who would have guessed that January would be so warm and rainy? It's certainly been an unusual winter!

Despite these challenges, we are excited to share that regular grooming continues at Independence Mine and Archangel Road. While we acknowledge the low snow conditions in the valley, the rain in January deposited buckets of snow up high, allowing us to maintain great skiing opportunities. Although conditions were not ideal and avalanches closed the pass for a short span of time, we are grateful for the observations and recommendations from Hatcher Pass Avalanche Center that helped ensure safety during this period. We remain hopeful for new snow to resume grooming at GPRA soon. For the latest information on trail conditions and grooming reports, please check our website or Nordic Pulse.

As a reminder, Hatcher Pass requires a parking pass for access, available for daily or yearly purchase. The proceeds from these passes go directly to Alaska State Parks, helping to maintain our beautiful outdoor spaces. The Mat-Su Ski Club is incredibly grateful for the support we receive through donations, memberships, and grants, which are essential for our grooming efforts in Hatcher Pass. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers, we are thrilled to provide our community with fresh tracks at Hatcher Pass, even amidst this low snow season in the valley. We truly appreciate those who support us and remain optimistic for more snow down low or an early spring ahead. We look forward to seeing you on the trails!

PHOTO BY **STEPHANIE LAROUSSE**

Thanks for our race support crew!

PHOTO BY **NANCY BLACK**

It wouldn't be a race without a crack timing crew selfie!

We love our volunteers!

Races, events, programs and grooming are only made possible by an incredible family of volunteers. They humble us with their generosity.

STATEWIDE

Peak performances for Alaskans across the state, country, world

BY THOMAS O'HARA
Cross Country Alaska

January and February were busy months for Alaska cross-country skiers. The year started with the U.S. Cross Country Senior National Championships at Kincaid Park, in Anchorage. Though it is a senior championship event, junior skiers from around the U.S. use the opportunity to get on the radars of college coaches and compete for spots on the U.S. World Junior Championship team and the U18 Nordic Nations Cup team, as well as possibly prequalifying for positions on their regional teams. Skiers prequalify for Junior Nationals if they finish in the Top 30 of the final World Junior Championships points list of the event. Those who prequalify for Team Alaska do not have to compete in remaining ConocoPhillips Alaska Besh Cup season races, giving them rest opportunities during the time leading up to U.S. Junior National Championship.

Justin Lucas (APU), Murphy Kimball (UAA), Cole Flowers (UAF) and Jack Leveque (AWS) were named to the Junior World Championship team, while Oskar Flora and Mia Stiassny (both APU) were named to the U18 Nations Cup Trip. At the Junior World Championships, Alaskans had a number of impressive results, with Cole Flowers, Murphy Kimball, and Justin Lucas finishing 15th, 28th, and 42nd in the Classic Sprint, Jack Leveque and Justin Lucas finishing 22nd and 46th in the 10 km skate, and Cole Flowers and Justin Lucas finishing 28th and 27th in the 20 km classic.

PHOTOS BY **MAX KAUFMAN**

Besh Cup 3 and 4 action from Birch Hill in Fairbanks.

For the U23 racers, being named to the U23 team at the U23 Cross-Country World Ski Championships is in the sights for elite skiers who have recently aged-out of the junior division and is often a stop on the way to competing in World Cup races. Michael Earnhart and Kendall Kramer both qualified for the U23 team. Earnhart finished 14th in the classic sprint, 12th in the 20km classic, and 24th in the 10 km skate. Kramer finished an impressive 4th in the 10km skate, and 23rd in the 20km classic. Kramer then qualified for the Senior World Championship team in Trondheiim, Norway.

Besh Cup racing was difficult this season, with the bad weather and low snow. While Besh Cup 3 & 4 were planned to be held at GPRA, they were switched to Fairbanks due to a lack of good snow in mid-January. Just two weeks later, a few inches of last-minute snow allowed GPRA to host Besh Cup 5 & 6. Despite all of the difficulty with weather and skiable terrain that everyone has had to deal with this year, the quality of racing and the amount of participation meant that we still had a great series! The 2025 Besh Cup trophy went to two APU skiers: Davis Isom (U20) and Mia Stiassny (U18).

Alaska skiers to the World Championships

This year, the FIS World Ski Championships are to be held in Trondheim, Norway. Alaskan skiers Luke Jager, JC Schoonmaker, Gus Schumacher, Zanden McMullen, Kendall

See **PEAK,** Page 15

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2025 Alaska Ski for Women: A sunny winter celebration!

BY MOLLY MYLIUS
Director, Alaska Ski for Women

Thank you to everyone who came out for the 29th anniversary of the Alaska Ski for Women. Despite a January that was largely void of new snow, we were able to have a fabulous event, thanks to the magic of NSAA's snowmaking and the heart of our volunteers, sponsors and participants. The course looked a bit different this year, but for the 350 folks who joined us at Kincaid Park on the first weekend in February, we enjoyed blue skies and picture-perfect ski conditions. We also exceeded our fundraising goal with our charity auction, raising over $15,000. the highest amount ever raised in the Ski for Women auction!

We're grateful for your support of this cherished Alaska tradition, and are looking forward to celebrating the 30th anniversary of our event next February!

A special congratulations to skier and committee member Allison Showers-Chlup, who won both the classic and the skate races! Top 3 in each race included: Classic, 1. Allison Showers-Chlup, 2. Hailey Robertson, 3. Claudia Rector. Skate, 1. Allison Showers-Chlup, 2. Edith Chlup, 3. Laura McDuffie. Find full race results at **anchoragenordicski.com/events/alaska-ski-for-women/**.

Costume Contest Winners – Incredible Individual: 1. Cat Woman; 2. Squirrel; 3. Shield Woman. Dynamic Duo: 1. Fabulous Feisty Flamingos; 2. Skiing Sushi; 3. Dragons. **Terrific Team:** 1. Klondike Gold Rush; 2. Butterfly Family; 3. Nordic Shield Maidens.

Scan this to take the Alaska Ski for Women survey!

PHOTOS BY ALASKA SKI FOR WOMEN EVENT COMMITTEE

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What's next?

Twenty percent of net proceeds go to NSAA and 80 percent are distributed to organizations working to stop the cycle of domestic violence against women and children. The largest grant will go to longtime community partner Abused Women's Aid in Crisis (AWAIC), with the rest going out via a competitive grant process. Grants will open in late spring – if you know of an organization that might qualify, please email alaskaskiforwomen-grants@gmail.com.

Merchandise: We still have Alaska Ski for Women merchandise available to purchase from NSAA's online store. Visit **nordic-skiing-association-of-anchorage.square.site/s/shop** and click Ski for Women on the lefthand sidebar.

Survey: We want to hear from you! Share your feedback via our online survey. Survey respondents will be entered into a drawing to win a Ski for Women packable fleece blanket. Take the survey by clicking on the link or scanning the QR code: **surveymonkey.com/r/J566RC7**.

Triple Patch: For those of you interested in qualifying for a 2025 Triple Patch, 2025 eligibility will be based on registration for events rather than proved participation. Don't forget to sign up for our sister events: The Bike For Women, May 4; The Alaska Women's Gold Nugget Triathlon, May 18; and The Run For Women, June 7.

Get Involved: Did you love our event? We are looking for more folks to join our fun, hard working committee to help bring the Alaska Ski for Women to life next year. Email the team at AlaskaSkiForWomen@gmail.com and learn more at **alaskaskiforwomen.org**.

Thank you to our many volunteers and sponsors!

The full list of volunteers will be included in the thank you May edition of the Nordic Skier.

And a special thank you to our 2025 sponsors:

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Juneau Nordic Ski Club

Juneau, Alaska

P.O. Box 21262
Juneau, AK 99802
jnski.org
info@jnski.org

Mission: To enhance, develop, and promote Nordic skiing in Juneau. | **Goal:** Great Nordic trails for all skiers!

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AROUND THE CAPITAL CITY

Leaving a Legacy

Message from Frankie Pillifant, JNSC Board President

PHOTO BY MERRY ELLEFSON

Wayne Carnes and company steal the last of the setting sun on Mendenhall Lake.

PHOTO BY **JNSC**

JNSC coaches spent February piloting in-school ski programs for 150-plus Juneau students.

PHOTO BY **ROMAN MOTYKA**

Author Roman Motyka skiing on Mendenhall Lake.

PHOTO BY **JENNIFER ADAMS**

The Juneau-Douglas Yadaa.at Kalé ski team showing off their brand new race uniforms (thanks to Simpson Tillinghast Sheehan law firm!) at the start line of their last home meet before heading to regions in February.

"Juneau has the best-groomed trails south of Denali National Park!" said an astute skiing wit recently.

As the winter sun continued shining on our trails throughout February, the past three weeks have been spectacular despite the lack of new snow to cover the ever increasing bagged and unbagged 'brown wax' on the local trails. Sure as the earth is going to continue its rotation (for today anyway) the light is increasing along with the hopes for some new snow to extend the skiing season hampered by the rains of January.

But weren't our volunteer groomers exceptionally impressive with their daily attention to the conditioning and maintenance of the snow that did stick around after the January meltdown? Skiers were down to just about 4 km of loop on Montana Creek trail when Ullr (god of snow) spoke and snow spilled from his mouth showering the trails. The temperatures dropped, Mendenhall Lake froze deep enough for grooming equipment to safely set a track, and then all at once our hardy crew of volunteer groomers were working 6 different trails around town: Salmon Creek, Mendenhall Lake, Mendenhall Campground, Montana Creek, Eagle Beach and Eagle Crest lower loop.

The youth ski program for K-12 grades is in full swing this time of year, with over 100 youth skiers and 32 coaches delivering 6 days a week of ski education fun. The adult league skiers are getting in their kilometers with efforts aimed towards varying competitions. And events such as ski o'caching, women's ski ups, and the Ski S'more pop ups are enticing new and existing members. Whew!

Speaking of youth programs, you've likely heard that 2024-25 is the first season in many decades that Juneau-Douglas High School has an AASA nordic ski team attending races. The skiers have been participating in peer relative racing and report that it's great fun. At the recent regional competitions in Fairbanks (who have the best ski trails north of Denali National Park), a number of JDHS Bears were able to snag some podium finishes as they readied for their second-straight appearance at the ASAA State Championships.

All to say, the season thus far can best be summed up in one word: remarkable. It's quite remarkable how much skiing we were able to eek before February's dump. In fact, we found ourselves one of the only places in the state skiing many times this winter. And that is all thanks to our many, hard-working volunteers and our members. Thank you.

Every. Day. Skier.

Our newest column featuring our neighbors and fellow trail users who make it a daily ritual to get out and glide. This month we peer into the mind of Jack Stickel.

What's your ski origin story?

I skied some in Michigan in the winter of 1989/1990 (I was just out of the service). We then moved to Juneau in October of 1990 and found incredible snow (like 5 feet) and skiing at Eaglecrest. (Of course I later found out that the snow in Juneau isn't like that every year.) I went downhill before trying cross country and have been active in it ever since.

Favorite place to ski?

The Valley ski areas: Mendenhall Lake is awesome when the wind is down. I enjoy the grooming route that takes in the views. This last week has been super; I did 60 km, though that is more than average for me. Montana Creek and Campground are also in frequent play as ski destinations.

Why are you a member?

Where do I start? Three takeaways: incredible organization of the JNSC, it's well cared for and nurtured. Groomers are awesome, they really take care of us and the daily communication about what has been groomed is greatly appreciated. The camaraderie of the ski club members, for example, lots of people don't know my name but they recognize my dog and say hello. Speaking of dogs, groomers are very patient with skiers and dogs, and I try to reciprocate by holding my pet when they come by on the grooming machines, as well as picking up after my dog.

A fun ski memory…

I went to graduate school at St Louis University from 1973 to 1975. I got a liking to my professor's daughter–and future wife, Lorraine–and invited myself on a school ski trip to Breckenridge, CO. Having never skied, I enrolled in a beginners ski class and totally failed, so I tried again the next day. One of the instructors pulled me aside and got me skiing in 10 minutes. Well, the professor's daughter and I

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Kachemak Nordic Ski Club

Homer, Alaska

P.O. Box 44, Homer, Alaska 99603
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PHOTO BY **BOB GLEN**

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AROUND THE BAY

A busy season for Kachemak Nordic Ski Club

February was chock-full of events in the Homer area, with the start of our Junior Nordic lessons for local youth, the Ski for Women event benefiting South Peninsula Haven House, our annual Friday Night Lights full moon ski, and our Wine & Cheese and Wooden Skis Tour. Our event organizers, coaches, and groomers have been busy!

Our Junior Nordic program is helping over 120 local kids improve their Nordic skills, with 40 volunteer coaches honing the skills of our next generation of skiers. The season started off warm, but enough snow stuck around to facilitate lessons for groups at Lookout and McNeil trails.

On Super Bowl Sunday, our Ski for Women event raised over $1,500 for South Peninsula Haven House, a nonprofit that supports and empowers individuals and families impacted by domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse.

The timing was perfect for our Friday Night Lights full moon ski on Valentine's Day this year, and fresh snowfall helped to make the event even more magical. Organizers placed torches along 2km of trails, made a bonfire, and entertained the kids with hot cocoa and marshmallows by the fire!

And the Wine & Cheese and Wooden Skis Tour was held at our Lookout trails on a longer course this year, proving yet again to be a hit for skiers of all ages.

In March, KNSC plans to host a Spring Break Biathlon camp for local youth, as well as our Kachemak Nordic Ski Marathon and our Sea to Ski Triathlon. Due to trail conditions and a lack of reliable snowpack, the Board made the decision to move the Marathon event to the McNeil/Eveline trail system, which is about 15 miles east of Homer. Event planners are still deciding on the exact race route(s), but the rest of the event will remain the same with options for a 13k, 25k, and 42k race, similar amazing sponsors, and another event after-party in Homer at the Sea Plane Base. Registration for the event is open on our website.

Both the Marathon and the Sea to Ski Triathlon are subject to trail conditions and snowpack measurements. Event planners are crossing their fingers for more snow and our groomers are ready to make the best of what we have on the ground at the time of each event.

And finally, KNSC has a new tracked ATV on order for use next season (with more snow, hopefully!). The purchase was a real team effort which showcases the close connections Homer's citizens have to their community. The Homer Foundation provided a $5,000 grant, Sara Jackinsky donated $5,000 in memory of her husband Ken Jones, and Karl Schwiesow, an Ellensberg, WA artist who grew up in Homer, donated the remaining $8,000 in memory of his father Doug Schwiesow. Alaska Saw & Cycle and Polaris gave the KNSC significant discounts as well, and we appreciate their support and service.

– Anna Lewald
KNSC Administrative Manager

PHOTO BY **DON PITCHER**

It's a big-time bonfire party for Friday Night Lights fun.

Eagle River Nordic Ski Club
Eagle River, Alaska

P.O. Box 770117, Eagle River, Alaska 99577
Club hotline — 689-7660
Junior nordic hotline — 689-7661
cernsc.wildapricot.org

Stadium Games for the win!

The Chugiak-Eagle River Jr. Nordic program has struggled to hold sessions this season with the lack of snow. But we accumulated about two inches of snow and frost on the Chugiak High School stadium field, allowing us to gather together for a week of games.

It was fabulous to be able to see our ski community all back out on snow together. The coaches came with some creative ideas and the kids brought their enthusiasm. One lucky crew got to play with lightsabers, another coach took his upper-level skiers "adventure sledding," and everyone got a round of sharks and minnows in. The Polar Cubs spent a lot of time on the little stadium hill practicing going up and down and up and down. Some of our skate skiers

See **WIN**, Page 15

PHOTO BY **BARB JOHNSON**

Coach Dustin Glazier with the Monday/Wednesday polar cubs on the stadium.

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How does thoracic spine mobility impact overall skiing performance

By Zuzana Rogers, PT, ScD, SCS, COMT

Thoracic spine mobility plays a crucial role in overall skiing performance, particularly for cross-country skiers. The thoracic spine, which is the middle portion of the spine between the neck and lower back, contributes significantly to a skier's technique, efficiency, and injury prevention.

Impact on Skiing Technique

1. Rotation and Force Generation: The thoracic spine contributes to around 80% of the total available range of trunk axial rotation. This rotation is essential for the diagonal stride technique in classical cross-country skiing, which requires good upper body range of motion.

2. Power Transfer: A mobile thoracic spine allows for better power transfer from the upper body to the lower body, which is crucial for efficient skiing technique.

Performance Enhancement

1. Improved Efficiency: Adequate thoracic mobility enables skiers to maintain proper form and technique, leading to more efficient movement and better overall performance.

2. Increased Lung Capacity: Studies have shown that improved thoracic mobility can increase lung volume and chest expansion. This enhanced respiratory function can directly impact a skier's endurance and performance across all disciplines.

Injury Prevention

1. Reduced Low Back Pain: Limited thoracic mobility can force skiers to compensate by overusing their lower back, potentially leading to low back pain. Improving thoracic spine mobility can help distribute the load more evenly and reduce stress on the lumbar spine.

2. Decreased Risk of Upper Body Injuries: Insufficient thoracic mobility can lead to altered movement patterns, potentially increasing the risk of injuries in the shoulders, neck, and upper back.

It's important to note that while thoracic mobility is crucial, it should be balanced with stability for optimal performance. This means that while working on thoracic mobility, we should also focus on developing stability in other areas, such as the feet and pelvis, to achieve the best results in the skiing performance.

Here are some of my favorite exercises:

1. Cat-Camel Stretch with Thoracic Focus: Perform 1-2 sets of 8-10 repetitions.

2. Thread the Needle: Perform 1-2 sets of 8-10 reps on each side.

3. Book-Opener Stretch: This exercise increases flexibility and mobility in the spine.

4. Foam Roll.

These exercises should be performed 3-4 times a week for at least four weeks to see improvements in thoracic mobility. Incorporating them into your regular training routine can help enhance skiing technique, improve efficiency, and reduce the risk of low back pain.

Disclaimer: Since we don't know you and we can't perform a detailed examination, responses are general tips only and not medical or physical therapy advice. If you need detailed answers to your questions, please contact us directly.

Ski tour up South Fork a success!

It has been a winter of challenges and changes to our club's planned ski tours, but thanks to the diligence of Ros Singleton, we had a fun outing! Ros had tried the Eagle River Visitor Center and deemed it too sketchy for a ski tour. She decided to check out Eagle River's South Fork Valley because it is up a bit higher and therefore had more snow. Since it was skiable up there, we changed the venue for February to this area and it turned out to be a good pick.

A total of six people headed out up South Fork Valley on a beautiful sunny day on Feb. 2. Everyone had a great time and there were smiles by all. We skied up to the bridge, went a bit further, then headed back under clear blue skies and sunshine. The scenery was spectacular and the skiing was fun. The downhill sections were a bit tricky with the narrow ski trail and harder snow, but it was still possible to put a ski off the main trail a bit to slow down. The very last downhill section was definitely doable if you snowplowed, but a few of us opted to walk it back to the parking lot.

We are all hoping for more snow before our March tour, but even this year with the paltry amount of snowfall, we had a successful tour in February!

PHOTOS BY **BARB JOHNSON**

Barb Johnson, Ros Singleton, Karen Bronga, Tom Bronga and Alan Brown up above the bridge in South Fork.

We even had a clear view of Denali in the distance!

Ros Singleton leading the way!

WIN

Continued from Page 14

enjoyed laps around the stadium and a couple of groups even attempted the trails.

By the end of the week, we had certainly depleted the little snow we had and were skiing on increasingly more grass than snow, but it was worth it. So many smiling faces and so many happy kids to finally be able to put their skis back on (and coaches too!).

Fun games on Tuesday/Thursday night Junior Nordic.

PHOTOS BY **KRISTI BROWN**

Tuesday/Thursday kids having fun on the field.

STATEWIDE

PEAK

Continued from Page 9

Kramer, and Rosie Brennan, who all train for APU, were named to the team. The races will be held Feb. 26-March 9.

Junior National Championships

The Team Alaska contingent for Junior Nationals will travel to Soldier Hollow, Utah, on March 6 to race from March 10-16. This year, the team will be 62 athletes thanks to a large number of prequalified skiers from the U.S. Senior National Championships. You can see the team on the CCAK website, here: **crosscountryalaska.org/2024-jn-awg-team**. Good luck to our skiers!

2024-25 Besh Cup overall champions Mia Stiassny (U18) and Davis Isom (U20).

JUNEAU

Continued from Page 12

enrolled in the next level ski class. The instructors had each person ski down a short hill and put us in the section according to our skills and I was put in a higher level class. This was despite falling on my first get off the lift and causing a multi-skier pileup, falling face first on a steep descent and getting a belly burn and falling on a poma ski lift and riding almost the whole way on my back. The lift operator got a chuckle - "never seen anyone do that"

At the end of the class, each of us was asked if we wanted to participate in the NASTAR ski race. I said sure, as if I hadn't done enough damage so far. In this race a professional skier does a run against amateurs and the top finishers get invited back. My objective for the day was to just finish without falling down and without regards to time. The professional skier that day was Spider Sabich (who was unfortunately shot and killed later that evening).

Of course my favorite story is my cell phone adventure last week… (Editor's note: if you see Jack ask him how he was reunited three days later with his cell phone).

Leaving a legacy

If you're like me, you greatly appreciate the Nordic ski opportunities that the JNSC has provided us over three plus decades. A legion of volunteers and trail bosses create kms of groomed trails for us to ski, even in marginal conditions. JNSC supports numerous youth programs, ski teams, and sponsors a variety of ski events throughout the winter. In short, the club provides us with great outdoor recreation opportunities, allowing us to stay in shape and remain sane through the winter months.

My skiing days started in the Sierras back in the late 1960s. I moved to Fairbanks in 1973 and there discovered the wonderful Skarland XC trail system. A connector trail led from my cabin to Skarland, and I used it regularly in winter to ski to the Geophysical Institute at UAF (where I was a grad student). Weekends would find us skiing backcountry trials on Murphy Dome, Goldstream Valley, the Delta Range and elsewhere. Back then, it was pine tar, three-pin bindings, Birkebeiner skis, and special green wax: you were set for Fairbanks winter skiing!

I moved to Juneau in 1984 and immediately loved the opportunities to telemark at Eaglecrest and the surrounding mountains. But I did miss skiing groomed Nordic trial systems, having been spoiled

PHOTO BY **ODIN BRUDIE**

Thanks to Trail Mix for being our home for community wax clinics!

PHOTO BY **FRED HILTNER**

The ski club's pop-up bonfire in February was a huge hit with the under 10 crowd.

in Fairbanks. However, after the formation of the Juneau Nordic Ski Club, opportunities for Nordic skiing quickly expanded, first with Mendenhall Campground and the Lake, then Dredge Lakes, then Montana Creek, Pioneer Road, Salmon Creek, and recently Eagle Beach and Amalga Trail. We now have dozens of kms of Nordic trails to ski (provided snow conditions cooperate!).

During the past couple of decades, I decided to give back to the JNSC as a volunteer, first by grooming ski trials, then by joining the JNSC board. One major contribution of mine while on the board was to help develop the JNSC Nordic Ski Trail Development Plan; and I continue to work on trial development issues, working to increase kms and connectivity between trail systems.

I am now in my elder years. As a legacy of my appreciation for the years of Nordic skiing JNSC has provided me, I have decided to include a bequest to JNSC in my will. I encourage you to also consider leaving a legacy by: Making a bequest to the JNSC in your will or revocable living trust; Naming JNSC as a beneficiary of your trust, retirement plan or life insurance policy.

You can designate your legacy or long-term gifts to be deposited directly to JNSC's Stewardship Fund, a critical and accessible reserve fund that our board can spend as needed. Or specify your bequest be used for a specific purpose, e.g., for facilities and/or trail development.

You can also make annual contributions to JNSC by giving gifts of stock or, if you are over 70 1/2, transferring the Required Minimum Distribution from your IRA to JNSC. Giving these types of gifts can have tax benefits for you and your family.

Let's keep Nordic skiing thriving for skiers of all ages in the years to come!

– Roman Motyka

Movin' on up!

After four years as Business Manager, Tristan Knutson-Lombardo has officially been Executive Director of the Juneau Nordic Ski Club. The JNSC has grown to the extent that our all-volunteer board needed more support to track and lead the many efforts that go into producing a ski year of note. This is a big step for the club and the board hopes that members agree it is a logical step in the growth of cross-country skiing around Juneau.

There are many people who have worked and played with TKL and would willingly provide testimonials. Three aspects that I find highly desirable in this fast-paced goofy world of grooming and maintaining snow include initiative, follow through, and communication skill. He is simply a great get at this important time of growth in Nordic skiing in Juneau. He's loaded with abilities regarding the administrative side of running a 501c3, bringing years of experience in budget management, grant writing, youth program development and program delivery. He has gained so much knowledge about the grooming equipment he is a go to for understanding where the grooming equipment is located at any given time and who is on deck for grooming. He's been steadily organizing the document drive and photos and awards and social media.

Thank you, Tristan. We are excited to have you help lead us through this latest ski chapter in our fair city.

– Frankie Pillifant
Board President

STATEWIDE AROUND ALASKA

Why should kids have all the fun? Tsalteshi adult ski program gets big kids on skis, trails

Learn-to-ski grew up this winter in Tsalteshi Trails Association's adult ski program. TTA began offering group lessons for adults in classic and skate skiing in 2024. The program was a resounding success, with up to 35 attendees at some sessions and twice that many requesting the program be offered again this year.

Participants ranged in age from high school graduates to those having once owned a pair of wooden skis, and not for decorative purposes. A crew of instructors, many former or current ski coaches, divided participants by skill level, ranging from first-time-on skis to a race training cohort. First-timers leveled up from the all-important dead bug, French fry, and pizza pie techniques to going up and down hills and learning proper striding form. The intermediate group worked on more advanced skills, like double poling, balance transfer and pole placement. The race training group refined skills while working on conditioning.

Coach Harbison helps an adult skier learn how to wax skis.

Beginner classic skiers learn the all-important "dead bug" technique to get back up after a fall.

When winter weather was replaced by rain, the program transitioned to ski waxing seminars.

Though the program is designed to build skiing skills. TTA found it just as important to build confidence and expand social groups for more connection on the trails.

Many thanks to the coaches and skiers who made the 2025 adult ski program a huge success!

– Jenny Neyman, Admin Coordinator
Tsalteshi Trails Association
tsalteshi.org

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Fairbanks, Alaska
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nscfairbanks.org

Skiathon at UAF has an old and continuing history

BY ERIC TROYER AND LIZ PAWELKO

The historic Skiathon is back for 2025! Skiathon is the historic ski racing and touring event of the Interior. You can be a part of its continuing history by entering this year's Skiathon on Sunday, March 2. It starts at 11 a.m. near the University of Alaska Fairbanks ski hut on the West Ridge. Bib pickup and late registration will be from 10-10:45 a.m. at the ski hut.

This beloved event has had some challenges in the past few years. First there were the Covid years when the race was held virtually. Then last year it was canceled because the arboretum (near the Large Animal Research Station) was not being groomed for skiing. The event was held the previous year on ungroomed trails in that area and it was not the experience organizer Stan Justice wanted for his participants. Fortunately, UAF Trails Manager Todor Yakimov has agreed to groom that portion of the course for this year.

For this event, skiers use classic diagonal stride technique (no skating). There is a wood ski division. Finishers receive a Skiathon patch. This joint event of the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks and the UAF Trails Club benefits the UAF trail system and follows quite a historic course. For more information or to volunteer check the UAF Trails Club website (https://uaftrailsclub.weebly.com/) or contact Stan Justice (479-5017; stanjustice@acsalaska.net).

PHOTO BY **MAX KAUFMAN**
Two skiers race toward the finish of the 2017 Skiathon while a cheering crew watches in the background.

The registration fee is $15. Registration forms will be available at Beaver Sports or via the UAF Trails website. Forms must be turned in to Beaver Sports by noon, March 1. If mailed in, forms must be received by Stan no later than Saturday, March 1. People can also register on the day of the race at the bib pickup for $40.

A long history

The Skiathon started in the 1920s when six students University of Alaska Fairbanks crossed the threshold of the campus on the hillside west of Fairbanks. Skiing was how those students commuted to downtown, or to their jobs at mines along Ester Dome. The trails that would become

See **SKIATHON,** Page 19

Who's Who in the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks

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AROUND THE INTERIOR

Fairbanksans break Top 5 at World Championships

Fairbanksans Rosie Fordham and Kendall Kramer break the Top 5 at the 2025 FIS U23 World Nordic Ski Championships! **tinyurl.com/dwf3ys2p**

ADMA Mushing race season has started

If you like to ski on the ADMA trails at Creamer's Field wildlife refuge, mushing season is starting to ramp up. It's a good idea to check on the ADMA FB page for races and other activities. **facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063543311230**. You can find general information about dog racing for the season here: **tinyurl.com/49vwcm6a**.

Sartz to attempt Iditarod Trail Invitation

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner has a story about Fairbanks skier Patrik Sartz and his plans to attempt the Iditarod Trail Invitation to McGrath. "I haven't done a lot of multi-day, sleep-deprived type of skiing, so it will be a challenge, but I'm pretty excited," Sartz said. See the story here: **tinyurl.com/sybtbt99**.

Midnight Sun Golf Course again open to skiing

The Midnight Sun Golf Course again has ski trails open to the public! Please respect the rules and, if you use the trails, try to support the course operations however you can.

Here's a Google Maps link to the golf course: **maps.app.goo.gl/bLinigvwXs9X75mG9**. Enter trails from the parking lot, not from the sides of the property; sign in at the lodge (the clipboard will be inside during business hours and placed outside the door when we are closed); the gates close between 4-5 p.m. daily.

Please park outside the gate if you will be using the trails after hours; dogs must remain on leash at all times and pick up after your dogs; stay on marked ski trails; do not go on the snowmachine trails; in areas where the trails are close, yield to the snowmachine tours; skiing, skijoring, walking, snowshoeing, fat biking, and dogs on leash are all allowed on the ski trails; no motorized vehicles; private snowmachines are not allowed on our property; and use at your own risk.

Survey helps guide outdoor recreation statewide

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreational Plan (SCORP) is an important document that helps guide the state's resources for outdoor recreation for personal and business use. Please take the survey. It doesn't take long. **alaskadnr.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bO9uRKuK68J9yom**.

Help build a ski trip cabin

Do you like to take ski cabin trips in the White Mountain National Recreation Area? The Folk School is holding a class on log cabin building and the class project will be the new cabin. There are still a few spots left. The class will be held in the Goldstream Valley March 21-April 6 (with opportunistic days off depending on weather). If you can't attend every class but want to attend some, please inquire with the Folk School. The cabin will be placed between the Lee's and Moose Creek cabins on Trail Creek Trail, a great distance for a ski trip! For more information: **folk.school/events/event/log-cabin-construction-3/**.

Survey needs input for community planning

Fairbanks North Star Borough (FNSB) Community Planning Department has released a survey for its update of the 2005 Regional Comprehensive Plan (Comprehensive Plan). This is a good survey to complete just because you live in the greater Fairbanks area. For ski and trails issues, there isn't a whole lot specific in the questions, but you do have an opportunity to add your own comments in a couple of places. The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete and will be available through February 10, 2025. **survey123.arcgis.com/share/481d51af05df41e398d8320abee8706c**

White Mountains National Recreation Area offers day trips, overnight cabin adventures

BY ERIC TROYER

PHOTOS BY **ERIC TROYER**

Corrine Leistikow skis the Wickersham Creek Trail toward Eleazar's Cabin during a November trip in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

Fairbanks residents are incredibly lucky to have one of the premier winter playgrounds in our backyard. Located about an hour north of Fairbanks, the White Mountains National Recreation Area has more than 250 miles of groomed trails and 13 public use cabins, all run by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The trails and cabins offer incredible views of the area's namesake mountains as well as other mountains, hills, and forests in the area. The vistas include everything from wide-open scenes of scrub black spruce trees covered in a snow blanket to rugged rock massifs jutting up from valley floors.

Animals are often seen along the trails, including moose, caribou, ptarmigan, and ravens. Signs of wolves are not uncommon, though getting a glimpse of these elusive animals is a bit harder.

The recreation area trails can be accessed from four official trailheads. The most popular is the Wickersham Creek Trailhead at Mile 28 Elliott Highway. That is popular for day outings because it starts high, has views almost right away, and has varying terrain. The trailhead's higher elevation means it is generally warmer than surrounding valleys, though it can be breezy at times.

Two trails leave from that trailhead: Wickersham Creek Trail, which is open to motorized use, and Summit Trail, which is non-motorized and heads up to Wickersham Dome. The Ski Loop Trail, about 5-6 miles, uses the beginnings of both those trails, which are connected by a nonmotorized trail. Lee's Public Use Cabin, just seven miles out the Wickersham Creek Trail, is popular for overnights or as a turnaround point for day outings (but please don't disturb anyone renting it unless you know them).

Another trailhead is at Mile 57 Elliott Highway. The closest cabin to that trailhead is Colorado Creek Cabin, which is about 14 miles in. That trailhead is lower in elevation and can often be colder than the Wickersham Creek Trailhead. It stays relatively low for several miles. It also has a few creek crossings, which are usually frozen but can sometimes be wet, especially as temperatures rise.

Eric Troyer skis through slush on the Wickersham Creek Trail toward Eleazar's Cabin during a May trip in the White Mountains National Recreation Area.

The McKay Creek Trailhead, Mile 42 Steese Highway, offers a trail that climbs almost continually for the first five miles. It offers access to Richard's and Cache Mountain cabins, 21 and 20 miles from the trailhead, respectively. Getting to both cabins require river crossings, so be prepared in case there is overflow.

Another trailhead exists at Mile 57 Steese Highway. However, the trail from there – US Creek Road – is not officially groomed. The road is not plowed in winter and is used as a trail by a variety of trail users. The closest cabin is Richard's, about 25 miles, but BLM does not give reports on the condition of that trail.

The trails are groomed regularly by BLM crews for multiple users, motorized and non-motorized. None of the trails have set tracks for classic skiing and some are a bit narrow for skating (though some hardcore skiers make due with shortie skate skis.) Trail reports can be found on the update page (**blm.gov/visit/white-mountains/trail-update**) or on the area's Facebook page (**facebook.com/BLMWhiteMountains/**).

All the cabins can be rented except for the small Wickersham Creek Trail Shelter, which is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Book early, though, as the cabins are popular. Reservations can be made 30 days in advance.

To find out more, including a link to the cabin reservation website, see the main White Mountains National Recreation page: www.blm.gov/visit/white-mountains. See links below for blog posts about a few recent overnight ski trips into the Whites. Different months can hold different kinds of adventures!

- **November:** Early Season at Eleazar's: **tinyurl.com/bdw9n2yu**
- **April:** An 'Otherworldly' Ski Backpack Trip into the Whites: **tinyurl.com/2p8ne2**
- **May:** Reframing Stupid: A "Summer" Ski Trip in the White Mountains: **tinyurl.com/2s4euku8**

38th Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot needs skiers, volunteers

BY ERIC TROYER AND NSCF STAFF

The Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot returns on Saturday, March 22. Skiers get their choice of skiing a 10 km, 30 km, or 50 km course, using the Jim Whisenhant Ski Trails at Birch Hill Recreation Area, including trails on the adjacent Fort Wainwright.

As has been true for 37 years, this will be a full celebration of spring skiing! The name Sonot Kkaazoot comes from the Athabaskan language. Sonot means "springtime" and Kkaazoot means "to slide your feet across the snow." There will be two mass start waves, feed stations every 4-7 km, and an awards banquet in the evening with age class and overall woodels (wooden medals), homemade soup, and bread.

As the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks' annual spring marathon, the Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot is a celebration of the sun's return and (hopefully) faster snow. Although elite skiers, including Olympic and NCAA athletes, have always raced the Sonot, the long daylight hours and impeccable grooming make it a joy for recreational skiers to participate.

The 10 km race will be a one-lap course starting at 10 a.m. followed 15 minutes later by the start of the 30 and 50 km races. The 30 km course will be one lap, which will include all the main trails at Birch Hill, including all the Sunnyside trail. The 50 km event will be two laps, the first lap is the 30 km loop, followed by a 20 km second lap, which will take the skiers to the bottom of the Cliffside trail and cross in front of the ski lodge at Fort Wainwright's Birch Hill Ski & Snowboard Area. With 37 km already on their legs, skiers will climb the Sonot Connector (a 116-meter A climb) before finishing the rest of the White Bear, Moilanen Meadows, and Warmup Loops for the second time. Finishing the 50 km course is a huge accomplishment, as a skier will do 1,689 meters of climb, which makes the Sonot an even tougher bookend to September's Equinox Marathon.

PHOTO BY **MAX KAUFMAN**

The SCUM ski group, shown with their haul of 12 woodels at the 36th Sonot Kkaazoot awards ceremony, vow to increase their haul of 50 km woodels this year. Including SCUM who didn't attend the awards ceremony, SCUM earned four 10-km woodels, six 30-km woodels, and two 50-km woodels.

PHOTO BY **MARK LINDBERG**

A line of skiers climbs a hill at Birch Hill Recreation Area during the 2018 Sonot Kkaazoot.

The awards banquet will be held in the Birch Hill ski center and starts at 6 p.m. Homemade soups and bread will be served, and there is always an assortment of leftover feed station goodies there as well.

The first Sonot Kkaazoot was held in March 1988. Up through 2018, the race usually started and finished in downtown Fairbanks on the Chena River and included 10 km of the river on either end of the race. Even though holding the Sonot on the Chena River made for an easier ski course, several challenges – mostly climate change – have made skiing the river a part of the race's past. On the few years when a river start was not possible, the entire race was moved to Birch Hill, starting a half hour later than scheduled. The race has never been cancelled. During Covid, the race was run virtually, with participants sending in their race times, even if it was accomplished in stages over 2-3 days.

The Sonot Kkaazoot is a freestyle race. Classic skiers are welcome and there will be classical tracks on the entire course, but there will not be a separate race category for classic skiers.

Whenever you get an opportunity, please thank the sponsors of the Sonot Kkaazoot: Denali State Bank, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, and Fort Wainwright, U.S. Army Alaska. Also, we appreciate all the trail donors who have helped provide great trails all season for training and racing.

Registration information can be found on the Sonot website: **sonotkkaazoot.org**

Sonot Kkaazoot looking for volunteers

Another great way to participate in the Denali State Bank Sonot Kkaazoot is to be a volunteer. Volunteering is fun and rewarding! You can cheer on skiers, work with other friendly volunteers, and feel good knowing you've helped another wonderful community event succeed.

Volunteer opportunities include: Early bib pickup - Thursday, March 20, from 5-7 p.m. at Birch Hill upstairs in the ski center. Race day bib pickup - in Rikka's Roadhouse from 8-9:30 a.m. Saturday, March 22. Timing crew – 9:30-mid-afternoon Saturday, March 22 (shorter time-shift is optional). Awards banquet setup – 5-6 p.m. in the Birch Hill ski center. Awards banquet cleanup – 8-8:30 p.m.

Most of these volunteer opportunities can be filled by anyone. No experience is needed. All jobs are easy to learn. We are especially looking for non-racing volunteers to join the timing crew. Again, no experience is needed, and food will be supplied to keep you going! Many of our usual race day volunteers who staff other Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks events will be skiing in the Sonot. So, now it is someone else's turn to time their race!

For more information and/or to register for the Sonot Kkaazoot visit **sonotkkaazoot.org**.

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor of the Alaska Nordic Skier. He had help with this article from Sharon and Bad Bob Baker and Susan Sugai.

SKIATHLON

Continued from Page 17

the bedrock of the Skiathon, the Skarland trails, started right where the Wood Center stands today.

Young Fairbanks was surprisingly in sync with the rest of the world. The first ski race of Fairbanks occurred sometime in the 1923-24 winter. In 1924, the first winter Olympics were held in France featuring among other sports like curling and mountaineering, something called Nordic skiing.

As far back as the 1933, UAF skiers hosted a spring ski event on a two-mile trail down to the farm on campus and back. In 1936, the first ski club officers were elected. The 1940s saw UAF skiers competing against Army skiers, envying that it was their "job" to ski.

Ginny Wood and Celia Hunter, local pioneers, and activists, had their hand in Skiathon. In the 1950s, they lived in the Dogpatch subdivision east of Ballaine Road and worked with the UAF ski team to connect the campus trails with the hillside trails. They helped create the network of trails that were the bedrock of the original 20K race that was officially started as Skiathon in the 1960s.

Another Fairbanks phenomenon touched Skiathon – Joe Vogler. Yep, this vigilantly independent soul protested that the Skiathon crossed his property, despite the trail existing before his ownership. He was known to sabotage the trails, sending one racer to the hospital with a broken collarbone, which happened when the skier crossed a bulldozed section of trail.

The Skiathon and Equinox Marathon are linked because in 1963 Nat Goodhue, athlete and trails advocate, went along with the idea of creating this innovative running race trail to expand 42 more kilometers of skiing trail.

After an inactive period caused in part by the exodus of ski racing to Birch Hill, the UAF Trails Club resurrected the Skiathon in 2001, using a course that avoided any road crossings by staying completely on campus. The "classic" character of the event was maintained by disallowing skating, having a wooden ski division, and keeping it the 20K distance. In 2014, a new course was implemented using the 6-mile trail that returned the event to its roots following more of the historic route.

Thanks to Jane Parrish for her scholarly work investigating the history of trails in Fairbanks.

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor of the Alaska Nordic Skier. Liz Pawelko is a Fairbanks skiing and history enthusiast.

Fairbanks sends skiers to Junior Nationals

BY ERIC TROYER AND JESSE WILKINS

A contingent of 10 skiers from Fairbanks will be competing in the 2025 Junior National Cross Country Ski Championships in March.

Junior Nationals will be held March 10-15 in Soldier Hollow, Utah. This is the pinnacle event at the national level for junior cross-country skiers in the U16-U20 age brackets (ages 14-19). (The U stands for Under, as in Under age 16.) Find out more about the races at the official website: https://utaholympiclegacy.org/event/junior-xc-nationals-2025/. You can also find out information on the United States Ski and Snowboard website: https://tinyurl.com/vv9heswj.

Skiers for the team were chosen based on points earned at certain races, such as the U.S. National Cross Country Championships, held in January, and the Alaska Besh Cup race series. Fairbanks skiers qualified primarily through outstanding performances at the Besh Cup Race series which included races held at Kincaid Park in Anchorage, Birch Hill in Fairbanks, and Government Peak Recreation area in Palmer.

Here is a lineup of Fairbanks-area skiers competing on the team: All of the skiers representing Fairbanks are members of the Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks FXC program.

U18/U20 Female: Ellie Abrahamson, Adah Decker, and Ingrid Baurick. U16 Female: Lilli Bond. U18/U20 Male: Kieran Kaufman, Basile Plattet, Wells Wappett, Peter-John Bragonier, Nathan VanderLugt, and Owen Wooller.

PHOTOS BY **MAX KAUFMAN**

These photos, (Ingrid Baurick above) taken at a Besh Cup race at Birch Hill earlier this year, feature some of the young Fairbanks-area skiers headed to Junior Nationals.

Kieran Kaufman

Ellie Abrahamson

Wells Wappett

Eric Troyer is the Fairbanks editor of the Alaska Nordic Skier. Jesse Wilkins is the Head Coach for the NSCF FXC program.

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