

Ester Valley Trail

Revised: 18 August 2019

History

The Ester Valley Trail (aka Ester Creek Drive) was constructed by miners in 1903, and first appears as a road along the northern bench of Ester Creek Valley, leading to placer and lode mines in the valley in 1908 (USGS Bulletin 525, Plate 11). Over the years, the road location has shifted to accommodate dredging activity. In 1933, the road is in the valley bottom and named Government Road (MS #1649). In later years, the road originated at Alpha Way in Ester, crossed the mouth of Ready Bullion Creek, preceded west along the north bench of the valley to the head of Ester Creek, then to the crest of the Ester watershed, continuing to Straight Creek, then on to the Cache and Old Saulich sidings on the Alaska Railroad. In the 1970's, because of placer mining activity in Ready Bullion Creek, the road was relocated from the bench in Ester Valley onto private property (patented mining claim) on the valley floor.

Today, the Ester Valley Trail is a route used by placer miners to access mining claims in the valley and is a recreational trail used by snowmachiners, ATV riders, mountain bikers, x-c skiers, runners, trappers, etc. While the trail, and its branches, are not included in the *FNSB Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan*, it forms critical connections to Ester Dome, via the Tri-Con Rd and Willow Creek Trail (present in the *FNSB Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan*), and to Old Wood Rd, via the Social Security Mine Trail. For a period of time in the 1990-2000's, the Fireplug Sled Dog Race was held on this route, from Ester to Nenana and return.

As a result of disputes between adjacent mining operators, in June 2011, the road was gated at the property boundary at the mouth of the valley and deep ditches/berms dug on three branch trails (Social Security Mine Trail, Fireplug Trail and Tri-Con Road) to prevent access. "No Trespassing" signs have been placed at these locations. Also, during the summer of 2011, the upper portion of the trail (between Moose Gulch and Willow Creek) has been relocated from the valley floor back to the bench on the north side to facilitate placer mining in the valley bottom. Mining activity at the head of the valley has also completely blocked the trail. As policy, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources requires that when mining activity blocks trail access in this area, the trails shall be relocated in a substantially similar fashion (*Eastern Tanana Area Plan*, 2014, Chap 2, Page 37).

1) As a public right-of-way, this trail qualifies for RS2477 status based on historical information (1903 claim recordings, 1908 and 1933 USGS reports and maps, and 1949 aerial photographs; RST 769). 2) Right-of-way easements, expressed in warranty deeds, clearly grant passage to neighboring landowners. 3) A public prescriptive easement exists, since it has seen uninterrupted and open use in its present location since the 1960's.

Usage History

2017. Affidavit of Daniel "Pete" Eagan, attests that as former manager of Alaska Gold Company (prior owner), the Alaska Gold Company always considered the Ester Valley Road was *public access and not private*.

2014. FNSB Mayor Luke Hopkins and Attorney René Broker state that the route is a "public easement". <http://co.fairbanks.ak.us/Assembly%20Meeting%20MP3%20Files/2014/2014Aug07COWT2.mp3> (10:25').

2013. Road depicted; labeled "Ester Creek Drive" and marked as a local road. USGS topographical map, Fairbanks D-3 SE.

2013. Complaint for Declaratory Judgment and Injunctive Relief filed by Geoffrey Orth.
2010. Ester Valley Trail, Tri-Con Mining Road, Social Security Trail and the Fireplug Trail depicted. TrailMapper.org. Tom Clark.
2010. Trails described. An Essential Ester Dome Trail Summary & Map. Ester Community Assoc, Tom Clark. <http://www.estercommunity.org/committees/esterdometrails.html>.
2004. Ester Valley Trail, Tri-Con Mining Road, Social Security Trail and the Fireplug Trail depicted. Ester Trails Map. Geoffrey Orth.
2002. Trail activity described. Tales of Bob A. Peggy Raybeck & Mike Tinker. The Ester Republic; Vol 4, No 7, Pg 13.
1999. Right-of-way easement expressed. Deed #401-1999-021542-0 (USMS #813, #799, #1651, #794 & #1650); Grantor: Alaska Gold Company, Grantee: Walter Largent & Roger Moore.
1997. Right-of-way easement expressed. Deed #401-1997-008380-0 (USMS #350); Grantor: Gerald Hassel, Grantee: Walter Largent & Roger Moore.
1994. RST 769, Ester Mining Area & Bonanza Creek System. Nomination as a RS 2477; under administrative review pending additional documentation. Alaska DNR-MLW.
1993. Right-of-way easement expressed. Deed #401-1993-013997-0 (USMS #356, #357 & #1992); Grantor: Alaska Gold Company, Grantee: Walter Largent.
1992. Road depicted and marked as a unimproved road. "Compiled from aerial photographs taken 1985. Field checked 1987" USGS topographical map, Fairbanks D-3 SE.
- 1990-2001. Fireplug Sled Dog Race held on trail route.
- 199?-2012. 2-3 mountain bike rides annually. Fairbanks Cycle Club.
- 1988-2012. Spring x-c ski outings. Alaska Alpine Club & Nordic Ski Club of Fairbanks.
- 1985-??. Competitive trail rides. Interior Alaska Trail Rider's Association. Fairbanks, AK.
1985. FNSB *Comprehensive Recreational Trail Plan* recommendation that borough lands on the southern slopes of Ester Dome be dedicated as a recreational trail area (I-BR2. Ester Community Trail System).
1984. Trails depicted. FNSB *Comprehensive Trail Plan: Jurisdictional Responsibilities and Trail Inventory*. Map 35 & 36.
1978. Trails depicted. Ester Trails and Greenbelt Proposal. Ester Community Association.
1978. Trails depicted. Ester Trails Map. Mike Spindler.
1978. Trails depicted. Aerial photography. USGS-UAF.
1978. Trails depicted. Ester Discovery Subdivision, Plat 401-1978-191-001.
1978. Use by plaintiff begins. Complaint for Declaratory Judgment and Injunctive Relief by Geoffrey Orth
1965. Documented use begins, establishing prescriptive rights. Affidavit of Michael Tinker. undated. Road depicted (Ready Bullion Road). Survey Status Plats.
1952. Road depicted; "Improved Dirt". USGS topographical map, Fairbanks D-3.
1952. Road depicted; "Light Duty Road". USGS topographical map, Fairbanks 1:250 series.
1951. Road depicted. USACE topographical map, Series Q501, Sheet NQ 5, 6-15, Edition 1-AMS.
1949. Road depicted. Aerial photography. FNSB GIS.
1946. Road depicted. A Reconnaissance for Radioactive Deposits in Eastern Interior Alaska, 1946. USGS Circular #331, p. 6.
1943. Map of the Fairbanks District, Alaska. USGS Bulletin 849, Plate 3
1940. Road depicted. USGS Alaska Fairbanks Special Map, Alaska Map 40.
1940. Road depicted. USGS Bull #907, Map Plate III, Geologic Map of the Alaska Railroad Region, Yanert Fork To Fairbanks.
1940. Road depicted. USGS Alaska Railroad, Yanert Fork To Fairbanks. Alaska Map 27. (http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/us_states/alaska/index_After1920.htm)
1933. Road depicted. Lode Deposits of the Fairbanks District. USGS Bull #849-B, James Hill. p. 121.
1933. Road depicted. Geologic Map of the Fairbanks District, Alaska. USGS Bull #849, Plate 3.

1929. Road location described, Route 7DD. Alaska Road Commission Annual Report, p. 78.
1928. Road depicted. Steese Highway, Fairbanks to Circle. Alaska Road Commission, D. MacDonald.
1927. Road work described, Route 7D & 7DD. Alaska Road Commission Annual Report, p. 52-54.
1914. First U.S. Mineral Patents issued for USMS #799, #794, #357, and #356.
1913. Road depicted. A Geologic Reconnaissance of the Fairbanks Quadrangle, Alaska. USGS Bull #525, L.M. Prindle. p. 204.
1912. Road depicted. Lode Mining Near Fairbanks, P.S. Smith. Fig 7, p. 190. Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1912. USGS Bull ??.
- 1911-33. Road depicted. U.S. Mineral Surveys Plats #813, #799, #794, and #1649.
1908. Road depicted. Topographic and Economic Map of the Fairbanks District, Alaska. USGS Bull #525 Plate11 (surveyed 1907), L.M. Prindle & F.J. Katz.
1908. Road depicted. Alaska, Fairbanks Special Map. Alaska Sheet 642 A (surveyed 1907).
- 1906-42. Road work described, Route 7D & 7DD. Alaska Road Commission Annual Reports.
1906. Trail use described. Fairbanks Daily Times, 19 September 1906.
1903. Road construction by prospectors. History of a Road in Ester Creek Valley Upstream of Discovery Claim. Matthew Reckard, February 2014.
1903. Mineral claims located. U.S. Mineral Surveys Plats #813, #794, #356, and #350.
1903. Trails established by prospectors. Trails in Ester Creek Valley Prior to Road Construction There. Matthew Reckard, May 2014.