

Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities, Northern Region,
R.S. 2477 Trails Documentation

As early as June 1972, Commissioner B.A. Campbell requested his department to "locate all existing trails and roads of record in the state on U.S.G.S. quadrangles maps and to make a list of each trail as to name, identification to area, source of information of public record and description." The Alaska Department of Highways complied and started the program on June 4, 1972. It completed plotting the trails on the U.S.G.S. quadrangles in September 1973, and by April 1974 had accomplished the IBM printout.

The Alaska Department of Highways distributed the blueline prints and bound set of IBM listings widely to both federal and state agencies, and the Native Regional Corporations.

Soon the Department of Highways reviewed Native land selections in light of the proposed easements to be reserved in the title documents. Commissioner W.B. Parker requested that only easements for existing trails and roads or highways would be claimed and made a part of the title document. The only exception were to be for highways contained in the department's five year program, and for which application for the right-of-way had been made. The department reviewed Native land selections, and proposed easements which coincided with existing trails and roads shown on the trails inventory.

In 1985, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources published an R.S. 2477 "Regional Trails and Roads Assertion Inventory." The department stated that it was only a partial inventory of roads and trails possessing characteristics suitable for R.S. 2477 assertion. The department had chosen four criteria in compiling its inventory:

1. known historic use;

2. some evidence that the road or trail had been used;
3. available documentation;
4. roads or trails shown on available maps.

It was a sparse inventory, giving the name of the trail or road, its number, quadrangle, known and suspected use, documents and maps. An "x" indicated the known or suspected use, and the availability of documents and maps.

In 1988, DOT&PF contracted with the principal investigator to document trails in helping to determine whether or not many of these were subject to R.S. 2477 rights-of-way.

The P.I. obtained the names of several hundred trails and roads north of southeastern Alaska listed in the annual reports of the Alaska Road Commission, 1905-1956. These reports furnish a wealth of information, including amounts of monies expended in their construction and upkeep. The information from these reports was xeroxed. So were documents showing the historic use of these trails and roads obtained from the records of the ARC, Record Group 30, housed at the Federal Records Center in Seattle, Washington; in the U.S. Geological Survey Bulletins; various collections housed in the archives of the Elmer E. Rasmuson Library of the University of Alaska Fairbanks; varying runs of 45 Alaskan newspapers, and the Records of the Alaskan Territorial Government, Record Group 348, consisting of 378 microfilm reels.

This information was used to create a computer data base with about 14,000 entries. Any prospective user desiring historical information on any of these trails merely has to pull up the name of the trail on the computer screen. There are three files:

1. Alaska Road Commission Report: trails;
2. Federal Record Center Report: trails; and
3. Rasmuson Library Report: trails.

Under each file, the name of the trail or road is followed by:

1. Route; Date; Cost; Source; Page.
2. Date; Description; Recommendation: Page, Location.
3. Date; Description; Recommendation; Source; Page.

The user then notes the source and page number and finds the appropriate documents in the historical xerox collection, appropriately arranged, in the Northern Region Research Section of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities on 600 University Avenue, Fairbanks, Alaska. Users may want to copy the needed information from this collection for each trail or road.

The data base is extensive and easy to use and should yield the information needed to assert a R.S. 2477 trail or road.