

MAHAFFEY URGES PROPER USE OF TRAILS

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Friends and the Alaska Pacific University Board of Trustees gathered on a sunny day last fall to dedicate the school's trail network to former ski coach Jim Mahaffey. When Mahaffey thanked those who'd gathered in his honor, he wasn't blinded by the bright light of the day. He talked about darker days for the trails and he wasn't talking about winter.

A trail-map sign with " Jim Mahaffey Trail System" emblazoned across the top had been erected at the trailhead next to Moseley Sports Center, but it wasn't necessarily a permanent fixture, he warned.

"It takes vision and eternal vigilance" to ensure the future of the APU trail system, he said Tuesday. "Economic greed all too often overruns aesthetic appreciation."

For now, APU has a 41 2-kilometer groomed ski trail which connects directly with more than 20 kilometers of University of Alaska Anchorage and Russian Jack Springs Park trails. Multi-use trails also criss-cross the area.

Mahaffey was a major player in the design, development and maintenance of the trails while a ski coach (1967-1975) and faculty member for the former Alaska Methodist University, now APU. At age 64, he has seen many trails eliminated, but others created.

Mahaffey said he understands the need for universities and communities to grow. He said he hopes architects and trail advocates can work together during any expansion.

APU Ski Club coach Vince Johnson said he shares Mahaffey's ideals and love for the on-campus trails.

"Rather than teaching environmental ethics here in a building and then walking out into a parking lot . . . you have a campus that's an embodiment of an environmental ethic," he said.

Johnson has worked with Mahaffey, and other members of the school's Recreation Facilities Advisory Committee, to help guide the future of the trail system.

What the trail could become a smoother, better-maintained trail that had public support and someday, perhaps, lights is only a vision, Johnson said. The trail crosses

unprotected private property rather than park land, and a popular, well-used trail is less likely to be bulldozed to make way for development, Johnson said.

To that end, new maps, available at Moseley Sports Center, were created with color-coding that distinguishes between multi-use and skier-only trails. Signs were put up along trails to help guide trail users to either the skier-only trail or the multi-use trail.

Johnson and others are trying to encourage users to respect the distinction.

"We're trying to develop a model for cooperation," Johnson said. "The question becomes, 'Are you going to keep kicking people off? Or are you going to accommodate everyone.' "

BARTLETT: The 5-kilometer trail system offers the best Nordic skiing in Anchorage this week. Trails were groomed after a high school ski meet last Wednesday and will be groomed again today after a 3:30 p.m. junior high race. Skiers can expect to find a groomed trail and the telltale pie-plate signs for the Nordic Ski Club of Anchorage's Trail of the Week. For directions to the trailhead call the club's hotline, 248-6667.

CHESTER CREEK TRAIL: City crews worked Saturday to flatten and rough-up the icy surface of the trail between Russian Jack Springs Park and Westchester Lagoon. Skiers should beware of skijorers and their dogs who will be racing between Mulcahy Stadium and Goose Lake, starting at 11 a.m. Saturday and lasting until about 4 p.m.

COASTAL TRAIL: The trail between Westchester Lagoon and Kincaid Park remains hardpacked and fast.

HATCHER PASS: The usual 15 kilometers of classical-technique trail near Hatcher Pass Lodge are the closest tracks to Anchorage that are ice free. The area received 8 inches of powder Thursday for more than a 5-foot base. The trails, in good condition, were groomed for a weekend of heavy use and another one-half inch fell Monday. The trail fee is \$5.

SEWARD: The Exit Glacier area received 4 to 6 inches of snow Monday, but the beginning of the road to the glacier received considerably less and remains icy. Watch out for pockets of water in the glacier's outwash plain, as well as at all creek bottom areas and crossings in the Seward area. The southern access to the Iditarod Trail (Mile 2 Nash Road) is unusable, while the rest of the trail is hardpacked and rough in places. The trail may be groomed for use by high school ski racers Friday. The Golden Fin Trail, Mile 12 Seward Highway, are in good shape for intermediate to advanced skiers. Forest Service trails are reported to be marginal.

SHEEP MOUNTAIN: All 20 kilometers received 2 inches of powder this week. Temperatures have remained well below freezing, so there's no ice. Expect trails groomed for skating and classical skiing by the weekend.

SOLDOTNA: The Tsalteshi Community Trails behind Skyview High received 4 inches of snow. All 15 kilometers were groomed for classical and skate skiers as of Tuesday and are reported to be in excellent condition.

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA VALLEY: A majority of trails in the Valley will need more snow before groomers will be able to work with the base. In the meantime, the Crevasse-Moraine trails were groomed Tuesday for both types of skiing and will be regroomed by Friday. All trails are hardpacked and icy.

UNIVERSITY TRAILS: The Jim Mahaffey and University of Alaska Anchorage trails are in fair to good shape. Skiers, however, will want to watch out for skijors on portions of the trail, especially the multi-use section around University Lake.

VALDEZ: Skiing conditions on the 10-kilometer trail near Valdez are reported to be good on more than a 2-foot base. Alpine skiing on nearby Thompson Pass is excellent. Six inches of snow fell on a 71 2-foot base. The area has received more than 42 feet of snow this winter.