

Pleasant Island Trip Report for SEACC's Wilderness Stewardship Program

June 9, 2011

Pleasant Island is a unique area because of its proximity to Gustavus. This has both positive and negative effects on the character of the Wilderness Area. The positive effect of being located near a community is that the residents of Gustavus take a keen interest and ownership of the Wilderness Area. The negative effects are primarily caused by the heavy use, and proximity to an airstrip. This has created some non-conforming sites, impact on the solitude of the area, and has introduced several large patches *Taraxacum officinale*. Overall, Pleasant Island is very healthy and the recreational sites were limited to the more heavily used beaches.

The trip consisted of a community meeting, a day long beach clean up, and 4 days of surveying Pleasant Island for recreational use sites, Culturally Modified Trees (CMTs), garbage, invasive species and collection of solitude data. The projects goals are to generate community involvement in stewardship of the area, as well as to collect baseline ecological data. Our efforts will help land managers identify and mitigate changes to the character of the wilderness area.

On Tuesday May 24, sixteen people attended a community meeting and a presentation on Wilderness Stewardship. The meeting was held at the Gustavus Public Library.

Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) distributed a survey designed to gain a better understanding of community concerns and uses of Pleasant Island. As of June 9th, 20 the surveys have been filled out and returned to SEACC. Surveys were left at the Cabin on Pleasant Island and the Gustavus

Library. A digital version is available on line at

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/pleasantislandusesurvey>.



On Wednesday May 25th, eight people on three skiffs volunteered for a beach clean up on Pleasant Island. During the beach clean up, 426 pounds of trash were collected from four beaches on the east side of the island. The Gustavus Disposal and Recycling Center waived all of their disposal fees as a donation to the project.



May 26-29th, SEACC, SCS, and four volunteers surveyed the island, covering a total of 9.24 miles of coastline, including all of the most heavily used areas. Twenty-three recreational sites were located, 14 of which were naturalized. Most of recreational sites consisted of fire rings and cut wood. A few had semi-permanent installations; one had a 30-foot cable that was strung between two trees, and tin roofing covering firewood.

The Pleasant Island trip provided an excellent opportunity to collaborate with the National Park Service. Two wilderness rangers with National Park Service (NPS) joined the expedition for two days. A joint survey of the beach and beach fringe allowed SEACC and SCS to compare recreational site survey techniques with those used by the NPS rangers. In addition, the interaction provided a chance to learn about the NPS's Natural Sounds and Night Skies Program, and the soundscape monitoring protocol currently being used by the NPS in areas such as Glacier Bay.

Throughout the trip the team documented 32 Culturally Modified Trees (CMT). CMT's are the result of traditional uses of trees, dating back decades to centuries. Some of the traditional uses that left visible marks on trees include bark striping, cutting planks and extracting sap for fire starting and caulking. Documenting CMT's is important because the data gives an indication of the location of possible archaeological sites and provides information about the traditional use of Pleasant Island. All CMT data, including photos, will be provided to the Forest Service for any follow up research.

Invasive plants were documented when observed on the 9.24 miles of coastline surveyed. Six invasive plant sites were found and mapped with a handheld GPS, all of which consisted of *Taraxacum officinale* (dandelions). The sites coincided with the more highly used beaches of the island and places where the land had become disturbed by natural occurrences. A full plant inventory was not completed, but one of the highlights of the trip was locating a patch of calypso orchids (*Calypso bulbosa*) in the beach fringe.



Throughout the trip SEACC, SCS and volunteers logged solitude data. A total of 58.5 hours of solitude data were collected, and we expect additional surveys to be completed by volunteers throughout the summer. The primary disturbances consisted of skiff and small

plane traffic. This was the first time that solitude data has been collected on Pleasant Island, providing an important baseline for noise and disturbances. The opportunity for solitude is an important part of the wilderness character of the area.

The beach clean up that kicked off the week was only the beginning of collecting trash from the beaches of Pleasant Island. Throughout the trip the team continued to pick up trash, resulting in an estimated additional 300 pounds of garbage being collected from the beach and beach fringe. Most of the trash appeared to have washed up with the tide. The combined total between the beach clean up and the rest of the week was 728 pounds of trash, roughly four skiff loads.

Nat Drumheller of Gustavus volunteered his birding expertise for two days. He identified 40 different species of birds, including but not limited to juncos, greater yellow legs, varied thrush, white-winged crossbill, and bald eagles. One of the highlights of our birding was finding an active oystercatchers nest with three beautiful speckled eggs.

All data collected during this trip (recreational site, solitude, bird, invasive species, and CMT data) was entered into excel spreadsheets and submitted to the appropriate Forest Service officials.



The Gustavus Inn and Spirit Walker Expeditions donated housing for SEACC and SCS organizers. Gustavus Inn also proved meals and use of their skiff. Total in-kind donations exceeded \$2,000.00.

Recommendations:
Priority actions should be taken to remove *Taraxacum officinale* from the Island. Remaining non-conforming sites should be naturalized,

and a cooperative education plan with SEACC and SCS be implemented to foster stewardship and discourage non-conforming use of the area. A high concentration of CMTs was documented and a complete CMT survey would increase our understanding of the cultural resources of the island.

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