

Trail Safety



Staying Safe on Alaska's Trails

Across Alaska, winter trails, ice roads, and seasonal overland routes serve as critical connections between communities. These routes are more than recreational assets—they are essential lifelines that support public safety, emergency response, and access to health and community services. —but they also carry risk. Weather can change without warning, daylight can be limited, and help may be far away. Preparation, good judgment, and situational awareness are critical for anyone traveling Alaska's trails, whether by snowmachine, ATV, skis, dog team, or on foot.

Before You Go

One of the most common mistakes people make is underestimating conditions or overestimating their equipment and experience. Before heading out:

- Check the weather and trail conditions and be prepared for them to worsen.
- Tell someone your plan: where you're going, how you'll get there, and when you expect to return.
- Dress for survival, not convenience. Wear layered clothing suitable for cold, wind, and moisture—even on short trips.
- Carry emergency supplies, including extra food, water, warm layers, a headlamp, fire-starting materials, first aid supplies, and a basic repair kit.
- Bring reliable communication, such as a satellite phone, inReach, or VHF radio. Cell service is limited or nonexistent on many trails.

On the Trail - Conditions can vary widely - even within a few miles.

- Slow down and stay alert, especially on unfamiliar trails.
- Be cautious around open water, overflow, thin ice, and avalanche-prone areas.
- If possible, avoid traveling alone, especially in remote areas.
- Don't rely solely on GPS. Batteries fail, and electronics can malfunction in cold temperatures. Carry a map and know the route.
- A frequent cause of trouble is pressing on despite worsening weather, fatigue, or mechanical issues. Turning around early is often the safest choice.

If You Become Lost - If you realize you're lost or disoriented:

- Stop moving to avoid making the situation worse.
- Try to retrace your route only if conditions and visibility allow.
- Shelter in place if needed, especially during storms or darkness.
- Use communication devices to call for help early—don't wait until the situation becomes critical.
- Make yourself visible with lights, bright clothing, or signal fires when safe to do so.

If Someone Is Injured - Injuries on the trail can quickly become life-threatening due to cold and isolation.

- Stabilize the injured person, control bleeding, and prevent heat loss.
- Do not separate unless absolutely necessary.
- Use emergency communication devices to request assistance as soon as possible.
- If evacuation is delayed, focus on shelter, warmth, hydration, and monitoring the injured person's condition.

Taking the time to plan, pack properly, and make conservative decisions can make the difference between a safe trip and a serious emergency.