

LANIE FLEISCHER CHESTER CREEK TRAIL  
(Chester Creek Trail)

HALS AK-8  
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Anchorage  
Anchorage  
Alaska

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

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**HALS NO. AK-8**

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Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska

The trail passes through Margaret Egan Sullivan Park, Valley of the Moon Park, Mulcahy Park, Charles Smith Memorial Park, Eastchester Park, Tikishla Park, and Goose Lake Park, a nearly continuous string of parks comprising the Chester Creek Greenbelt. Chester Creek is the southern boundary of the Historic Preservation Plan for Anchorage's Original Four Neighborhoods, adopted by the Anchorage Assembly on February 12, 2013.

Latitude: 61.208611, Longitude: -149.9225 (west end of trail at Westchester Lagoon, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84).

Latitude: 61.196944, Longitude: -149.821389 (east end of trail at Goose Lake Park, Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84).

**Significance:** The Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail was the first paved recreational bicycle trail in Anchorage. When Lanie Fleischer moved to Anchorage in 1971 from Washington, D.C., she found that Anchorage had no trail system. Her vision was a trail system that would connect children to schools, parks and libraries, without having to be driven. Three hundred enthusiastic people turned out for a "bike in" event she organized. Lanie and the Anchorage Bike Committee she helped organize, succeeded in getting a bond issue passed to finance construction of the four-mile Chester Creek Trail in 1973. Fleischer was recognized and honored by the mayor and assembly in 1994 when it named that initial trail the "Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail". (Source: Alaska Women's Hall of Fame). Design and construction of other paved trails in Anchorage followed, including the Tony Knowles Coastal Trail, the Campbell Creek Trail, and the Ship Creek Trail.

"You can ride from the east side of town to ... the west without ever crossing a road. Part of one of the greatest urban trail systems in America." (Source: Mountain Bike Review).

Description: By federal guidelines the Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail is a “*shared use path.*” The Municipality of Anchorage refers to the facility as a “*trail,*” and this document will use the same term.

The Chester Creek Lanie Fleischer Trail is a multi-use trail used in the summer by bicyclists, skaters, runner, and walkers. The trail is maintained for running in winter, and is also used for cross country skiing, ski-joring, mountain biking, and occasionally, for dog mushing.

The trail is eight feet wide, paved, with grass and gravel shoulders. It is approximately four miles long, from Westchester Lagoon to Goose Lake. The trail connects to other trails including the eleven-mile Tony Knowles Coastal Trail and numerous local neighborhood trails. The trail follows Chester Creek, crossing it repeatedly. The Chester Creek Lanie Fleischer Trail is grade-separated from all streets for its entire length, mostly with tunnels. Near its east end, the trail crosses Northern Lights Boulevard on a bridge. The trail passes through primarily undeveloped woodlands along the creek, with developed recreation facilities including playgrounds and ball fields, at numerous locations. The trail is lit by pedestrian-scale light poles. Single- and multi-family residential areas abut the greenbelt.

The asphalt surface of the trail has deteriorated badly. Pavement has been damaged by tree roots, frost-jacking of culverts, and movement of unstable soils. Bumps are often painted, making them more visible to runners and bicyclists. The oldest tunnels are narrow and poorly lit by today’s standards. Concrete headwalls at the tunnels are cracked and spalling. Maintenance doesn’t appear to keep up with the need.

Naturalized Mayday Trees or chokecherries (*Prunus padus*) are displacing native vegetation in Anchorage creek bottoms, including Chester Creek. While visually attractive, chokecherries do not provide good browse for the local moose population.

Homeless camps are found throughout the greenbelt on either side of the trail. Camps are sometimes unsightly and unsanitary, and raise safety concerns for trail users.

History: Chester Creek flows from the Chugach Mountains east of Anchorage to Cook Inlet in the west. The name “Chester Creek” was reported in 1906 by T.G. Gerdine and R.H. Sargent of the U.S.G.S.

Anchorage was badly damaged by the 1964 earthquake. With development already taking place near the creek banks, the Chester Creek Greenbelt was set aside in 1971, thanks to efforts of Kit Crittenden and other citizen activists. One subdivision in what is now the Chester Creek Greenbelt was laid out after the

earthquake but never built.

Soon after establishment of the Greenbelt, Lanie Fleischer and John Reese helped organize an Anchorage Bike Committee. Their goal was an interconnected trail “from the mountains to the sea,” a distance of about 10 miles. The trail would connect neighborhoods to parks and schools, giving children a safe alternative to riding their bicycles through traffic. The Bike Committee faced opposition from a mayor who claimed no one would ride that far. They also faced opposition from some parks supporters who felt the Greenbelt should remain completely undeveloped. After neighborhood meetings, public hearings, and a “bike in” that attracted 300 people, the Bike Committee succeeded in getting a bond measure passed in 1973 to finance construction of a paved bike trail.

The original trail was designed in 1973 by City of Anchorage engineers under the direction of City Engineer Lee Browning. A contract for \$182,000 was let to C.R. Morse Company for construction of an 8’ asphalt trail along the creek from Minnesota Drive to Goose Lake, a distance of approximately 4 miles. The contract included wood bridges across Chester Creek. Separated grade crossings at roadways were not included in the initial contract.

Construction began on August 16, 1973 and work was completed on June 7, 1974 for a total contract amount of \$181,905. The alignment of the trail along the creek was accomplished in large part by City contract administrators walking the area with lath and surveyor tape.

In 1974, the Alaska Department of Highways (now Department of Transportation and Public Facilities) contracted with Damco Construction, Inc., to construct pedestrian underpasses consisting of two 10-foot diameter corrugated metal pipe (CMP) culverts under the northbound and southbound lanes of Minnesota Drive. The State also constructed a 12’ diameter CMP tunnel under Spenard Road, along with two wood bridges on either side of “C” St, at the same time the City contract was underway.

Even during construction of the trail, its popularity was apparent by the number of pedestrians and bicyclists using the partially completed trail.

A second trail contract was awarded to Comanche Corp in 1975. This contract included the tunnel under Arctic Blvd, and trail sections at Gambell and Ingra Streets and at Lake Otis Parkway that were not in the original contract. Work on this contract was completed on July 1, 1976 for a total contract amount of about \$112,000. CMP tunnels under the Gambell/Ingra Couplet and Lake Otis Parkway were constructed by the State and the City respectively, under separate contracts, during this same time.

The third Chester Creek bike trail contract in the amount of \$246,896 went to T. H. E. Construction with a NTP on May 16, 1977. This contract included some additional trail ties around Mulcahy Park and Lake Otis Parkway along with a trail extension next to Northern Lights Boulevard between Boniface Parkway and Muldoon Road.

The original Northern Lights Boulevard overpass at Goose Lake was constructed about this same time under a separate Municipal contract. This overpass was replaced with the present reinforced concrete structure by the State when Northern Lights Boulevard was widened to four lanes.

The fourth and final contract administered by the Anchorage Department of Public Works for the Chester Creek bike trail was prepared by Tryck, Nyman & Hayes and awarded to Lourie Contracting. The NTP was issued on October 15, 1984. This contract installed additional bridges across the creek and trail lighting between Westchester Lagoon and Mulcahy Park, and in the area east of Lake Otis Parkway. The contract was completed and accepted on September 8, 1986 for a final amount of \$337,447

The Department of Parks and Recreation, through their consultant, Tryck, Nyman & Hayes, prepared a contract for further improvements to the Chester Creek bike trail system in 1987. This work included pavement replacement and drainage work at various locations between Westchester Lagoon and Goose Lake. This work was completed in 1989.

Sources: Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities archives

Alaska Women's Hall of Fame <http://alaskawomenshalloffame.org/>

Mountain Bike Review. [http://trails.mtbr.com/cat/united-states-trails/trails-alaska/trail/chester-creek-trail/prd\\_173982\\_4512crx.aspx](http://trails.mtbr.com/cat/united-states-trails/trails-alaska/trail/chester-creek-trail/prd_173982_4512crx.aspx)

Municipality of Anchorage Department of Public Works

Municipality of Anchorage Parks & Recreation  
<http://www.muni.org/Departments/parks/Pages/parksntrails.aspx>

Personal recollections:  
Lanie Fleischer, Anchorage, AK, 2013  
Lee Browning, Anchorage, AK, 2013  
John Reese, Anchorage, AK, 2013

Historian: Kenneth V. Morton  
8631 Leeper Circle  
Anchorage, AK 99504

907-441-7164

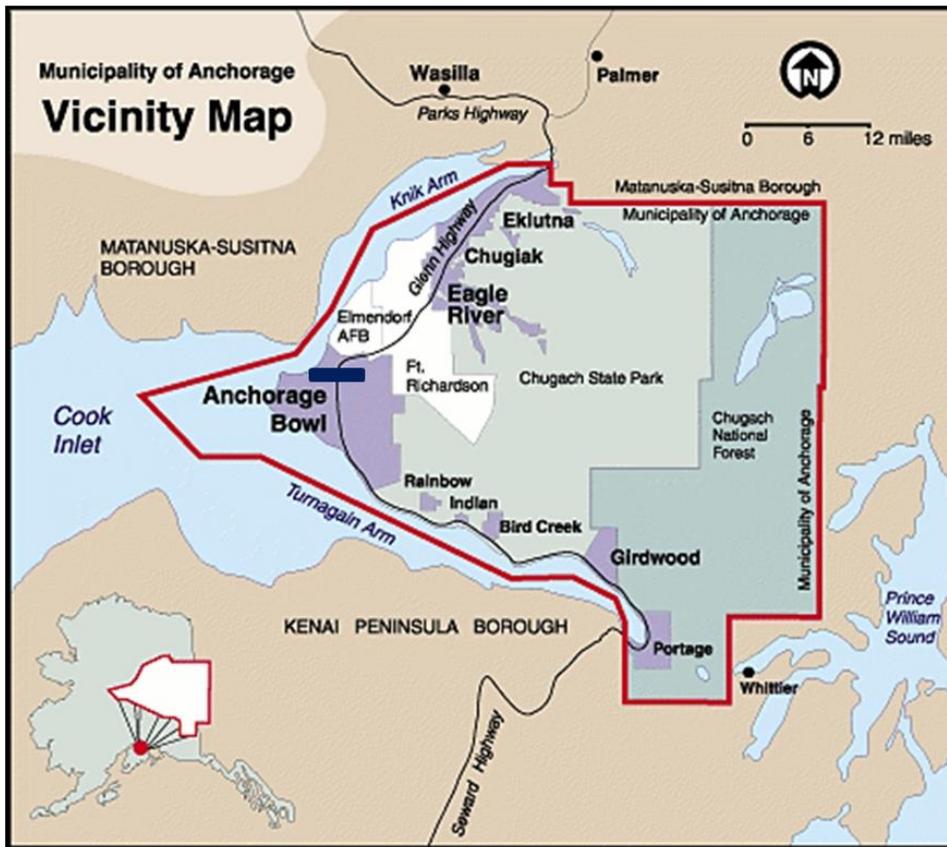
American Society of Landscape Architects, Alaska Chapter HALS Liaison

July 31, 2013

2013 HALS Challenge Entry: *Documenting the Cultural Landscapes of Women*

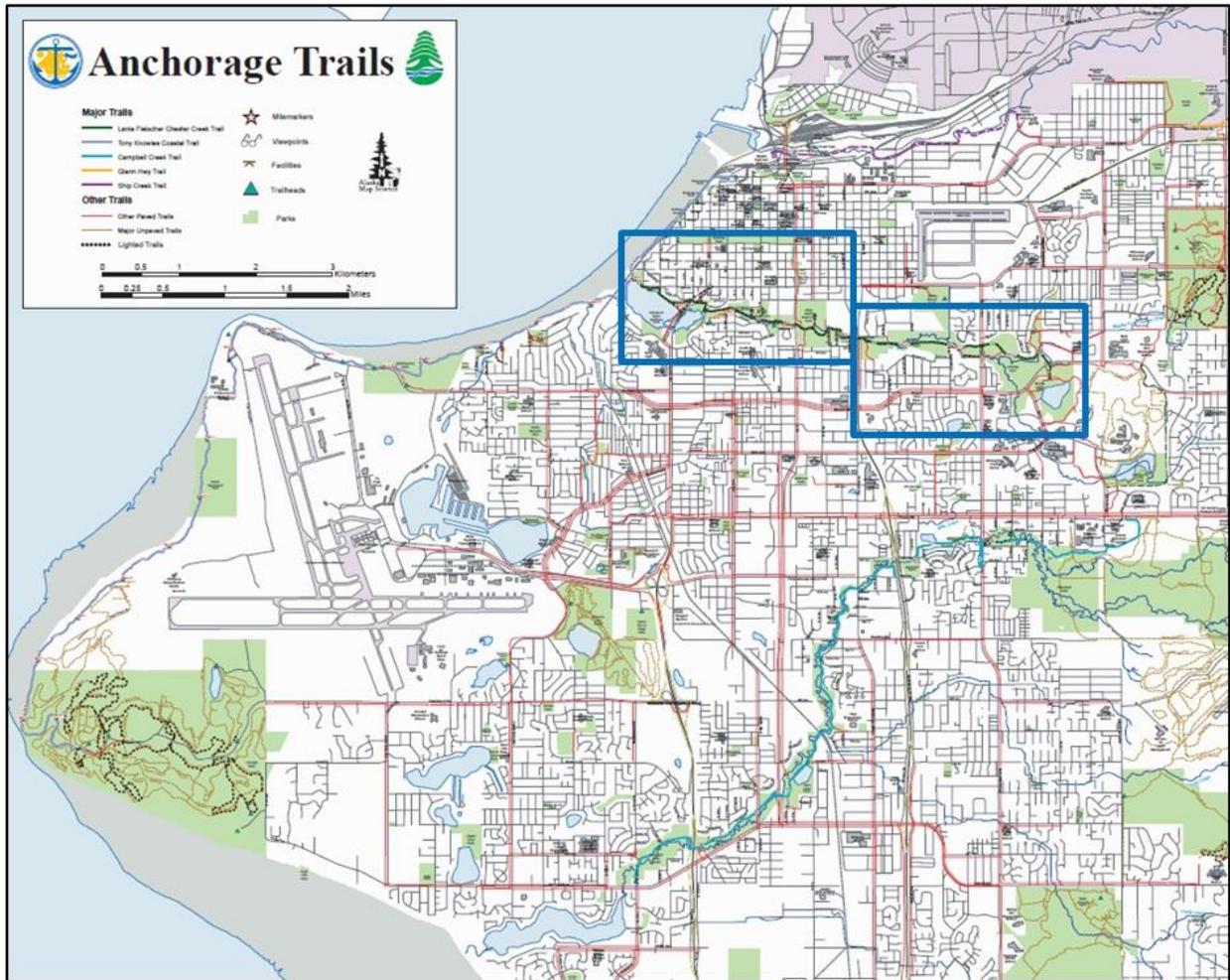


Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail sign (K. Morton, 7/13/13).



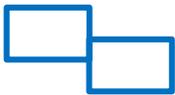
Anchorage Vicinity (Municipality of Anchorage).

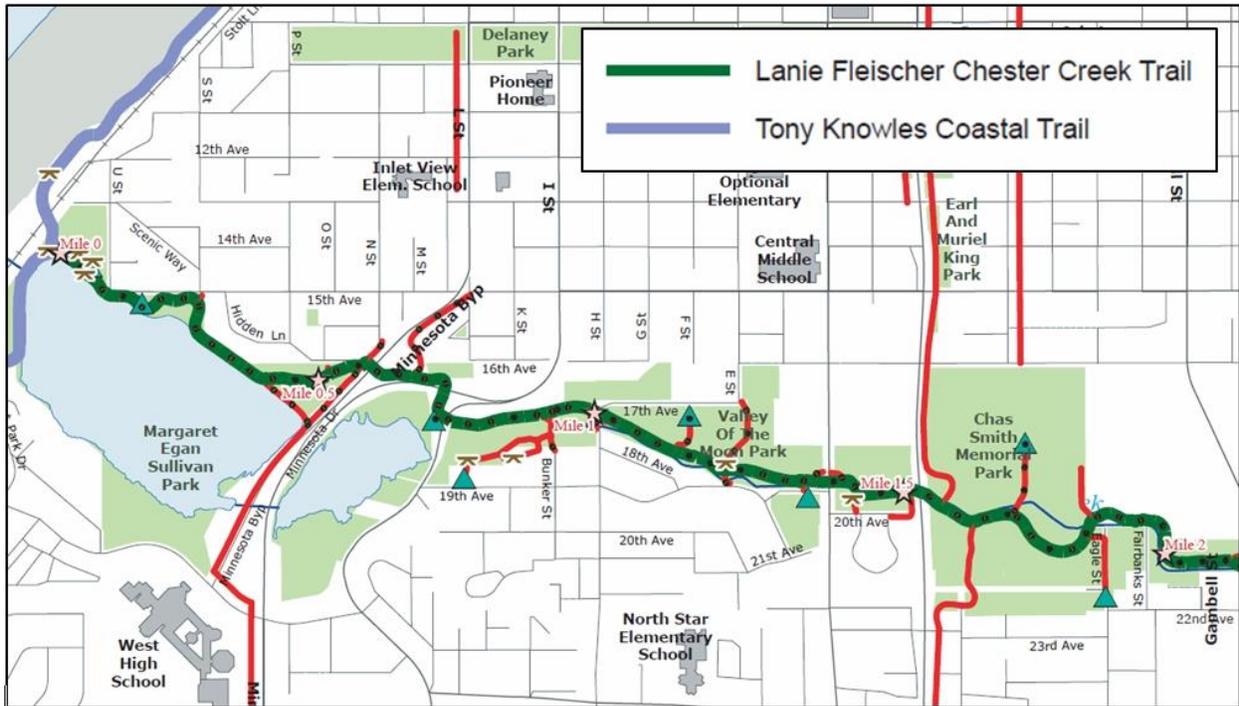
 Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail



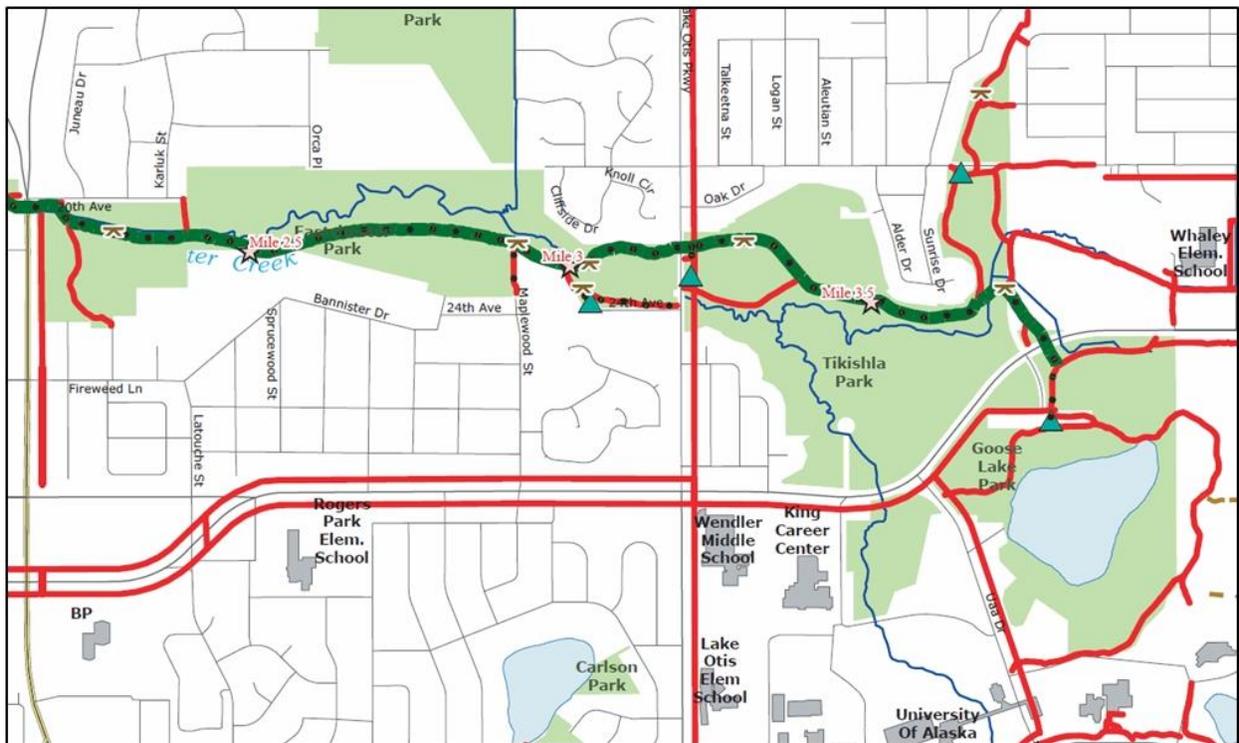
Anchorage Trailwatch Map (Municipality of Anchorage, 2004).

Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail (refer to next page)





Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail detail, west half (Municipality of Anchorage, 2004).



Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail detail, east half (Municipality of Anchorage, 2004).



Mile 0, Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail, intersection with Tony Knowles Coastal Trail at Westchester Lagoon (K. Morton, 7/13/13). To the viewer's back are the Alaska Railroad tracks and Cook Inlet; on the right is Westchester Lagoon, and in the distance are the Chugach Mountains and Chugach State Park.



Minnesota Drive undercrossing (K. Morton, 7/13/13). The two Minnesota Drive tunnels were installed by the Alaska Department of Highways (now Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.) The 1973 tunnels are very narrow by current guidelines.



Arctic Blvd undercrossing (K. Morton, 7/13/13). The Arctic Boulevard tunnel was constructed in 1975, two years after the initial construction, and is considerably wider. All of the early multiplate tunnels are poorly lit by current guidelines.



A Street Bridge (K. Morton, 7/13/13). The A Street Bridge was constructed later and crosses the creek and the trail with a single span. Chester Creek is in the trees on the left; an open play field is on the right.



Bicyclists approach bridge over Chester Creek (K. Morton, 7/13/13). The trail crosses Chester Creek, here on a prefabricated steel truss bridge. The trail is in mixed forest, but there are ball fields and hockey rinks nearby. The greenbelt is frequented by the homeless, and illegal camps are fairly common.



Jogger with stroller crosses Chester Creek (K. Morton, 7/13/13).



Muskrat, Hillstrand Pond (K. Morton, 7/13/13). The Chester Creek Greenbelt provides habitat for wildlife such as muskrats, beaver, Moose, and bear. Native paper birch are being displaced by naturalized chokecherries to the detriment of moose habitat.



Bicyclist on a typical stretch of forested trail (K. Morton, 7/13/13). The eight-foot pavement width was considered generous when the trail was constructed. Runners seeking a softer surface have created parallel paths on both sides, resulting in an abrupt drop-off at the edge of pavement.



East Northern Lights Boulevard overpass (K. Morton, 7/13/13). A family on bicycles crosses a major arterial on a concrete bridge. This bridge replaced the original when the Department of Transportation & Public Facilities widened Northern Lights Boulevard to four lanes.



Goose Lake Park, at the east end of the trail (K. Morton, 7/13/13). Three bicyclists at the end of the trail, and pedestrians on the beach. University of Alaska Anchorage in the distance. The Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail made facilities such as Goose Lake easily accessible to youth without automobiles.



2013 Alaska Run for Women (K. Morton, 7/8/13). 7,000 women run through Valley of the Moon Park on the Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail in a fund-raising event for breast cancer research.



Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race (K. Morton, 3/5/11). Perennial contender DeeDee Jonrowe mashes her team up the Lanie Fleischer Chester Creek Trail through Eastchester Park during the Ceremonial Start of the 2011 Iditarod Race. The trail is also used by the Fur Rendezvous World Championship Sled Dog Races, and the Tour of Anchorage ski marathon race.