The long-discussed changes to the Equinox Marathon (and Ultramarathon and Relay) course are finally in place. Below is a summary of the changes.

There will be five changes to the course, here they are, in the order that runners will encounter them:

## Between Miles 1 and 2

After running along the bike path beside Ballaine Lake the course re-enters the woods and crosses the range access road. Approximately 100m later, the course has made a 90-degree turn to the left and run along a rooty path before intersecting with the Karl Reisus Trail, turning north (right), then turning right again when the Reishus Trail intersects the Six-Mile Trail, then following the Six-Mile Trail eastbound, exiting the woods and running up onto Ballaine Road.

For this year's race runners will NOT turn left onto the rooty trail. Instead they will continue straight north across the lakebed of "Mosquito Lake", staying on the Six-Mile Trail northbound until exiting through the woods at the same point and running up onto Ballaine Road.

This change is necessary because the other changes add distance. By cutting off a few hundred meters here, we will be able to leave the Turnaround point on the Out-and-Back section in approximately the same location it has occupied for many years.

## 8-Mile to 8.5-Mile

The course currently crosses the railroad tracks and Sheep Creek Road at the railroad crossing just before the 8-Mile post. After crossing Sheep Creek Road, runners have run uphill along the left side of Sheep Creek Road until entering Ester Dome Road, then continuing west on Ester Dome Road.

This year, after crossing Sheep Creek Road, runners will continue south for a short distance, departing from the pavement, before turning right/west on a path that takes them to Ann's Greenhouse Airstrip across. Runners will run westward the length of the airstrip before reaching Saxon Road (the dirt road you turn down to go to Goldstream Sports, then turning right (north).

The airstrip route was a part of the course for many, many years, including 1983 and 1984 when men's course records were set.

After reaching the road, individuals running the marathon and ultramarathon will continue on the road; first leg relay runners will depart the road to the left (west) and enter the Goldstream Sports parking lot, where the first relay exchange zone will be located.

After leaving the exchange zone, relay runners will rejoin the individual runners on Saxon Road. Just before reaching Ester Dome Road the course turns left (west) and runs along a trail that is parallel to Ester Dome Road for approximately 100m before turning right and rejoining Ester Dome Road just across from the small drive-up Thai restaurant.

This course change will add a little distance, but will also eliminate approximately 1/2 mile of pavement on Sheep Creek and Ester Dome Roads. No new trails construction will be required, but a little brushing will be done before the entrance to the airstrip, and a little fence modification and dirt work will be done to make the entrance to the relay exchange zone more runner-friendly.

Moving the course off this section of heavily-trafficked Sheep Creek Road, and the Sheep Creek Road-Ester Dome Road intersection will mean a big improvement in safety for runners and motorists. An even bigger improvement in safety and congestion results from moving the first relay exchange off of Ester Dome Road and into the Goldstream Sports parking lot. A big thanks goes out to Joel Buth and Goldstream Sports for their help in making this happen.

## IMPORTANT NOTE Re: The 8-Mile Re-Route

Permission to use the route along the airstrip is a one-day use permit ONLY. Please do not train along the airstrip, so that we can maintain good relations with private landowners along

this and other sections, and so that we can provide Equinox participants with the best course possible.

## 9-Mile to 9.5-Mile

For several years the course departed left from Ester Dome Road just past St. Patrick Road and ran up a driveway and double track before emerging onto Ester Dome Road about 100m-150m below the point where the marathon course now turns right (west) off Ester Dome Road. For the past 15-20 years, the course has gone straight up Ester Dome Road after passing St. Patrick Road, then departing to the right (west) on the trail.

This year runners will turn left (south) on St. Patrick Road at the Ester Dome Road-St. Patrick Road intersection. From that point the course continues southwest on St. Patrick Road for a few hundred meters before departing the road to the right and beginning the ascent of Ester Dome. Initially the course will follow an open, grassy area before departing left into the forest and continuing to ascend until intersecting with the Ester Dome Mountain Bike Singletrack Trail.

Upon reaching the singletrack, the Equinox course will turn right and follow the singletrack, then will depart left from the singletrack, cutting off a loop of the bike route, then crossing the singletrack shortly before emerging from the woods onto Ester Dome Road, approximately 100m above the current entrance to the trail.

The course will cross Ester Dome Road almost at right angles, then enter the woods on a new trail segment that rejoins the old trail approximately 100m after entering the woods. The crossing of Ester Dome Road has been situated near a culver that passes under the road, so that runners will be able to cross the road without having to negotiate any deep drainage ditches or gullies.

This reroute segment entails the construction of a substantial amount of new trail. Construction is being performed by Jon Underwood's trail construction firm, Happy Trails, Inc., and paid for by a grant. Equinox participants should give a big thank you to the Interior Trails Preservation Coalition, especially to the leadership of Eric Troyer, and for the helpfulness of ITPC member Geoff Orth.

This segment adds a few hundred meters to the course, which will be lost later in the course at another reroute. This course also removes about half-a-mile of pavement from the course. Since we started on this project, the pavement (high-float surface) along this portion of Ester Dome Road has been removed and the road surface is very rough and loose. This trail will be much nicer for running than Ester Dome Road.

This change, too, will produce a big improvement in safety, as runners will no longer be running along a half-mile-long stretch of Ester Dome Road, the winding nature of which resulted in many runners following tangents across corners and moving back and forth from one side of Ester Dome Road to the other.

## 21.5-Mile to 22-Mile

For many years the Equinox Course, once reaching Henderson Road, has followed that road all the way to the bottom, where it intersects with Goldhill Road, at that point turning left (east) on Goldhill Road and following it to Cloudberry Road, where the course turned left before entering the powerline.

Not so in 2012. This year, at approximately the current 21.5-mile point, where the powerline crosses the Intertie powerline, runners will turn left and enter the woods on a trail parallel to and just north of the powerline. The course will follow that trail and the powerline all the way to Cloudberry Road, where it rejoins the existing trail just before the 22-mile post.

This trail segment already exists, although there will be a small amount of work done to improve a wet spot along the route. Like the previous two segments, this segment eliminates about one-half mile of pavement. This segment is also part of the "historical" route of the marathon back in the "early years" of the 60's and 70's.

There won't be a huge improvement in safety as a result of this change, but any time that runners can move away from half a mile of paved state roads, it can't help but make things safer.

## 25.75-mile-26-mile

After reaching the satellite dish on top of the West Ridge, the course turns right and descends

to the "Ag Farm Road", then turns left and ascends to the overlook parking lot at the top of Kuskokwim Drive/West Tanana Loop. In the past, runners have turned right at this point and descended the pavement to the traffic circle before following the old roadbed to the athletic field west of the Student Recreation Center (SRC).

This year, upon reaching the parking lot at the top of Kuskokwim Drive/West Tanana Loop, runners will cross the road, then enter the ski trial that was constructed in fall 2011. That trail follows an undulating, curving path along the hillside below the Buttrovich Building and the Greenhouse, then enters the woods and descends a little more steeply to the east end of the roadbed, then heads for the finish by the normal route.

This segment eliminates approximately 400m-500m of pavement, which is a comforting thought to many runners who dread that final insult to their quads pounding down the pavement. The hillside trail has been constructed such that most of the sidehill has been eliminated, which should make for comfortable running. Early reactions from people who have been testing it out have been positive.

This segment, too, will produce some safety improvements as runners will no longer run along a busy campus road.

## The Turnarounds

By including the first course change just before the two-mile mark, we have been able to avoid having to change the location of the Turnaround on the Ester Dome Out-and-Back by a significant amount. We, of course, will be checking our distances closely, but we believe that we will be able to keep the Turnaround within about 10m of its current location.

The Ultramarathon Turnaround will have to be relocated slightly, but we won't know by exactly how much until we have made our measurements. Our first concern has been the Marathon course and retaining the character of the course and returning it, where possible, to its historic routes (roots). The 40-mile Ultramarathon course did not have the same history as the Marathon course, so having to make a change in it was not as much of a concern.

## Finish, and Start

For the past two years the course has included a short uphill above the location of the UAF climbing tower before descending to the finish on the Beluga Pad. This change in the course was necessitated by construction during the summer of 2011 which made the former finish area unsuitable for use. Last year, with the former finish area still unsuitable, this change was retained.

As is obvious to anyone who has been anywhere near the UAF campus this summer, the utilidor project on the Patty Center/SRC athletic field has caused a huge disruption of the area. The bad news is that the area will not have grass growing on it at the time of the Equinox events on September 15. The good news is that all the excavation generated a huge amount of fill which will enable the contractors to raise the level of the athletic field to approximately the same elevation as the Beluga Pad.

While the utilidor construction and the creation of new facilities, such as a paved "pond hockey" rink on the Beluga Pad, have created some challenges when it comes to the start and the finish, the construction also creates some new possibilities for the routes taken by the race at the start and the finish. Once the construction is "effectively complete", i.e. the athletic field surface grading is complete and the area is relatively stable, construction-wise, we will be taking a very close look at how best we can route the start and finish and make the best possible course for participants and spectators.

# Summary

It has been a long, difficult effort to get to the point where we can actually implement the course changes described above. Our objective from the start has been threefold 1) eliminate a significant amount of pavement, 2) return to the "historic" route of the marathon wherever possible, 3) improve safety for runners, motorists and spectators.

We believe that these changes have accomplished those three goals. That doesn't mean that the course is in its final shape FOREVER, but we beileve that the course to be followed in 2012 is a big improvement over the recent past, and will be more enjoyable for all participants.

It remains to be seen if it will be faster or slower - only time will tell. It is important to keep in mind that in 1983 and 1984 when men's course records were set in consecutive years, that the segment that we will be using this year along Ann's Greenhouse Airstrip was part of the course, and runners did NOT run up a paved half-mile at the bottom of Ester Dome Road as they have

the past few years. Furthermore, in those years the course used to cross Sheep Creek Road at Black Sheep Lane, then descend on rough footing to the Alaska Railroad tracks before turning right and following the tracks to a point near the Ann's Greenhouse Airstrip. Not a fast surface.

We would like to thank Stan Justice for all his work on these course changes. Without his untiring efforts and dogged persistence, we would probably be still talking about the changes, and runners would still be running the same course as last year. Stan did a huge amount of work, and hopes that these changes will produce a really fast course and some really fast times.

Looking forward to seeing you all on course on September 15, 2012.