

## Ranger Boat *Chugach*



Ranger Boat *Chugach*, whose home port is Petersburg, Alaska, is the last commissioned Forest Service wooden ranger boat in Alaska. *Chugach* was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992; only the second vessel from Alaska to be added to the list of the nation's most important heritage sites. *Chugach* is undergoing a major refurbishment at Port Townsend Boat Works with the intent to return it to full, active service as a Forest Service ranger boat.

L.H. Coolidge, a well known Seattle naval architect, designed *Chugach* according to Forest Service specifications. She was built in 1925 by the Lake Union Drydock and Machine Works, a Seattle firm which is still in business. Ranger boats served as travelling offices and as the primary work station for Forest Service personnel carrying out a variety of tasks, such as administering timber sales; monitoring special use permits for fox farms, logging camps, and trapping cabins; transporting Civilian Conservation Crews to work camps in the forest; and taking Forest Service officials on regular inspection tours.



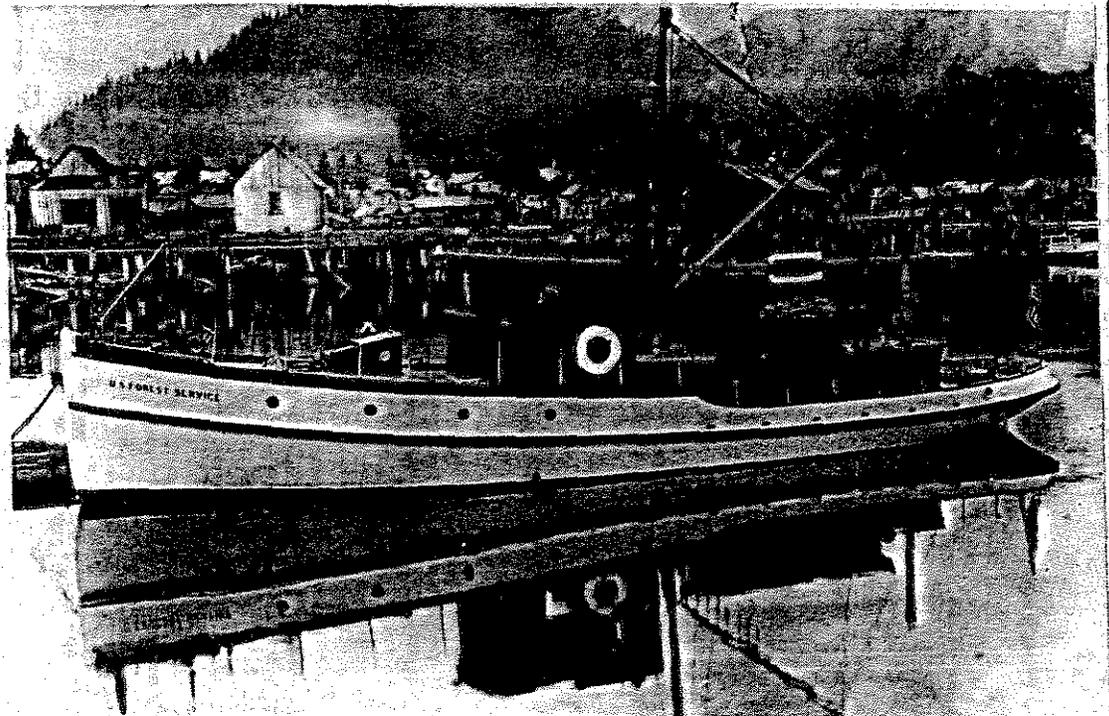
Since her launching, *Chugach* has been in continuous service as part of a fleet that at its peak in the 1920s included eleven ranger boats. Known unofficially as the "Green Serge Navy," the fleet operated along the 12,000 mile coastline of the nation's two largest national forests, the Chugach and Tongass National Forests. One distinctive aspect of the Forest Service in coastal Alaska is the transportation system required to traverse the maze of islands and passages. William Weigle, Alaska Forest Supervisor from 1911 to 1919, described the differences between Alaskan forest rangers and those in the lower 48 states:

*The motor boat took the place of the saddle and pack horse; hip boots and a rain slicker the place of chaps; and it was much more essential that a ranger knew how to adjust his*

*spark plug than be able to throw a diamond hitch. His steed may do just as much pitching and bucking, but this is prompted not by a spirit of animal perversity but by the spirits of climatic adversity.*

Until 1953 *Chugach* operated out of Cordova, Alaska, then headquarters for the Chugach National Forest. From Cordova, *Chugach* operated year round in Prince William Sound and the Gulf of Alaska. *Chugach*, often being the only Federal vessel on duty, performed frequent search and rescue missions and other public service. Her logs record delivering mail; re-lighting lighthouses and buoys; performing the Federal census of 1950; delivering medical personnel and supplies; transporting U.S. troops during World War II; carrying law enforcement officials and judges; and carrying game wardens to distribute hay to feed starving deer. *Chugach* also transported and supplied various scientific and community projects. In 1953 *Chugach* was transferred to Petersburg, in southeast Alaska, which has remained her home port.

The Forest Service decided to refurbish *Chugach* due to her historical significance and demonstrated effectiveness as a ranger boat. *Chugach* will return to Alaska this fall to once again serve as a working ranger boat. During the seven decades of her career, *Chugach* played a central role in the administration of Alaska's national forests. Her activities had an important influence upon the regional economy, the welfare and safety of isolated communities, and people and vessels in distress. *Chugach* provides an authentic link between the Forest Service as it served the people of Territorial Alaska in the first half of the twentieth century, and the agency today as it continues to serve the people of Alaska and the nation.



The M/V CHUGACH  
Summary and Progress Report  
of her Nomination to the National Register

Conner Sorensen  
Petersburg, Alaska, April 6, 1990



The M/V Chugach is the last of the commissioned USDA Forest Service wooden ranger boats. The USDA Forest Service is proposing to have the vessel included on the National Register of Historic Places as part of a process to decide her future use. Historical consultants Conner Sorensen and Tom Schley are preparing the nomination under contract for the Stikine Area of the Tongass National Forest.

L. H. Coolidge, a well known Seattle naval architect, designed the Chugach according to Forest Service specifications. She was built in 1925 by the Lake Union Drydock and Machine Works, a respected Seattle firm which is still in business. Her 62 foot hull and decking have remained essentially unaltered except for repairs, and her pilothouse, cabins, and rigging have been changed only slightly since her construction.

Since her launching in 1925, the Chugach has been in continuous service as part of a fleet that at its peak in the 1920's included eleven ranger boats operating along a total coastline of approximately 12,000 miles in the Chugach and Tongass National Forests. From 1925 to 1950, the Chugach operated out of Cordova, headquarters for the Chugach National Forest. In 1953, she was transferred to Petersburg, Alaska, which (except for a short period in Sitka) has been her home port ever since. From Cordova, the Chugach

operated year round in Prince William Sound and adjacent waters from Kodiak in the west to Point St. Elias in the south. From her Petersburg and Sitka ports, she has operated throughout Southeast Alaska. The ranger boats served as travelling offices and as the primary work stations for Forest Service personnel carrying out myriad tasks such as scaling timber and administering timber sales; administering special use permits for fox farms, logging camps, trapping cabins, and water power sites; transporting Civilian Conservation Crews to work camps in the forest, and Forest Service officials on regular tours of inspection. The Chugach, being the only federal boat on duty year round in Prince William Sound, performed frequent search and rescue missions. Her log also records frequent service to the region and nation including delivering personnel and supplies for scientific and community projects, performing the federal census of 1950, delivering mail, carrying game wardens to distribute hay to feed starving deer, re-lighting Lighthouses and buoys, carrying law enforcement officials and judges, and transporting U.S. troops during the Second World War.

The Chugach is proposed for nomination to the National Register under the following criteria:

1. She was designed and built by individuals and firms prominent in the history of the Pacific Northwest, and she possesses integrity of original design and construction. She is also located in an appropriate setting where she has served up to the present time.
2. She has been intimately associated with the broad pattern of events that relate to the history and economic development of Alaska. She has played a central role in the administration of the nation's two largest national forests, the Chugach and the Tongass. She has influenced the regional economy of South Central and Southeast Alaska, and the welfare and safety of the individuals and communities in those regions.
3. She has been associated with a number of significant persons and vessels. In particular, she transported and supplied four internationally prominent archaeologists who initiated the study of aboriginal people in Alaska: Frederica de Laguna, Kaj Birket-Smith, Alex Hrdlicka, and Robert Heizer. She also performed rescue work in cooperation with nationally prominent boats like the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries Kittiwake, and the USCG Cutter, John C. Spencer.

