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2019 Annual Report

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

Forest Service

Alaska Region

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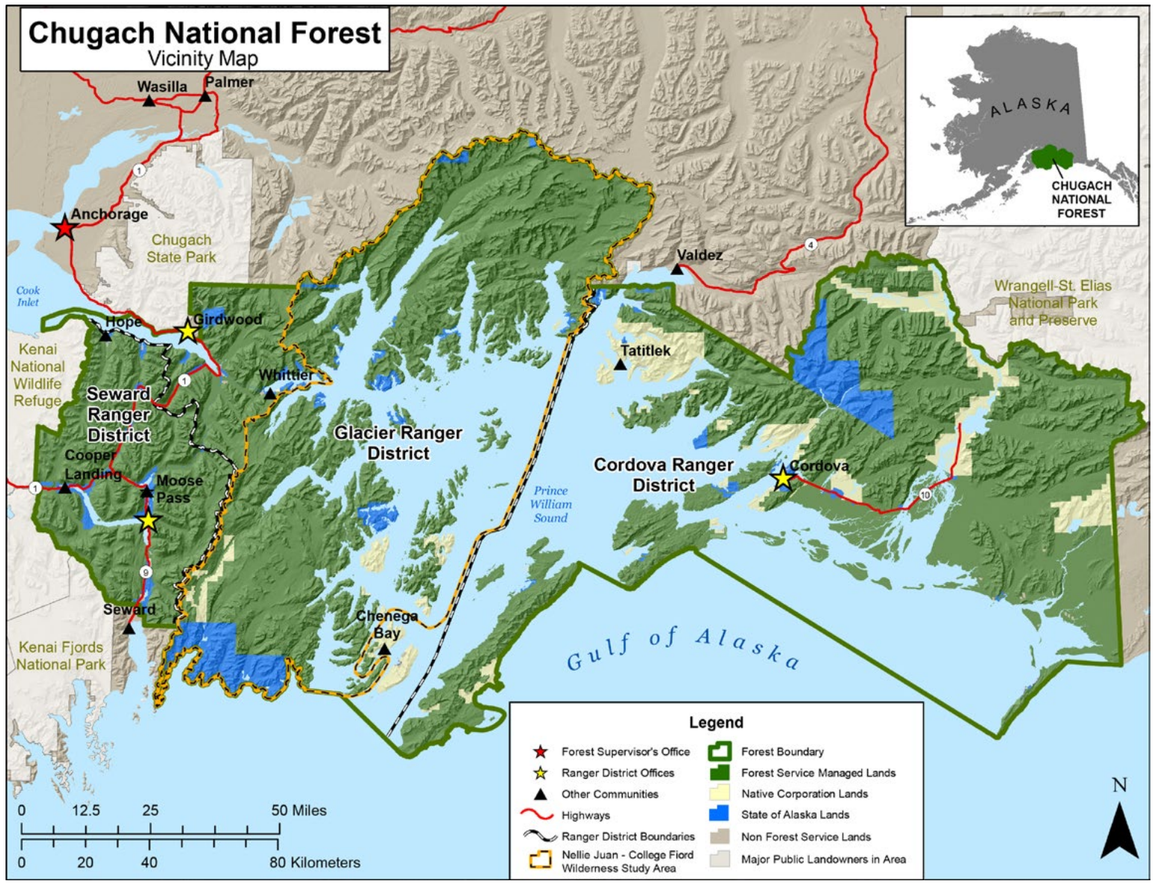
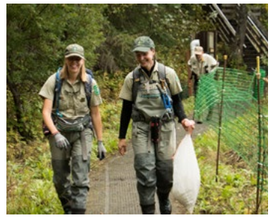
June 2020





WELCOME TO THE CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

The farthest north and west of all national forests, the Chugach National Forest is located in southcentral Alaska, and is close to over half the population of Alaska.

The Chugach National Forest's 5.4 million acres comprises a landscape that includes portions of the Kenai Peninsula, Prince William Sound, and the Copper River Delta. Alaskans and visitors from all over the world come to experience what the Chugach National Forest has to offer: mountainous glacial scenery, wildlife, fishing, hunting, kayaking, hiking, camping, and more.

This annual report summarizes some of how the Chugach National Forest plays a key role in participating in and supporting local communities and economies.

The Chugach National Forest supports more than 1,000 recreation jobs, which annually contributes $12.3 million to the local economy; provides drinking water, fuelwood and free use timber to communities; contributes to the local food supply through the federal subsistence management program; works with partners to provide diverse recreation experiences and stewardship engagement with youth and volunteers; sustains critical habitat for salmon that support a commercial salmon harvest valued at more than $19 million annually generating over 3,000 jobs; and is supportive of the more than 300 authorizations for fish hatcheries, hydroelectric facilities, outfitter/guide permits, concessionaires, cabins, and other uses.

I express my sincere gratitude to all Chugach National Forest employees, our partners, stakeholders, and the public for making it possible to accomplish so much in 2019.

I look forward to 2020 and to continuing our work to support the Alaskan way of life culturally and economically.

Jeff Schramm

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FOREST OVERVIEW

The Forest stretches across southcentral Alaska, from the waters and peaks of Prince William Sound to the salmon and trout streams of the Kenai Peninsula, covering an area the size of New Hampshire. This is one of the few places in the world where glaciers still grind valleys into the hard rock of the earth.

Its geographic diversity is unique among national forests. The three distinct landscapes of the Copper River Delta, the Eastern Kenai Peninsula, and Prince William Sound call to adventurers and nature enthusiasts the world over, and are once-in-a-lifetime destinations for a million visitors each year.

92% of non-urban Alaska households rely on subsistence foods.

SUBSISTENCE

The management of National Forest lands for subsistence uses plays a vital role in the health of rural Alaskan communities by ensuring fish and wildlife populations are available to provide a reliable food supply for residents. It also promotes employment in remote areas where jobs can be scarce. Last year the subsistence program supported 30 jobs in rural Alaskan communities.

In 2019 the Chugach National Forest completed analyses to determine current wildlife populations and appropriate harvest levels, and to determine appropriate management action to provide for subsistence uses on the Forest.

CHUGACH FOREST SERVICE STAFF PROVIDED INPUT AND EVALUATIONS ON A VARIETY OF FISH AND WILDLIFE PROPOSALS FROM AROUND THE STATE:

- Implemented special actions to conserve subsistence resources
- Held a public hearing for the Moose Pass non-rural proposal
- Funded a fish wheel Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program with the Native Village of Eyak and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Completed the fourth year of a black bear monitoring project with Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Completed deer surveys and population surveys for moose and mountain goats

SUBSISTENCE PERMITS

Prince William Sound Zone

moose	81
caribou	6
salmon	18

Kenai Zone

caribou	6
salmon	130

FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Chugach National Forest began updating the 2002 Land and Resource Management Plan in 2012. In August 2019 the release of the draft record of decision, final environmental impact statement, and final 2019 Land Management Plan began a 60-day objection period. The objection period ended October 29, 2019.

Public engagement throughout the multi-year plan revision process included 18 public workshops, two public comment periods, nine public open houses, targeted outreach to various constituencies, and thousands of public comments. The Plan will guide all management decisions and activities on the 5.4 million acre Chugach National Forest for the next 10-15 years.

A final Record of Decision was issued by the Forest Supervisor and the Land Management Plan is now effective. The Record of Decision was signed in April 2020.

SWAN LAKE FIRE

The Swan Lake fire started on Kenai National Wildlife Refuge on June 5, 2019 and ultimately grew to 167,164 acres. Almost 12,000 acres were located on the Forest. By the first week of July the fire had spread to the western edge of the Forest, threatening the southern side of Resurrection Pass Trail.

The trail south of Devil's Pass closed on July 8. The closure prohibited use of trails, cabins, campgrounds and associated activities in the restricted area. More information on the Swan Lake Fire can be found on page 23.

HERITAGE & CULTURE

The Chugach National Forest manages cultural and historic resources under the auspices of The National Historic Preservation Act. The Chugach National Forest provides leadership in preserving Native and cultural heritage through stewardship that recognizes, preserves, protects, and enhances cultural resources for the greatest public benefit.

Two Kenaitze Indian Tribe Student Conservation Association interns conducted field surveys, soil probes and monitored archaeology sites, helping the Forest Heritage program meet its goals.

In 2019 two Susten Culture camps were held on the Forest with more than 20 Native students attending.

RECREATION & TOURISM

The Chugach National Forest is known for its spectacular recreation opportunities. More than 200 miles of maintained trails are perfect for hiking, horseback riding and biking in the summer. 500 miles of winter trails and a forest blanketed in snow offers a wide-open landscape for skiers, snowboarders, and snowmachiners. Freshwater lakes, streams and rivers, and the waters of Prince William Sound are waiting to be explored.

Nearly 120 permitted outfitters and guides do business on the Forest, leading hikes, sight-seeing tours, boat excursions and fishing and hunting trips.

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST **AVALANCHE INFORMATION CENTER**

Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center (CNFAIC) is one of 15 Forest Service-affiliated centers whose mission is to provide avalanche and mountain weather information and offer avalanche education.

The Friends of the Chugach National Forest Avalanche Information Center (F-CNFAIC) is a nonprofit corporation organized to support and contribute to the Avalanche Center. F-CNFAIC supports three forecaster salaries and the operation of weather instruments, helping to bridge the gap between Forest Service funding and operating expenses.

"Public contributed more than 200 observations"

The Center would not exist today without community support and the hard work and dedication of the F-CNFAIC group.

The 2019 season marked the 20th anniversary of the accident on Turnagain Pass where six snowmachiners died. CNFAIC forecasters honored those impacted by the accident and recognized those who pushed for its creation.

During the season (November 2018 - April 2019) 147 advisories, two avalanche warnings and one special avalanche bulletin were issued.

In 2019 the public contributed more than 200 observations improving the quality and accuracy of avalanche information.

Forecasters and volunteers conducted over ten outreach talks/special events, two rescue workshops and made 22 media appearances.

Likes	5833
Followers	6081
Total Posts	119
Followers	5236
Posted Videos	32
Views	4593

GAINED 2000 FOLLOWERS ON FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM IN 2019 SEASON.

Forty cabins are available for reservation on the Forest.

CABINS & TRAILS

Through the Alaska Forest Fund the National Forest Foundation (NFF) supported $121,790 worth of trail and recreation facilities improvements on the Chugach National Forest in 2019. Alaska Geographic and Alaska Trails were supported with NFF funds in recruiting youth and adults to maintain and build trails along the Iditarod National Historic Trail – *Southern Trek*. Funds from NFF were also used to hire a local contractor to make improvements to Aspen Flats and Paulson Bay public use cabins.

National Forest Foundation

IDITAROD NATIONAL HISTORIC TRAIL

In 2018 the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance received a grant from the National Park Service to promote stewardship along the Iditarod National Historic Trail (INHT) *Southern Trek*. The Forest Service partnered with Alaska Geographic to sponsor a youth crew for INHT trailwork, and Qutekcak Native Tribe youth worked on a new segment of the *Southern Trek* near Moose Pass. Over the summer, youth crews and other volunteers built and maintained 2400 feet of trail.

2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Layout and design of trails and trailheads
- Improved first two miles of Lost Lake Trail
- Completed surveys for several sites and trail easements for INHT segments that cross state lands
- Secured funding for two new bridges on the INHT
- Three stewardship events with 35 volunteers

HELISKI OPERATIONS

In response to interest for additional commercially guided helicopter skiing (heliski) opportunities on Chugach National Forest lands, an adaptive two-pronged approach was developed to provide priority use on the Seward and Cordova Ranger Districts.

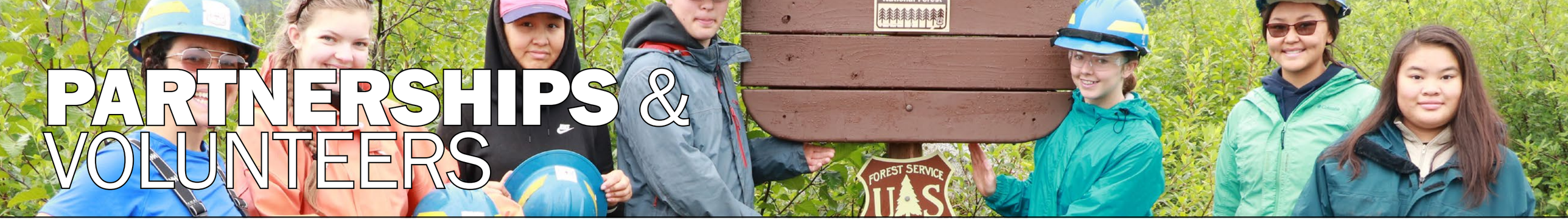
A two year probationary permit, with an option to reissue for an additional eight years, was issued to Silverton Mountain Guides for 414 priority use service days for guided helicopter skiing in the Seward Ranger District.

Chugach Powder Guides existing ten year priority use permit allows for 1786 priority use service days for guided helicopter skiing in the Glacier Ranger District.

The Cordova Ranger District issued one temporary heliski permit to Points North Heli-Adventures and offered a solicitation for up to three temporary use heliski permits for the 2020 season. Three outfitter/guides (Points North Heli-Adventures, Silverton Mountain Guides and Valdez Heli-ski Guide Service) were selected and given temporary permits for the 2020 season.

PERMITTING ON THE FOREST

119	Outfitter and Guide Permits
25	Other recreation permits
132	Land Use Authorizations



PARTNERSHIPS & VOLUNTEERS

Over the past 25 years 11,300 cigarette butts have been picked up by Stream Watch.

25 YEARS OF WATCHING

In 2019 the award-winning Stream Watch Volunteer Program celebrated 25 years of river stewardship on the Kenai Peninsula.

Founded in 1994 by enthusiastic river aficionados wanting to share information on how to protect the Russian and Kenai Rivers, the program has expanded to include the Kasilof, Anchor and Ninilchik rivers. Volunteers are also at Deep Creek cleaning up trash, installing fencing, and working on habitat restoration projects.

Volunteers earn the title "Ambassador" by committing to at least 24 hours each season, or by taking part in a "Stewardship Work Day," where participants help in an all-day river-related project.

ON RIVER	THIS YR	+25 YEARS
volunteer hours	1557	20,000+
public contacts	4,031	60,100+
LBs of trash	4258	28,700+
LBs of fishing line	127	650+

10 YEARS OF CHUGACH CHILDREN'S FOREST

The Chugach Children's Forest (CCF), a partnership between the Chugach National Forest and Alaska Geographic, celebrated its tenth year in 2019. The program introduces diverse groups of young Alaskans to the Chugach National Forest through project engagement and environmental education. Connections begun on CCF expeditions and work projects enhance youth career prospects, support agency and partner goals, and create future public land stewards.

During the summer of 2019 youth crews built sections of trail for the Iditarod National Historic Trail, hardened campsites in Blackstone Bay, and removed marine debris while kayaking through Culross Passage.

Youth helped with Eyak Lake Community Clean-up Day, built steps to One-Eyed Pond, brushed trails and cleaned developed recreation sites in Cordova. They also worked with the Copper River Watershed on a restoration project and helped with the annual community Salmon Jam.

A CCF Every Kid in a Park volunteer created programs promoting fire safety and general forest awareness. A second youth provided support to the Chugach National Forest Public Affairs program by creating social media posts, developing a Smokey Bear history and fireworks safety display, and supporting community events.

30 conservation projects

6400 European black slugs removed from the Forest

1800 students participated in the program

2984 feet of trail built on the Iditarod National Historic Trail *Southern Trek*

520 miles of coastal patrolled for debris removal

62 events & trail days

>50000 youth contact hours

OTHER CHUGACH CHILDREN'S FOREST-SUPPORTED PROGRAMS:

- Volunteer day on the Iditarod Trail
- A winter excursion to Manitoba Hut
- An outdoor photography workshop
- King Tech High career days and field trip
- Outdoor Club gatherings and activities
- Teach the Teachers teacher training

The Chugach National Forest collaborates with other government agencies, user groups, non-profit organizations, and businesses to provide resources and services for the American public. Partnerships address almost every aspect of land management, scientific research, and policy related to the Forest.

Providing wise management of our nation's water resources; engaging youth in conservation stewardship; promoting healthy, active lifestyles; and serving communities are goals that contribute to a healthy and vibrant America—these goals could not be achieved without the help of the Forest Service's partners, grant opportunities, volunteers, Tribes, and community engagement.

PARTNERSHIPS & VOLUNTEERS

In 2019 volunteers worked 22,207 hours equal to 12.3 full time employees (up from 8.7 in 2018)

VOLUNTEERS

The Chugach National Forest relies on volunteers to help maintain trails, provide information to visitors, and perform other valuable services. Volunteers are indispensable to the mission of the Forest Service, supporting and motivating the agency's staff and partners.

Volunteerism is also responsible for an increasing amount of on-the-ground project accomplishment.

In 2019, volunteers worked predominately in Recreation Management, but they also had a strong presence in Heritage Resources and Natural Resource Management programs.

10 YRS VOICES OF THE WILDERNESS ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

The Voices of the Wilderness artist residency program celebrated its tenth year in 2019. The program pairs participating artists with wilderness specialists. Artists are actively engaged in stewardship projects, such as research, monitoring and education, giving them a sense of the stewardship behind America's public lands and fostering an artistic exploration of these natural and cultural treasures.

"I wanted to burn the image into my mind…"

Last year, paper artist Valisa Higman from Seldovia, Alaska was chosen for the Chugach National Forest Nellie Juan College Fiord Wilderness Study Area (WSA) residency.

Valisa spent two weeks in Nellie Juan-College Fiord WSA and participated in a *Teach the Teachers* expedition at Derickson Spit, assisted with trail work at Granite Mine trail, worked with the cabin crew at Harrison Lagoon Cabin, and served as a deckhand aboard Forest Service vessels. After her residency, Valisa hosted a slideshow lecture about her experience and donated a framed piece of art to the Forest.

iTREC!

Iditarod Trail to Every Classroom celebrated its ninth year in 2019. The year-long professional development program provides teachers with place-based service learning tools to help students become lifelong stewards of Alaska's public lands, natural resources, and cultural heritage. Educators attend three multi-disciplinary professional development workshops that are supplemented with on-going partner support and guidance.

iTREC! has trained 126 teachers who have engaged more than 10,000 K-12 students in eleven urban and rural communities along the Iditarod National Historic Trail. Preliminary evaluations show a direct link between iTREC! and increased physical activity.

RESOURCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Under Title II of the Secure Rural Schools Act, the Secretary of Agriculture may establish resource advisory committees for one or more national forests.

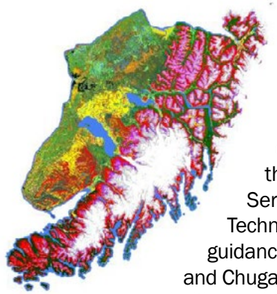
The Forest has two Secure Rural Schools Resource Advisory Committees (RAC) that provide recommendations on development and implementation of special projects: Prince William Sound (PWS); and Kenai Peninsula-Anchorage Borough (KP-AB).

• FY 2018 funds were dispersed in spring of 2019. 2019 payments will be released in 2020. • PWS-RAC received $351,000. • KP-AB received $106,643.

GOOD NEIGHBOR AUTHORITY

In 2019 the Chugach National Forest utilized the expanded Good Neighbor Authority to partner with regional Tribal consortium Chugachmiut to perform various forest restoration activities. The agreement adds capacity to the Forest to tackle restoration projects related to forest health issues while at the same time providing employment and training opportunities for the Native communities served by Chugachmiut.

RESOURCES



VEGETATION MAPPING

This effort is regionally coordinated, accessing state of the art processing with the Forest Service Geospatial Service and Technology Center (GTAC). Leadership and guidance are provided by Regional Office and Chugach National Forest specialists. Local priorities and needs are identified by Cordova District staff and collaborators engaged in conservation planning and land management activities.

Field sampling began in 2019 and will continue in 2020, involving agency staff and partners. Modeling and draft map production by GTAC is scheduled during the fall and winter of 2020, refinement and map revision during the spring and summer of 2021, with final map product and associated data delivery December of 2021.

The new map of the Cordova Ranger District will complement the existing Copper River Delta vegetation map.

Map products meet nationally accepted standards and will be available to the public in an accessible location and format. The work is done in concert with the Alaska Geospatial Council – Vegetation Mapping Technical Working Group, in an effort to develop consistent products statewide.

INVASIVE SPECIES PROGRAM

The Chugach National Forest continues to work with public and private organizations, tribes, states, and local landowners to address a range of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. The Chugach National Forest invasive program is mainly focused on preventing the introduction of invasive species on the Forest. The program cooperates with partners to respond to and manage invasive species threatening Alaskan land and water and native species populations.

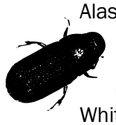
In 2019 the Chugach National Forest worked with Kenai Cooperative Weed Management, Homer Soil and Water Conservation, Girdwood School, Seward Middle School and the American Hiking Society on joint weed pulls, conducting manual and mechanical treatment on nearly 50 acres. Chugach National Forest staff and partners like the Copper River Watershed Project treated 160 acres with herbicide and, under a partnership with the PWS Stewardship Foundation and Kenai Watershed Forum, black slug collection was completed in Whittier in June. The Chugach National Forest continues to work with partners such as the State of Alaska on outreach and messaging to prevent the spread of all plant and animal invasives.

WORKING VACATIONERS TARGET INVASIVE SPECIES

For more than ten years American Hiking Society volunteers have "vacationed" on the Chugach National Forest. In June members of the society's Volunteer Vacation program spent their vacation working alongside Forest Service employees and Student Conservation interns digging up non-native species and invasive weeds on the Forest.

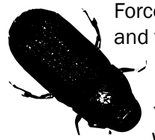
Volunteers travel to the backcountry via the Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop area to control dandelions along trails and developed camp sites, and document the extent of other non-native species.

SPRUCE BEETLE



Chugach National Forest, like many areas in southcentral Alaska, has been impacted by spruce beetle outbreaks over the last few years. Warmer spring temperatures mean adult spruce beetles are active earlier in the spring and drier summers make trees more vulnerable to attacks. White and Lutz spruce trees are among the primary species being attacked.

Through a variety of programs, the Chugach National Forest has teamed up with other federal, state and local land agencies to help manage hazardous fuels and educate land owners on how to treat current infestations and to prevent future ones.



Active spruce mortality mapped in 2019 indicated a substantial decrease in acreage. Despite this decrease, the outbreak continues. As primary host trees die the beetles are moving into other types of trees. Outbreak activity remains active on the Kenai Peninsula. The cumulative extent of the outbreak, in its fourth year, exceeds one million acres.

Two tree protection research efforts were undertaken in 2019: a systemic pesticide trial and an anti-aggregation pheromone trial. The projects are being conducted collaboratively with the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station, Region 10 Forest Health Protection and the Alaska Division of Forestry. Results will be available in 2020.

HAZARDOUS FUELS

Fuel Reduction is a priority as we deal with rapidly evolving seasonal changes, precipitation variation and temperature fluctuations.

In 2019 assigned fuels targets were met through interagency partnerships that contributed to cross-boundary accomplishments. The establishment of Good Neighbor Agreements and continued work with the Kenai Peninsula All Lands All Hands group and Mat-Su Spruce Beetle Task Force extends an interagency approach to supporting fuels and forest health programs and provides additional capacity to implement projects.

The Chugach National Forest-led Chugach All Lands Wildfire Risk Assessment project gathered multiple agency partners, including federal, state, borough, and Native entities to consider fire risks across 30 million acres of Southcentral Alaska. The assessment identifies fire-prone areas and values at risk across all jurisdictions, focusing management efforts on high priority areas.

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND BLACK BEAR MONITORING PROJECT

In response to dramatic declines in black bear harvest in Prince William Sound, the Chugach National Forest Subsistence program partnered with Alaska Department of Fish and Game in 2016 to begin a black bear study. The primary goal of the project is to evaluate habitat use, particularly the use of shoreline habitats where bears are most vulnerable to hunting pressure.

Ninety-six bears were captured over three field seasons, with 53 satellite/GPS collars deployed. The capture and collaring phase of the project was completed in 2018, however a failed collar was replaced on a male bear in spring of 2019. While initial analysis on the data has begun, monitoring and data collection will continue through fall of 2021.

FOREST OUTREACH

In 2019, the Forest worked with more than 50 major partners to host or participate in nearly 60 events, reaching more than 250,000 people. Here are some of the highlights.

JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM
The Chugach National Forest published the Chugach National Forest Jr. Ranger Field Notebook and the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center Jr. Ranger Field Notebook. These new booklets are part of the National Junior Ranger Program, inspiring a life-long relationship with public lands and a sense of stewardship and curiosity, motivating children to explore the natural and cultural world. In 2019 Crooked Creek Information Center and Begich, Boggs Visitor Center deputized more than 500 new Jr. Rangers.

PROJECT BUDBURST
The Forest coordinated a Project Budburst citizen science outing with Mt. Eccles Elementary School. Students learned about the important role plants play in their ecosystem. They made observations about plants, examined pollinator interactions with blueberries, salmonberries, and sedges, and documented them.

ICE FISHING DAY - SEWARD
In early March, 61 youth from Seward Middle School and local homeschoolers gathered at Grouse Lake for lessons on angler ethics, fish identification, and ice safety. When everyone set out to test their skills, the air soon filled with shouts of "fish on!"

KIDS FISHING DAY

BEGICH, BOGGS VISITOR CENTER
More than 100 people, including 40 youth enjoyed the Chugach National Forest Kid's Fishing Day at Moose Flats in Portage Valley. Along with lessons on baiting your hook and how to safely take a fish off the hook, there were fly tying, fish printing, and game stations to entertain participants.

VALDEZ
Thirty-two children participated in the 2019 event. The U.S. Coast Guard joined other volunteers to demonstrate boat safety, lure making, fish printing, salmon life-cycles, and casting.

Cordova Alaska holds its annual Copper River Shorebird Festival each spring as millions of shorebirds migrate to the Copper River Delta. The Chugach National Forest is a key partner in the Festival and provides support with communication and education and outreach activities, guided bird excursions, and presentations.

GIRDWOOD FUNGUS FAIR
The Girdwood Fungus Fair took place in early September and included mushroom forays and identification, kid events, photography, science talks, food with locally sourced fungus, craft workshops, mushroom dyeing, and cultivation.

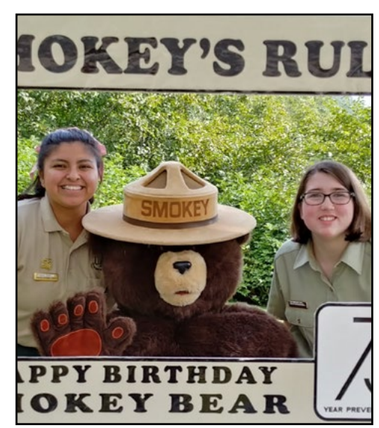
SALMON JAM
Cordova Ranger District worked alongside partners Prince William Sound Science Center and Copper River Watershed Project at the Small Fry family event during the 2019 Salmon Jam in Cordova. Events included fish printing, relays, casting, fillet and preserving demonstrations, and other hands-on activities. This year Salmon Jam helped Smokey Bear celebrate his 75th Birthday.

CORDOVA FUNGUS FESTIVAL
More than 100 participants took part in the 13th annual festival, with guided mushroom forays, and displays, a recipe swap, bear bread (conks) painting, cooking demos, craft and writing workshops, the famous harvest feast and more.

GOLD RUSH DAYS - VALDEZ
Each year Cordova Ranger District takes part in the Valdez Gold Rush Days. Over the five-day event the Crooked Creek Information Site staff and other Cordova employees host Dutch-oven cooking demonstrations and other "Past-times" events like, gold panning, rug-making, soap carving, and educational games.

SMOKEY BEAR'S 75TH BIRTHDAY
In 2019, Smokey Bear celebrated 75 years of sharing his wildfire prevention message. The Chugach National Forest held a variety of events across all three districts. Smokey participated in parades in Girdwood and Seward, and won first prize for his float in the Seward parade. Birthday parties celebrating Smokey Bear's 75 years were held at the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center and Crooked Creek Information Site.

BEGICH, BOGGS VISITOR CENTER



CROOKED CREEK INFORMATION SITE

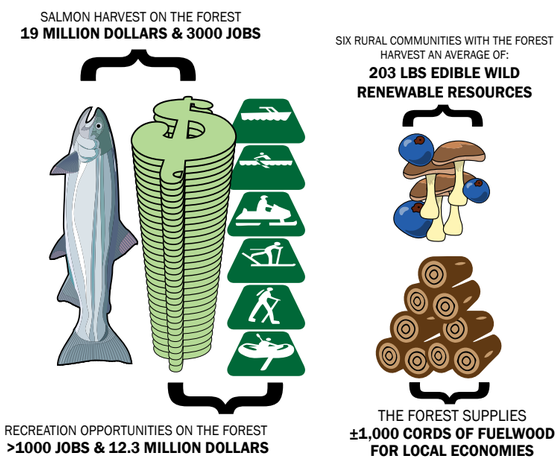
SEWARD 4TH OF JULY PARADE

ECONOMICS

The Chugach National Forest provides many benefits to Alaskans and local communities: clean air and water; natural and cultural resources; and the conservation of lands for present and future generations.

In 2019 the Chugach National Forest contributed nearly $36 million to the state economy through recreation programs, outfitter and guide and land-use permitting, fishing opportunities, mining claims, and fuel and log home timber availability.

The Chugach National Forest also receives funds for community programs, roads and facilities, and stewardship projects that contribute to local communities.



CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST TOTAL 2019 BUDGET ALLOCATION

– $17,182,138 –

SUPPLIES AND SERVICES	**$968,000**
FIXED WING & HELICOPTER COSTS	**$188,130**
TEMPORARY EMPLOYEES	**71**
PERMANENT EMPLOYEES	**97**

ENGINEERING

Engineering's year started with a bang in November 2018 when a 7.1 earthquake hit southcentral Alaska and staff was called to assess Forest infrastructure. Luckily, no major damage was found.

Boiler and hot water systems that use heating oil were replaced with propane systems in quarters and temporary housing in Moose Pass and Cordova. The water system at the Cordova Work Center was replaced. A lighting contract at the Kenai Lake Work Center installed timed lights, increasing energy efficiency. New outdoor lighting improved safety and security.

The contract for site development at Kenai Lake Work Center was awarded.

The Chugach National Forest and partners acquired Federal Lands Access Program funding for the following projects:

- Vagt Lake trailhead (Iditarod National Historic Trail) ..... $1.7 million
- Alaska Railroad Portage Depot upgrade ..... $2.1 million
- City of Whittier Shotgun Cove Road ..... $2.5 million
- Planning for Trinity Road site development $230,000

PORTAGE CURVE
MULTIMODAL CONNECTOR

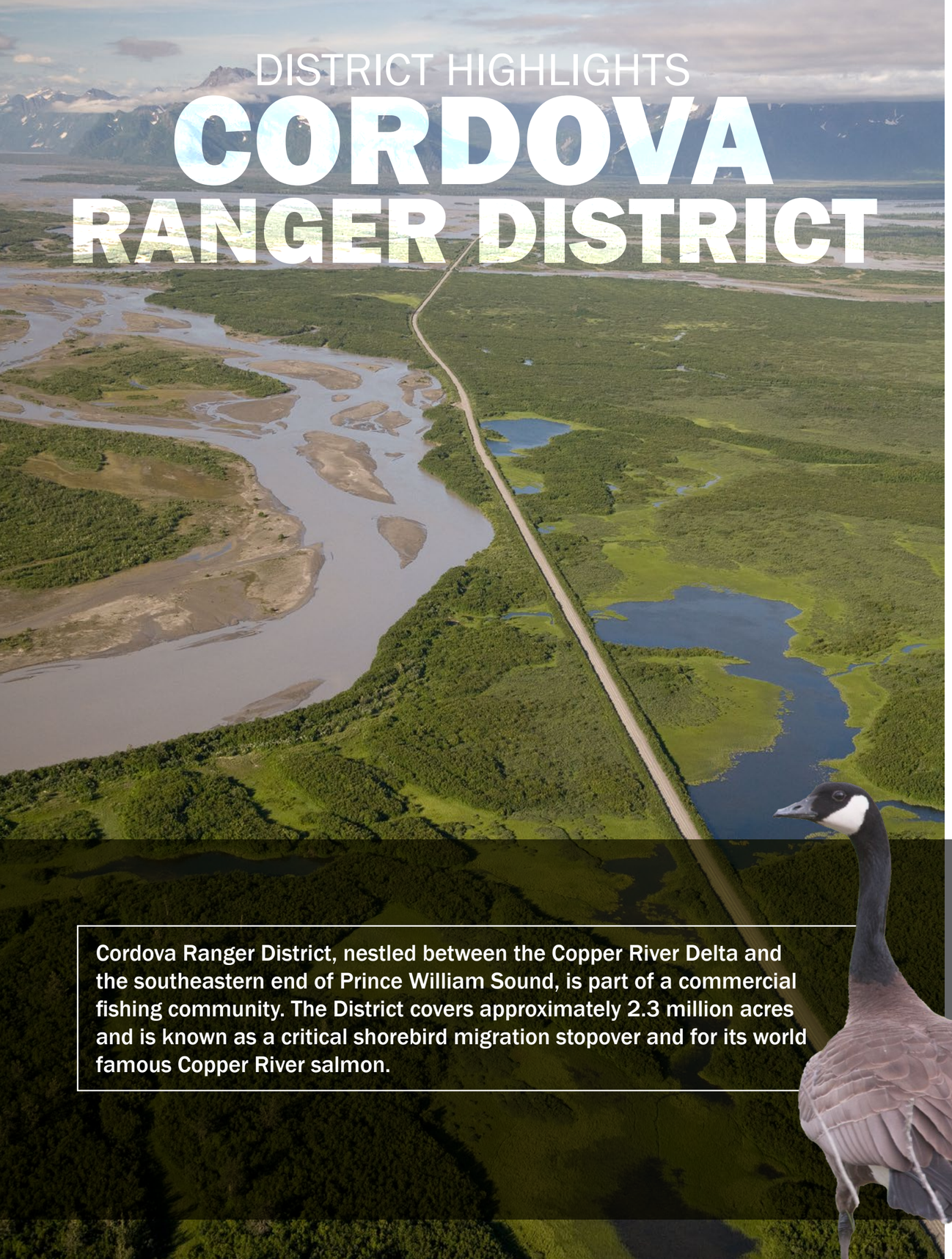
The Chugach National Forest is planning to construct a multimodal recreational path along the Seward Highway between Ingram Creek and an area north of Twentymile River.

The Portage Curve Multimodal Connector project in partnership with Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) Seward Highway Milepost 75 to 90 Rehabilitation Project, will provide a safe multimodal path separate from the highway to connect users to recreational opportunities along a heavily used segment of the Seward Highway. This accessible infrastructure will facilitate ongoing year-round recreation in the area.

Other partners and stakeholders include: Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Railroad Corporation, Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center, and the Iditarod Historic Trail Alliance, among others. The multi-year Portage Curve multimodal connector project is at 95% design, and construction is expected to begin in 2020.

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

CORDOVA RANGER DISTRICT



Cordova Ranger District, nestled between the Copper River Delta and the southeastern end of Prince William Sound, is part of a commercial fishing community. The District covers approximately 2.3 million acres and is known as a critical shorebird migration stopover and for its world famous Copper River salmon.

ELODEA

Introduced into Eyak Lake near Cordova, Elodea is the first invasive aquatic plant established in Alaska. Thought to be introduced from an aquarium dump into lake prior to 1982, Elodea has spread through flooding and floatplanes to major water bodies, ponds, and side sloughs across the Copper River Delta.

The Chugach National Forest, in collaboration with researchers at USFS Pacific Northwest Research Station, Loyola University, U.S. Geological Survey, and University of Notre Dame have been studying the effects of several small-scale herbicide treatments on native aquatic plants, macro-invertebrates, water chemistry, and fish. The Chugach National Forest is also exploring the ecological role of this invasive aquatic plant on the Delta.

KEY COASTAL WETLANDS

Large intact natural ecosystems like the Copper River Delta cover estuaries, wetlands, freshwater and riparian habitats, uplands, and glaciers. These wetlands contribute profoundly to the economies of coastal Alaska communities. The Key Coastal Wetlands (KCW) Plan identifies areas where potential threats, like increased human use, invasive species, and climate change can be addressed.

The Copper River International Migratory Bird Initiative, integral to both the KCW plan and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, protects birds of conservation concern within the Copper River Delta by developing international partnerships and on-the-ground conservation efforts in countries that share migratory birds.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS INCLUDE:

- Linking the USFS bird festivals to partners in Latin America promotes economic growth and increases visibility and capacity of both U.S. and Latin American organizations.
- Pacific Red Knot surveys identified key use sites for this species from Mexico to Alaska. It is estimated that 90% use the Copper River Delta during migration.
- Partnership in the Pacific Flyway study committee provides the Chugach National Forest with shared stewardship opportunities for dusky Canada goose populations and habitat.
- Environment for the Americas Latino Intern Program – provides on the job experience for biologists at the beginning of their careers.

NATIVE VILLAGE OF EYAK

- Eyak Boat Ramp and Ibeck Access Trail
- Saddlebag Thinning
- Knowles Head Thinning Cost Share Agreement
- Roads Agreement
- Access Plan for Cordova with Community.

DUSKY CANADA GOOSE

The Dusky Canada Goose population has declined significantly over the last 35 years. Nearly all Dusky Canada Goose nest on the Copper River Delta, creating a significant conservation responsibility for the Forest. The geese are officially listed as a Species of Conservation Concern in the Alaska Region. Management involves multiple agencies across Alaska, Oregon, Washington, and Canada.

Chugach National Forest has partnered with Ducks Unlimited, which has provided funding and assistance through internships to help with Forest conservation efforts. Work includes maintaining 380 artificial nest islands to increase nest success, and surveying and monitoring nests.

The program is evaluating a project to reduce aerial predation by removing perch trees near nesting areas. The new Forest Plan Revision includes a *desired condition* for the Copper River Delta area to maintain nesting habitat sufficient to support Dusky Canada Goose populations.

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

GLACIER RANGER DISTRICT

Glacier Ranger District is just a short drive from Anchorage on the nationally recognized Seward Highway. The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center in Portage Valley and the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area both fall within the District's jurisdiction.

MAKE A WISH

Our partner Alaska Geographic connected the Chugach National Forest to the Alaska Make-A-Wish Foundation, to help fulfill the wish of 7 year old Saylor who is battling leukemia. Saylor's wish was to become a National Forest wilderness ranger.

"wild and awesome."

Saylor's day as a wilderness ranger on the Chugach National Forest included a visit to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, meeting Smokey Bear and being sworn in as a Junior Forest Ranger. After a trip on the Alaska Railroad Chugach Explorer train, Saylor spent time in the backcountry exploring the Spencer Whistle Stop area. Outfitter and Guide permittee Chugach Adventures, provided a guided raft trip on Spencer Lake so Saylor could get a close-up look at Spencer Glacier.

BEGICH, BOGGS VISITOR CENTER

In addition to normal center operations, partners used the Visitor Center as a base of operations for their programs.

Alaska Outdoor School, an interagency collaboration developed for youth grades 4-6, conducted four week-long camps in early spring and fall in 2019. The 151 students studied topics such as aquatics, glaciers, forests, and the unique physical characteristics of Portage Valley.

In a partnership with **University of Alaska Anchorage**, students enrolled in the Exploration Ecology course, focused on exploration of topics relevant to the complex biology of Portage Valley. Twenty students worked on seven different projects related to the nightlife of bats, micro plastics, stream introverts and more. Data collection results were presented to public land managers.

BBVC STATISTICS:

- Visitors.....46,602
- Junior Rangers sworn in.....3235
- Buses visiting BBVC.....172
- Ferry passengers 49,994
- Train passengers..... 2,978
- Spencer guided hikers..... 1,537
- Byron Glacier guided hikes 31
- Passengers - MV Ptarmigan... 30,365
- 21 Campfire programs...308 people
- Informal contacts.....95,895

WHISTLE STOP PARTNERSHIP

The Whistle Stop partnership between the Chugach National Forest and Alaska Railroad continues to grow as site improvements are made and new trail is developed at the Spencer and Grandview Whistle Stops. Trail construction took place at the Grandview Whistle Stop with nearly three miles of new trail along the Glacier Discovery Trail from Grandview to the Bartlett Gorge and on the Bartlett Spur from Bartlett Gorge to the toe of Bartlett Glacier.

American Hiking Society volunteers worked on trail improvements along the route to Spencer Bench cabin and improvements for the cabin's outhouse were also funded and planned.

Facility improvements for 2019 were postponed due to fire priorities, but will be implemented in 2020. Last year, Alaska Railroad managed reservations for the popular Forest Service Spencer Bench cabin sold out the first day reservations were available.

DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

SEWARD RANGER DISTRICT

The Seward Ranger District covers most of the Eastern Kenai Peninsula. Recreation opportunities abound with miles of maintained trails, recreation cabins and campgrounds. The District is also the home of world-famous fishing destinations on the Kenai and Russian rivers.

SWAN LAKE FIRE

In the summer of 2019 more than 4,000 lightning strikes were recorded across Alaska with 200 on the Kenai Peninsula. On June 5 a lightning strike ignited the Swan Lake Fire on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Kenai National Wildlife Refuge. The second week of July, Swan Lake Fire crossed into the Chugach National Forest.

Jurisdictional agencies U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, USDA Forest Service Chugach National Forest, and Alaska Division of Forestry (Kenai-Kodiak Area) coordinated efforts on the Swan Lake Fire. As protecting agencies, the Alaska Division of Forestry and Chugach National Forest had operational control of firefighting resources. The Alaska Fire Service (Bureau of Land Management) has fiscal responsibility for wildfires originating on the Refuge.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONTAINING THE FIRE:

1. Protecting human life.
2. Protecting qualifying sites and natural resources from damage.
3. Containing fires to the smallest area possible.
4. Letting fires burn naturally to the extent possible to protect, maintain, and enhance natural and cultural resources and maintain natural fire regime.

Officials coordinated with the Kenai Peninsula Borough's Office of Emergency Management to assess nearby properties, assist residents in improving their evacuation readiness, and distribute information about "Ready, Set, Go" evacuation plans.

In recreation areas, campfires were initially restricted to enclosed fire rings/grates, and then prohibited entirely within designated campgrounds and cabins on all federal and state public lands on the Kenai Peninsula. The Chugach National Forest implemented a closure on Resurrection Pass Trail from the junction of Devil's Pass south to the Sterling Highway, including several public-use cabins. Fire personnel installed pumps and sprinklers around buildings, working to reduce wildfire risk by removing nearby fuels. Portions of the upper Kenai and Russian Rivers and associated recreation areas were closed for public safety through a coordinated effort with the Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

Community outreach about reducing wildfire risk to homeowners' properties and fire information was provided through daily Swan Lake Fire updates and distribution of educational materials. Public meetings were held to keep community members up-to-date.

More than 3,000 firefighters and support personnel were assigned to the Swan Lake Fire over the course of nearly 150 days. As of October 28, 2019, the fire size was equivalent to 261 square miles and 90 percent contained, with a suppression cost of nearly $49 million dollars.

EXPLORING THE PAST

The week-long Susten archaeology camp Breaking Trail took place in June. Eleven Kenaitze Indian Tribe members and five Qutekcak Native Tribe members joined nine archaeologists from the Chugach National Forest, National Park Service and the private sector. Two Student Conservation Association (SCA) Kenaitze Heritage interns and two Job Corps interns rounded out the group.

Specialists in forestry, biology, special uses, fire, and ecology visited during the week giving presentations and engaging youth. Campers identified and documented a prehistoric site and an historic cabin site on Kenai Lake. The two Kenaitze SCA summer interns accomplished a great deal for the program, surveying, taking samples, and monitoring numerous archaeological sites.

Susten Junior Archaeology camp for 4th graders also took place in June. Seven young Kenaitze learned the history of their culture, joined Kenaitze Elders in identifying plants used by the Tribe, participated in a mock archaeology dig, and visited the newly documented Kenai Lake sites.

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