See What's New in 2022 | Wellness in the Workplace | Passing on Alaska's Traditions
ON THE COVER
Sheridan Glacier Lake, Cordova Ranger District, Chugach National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo by David Zastrow.

JANUARY 2022
Stories capturing the spirit of your Alaska public lands as told by Forest Service staff and partners who work and live in the Alaska Region.

New for 2022
Sourdough News is now monthly
A shorter, more frequent publication delivers you timely news that you have time to read.

Enhanced interactive features
Be on the look out for links, clicks, and rollovers that provide additional content or just add some fun (hint, roll your mouse over the snowman on page 1).

Contents
1  Employee Wellbeing

Celebrating People
2  2021 Region 10 Forest Management Employee of the Year
3  Retirements

Exploring Nature
4  Trio of Trails in Sitka
4  Winter Adventure Tips
5  Alaska Students Thrive in Outdoor Learning Environment

Discovering Tradition
6  Alaska Youth Celebrate Culture Through Outdoor Employment
7  Submerged Wooden Bow Discovered in Alaska Lake

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The editorial staff reserves the right to edit all articles for journalistic standards and space consideration.

The USDA Forest Service is committed to doing its part to help halt the spread of COVID-19. Masks and physical distancing are required in all USDA Forest Service buildings and facilities and on all national forest and grasslands, especially when physical distancing cannot be maintained. Safety is a core agency value. Images in this product that do not demonstrate appropriate measures, such as wearing a mask or physical distancing, were taken before mandates were in place.
Hello Team Alaska. Here we are, with slightly growing days, in the middle of another winter managing life during a pandemic. So much has changed for us over the past 20 months; the ways in which we do our work, how our children are learning, how our loved ones receive care, and a change in the administration that each of us serve under. Change has become a constant and personally, it kind of wears me out.

As an agency and a region, we are about to experience even more change as increased appropriations and recent legislation offer opportunities in hiring, and the ways in which we carry out our work.

While increased staffing and new ways of doing work are exciting, they also require our attention and energy. And from what we’ve been hearing from others, and I have been experiencing myself, attention and energy are in high demand, but low in supply.

So how are YOU? Helping you find ways to weather these changes is what our new Employee Wellness Program is all about. This program is expanding on the existing wellness program, and actively adjusting and extending our definition of safety to include social and psychological safety of our employees, along with physical safety.

Two of our agency’s Code and Commitments call upon all of us to Invest in Relationships and Protect One Another. Fulfilling these contributes to our wellbeing. So please check-in with your employees and co-workers, not just for a status update on projects, but to touch base on their wellbeing.

How are they coping with winter? What was something fun they did recently? How are their pets, their family? And remember to ask yourself how you are doing. Are you in need of any resources to support your wellbeing, from stress management or resilience courses to gaining access to a mental health professional? Maybe for a moment, we all just need an ear.

Let us know how you are and what your wellbeing needs are. Check out our new Employee Wellbeing portal to learn about our new Employee Assistance Program, get information on how to create and use a wellness agreement, read articles on wellness and wellbeing and get caught up on what programs are coming up to support you.
Aaron Petty began work on the Tongass as a presale forester based in Thorne Bay. After two years there, he transitioned to the silviculture program at the Supervisor’s office. Petty stepped in as the lead in managing and analyzing an extensive dataset for the forest’s old-growth and young-growth inventory collected under the Challenge Cost Share with the State of Alaska during 2016-2018 field seasons. His work with the inventory has been vital to the success of that cost-share partnership and has greatly advanced the forest’s work towards the transition to young growth. Without Petty’s review, attention to detail, and problem solving, the collected information would have been of limited usefulness due to information gaps and other deficiencies. Petty was critical in recognizing these issues and following up with corrections and suggestions to ensure the inventory could be used to its greatest extent for the purpose of guiding a young-growth transition.

Petty recognizes the current unique challenge of an accelerated transition to a sustainable young-growth forest industry. He has become the forest’s expert in utilizing the Forest Projection System growth and yield model. Using this model and working with the Forest young-growth coordinator, Petty has helped develop an innovative method to map and analyze more than 50 management ‘basins’ forest-wide, using inventory data and Forest Projection System to project merchantable volumes, acres, and time periods when each basin may have economic young-growth harvest opportunities. He took on non-traditional duties for a forester job by learning programming language to ensure the Forest Projection System model is being used to its maximum capacity and engaged other resource groups to help others understand and find integrated applications for the inventory data.

Petty’s work greatly benefits the agency as the Tongass moves towards an even more expedited transition to young growth. The recently completed basin analysis was presented at an Alaska Forest Association meeting and was highlighted as the Forest Service’s best available young-growth information and projections, which is helping to guide the development of the forest’s five-year young-growth sale plan. Petty’s accomplishments are vital in making the transition to a sustainable young-growth forest management program that is science-based and will benefit the forest and the Alaska Region for years to come.

Congratulations Aaron Petty on your recognition as the 2021 Region 10 Forest Management Employee of the Year.

“He has become the forest’s expert in utilizing the Forest Projection System growth and yield model.”

Forester, Aaron Petty, inspects a large, old-growth western hemlock tree in Thorne Bay Ranger District, Tongass National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo by Sheila Spores.
A retirement note from TJ Holley

After nearly 29 years with the Forest Service, mostly spent in the IT arena, I’m off to take time to be with family, friends, pups, and paramotoring.

My career began back in 1988 as a Forestry Tech caring for campgrounds at the Stanley Ranger Station on the Sawtooth National Forest. I was also fortunate to enjoy time on the fire crew. In 1990, I accepted an admin job for the Stanley Office where I eagerly offered to do any computer work available and quickly made a bond with the Data General, lovingly known as the DG.

As our kids moved to middle school, they were going to be bused down the windy Salmon River to Challis, so we asked them where they wanted to go, and they choose Alaska. After my willingness to learn all I could about computers, time in college learning to “play nice” with them, and having a personal computer at home, I qualified as a Computer Assistant.

My first job in Alaska was at the Chugach Supervisor’s Office doing Computer Support for the Planning Team that was working on a revision to the Forest Plan in response to the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. We arrived in Anchorage in June of 1992 and in July of that same year, I went to Cordova on a work trip and fell in love.

After four years in Anchorage, I was able to transfer to Cordova where I once again got to care for my old friend, the DG. I spent two years working at the District before taking 2½ years off to run a boat charter business with my husband Jim.

Realizing it was time to be responsible, I returned to work at the Cordova Office in September 2001 just as the Forest Service was starting the A-76 process that was reviewing computer positions at the local level. It took a few years before that process was completed and I was afraid I would have to move to the CIO, but in 2004, I was able to take on an IT Specialist position for the Region while getting to stay in my beloved Cordova. During that time, when I wasn’t working on other tasks such as developing Lotus Notes Databases, I became involved with video conferencing systems that were just beginning their Forest Service debut. In 2009, I moved to a position with Digital Visions Enterprise Team supporting video conferencing nationally.

In 2014, I was fortunate enough to return to Region 10 as the Web Manager, and in 2019, I moved to Information Management as the Regional Data Services Specialist where I’m now retiring from.

It’s been an amazing journey that I’m so grateful to so many of you for being a part of. There have been endless friendships and opportunities that I will forever cherish. Mostly though, I love this Region and its employees, and of course my beloved Cordova! Cheers my friends!

TJ Holley paramotor into the sunset. Courtesy photo.
Trio of Trails in Sitka:
Trail work funded by the Great American Outdoors Act Legacy Restoration Fund

The Tongass National Forest is the nation’s largest national forest, spanning nearly 17 million acres and comprising the largest intact temperate rainforest in the world. Home to world-class recreation experiences, the Tongass has a lot to offer not only to locals but to tourists from across the globe. From hiking and biking to hunting and wildlife watching activities, the Tongass evokes passion among its many users.

Sitka, a city of about 8,500 people, has a very well-developed trail system. Much of the trail system is managed by multiple agencies, with the Forest Service managing approximately 135 miles of road- and boat-accessible trail within the Sitka Ranger District.

For many years, several trails on the Sitka Ranger District have needed maintenance and improvements. Recognizing the importance of ensuring access to these trails, district recreation staff seized the opportunity of the Great American Outdoors Act funding to make some specific projects happen.

Funding allowed for significant improvements to Shelikof Trail, Lower Cinder Cone Trail and connectors, and Harbor Mountain Trail.

Shelikof Trail underwent trail hardening allowing for improved access to a remote cabin that is used almost daily from May through October by backcountry travelers. The Lower Cinder Cone Trail, an off-highway vehicle trail used for recreation and hunter access, and its connectors received improvements including hardened stream crossings, new drainage dips and tread repair. Used primarily for hiking, running, bird watching, and backpacking, Harbor Mountain Trail’s failing boardwalk was replaced by durable gravel and rock steps.

Successful completion of work on these trails was made possible through collaboration with the Student Conservation Association, Outer Coast College volunteers, Forest Service trail crews and local contractors. The upgrades improve visitor access and experiences and create long-lasting, sustainable improvements.

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Winter Adventure Tips

Use these top tips to get out and enjoy all winter has to offer on the Tongass and Chugach National Forests.

1. Wear extra layers and bring some, too. Cold temperatures mean the need for layers as temperatures change quickly.

2. Check weather and avalanche forecasts before departing. Checking weather and avalanche forecasts will help provide the most recent information and avalanche risk for winter activities occurring on slopes. Check out the Chugach Avalanche Center at: https://www.cnfaic.org/

3. Prepare for winter road conditions. Pack an emergency roadside kit, plan extra time for travel, and be ready for snow, ice, or wind.

4. Keep an eye out for traps. Winter is trapping season in Alaska. Be sure to stay on the trail, keep children close, and keep pets safe by keeping them on a leash.

5. Stay hydrated. Cold temperatures can lead to dehydration too. Make sure to keep hydrated while having fun.

6. Always use caution when crossing frozen bodies of water. Ice thickness can change quickly and is not always stable.

7. Share trip plans. Always share trip plans (routes, destinations and return times) with someone not on the trip.
It’s back! After a short pause due to COVID-19, the Anchorage Outdoor School in Alaska welcomed students for two packed days of outdoor learning.

The program directly engages 4th-6th graders from the Anchorage School District with the natural world to learn important topics such as natural ecology, cultural history, physical education, career options and leadership.

The Forest Service is one of many partners collaborating with the Anchorage Outdoor School. The program, that is now managed by the Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area, was an idea that started five years ago among like-minded individuals who were passionate about outdoor education.

Adrienne McGill is one of these advocates for connecting kids to the natural world around them and is the Chugach National Forest’s Begich, Boggs Visitor Center Director and a facility supervisor for the Outdoor School. “For most of the kids this is their first time seeing a glacier and visiting the National Forest.”

The Forest Service is a highly involved partner in the program. Typically, the multi-day school is hosted at a Forest Service facility and staff help with logistics and site preparation. Employees also help facilitate recreation activities such as bird identification, a nature walk, or capture the flag.

In 2019, after years of planning, the school hosted four pilot sessions. Students were bused to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center in Portage, Alaska for a two-night, three-day Outdoor School experience.

This year, an adapted program that included required mitigation efforts to best serve the participants, allowed for a two-day program with 57 Willow Crest Elementary 5th grade students coming together at a park next to their school. The park was filled with enthusiastic students and coordinators. The young folks were so enthusiastic that one of the students loudly exclaimed, “This is the best day of my life!”

Dianna Beltran, principal of Willow Crest Elementary, said “this was a once in a lifetime opportunity for our students, many who have not had this experience. It allowed for our students and staff to make connections socially and emotionally, as well as academically, while learning new ways to enjoy science as well as what surrounds us in Alaska.”

The program has had positive feedback with an increase in partners coming onboard to support. Several other schools have reached out with interest to participate as well. So far, the program has hosted 211 4th-6th grade students and hopes to add to those numbers every year.
Passing it On

Alaska Youth Celebrate Culture Through Outdoor Employment

While the summer of 2021 continued with its set of challenges, the Tongass National Forest continued to prioritize youth programs in rural Southeast Alaska communities. The Forest Service serves as a key partner for the Alaska Youth Stewards program that sets youth towards the path of higher education and employment in natural resource stewardship.

In 2021, the program employed youth in the rural Tlingit communities of Angoon, Hoonah, Kake, and Prince of Wales Island. In each location, Forest Service employees played an important role in coordinating a variety of projects to teach new skills and showcase careers working in natural resources.

This year, Angoon had five youth work with Forest Service employees and various partners to maintain trails and remove over 250 pounds of trash from the shoreline. The crew also helped cultivate two local gardens and were able to distribute fresh produce to the community. Similarly, the Alaska Youth Stewards program in Kake expanded its Community Co-Op Garden and installed 12 medium-sized Tlingit potato beds at community members’ homes.

The Kake program had five youth and a crew leader from Forest Service partner - Spruce Roots. The element that makes the program unique from other youth conservation and development programs is the emphasis on native cultural values and customs. Each week, the crew devoted at least three hours to working on cultural art projects.

Hoonah’s Alaska Youth Stewards employed four youth over a ten-week program that assisted in many projects including data collection to monitor changes to natural resources. Alongside Forest Service employees, they collected eDNA samples from a muskeg pond to identify if any frog species were present. Participants also assisted in surveying road culverts to measure their effectiveness in allowing salmon to pass through.

Prince of Wales Island had a four-member crew and were based out of Klawock. One project the crew accomplished was finding trees on Forest Service land that were the size and quality necessary for cultural uses. The crew spent time during their search discussing the importance of Red Cedar regeneration and the longevity of traditional carving practices.

“Each week, the crew devoted at least three hours to working on cultural art projects... including carving planks, basket weaving, sewing hides, and traditional beading.”

Levi and Kji work on the Angoon Highschool garden. Photo by Eric Benedict.

Mamie works on the finishing touches of the Tlingit dancing apron she has been making over the course of the AYS season at Bear Crossing Center. Photo by Audrey Clavijo.

Levi and Kji work on the Angoon Highschool garden. Photo by Eric Benedict.

Mamie works on the finishing touches of the Tlingit dancing apron she has been making over the course of the AYS season at Bear Crossing Center. Photo by Audrey Clavijo.

Levi and Kji work on the Angoon Highschool garden. Photo by Eric Benedict.

Mamie works on the finishing touches of the Tlingit dancing apron she has been making over the course of the AYS season at Bear Crossing Center. Photo by Audrey Clavijo.
Submerged Wooden Bow Discovered in Alaska Lake

Occasionally, field work discovers something other than intended data. This is what happened when a biologist who was recording water temperatures in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve in Alaska discovered a completely intact wooden bow submerged in a few feet of water.

To help identify the bow, Katie Myers, Museum Curator for Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, reached out to State and Private Forestry for a wood identification consultation.

Dr. Priscilla Morris, wood biomass and utilization coordinator with State and Private Forestry, Alaska Region, was able to make a preliminary identification given the history of the area, the history of bow-making, regional use of wood species and looking at three main sections of the wood. All three sections of the wood provide clues to the species type.

“After inspecting the artifact, I am leaning towards Spruce. Using the hand lens there were certain anatomic characteristics that lead me to believe Spruce is the most likely species,” said Morris. “There is presence of sap along with a multitude of small knots. Birch is also a suspected species, but I did not see any anatomical characteristics that lead me to believe birch over spruce.”

At this point the age of the artifact is not known but radiocarbon dating of the bow will occur and help uncover more details. Regardless of age, a skilled bower crafted the well-manufactured steam bent bow, which is apparent from the uniform curvature and lack of tool markings.

While the artifact was found in Dena’ina country, preliminary research indicates that the bow looks like ones that were collected ethnographically from the Yupik of Western Alaska. How the bow landed in this area remains a mystery, however, the National Park Service is just beginning to study this object. Whatever information is learned about the bow will help provide a glimpse into the lives of Alaska Natives and their intimate relationship with the land and its resources.

Hoonah residents on how local access to wood products for culture and heritage practices, such as carving and weaving, has changed over time. This is the second year they have participated in the Wood Products for Culture and Heritage project.

Even though each community is hundreds of miles apart, they stayed connected through a mapping project. Each group mapped their projects with a description and pictures allowing their peers in other communities to see their accomplishments.

The Alaska Youth Stewards program is an example of organizations partnering to cultivate the next generation stewards by engaging Alaska Native and rural youth in connecting to the natural elements around them and providing benefits to the community and environments they reside in.
ALASKA’S NATIONAL FORESTS
Where nature, people, and tradition come together.

First fish!
Amber Kraxberger-Linson helps Jasmine land her first trout on the Russian River, Chugach National Forest.

USDA FOREST SERVICE PHOTO
BY MARION GLASER

A bear forages for food.

USDA FOREST SERVICE PHOTO
BY RUSSEL WICKA

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