

Leaders' Intent: Recreation, Wilderness and Heritage Program Management in the Alaska Region

February 2014



Southeast Alaska Guidance Association Crew at Admiralty Island



Kenaitze dancers celebrate Chugach National Forest Centennial



Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center



Tongass Wilderness



USDA-FOREST SERVICE
ALASKA REGION



CHUGACH & TONGASS
NATIONAL FORESTS

MORE THAN A PLACE TO VISIT ~ IT'S WHERE WE LIVE

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Introduction

The 22 million acres of the Chugach and Tongass national forests are highly prized for their beauty, wild places, pristine landscapes, abundant wildlife, and year-round opportunities for recreation, heritage and wilderness. As conservation leaders of these unique public lands, the Alaska Region recognizes the serious challenges to our long-term success in sustaining the level of service the public has come to expect. **It is our intent to meet these unprecedented challenges by transitioning our business models to clarify how we will provide the wide variety of Alaska recreational offerings, and establish our priorities.**

We are committed to adapting to current fiscal realities, engaging the public, expanding opportunities for partnerships and shifting our priorities in ways that maximize what we manage with the resources we have.

Vision

The Alaska Regional Leadership Team established the following strategic priorities for the two Alaska national forests. We will provide sustainable levels of world-class recreation, tourism and cultural experiences. We will provide opportunities for Alaskans, visitors, and youth to connect with Alaska's wild, intact and remote landscapes. Our vision of success is fulfilling our stewardship responsibilities for these unique resources. We will manage them sustainably and in collaboration with our communities and partners. We will also operate as a highly effective organization and manage infrastructure sustainably.

Key Messages

We are adapting and investing in a sustainable recreation future, balancing social, environmental and economic conditions. To sustain our full suite of recreation, wilderness and heritage programs over time, they will need to be delivered differently. This investment will meet national goals for the *National*

*Sustainable Recreation Framework*¹ and honor the February 23-25, 2010 *Alaska Region Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Workshop*.²

We will:

- Ensure employee and public safety; there is no compromise.
- Manage as conveners and facilitators, more than doers.
- Balance our inventory at a socially, financially, and environmentally sustainable level. Serve as a model for others as we reduce our environmental footprint.
- Promote citizen stewards and partnerships to protect our special places, and unique natural, heritage and wilderness resources.
- Use all available authorities to accomplish our vision (through outfitter/guides, concessions, partnerships, etc.).
- Ensure the funding for each recreation offering can be sustained over time.
- Deliver our recreation, heritage and wilderness (RHW) services and facilities in partnership with our local communities and other communities of interest.
- Fully integrate our investments to achieve program requirements.
- Share lessons learned and build upon our successes across the Alaska Region.
- Support sustainable economic development that:
 - ♦ builds on the region's natural and cultural resource strengths, and
 - ♦ provides jobs in the recreation program sectors.

¹ <http://go.usa.gov/Kqj>

² <http://go.usa.gov/KqjV>



- Invest in our employees; seek and develop the skills needed to achieve this Leaders' Intent.
- Seek understanding from our business peers and non-profit partners as to how we can:
 - ♦ capitalize on new visions and methods of program delivery.
 - ♦ work with communities and recreation service providers to aggressively pursue service delivery models.
 - ♦ use the full suite of authorities.
 - ♦ reduce our environmental footprint and serve as a model for our visitors and recreation service providers through our infrastructure and practices.

Current Reality

Outdoor recreation continues to grow in popularity. This is demonstrated through increased public use and expectations of the Chugach and Tongass national forests. With more than 2.5 million visitors annually, the forests support a complex of recreation sites, facilities, trails and programs that provide: 1) access to outdoor recreation opportunities largely through appropriated funds; 2) a skilled internal workforce; and, 3) special use permit administration.

As allocated RHW dollars have declined by 42% in the past five years, it has become obvious that it is not sustainable for the Forest Service to be the main doer, provider or funder of every recreation experience and opportunity.

We have a wide variety of tools, authorities, strategies and success stories to build upon and use as we explore and implement new program delivery models.

We can no longer maintain the recreation and trail infrastructure we have in place solely with appropriated and fee dollars—we must reduce our inventory. The degree by which we must reduce will be determined in concert with our allocations and the amount of outside support we can garner.

Our traditional ways of doing business have been funded through a wide variety of special funding sources.³ While these programs do provide opportunities, they do not provide for long-term maintenance of constructed facilities and trails. As we move forward, if funding to build a structure is available, but resources to maintain them long-term are not, we **will not** be adding to our inventory.

We have much to celebrate in regard to meeting the Chief's Wilderness Challenge to manage our Wilderness Areas to a minimum standard by 2014. Future successful investments in maintaining the Wilderness Character will be achieved through collaboration with our partners and citizen stewards. Heritage programs will follow a similar path of achievement through collaboration with others.

Cultural Change Desired

What is truly achievable must be communicated by regional leadership to strategically navigate push-back and address concerns that may arise. We also need to change our modes of thinking to streamline our internal processes and aggressively pursue new delivery models.

At the summer 2014 Regional Leadership Team meeting, line officers will develop a regional strategic action plan for sustainable RHW programs. Peer partners and stakeholders will be invited to contribute collaboratively.

We take great pride in our skilled work, local passion and sense of place that keep us here. It will be hard to give up "the doing." We also recognize there are examples in the region that are successful models, and we will build upon those as we move fully into new delivery models and seek unique ways to offer incentives for creative sharing.

³ARRA (*American Reinvestment and Recovery Act*); *Secure Rural Schools Act* and *FLAP (Federal Lands Access Program)*



Moving Forward

Collaboration is our model for doing work that brings in our local communities and stakeholders to assist in establishing focus areas and exploring strategic partnerships for sustainable recreation programs.

We will move from an expansion mindset and determine the appropriate number of facilities and programs that are sustainable for the long term. We will prioritize our resources to maintain what we already have.

It is time to increase our efforts to bring in partners and communities in all aspects of program delivery.

- New construction projects **must have** a business plan that clearly shows long-term sustainability.
- New programs and opportunities **will be** embraced where clear partner interest and contributions can be demonstrated.

As Leaders, We Agree

- **To allocate dollars purposefully toward a decommissioning program.** This allocation will move us deliberately toward obtaining our goals as

stated in our *Recreation Facility and Trail Master Plans*, recognizing that allocating these dollars will directly impact the available funds for ongoing recreation and trail maintenance. We will redirect these dollars beginning in FY15. In FY14, we will focus on developing a decommissioning strategy.

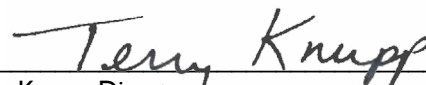
- Regional Leadership (Directors and Line) will develop an integrated policy for the program delivery of the Interpretation and Conservation Education (ICE) program by the July RLT. ICE staff will develop a strategy for implementation of this policy in accordance with regional direction.
- At a regional level we will:
 - ♦ Collaborate with economic development expertise and citizen groups to ensure full utilization of authorities.
 - ♦ Invest in developing our internal skills around business practices, partnership cultivation and management and message delivery around these program changes.
 - ♦ Explore and frame our program and approach to create the needed skills.
 - ♦ Increase understanding and operability of this Leaders' Intent at the July RLT meeting.

Signatures

When implementing this strategy, the Alaska Region will proceed in a thoughtful, responsible manner that leverages expertise, resources and cooperation from stakeholders across the entire state. We believe much can be achieved in the region through collaborative efforts, coordinated investments and public-private partnerships. Our economic development and environmental stewardship must go hand-in-hand. To meet this challenge, we will need bold, innovative thinking that embraces and generates new and creative public-private cooperative models.



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