



United States Department of Agriculture

# State of the Tongass National Forest FY2013



Forest Service

Alaska Region

R10-MB-786

April 2014

# Message from the Forest Supervisor's Team 2012

This State of the Tongass National Forest report highlights the forest's many accomplishments in 2013. Thanks are extended to our employees and partners for a productive and successful year.

Foremost, it was another very safe year for the Tongass team. Although we faced challenges due to the sheer number of people in the woods, the hazardous terrain and weather, and the difficult physical work performed, everyone came home safely at the end of the day. This was due to the diligence of each employee to promote the Tongass' award-winning safety culture.

The report also focuses on several significant milestones, such as:

- Completion of Greens Creek Tailings Expansion Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision (ROD).
- Continuation of the Prince of Wales Island Forest Highway 43 construction project.
- Public meetings for the Big Thorne Stewardship Project as part of the transition from old-growth to young-growth harvest.
- Public input for the Tongass National Forest Land & Resource Management Plan.
- Effective partnership effort to complete the 12-Mile Restoration Project.
- Dedication of the Chief Shake's Tribal Longhouse and the One People Canoe Society voyage.
- Delivery of the quality recreation programs and managing 100 percent of our 19 Wilderness Areas to standard.

We are happy to share these success stories and more as we move into 2014. We look forward to another year of working safely and effectively to complete our mission: caring for the land of the Tongass National Forest and serving the people who live and visit here.

Forrest Cole

Patricia M. O'Connor



Deputy Forest Supervisor Tricia O'Connor and Forest Supervisor Forrest Cole participated in a Children's Forest event. The tree hats were produced by youth from the Tongass School of Arts and Sciences to celebrate and dedicate a Louise Snyder Phillips Children's Forest painting.



"Mystery of the Deep, Dark Forest," abstract painting by Louise Snyder Phillips.



# THE TONGASS

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

# Rooted in COMMUNITY

## Big Thorne Project is a critical transition step

The Tongass National Forest Big Thorne Record of Decision was announced at public meetings in Ketchikan, Thorne Bay and Coffman Cove. The decision was crucial to the diversification of Southeast Alaska's economy's shift from old-growth timber harvest to young growth harvest and forest restoration. The Big Thorne project was offered as a stewardship contract, which allows the Forest Service to foster collaboration and reduce risk to contractors by allowing contracts with terms up to 10 years. Offering Big Thorne under the stewardship contracting authority also enables the Tongass to apply timber receipts toward landscape restoration and enhancement activities. Stewardship projects offer job creation opportunities in Southeast Alaska. The decision is currently on hold while the Forest Service examines the impacts of large-scale logging on Prince of Wales Island deer and Alexander Archipelago wolf population.



## Greens Creek Tailings facility decision adds 10 years to mine operation

The Tongass National Forest issued a decision that allowed limited expansion of Hecla Greens Creek Mining Company's tailings facility in Admiralty Island National Monument. Greens Creek may expand the existing tailings disposal facility by about 18 acres. An additional eight acres was authorized to be developed outside of the monument for rock quarry and reclamation material storage sites and for expanding an existing water management pond. The additional tailings area is expected to add 10 years of life to the mine operation. The decision protects sensitive fish habitat in Alaska's Tongass National Forest while allowing for the expansion of the silver mine. The Greens Creek Mine is one of the largest silver mines in the world and an important regional employer.



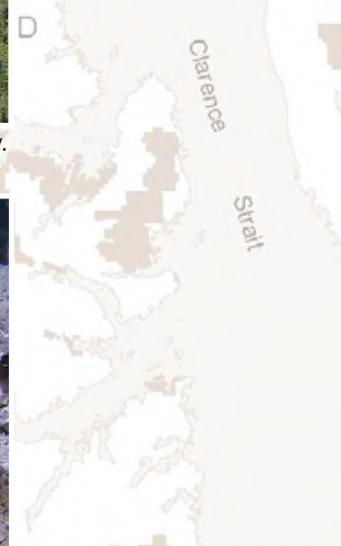
Greens Creek Mine. Photo courtesy Hecla Mining Company.

## Forest Highway 43 Project improves safety and fish passage

Work continued on the Prince of Wales Island Forest Highway 43 road Improvement project through the 2013 construction season. Multiple fish passage culverts were installed, excavation and rock backfill continued, and aggregate was placed to the Naukati Junction. The gravel road is being converted to a two-lane, paved highway with a 35-mph design. The project facilitated a hydroelectric power transmission line to Naukati.



Forest Highway 43 typical cross drain culvert installation.



t Area and Vicinity Map

BIG THORNE PROJECT  
TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST

# Rooted in COMMUNITY

## STARRIGAVAN CREEK

Waste from one project turned into the raw materials for another

What do six holes, a pile of gravel, and old logs from a culvert have in common? They all help fish and off-highway vehicle (OHV) trail users in Sitka when used together near Starrigavan Creek.

During the summer of 2013, Sitka Ranger District ecosystems and recreation staffs combined forces to make substantial improvements for recreationists, anglers, water quality, fish, and fish habitat in the Starrigavan Creek Valley just north of Sitka. Using a resource advisory committee-funded contract, a local contractor dug quarter-acre pits to create two new coho salmon-rearing ponds and refurbish four existing coho ponds. The same contractor used the removed gravel to maintain and improve more than a mile of the Starrigavan Valley OHV trail, where the agency installed a new trailhead sign to orient and educate trail users. Logs from a failing culvert served a new purpose as protective barriers between the trail and the creek to deter riders from taking OHVs into streams and closed areas.

Bringing in a single contractor and re-using raw materials reduced both the financial cost and the environmental impact of the project.



### Enhancing the OHV trail and the coho run at Starrigavan

is important to Sitka residents. Starrigavan is one of two OHV-use areas accessible from Sitka's main road system and the only OHV-use area available during the summer. Starrigavan Creek contains one of only a few nearby coho salmon runs.



Rearing ponds improve coho habitat



## STEEP CREEK Fish Go Viral

The fish of Steep Creek went viral this year. A live broadcast of spawning salmon, Dolly Varden char, and an occasional black bear captured the attention of internet viewers worldwide when the underwater webcam at Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center in Juneau beamed live video to the Forest Service's YouTube site during the salmon run. More than 27,000 people tuned in to the Steep Creek feed and collectively watched 10,314 hours of video, for an average engagement time of 22 minutes per viewer. The "fish cam" was far and away the most popular of all Forest Service web videos.

The camera showcased the variety of fish that make their homes in Southeast Alaska streams. Sockeye swam into the camera's view on July 16, 2013 and predominated throughout August. As the sockeye run dwindled, the coho salmon moved in to spawn from late August through early October. Dolly Varden char, year-round residents spent the duration feeding on loose salmon eggs.

Many viewers posted comments and questions as they watched the live video, which allowed fish biologists and other viewers the opportunity to teach and learn about Alaska's salmon.

First put in place in 1995 with a localized display, in 2013. The Steep Creek fish camera opened up to the world to provide a virtual window into the Tongass National Forest.



Fish cam



Helicopter transporting wood to stream

## PARTNERSHIPS

The Tongass National Forest plays a role in strengthening the relationships among the people and places of Southeast Alaska. Whether related to tourism, subsistence hunting, Native ceremonies, timber harvest, or fishing; activities on Tongass lands and waters sustain Southeast Alaskans.

In a time of challenging budgets, partnerships are vital to the ability of the Forest Service to carry out its mission. Through active partnerships, we can establish new and creative models to guide our ongoing stewardship efforts on the ground.

## TWELVEMILE CREEK

Watershed restoration project successfully completed

Stream restoration efforts in the Twelvemile Creek watershed on Prince of Wales Island concluded successfully in late July 2013. This major watershed restoration effort started with planning and design work in 2009 and featured wildlife habitat and streamside vegetation improvement, fish crossing and road condition improvements, and concluded with major in-stream channel work in 2012 and 2013.

The project was a joint effort among the U.S. Forest Service, National Forest Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Grants from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Alaska Sustainable Salmon Fund, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and Prince of Wales Island communities through Title II funds for ecological restoration were used. Coho, pink, and chum salmon, steelhead trout, resident and anadromous cutthroat trout and Dolly Varden, Sitka black-tailed deer, wolf, black bear, and other fish and wildlife benefited from the watershed restoration project.

During the final phase of the project in 2013, crews thinned 40 acres of riparian area, completed treatments on over 65 acres of wildlife habitat, restored an additional mile of mainstem Twelvemile Creek and added nearly 310 pieces of wood at select locations to improve hydrological function and enhance aquatic habitat in degraded stream reaches.

The work additionally benefits commercial, sport, and subsistence fishing, sport and subsistence hunting and the economic vitality of local communities.

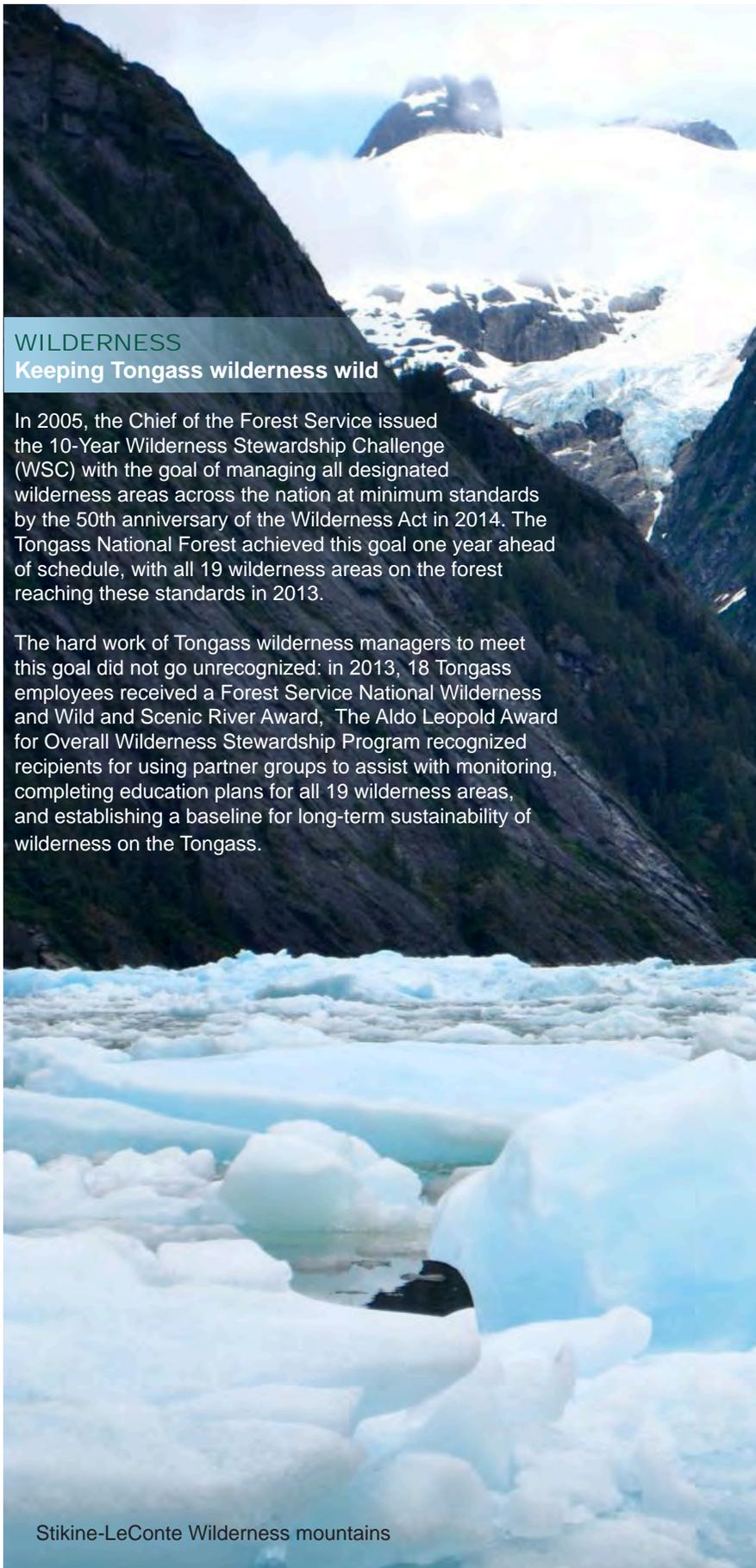
The Tongass National Forest is a salmon stronghold, home to one of the most productive and sustainable salmon fisheries in the world.

It was apparent during the 2013 hot, dry weather, when stream flows were critically low, that migrating salmon were using pools developed with large wood additions during the 2012 restoration efforts.



Logjam structure built for bank stability

# ADVENTURE *within range*



## WILDERNESS

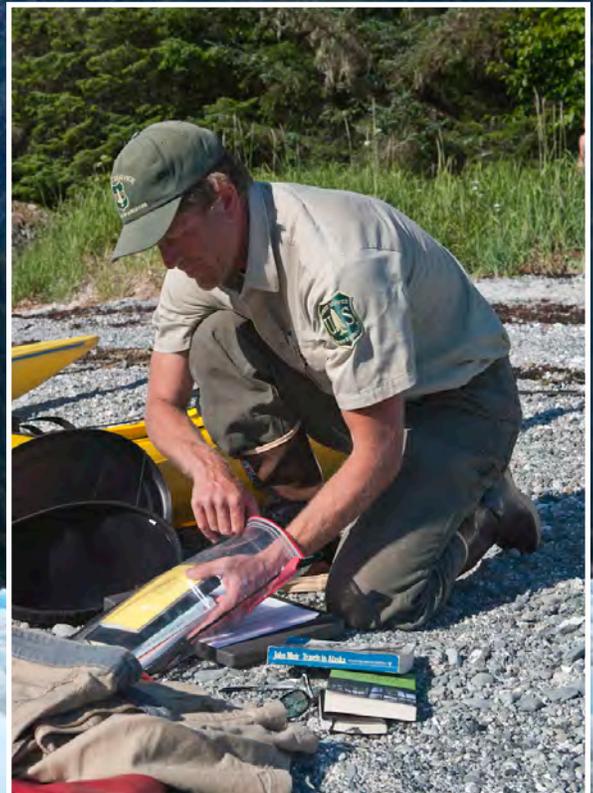
### Keeping Tongass wilderness wild

In 2005, the Chief of the Forest Service issued the 10-Year Wilderness Stewardship Challenge (WSC) with the goal of managing all designated wilderness areas across the nation at minimum standards by the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act in 2014. The Tongass National Forest achieved this goal one year ahead of schedule, with all 19 wilderness areas on the forest reaching these standards in 2013.

The hard work of Tongass wilderness managers to meet this goal did not go unrecognized: in 2013, 18 Tongass employees received a Forest Service National Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River Award, The Aldo Leopold Award for Overall Wilderness Stewardship Program recognized recipients for using partner groups to assist with monitoring, completing education plans for all 19 wilderness areas, and establishing a baseline for long-term sustainability of wilderness on the Tongass.



Wilderness rangers and intern at Tracy Arm – Ford's Terror wilderness.



Wilderness ranger Kevin Hood

Stikine-LeConte Wilderness mountains

## TONGASS RECREATION FACTS

More than two million visitors from around the world visit the Tongass each year. The 2013 Economic Effects of National Forest Recreation in Alaska lists the total annual spending related to the Tongass National Forest in excess of \$268,000,000 and jobs related to visitation totaling more than 3,500.

The Tongass boasts more than 800 miles of trails, including 400 miles of foot hiking trails, such as boardwalks over spongy muskegs to high alpine routes.

Throughout the Tongass, 152 public recreation cabins offer diverse recreation experiences on remote lakes reached only by floatplane, great saltwater fishing, or scenic hiking.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built many recreation facilities in the Tongass in the 1930s. Some CCC-era sites are still in use today, including the Big Shaheen Cabin on Admiralty Island, the Skaters' Cabin Picnic Shelter near Mendenhall Glacier, and many miles of trails through the Tongass. The Ward Lake 3C's campground was the site of a CCC camp that was later used as a training base for the 10th Army Air Force Rescue Boat Squadron.

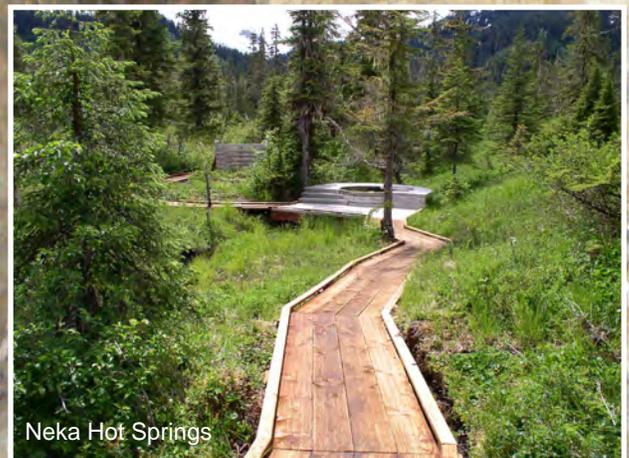
El Capitan Cave on Prince of Wales Island is the longest known cave in Alaska, with over two miles of mapped passageways. During summer months, tours offer visitors a chance to see inside this cave.

Built in 1962 as the first Forest Service visitor center, Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center receives 450,000 people annually.

There are more than just bears at Tongass wildlife viewing sites. The same salmon that attract bears also draw in bald eagles, wolves, seals, mink, and other wildlife.

While Tongass waterways are famously cold, hot springs do occur throughout Southeast Alaska. The Forest Service manages three developed hot spring sites on the Tongass: Neka Hot Springs on the Hoonah Ranger District, Chief Shakes Hot Springs on the Wrangell Ranger District, and White Sulphur Springs on the Sitka Ranger District.

Independent travelers visit Southeast Alaska by air and ferry. As part of our efforts to provide interpretation at sea, the Forest Service continued its 50 year marine delivery partnership with the Alaska Marine Highway. Over 27,000 ferry riders learned about the Tongass National Forest while floating through Southeast Alaska through information stations, interpretive talks, and youth programming.



# ADVENTURE *within range*

## VOLUNTEERS

Invaluable contributions across the Tongass National Forest

Throughout the summer, hundreds of thousands of people spend time visiting the Tongass National Forest. Their safety and welfare were made possible with the help of the 369 volunteers and interns who served as the “eyes and ears” of the Tongass rangers. Volunteers collectively contributed 36,489 hours of service in 2013 to programs on every district and in every program area.

At one of the most heavily visited sites, the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area, the biggest

attraction isn't necessarily the glacial ice, but the bears. The Steep Creek Trail provides one of Alaska's best and most accessible bear viewing opportunities. Where bears come in contact with people, management challenges often multiply faster than staff. That's where Mendenhall Glacier's bear volunteers come in.

Wearing green vests and ballcaps, volunteers staff the busy boardwalks. They interpret bear behavior for visitors, document movement patterns, provide traffic and crowd control, and report by radio if Forest Service staff are needed.



Traffic control at Mendenhall Glacier Visitor's Center



Trail improvements on Sitka Ranger District

### Volunteers also played notable roles at other sites:

- Four wilderness park rangers from Germany participated in a working and learning exchange program on Admiralty Island National Monument building trails, cleaning up a campsite, and monitoring wilderness conditions.
- The Wrangell Boy Scouts and the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council spent a week sprucing up Twin Lakes Cabin, eradicating invasive weeds, and improving trails.
- Student Conservation Association interns continued the long-term Tongass-wide young-growth monitoring study on Prince of Wales Island, providing invaluable data for sustainable forest management.

### Bear-viewing sites on the Tongass National Forest and associated visitor numbers

Site	District	Guided	Unguided
Anan	Wrangell	2,021	852
Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center	Juneau	450,000	
Fish Creek	Thorne Bay	348	14,500
Dog Salmon Creek	Craig	1500	200
Margaret Creek	Ketchikan	1681	250
Pack Creek	Admiralty Island National Monument	600	820



### BEAR VIEWING “We want it wild, but safe”

The Tongass National Forest is one of the best places in the world to see brown and black bears in their natural habitats. Bears naturally congregate around rivers and streams in the Tongass, where they catch salmon during summer months. To provide a safe, comfortable environment for forest visitors to enjoy and appreciate bears, the Tongass has six staffed bear-viewing sites near salmon spawning streams. Considering the continued safety of visitors at bear-viewing sites, the forest compiled a Facilitated Learning Analysis (FLA) of Bear Viewing Sites in 2013. The FLA reviewed what the Tongass is doing right to make these sites safe and how to sustain and enhance those efforts in the future.

## COMMUNITY CELEBRATIONS

After a dark, damp Southeast Alaska winter, the return of migratory birds is a welcome sign of spring. Celebrating these migrants is an annual ritual for the Tongass National Forest, and a chance to bring the Forest Service and Tongass communities together.

The month-long Hummingbird Festival at Ketchikan's Southeast Alaska Discovery Center celebrates the return of the rufous hummingbird and other migrants. The center hosts a variety of field trips, bird lectures, and other family activities. In Wrangell, the Stikine River Birding Festival highlights the importance of the river's delta, a vital resting ground for migrating shorebirds and home to the largest springtime concentration of bald eagles. Yakutat's Tern Festival celebrates the Aleutian tern, as the Yakutat Forelands boasts one of the terns' largest known breeding colonies. It's not all about the birds however. There are festivals to celebrate mammals large and small, from bears to deer and even bats.

Fish are a mainstay resource in Southeast Alaska, providing food, jobs and recreation. Many local Forest Service offices continued to partner with local communities, hatcheries, and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to host Family Fishing Days and Derbies in 2013. These fishing days helped young anglers hone their skills and encouraged them to enjoy the outdoors.

Through these events and others, including Earth Day in April, and National Public Lands Day in September, the Tongass National Forest strengthened partnerships, built relationships with their communities, and raised awareness of our valuable forest resources.

Yakutat's TERN of Events festival youth activities received a \$9,000 grant from the Forest Service More Kids In the Woods program. Combined with \$12,000 from partners, the funds supported educational leaders who enhanced the festival offerings and expanded instruction to young people about natural resources.

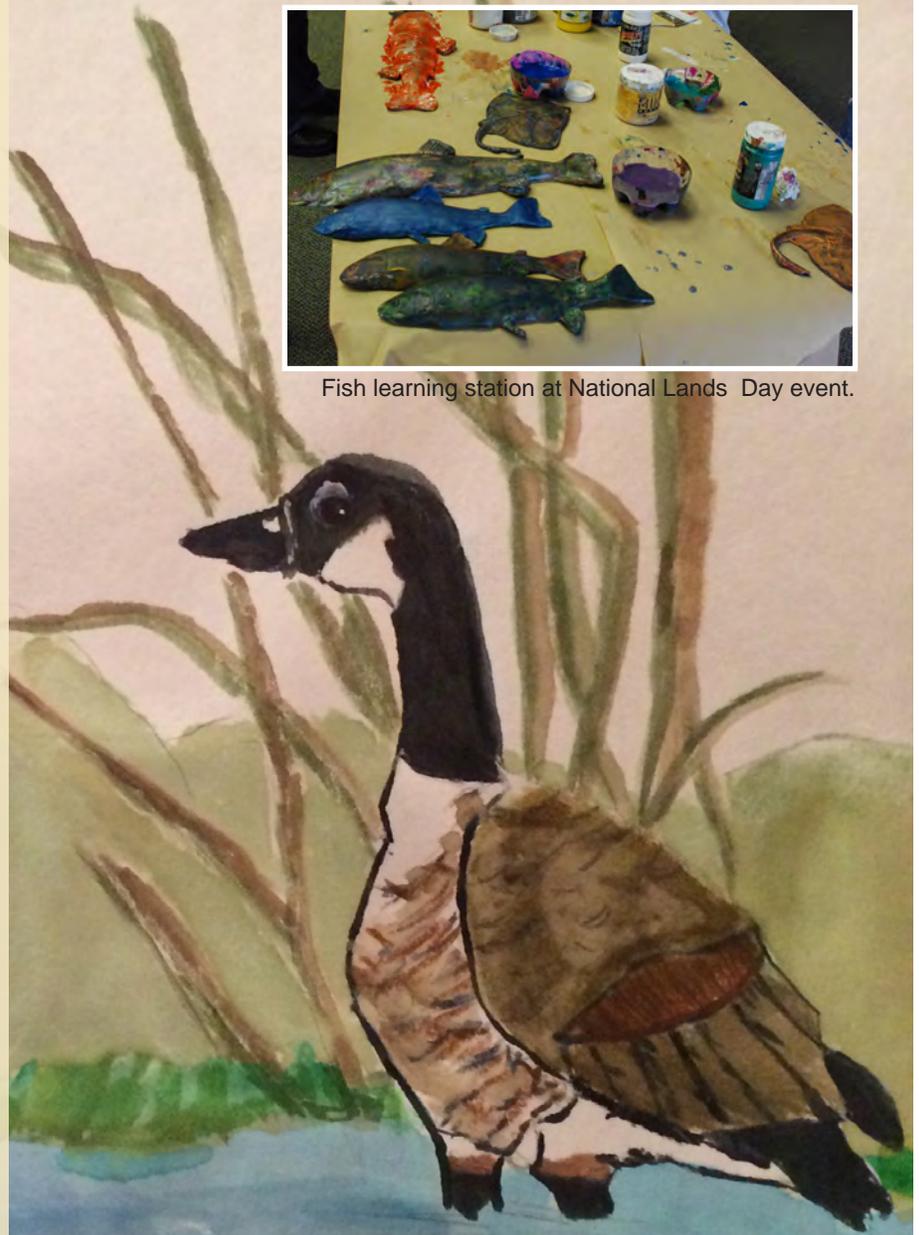
The Tern Festival is an amazing event. The Forest Service and partners contribute their time, energy, and resources to help connect kids and families with the natural world. Education of the local community, particularly youth, and stimulating ecotourism in the Yakutat area are two key objectives of the festival.



Raptor center display at Yakutat Tern Festival.



Fish learning station at National Lands Day event.



Best of Show: Madison Rose, "Canada Goose," Watercolor and Colored Pencil, Species: Canada Goose 2014 Hummingbird Festival juried art show.

# TONGASS *as a Native Place*

For thousands of years, Tlingit and Haida people have fished for salmon and herring in the waters of the Tongass National Forest. The Tsimshian arrived in Southeast Alaska in the 1800s. Each generation shared its knowledge of hunting, fishing and gathering with the next. The Forest Service, in recognizing the Tongass as a Native place, has worked to involve Alaska Native youth in several projects related to sustainable management of the natural resources of Southeast Alaska.

## **Alaska Native Youth Wilderness Stewardship Project**

The Alaska Native Student Internship was initiated in 2013 to raise awareness of career opportunities in the Forest Service for Alaska Native youth. The project provided an opportunity for Alaska Native students to learn about public lands management, gain outdoor skills, and get hands-on experience and training in various natural resource-based careers. During the first phase of the program, two Sitka Mt. Edgecumbe High School student interns spent a week working side by side with Forest Service employees learning about natural resource careers.

The trip also provided Forest Service staff an opportunity to learn about Alaska Native culture.

## **Chief Shakes Tribal House Rededication**

The Chief Shakes' Tribal House in Wrangell, Alaska was built in 1940 during the era of Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in Alaska. Since the original house was built under Forest Service direction with redcedar from the Tongass National Forest, it was only natural for the Forest Service to take part in the necessary rebuilding almost 80 years later.

The Forest Service contributed to the house restoration by providing timber and carving materials through the Farm Bill and \$50,000 in Secure Rural Schools Funding. The house was rededicated during a community celebration in May 2013. The ceremony began in Wrangell with the arrival of canoes from surrounding communities. The Forest Service ranger boat, M/V Chugach provided support. The Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts assisted with land logistics for the canoes.

This rededication provided a good opportunity to reflect on the significance of CCC projects in Southeast Alaska's cultural preservation, and served as a testament to the long-term relationships between the Forest Service and Alaska Natives.



Alaska Native students gain hands-on field experience with wilderness professionals.



Chief Shakes Tribal House

# TONGASS *financials*

<b>Program</b>	<b>Dollars</b>
Secure Rural Schools Title II	\$ 2,292,211
Land Ownership Management	\$ 1,082,851
Minerals & Geology Management	\$ 1,014,028
Fish, Wildlife, Subsistence, Veg & Watershed Management	\$ 9,062,778
Capital Improvements, Infrastructure Maintenance, and Trail Building & Maintenance	\$ 12,522,653
Fire Preparedness, Suppression, & Rehabilitation	\$ 648,320
Inventory & Monitoring and Land Management Planning	\$ 2,269,194
Forest Management	\$ 11,430,369
Recreation, Heritage, & Wilderness Management	\$ 6,797,521
Administrative Operations and Miscellaneous Programs	\$ 9,013,295
Federal Highways	\$ 7,972,143
<b>Tongass National Forest Budget Total</b>	<b>\$ 64,105,363</b>

<b>Program</b>	<b>Dollars</b>
Timber (All Service Receipts - NFS Lands)	\$ 405,122
Timber (Knutson-Vandenburg Earnings)	\$ 26,865
Timber (Salvage Sale)	\$ 181,246
Land Use (All Service Receipts - NFS Lands)	\$ 332,954
Recreation (All Service Receipts - NFS Lands)	\$ 111,319
Power (All Service Receipts - NFS Lands)	\$ 83,797
Minerals (All Service Receipts - NFS Lands)	\$ 22,045
Recreation Fees, Forest Service - Outfitter/Guides & Collection Support	\$ 1,986,365
Recreation Fees, Forest Service - Rec Sites & Collection Support	\$ 1,243,324
Recreation Fees, Forest Service - National Pass Sales & Collection Support	\$ 7,719
Employee Quarters	\$ 483,725
Cooperative Work - Other (Roads & Other Co-op Deposits)	\$ 264,711
Gifts, Donations & Bequests	\$ 19,212
Commercial Film - Local Admin Unit & Collection Support	\$ 41,443
Cost Recovery Lands, Major & Minor Projects	\$ 31,423
Conveyance Program (Admin Sites)	\$ 45,100
<b>Tongass National Forest Revenue Total</b>	<b>\$ 5,286,370</b>

**FOREST SUPERVISOR'S OFFICES**

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Federal Building  
Ketchikan, AK 99901-6591  
907-225-3101 (voice)  
907-228-6222 (TTY)

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PO Box 309  
Petersburg, AK 99833-0309  
907-772-3841 (voice)  
907-772-4636 (TTY)

204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, AK 99835-7316  
907-747-6671 (voice)  
907-747-4335 (TTY)

**VISITOR'S CENTERS**

**Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center**  
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801-8041  
907-789-0097 (voice)

**Petersburg Visitor Information Center**  
19 Fram Street  
Petersburg, AK 99833  
907-772-4636

**Southeast Alaska Discovery Center**  
50 Main Street  
Ketchikan, AK 99901-6559  
907-228-6220 (voice)  
907-228-6237 (TTY)

**RANGER DISTRICTS**

**Admiralty National Monument**  
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801  
907-586-8800 (voice)  
907-790-7444 (TTY)

**Craig Ranger District**  
900 Main Street  
P.O. Box 500  
Craig, AK 99921  
907-826-3271 (voice)

**Hoonah Ranger District**  
430A Airport Way  
P.O. Box 135  
Hoonah, AK 99829  
907-945-3631 (voice)

**Juneau Ranger District**  
8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801  
907-586-8800 (voice)  
907-790-7444 (TTY)

**Ketchikan-Misty Fiords Ranger District**  
3031 Tongass Avenue  
Ketchikan, AK 99901  
907-225-2148 (voice)  
907-225-0414 (TTY)

**Petersburg Ranger District**  
12 North Nordic Drive  
P.O. Box 1328  
Petersburg, AK 99833-1328  
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907-772-4636 (TTY)

**Sitka Ranger District**  
204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, AK 99835  
907-747-6671 (voice)  
907-747-4335 (TTY)

**Thorne Bay Ranger District**  
1312 Federal Way  
P.O. Box 19001  
Thorne Bay, AK 99919  
907-828-3304 (voice)

**Wrangell Ranger District**  
525 Bennett Street  
P.O. Box 51  
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**Yakutat Ranger District**  
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Yakutat, AK 99689  
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**USDA·FOREST SERVICE**  
**ALASKA REGION**



**TONGASS & CHUGACH**  
**NATIONAL FORESTS**

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