

Alaska Region
Sustainable Recreation & Tourism Workshop
February 23, 2010

Opening Remarks
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Connecting people with Alaska's great outdoors – leading to healthier landscapes, communities, and citizens.

Thank you mayor for your participation and remarks – for your understanding of the role, value, and the benefits of recreation & tourism to the community of Juneau – for jobs and economic vitality -- and for the residents of Juneau – for personal renewal, healthy lifestyles, and quality of life we enjoy in Alaska. You truly recognize the *importance* and *significance* of what we do and what we provide on the National Forests – and how we contribute to your community – to each of our communities – the special places across Alaska.

It is wonderful to see so many of you this morning . . . given weather & travel challenges. We have over 100 participants – equally split between agency, tribal, community, industry and partner leaders. A diverse group – representing various interests. A cohesive coalition of advocates for recreation in Alaska.

Thank you for joining us. . . for taking the time out of your busy schedules to engage with us this week – I thank each one of you - whether agency leader, recreation user, service provider and partner – for dedicating your time - your energy – your resources - to participate in developing a framework for sustainable recreation in the Alaska Region. We need your insights – your wisdom – your creativity – your critical thinking – your knowledge - to be part of the journey. We truly have a unique opportunity and are in it together. Help us create a new model for working together.

Our Theme for the workshop *is connecting people with Alaska's great outdoors – leading to healthier landscapes, communities, and citizens - Renewing Body and Spirit, Inspiring passion for the land. Through this workshop we will begin a new chapter in working together - of shared leadership of the treasured landscapes and resources - recreation, wilderness, heritage, and trails - of the Alaska Region. It is time to renew our emphasis and seek new possibilities for outdoor recreation and nature based tourism - and how to work together – as partners - to achieve our common interests.*

Our goal is to build relationships between partners, communities, non-profits, and the Forest Service: to help sustain outdoor recreation environments; to connect people with nature; and to build healthy and vibrant communities.

Our central objectives:

- *Connecting* outdoor recreation to human health & well-being
- *Creating* sustainable outdoor recreation environments for today and tomorrow
- *Providing* quality outdoor recreation and tourism experiences and settings
- *Building* healthier, more resilient and vibrant communities
- *Being* relevant in a changing world; relevant to our diverse our communities and the American people.

Our Agenda - framed around this interaction – around the journey. Richness and success will come from what each of you contribute to the discussion.

- Day 1: Listening and sharing - role, values, and benefits of outdoor recreation – and partnering.
- Day 2: Roundtable discussions – on those issues and areas that are most important to the group. What do we care about in the Alaska region
- Day 3: pulling together - where do we go from here. How do take it home – and how do we stay connected. Call for action

For me, the next few days are about

- *Sharing* our collective wisdom, knowledge and understanding – of what it means to provide sustainable outdoor environments, quality recreation experiences, and healthy communities - -
- *Instilling* passion and excitement for the place. . . this place . . . the Alaska Region -- SE to SC AK
- *Sharing* what you see as special about the Alaska Region and how we can work together to achieve our common interests.
- *Defining* as a group what it means to have a sustainable outdoor Recreation program in Alaska . . .
- *Pursuing creative approaches to reconnect* our Alaska youth with nature and outdoor experiences.
- *Recognizing* the benefits and values of recreation – to communities, to individuals – both local and global
- *Developing* long-term collaborative relationships between partners, communities, and the Forest Service. LASTLY
- *Creating* energy and momentum for moving forward.

It is all about. . . Place, People, and Relationships

What is the Place - Outdoor Recreation Portfolio in Alaska: It is diverse, unique, remote, wild, mostly undeveloped - with world class resources and destinations. Iconic places

- Treasured Landscapes/Special Areas – Wilderness, WSA, National Heritage Area, National Trails, National Monuments
- World class Resources - fish & wildlife – viewing, hunting, fishing, & subsistence
- Trails – Over 1000 miles, national Historic Trail, National Recreation Trails. Community based connections.
- Marine environments – kayaks, glaciers, boats, floatplanes, cruise ships, and ferries.
- Cultural and Heritage resources - heritage assets, Natl historic landmarks, Passport in Time
- Discovery & learning – major visitor centers, I&E programs, children’s Forest
- Tourism – Outfitters & Guides, nature based, BMP’s, international and independent visitors,
- Facilities & Access – Campgrounds, Public Use Cabins, scenic byways

Why here – Why Now – Stage setting – For me there have been 3 major “watershed moments” past year.

1. April 2009, Forest Service Regional Leadership Team Meeting in Anchorage – engaged FS Alaska regional leadership and partners - in thinking about our recreation and partnership programs – what is special - how we contribute nationally – what role do we play – should we play. WO presented early draft of national Recreation Framework. Started thinking about sustainability - What does it mean to have a sustainable recreation program? It is about being relevant to a more diverse, urban, and less connected public (with the outdoors) – how do we instill the passion, the excitement, the shared stewardship for these special places? We only started the discussions. . Began the journey. We recognized that we could not answer these questions alone . . . we needed to engage a larger group – we needed your involvement. We need to address together. Also wanted to share the

enthusiasm and energy from time spent with partners and youth - thus this workshop. Regional leadership made this a priority.

2. National Framework for Sustainable Recreation – Been evolving over the past 2 years. Nora will share with us. Caused us all to be thinking more about what sustainable recreation means. Provided national dialogue on recreation program. We re-affirmed that providing public opportunities for outdoor recreation is core to the Forest Service mission. We developed principles and focus items. Intent was for each region to identify how they will contribute to and further the national framework. What role does R10 play and what does it mean to us?
3. Secretary of Agriculture Vision for Forests – Secretary has been sharing his vision for Forests in a number of speeches over the past year. A collaborative vision for the management and restoration of the nation's Forests - across all lands. His vision includes improving forest health while creating jobs and opportunities – with heavy focus on restoration. He has recognized the benefits Forests provide - including recreation opportunities. Key to this will be promoting outdoor recreation and nature based tourism - to provide jobs and community sustainability. Outdoor recreation was recently featured in the Secretary's 6 point plan for economic renewal of Rural America. He recognizes that rural America is home to many of America's natural wonders. Hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation activities in these landscapes represent both economic opportunity -- and healthy lifestyles for youth. How do we align with Secretary's vision? How do we deliver - across all lands – in a collaborative way?

Convergence of events – time is now to take action and move forward. We have the opportunity to make a difference.

What is the challenge ahead of us –

- Alignment with National Recreation Framework and Secretary Vision
- Defining what recreation Sustainability really means - environmental, economic, social
- Understanding the changing demands and uses – the new demographics.
- Staying Focused-- currently all over the place trying to please everyone. We need to be deliberate, focused and organized around delivery of recreation program.
- Finding new and creative ways to re-connect with communities, youth, and families.
- Understanding the affects of a Changing World – climate change
- Integrating our Program Delivery
- Recognizing Capacity Challenges
- Contributing to Economic recovery and sustaining healthy and viable communities. It is about jobs.
- Recognizing that Community engagement needs to be done in a more purposeful manner – allowing more creativity – use our decentralization in a positive way to connect communities.
- Being relevant in a changing world and positioning us for the future.

At the April Regional Leadership Meeting, we gathered around a map of the Alaska Region and attempted to create a regional recreation niche statement to define the place – what we value – what we contribute – what we do not want to lose – about the National Forests of Alaska. We recognized the great diversity in Alaska – from the Chugach to the Tongass. We celebrated what is similar and what is different. For me it comes back to place – the backdrop – the canvas for our discussions next few days – What we share in common; to the People – we serve, our youth, our communities, our visitors – our diversity and culture; and lastly Relationships, between the agency, our partners, our service providers, our communities – working together.

CLOSE YOUR EYES and envision the sights, sounds, and the smells of the National Forests in Alaska – as I share the DRAFT recreation niche statement that was developed at the April 2009 Regional Leadership Team Meeting:

Touch Alaska

Wild lands and wild ice plunge to the sea - along thousands of miles of rugged shoreline – lined with deep wet Forests. Rivers thick with fish, unsurpassed scenery, wildlife for the viewing, and real remoteness - describe this wild place. A quiet place, with the sounds of nature’s creation, vast in size, yet still untamed.

Experiencing Alaska’s vast grandeur is awe-inspiring and spiritual – that has to be experienced to be believed. These landscapes that have shaped human use over time - continue to define our communities, and have profound personal impact today. Rough, weather-beaten towns sustained by vessels, trains, and planes that visit each summer. There are few places left like Alaska, and the world benefits from maintaining these healthy, expansive landscapes and telling the rich cultural story of our thriving native people. Shared responsibility and community connectedness are fueled by the desire to maintain these benefits and build a legacy for the future. The Forest Service, as part of this community, reaches out and connects with others - to create environmental awareness, shared stewardship, and opportunities to “Touch Alaska” – an experience larger than a lifetime.

I ask that you keep focused on the place, the people, and our relationships - what you can do - to contribute to restoring and conserving our spectacular place – our treasured landscapes – to restoring recreation opportunities, experiences, and facilities – to restoring and sustaining our communities – and lastly, to restoring lives in Alaska and beyond!

I challenge you to be a part of something exciting this week – to be engaged, be active participants, listen and be open to views that may differ from your own – our diversity is our strength - as we make this journey.

Thank you again for joining us - and being a part of this important learning - important sharing - and important connecting . . . to further the recreation, wilderness, heritage, trails & tourism programs in Alaska. We need your creativity, your passion, your ideas – we need you to challenge us to be thinking and acting in new ways – that are engaging and shared – we need you to make this journey with us.