

Downpours Dampen Petersburg Get Outdoors Day Festivities But Can't Extinguish Outdoor Enthusiasm

Story and photos by Julie Speegle, Assistant Public Affairs Officer, Tongass National Forest

After weeks of unusually beautiful, sunny weather, National Get Outdoors Day dawned with a not-so-promising forecast in Petersburg, Alaska—windy, rainy and cooler.

That didn't stop nearly 60 people from participating in the Petersburg Ranger District's National GO Day event, which included a picnic and

ribbon-cutting at the recently completed Blind Slough Picnic Area. Some visitors who attended were from as far away as New Jersey and Indiana.

"We went on the plant and bird nature walk at Blind River Rapids this morning," said Indianapolis resident Alice Craig, who was visiting Petersburg with her husband Jay Craig. "We both love photography, so we thought we'd get some tips on the nature photography hike this afternoon."

PRD staff had planned many outdoor activities for the day, including fly casting demonstrations, biking, hiking, and a Junior Ranger Program. One of the most popular activities was the free, one-hour paddle trip up Blind Slough offered by Tongass Kayak Adventures.

"I love the quietness and calm of the water," said Nicole Goldsmith, a zoo science college student visiting Petersburg from New Jersey. Goldsmith had visited Southeast Alaska four years ago on a cruise, and had always wanted to come back. This was her second time kayaking.

With intermittent periods of rain throughout the day, many attendees



Gabriele Whitacre, 2, tries a toasted marshmallow at Blind Slough Picnic Area near Petersburg, Alaska.



Freya Tucker, 2, doesn't let rain dampen her enthusiasm for National Get Outdoors Day.



The newly renovated Blind Slough Picnic Area near Petersburg, Alaska, was first constructed in the 1980s. A \$950K renovation began in the fall of 2008.

stayed warm and dry around the campfire built under the roof of one of the new pavilions. Some roasted marshmallows.

To others, rain did little to dampen their enthusiasm for being outdoors. Little ones stomped and splashed around in the puddles with their rubber boots, teenagers followed Petersburg tradition by jumping off the bridge into Blind Slough, while others played Frisbee with their dogs.

Most activities were based from Blind Slough Picnic Area, just 18 miles outside of Petersburg. The facility was first built in the early 1980s. It was closed in the fall of 2008 for a \$950K renovation project that added three new pavilions and two new paved parking lots for vehicles and buses. The pavilions were made out of Alaskan yellow cedar from Icy Straits Milling and Lumber, Inc., in Hoonah. Also added were two new fishing piers that

are ADA compliant. The entire facility is now fully accessible.

The Blind Slough Picnic Area was reopened this spring, and Get Outdoors Day offered a great opportunity to celebrate the completion of the popular recreation spot with a picnic and ribbon-cutting.

Since the Blind Slough area has long been a place of gathering for outdoor fun, and with the renovation representing a future of outdoor recreation opportunities designed to get kids outdoors and into the woods, PRD staff thought it would be fitting for children to be the honorees to actually cut the ribbon.

After a short speech by Petersburg District Ranger Chris Savage, three children stepped up to the red ribbon, scissors in hands. The sounds of “snip, snip” could be heard as Iris Case, 3, Isiah Slaven, 7, and Liam Demko, 7, each cut through their section of ribbon, symbolizing the opening of Blind Slough Picnic Area to children of all ages.

“That was fun,” the children chorused. And after all, isn’t that what it’s all about?



Teenagers follow Petersburg tradition by jumping off the bridge into Blind Slough.