



Chugach National Forest-Alaska Railroad Whistle Stop Partnership

Issue

The Alaska Railroad and the Forest Service have joined together to develop Whistle Stop stations between Anchorage and Seward to provide opportunities for sustainable tourism, to benefit local economies, and to open the Alaskan backcountry to people of all abilities. Significant achievements in 2006-2010 have made this vision a reality.



At five designated Whistle Stops, passengers will be able to exit the train to experience the awe-inspiring roadless backcountry of the Chugach National Forest through day and overnight trips. The first station, at Spencer Glacier, was completed in 2007, offering a variety of sightseeing, hiking, and camping opportunities. Over 15,000 people have visited Spencer since it was completed. The second Whistle Stop is planned for construction in 2011 at Grandview, the high point on the railroad between Portage and Seward.

Passengers are now riding the *Chugach Explorer*, a self-propelled railcar, to access the area. In September 2006, the Forest Service was awarded a \$4.7 million federal grant through the “Alternative Transportation in Parks and Public Lands Program” to purchase the *Chugach Explorer*. The Alaska Railroad contributed an additional \$1 million to complete the project. In addition to providing a comfortable ride and outstanding views, this type of railcar, known as a Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU), is also an environmentally friendly means of transportation. The DMU is 50% more fuel efficient, emits 72% less pollution and 75% less noise than a traditional locomotive configuration.



Background

Making this vision a reality requires continued investments in facilities and equipment. The key facility need is Whistle Stop stations where passengers can safely load and unload from the train. A typical Whistle Stop station includes amenities such as a wheelchair lift, toilet, shelter and an information kiosk. Facilities will be located a safe distance from the railroad tracks to increase user safety. Other important recreation infrastructure including trails, campsites and cabins will be constructed over several years.

The key equipment need is a second DMU to transport passengers to the various stations. New DMUs are required because the Railroad’s existing passenger equipment is already fully utilized. For safety and operational concerns, two passenger vehicles are needed for long-term, dedicated Whistle Stop service.

Recent Accomplishments

Continued build-out at Spencer and construction of the Grandview Whistle Stop

- ARRA funds were secured to construct the Grandview Whistle Stop (\$1.2 million) and a complex trail bridge across the Placer River (\$1.7 million). These two projects are critical in connecting and expanding recreational opportunities in the project area. Design and construction of these sites will be completed by the end of 2011.
- Work is nearly complete on an additional 2.8 miles of trail leading to Spencer Bench—a high alpine area overlooking the glacier and future site of a public use cabin.
- The Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop will enter its third full season of use. Infrastructure was completed in July 2007. This fully accessible site consists of historically-themed shelters, interpretive kiosks, standard recreation amenities, 3.1 miles of accessible trail leading to Spencer Glacier, a viewing platform and 25-person group campsite.



Future Plans and Current Issues

- Additional future plans include ongoing trail construction (about one mile per year) to connect the Spencer and Grandview Whistle Stops, and the addition of a public use cabin in the Spencer area (\$200,000).
- New opportunities to provide commercial services at the Spencer site will be developed in the near future. Services may include such things as overnight accommodations and guided upland and river trips. Proposals will be selected based upon the vision of the Forest Plan and Whistlestop Record of Decision to provide recreation opportunities while maintaining a backcountry experience.



More Information

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