

# Healthy Working Forest, Healthy Working Communities

## The Human Story of the Tongass Economic Recovery Projects

By Leslie Swada, Acting Public Affairs Specialist, Tongass National Forest



*The Yakutat Tlingit Tribe crew escorts the mini excavator out of the project area using supportive panels to minimize the damage to wetlands. Photo by Dan Kelliher.*

Serving Southeast Alaskan communities since 1907, the Forest Service has continuously contributed to local economies across the region. During the Great Depression, the Civilian Conservation Corps was established to ease nationwide under-employment, and these programs were managed on the Tongass by the Forest Service. Using local wood products, workers built trails, cabins and shelters to provide greater accessibility to the Forest. Similarly, in recent years, our economy has down turned, and the Forest Service has continued the tradition of putting people to work, this time through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

Nearly 40 restoration, engineering or recreation projects were funded with \$23.6 million across the Tongass National Forest. These projects encompassed 71 contracts, the majority of which were awarded to Alaskan based companies. Our work provided the means to fund over 30 contractors this summer, and currently fund 35 jobs in Southeast Alaska. ARRA funds supported both tempo-

rary and permanent Forest Service employees for 4,484 days of project work his past fiscal year.

Through ARRA funding, healthy forest ecosystems have been restored on the Yakutat Ranger District through the Lost River Restoration and Trail Fish Passage Improvement project. The district received \$300,000 to restore 25 streams impacted by a previous oil exploration route, restoring fish stream connectivity and proper function to adjacent wetlands. Most of the money funded an agreement between the Forest Service and the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, with assistance from Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Both the Forest Service and the ADF&G said that the project was more successful than anticipated.

Alex James, Project Manager for the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, stated recently that, "Four Native people from the Tribe were employed [by ARRA funds] for over a month. The work consisted of bringing in the equipment and fuel, and prepping and establishing the route with minimum impact to the watershed."

James also said, "I appreciated the work to enhance the lost river watershed and to meet the guidelines set by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The Tribe is pleased to do the work with the Forest Service."

Dry Straights Road Resurfacing near Petersburg was another ARRA project that brought about an impact to a small community. The Forest Service hired Ketchikan Ready Mix, a family-owned Southeast Alaska business, to implement the project. In doing so, the company employed between five and 15 people on a periodic basis, and during the winter season when a lot of people are unemployed. The culvert replacement employed up to six people.

Asked about the economic impact to the local community, Larry Dunham, Forest Engineer, said, "These are jobs and incomes the town of Petersburg sorely needed. Thousands of dollars were spent on transportation, rent, groceries, fuel and spare parts. There is no denying, this Forest Service stimulus project has had a very positive financial effect on Petersburg."

ARRA funds even found their way to the small community of Hyder. Off the beaten path, Hyder is home to the Titan Trail, one of the few Tongass trails accessible by a road system to and from the Lower 48. Contracts for Titan Trail were awarded to a local contractor living in Hyder, and provided employment for four people for five weeks total, according to Nicholas Korpela of Korpela Construction. The result? The newly constructed bridge provides new, safe passage across the

creek and is a striking timber-arched suspension bridge, the first of its kind on the Tongass.

Continuing the Tongass National Forest's long history of enhancing the economy, the stimulus funds have provided the means for employment and partnerships while improving access to recreate and subsist in our largest forest. Forrest Cole, Forest Supervisor, perhaps said it best. "The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act projects on the Tongass were a resounding success. Great job."

*Korpela Construction employees work on the 90-ft. Titan Trail Bridge crossing Fish Creek in Hyder. Photo by Clark Simpson.*

