

Podcast Script: USFS "Alaska Forest Reflections"
#TO-18 "AMY GULICK"

MUSIC OPEN: "Inner Light" by George Wood (Used by Permission)

NARRATOR:

Alaska Forest Reflections, a series of stories by people who have lived, worked and played in Alaska's National Forests...sharing their memories of Favorite Forest Places for this 2011 International Year of Forests

MUSIC FADE:

AMY GULICK:

"My name is Amy Gulick, and I'm a nature photographer and writer, and I'm the author of the book "SALMON IN THE TREES: Life in Alaska's Tongass Rain Forest," and there are many incredible places within the Tongass National Forest, where you can experience Wild Alaska at its best. Whether it's hiking on the Mendenhall Glacier, or watching for humpback whales, or dall porpoises in Fredrick Sound, hiking in an old growth forest just about anywhere, or watching two grizzly bear cubs wrestle each other in the Pack Creek Estuary on Admiralty Island. Again, there's just no end to the fantastic experiences and places within the Tongass.

"I think if I had to pick a favorite place, I don't think I'd necessarily pick a specific location but rather a specific time of year that I enjoy most, and that's what's known as salmon time in the Tongass. Every summer and fall, millions of wild salmon show up in the more than four-thousand spawning streams throughout the Tongass National Forest. They're returning from the ocean, coming to their birth streams to spawn the next generation. And these are the times of year this whole place just absolutely comes alive. There's bears everywhere, both brown and black bears, eagles screeching, ravens cawing, gulls screaming, orcas feeding...seals, sea lions, it's just this wild show of life, and to me it's pretty much unparalleled to any other spectacle, I think, that we can see on our planet. "And during this time of year, you're able to see, really, on any spawning stream up in the Tongass. You see this unbelievable connection between the salmon and the trees that still exists here, in the Tongass National Forest.

"So when the salmon leave the ocean and return to their birth stream, they bring the ocean nutrients with them in their bodies. And then all the bears in this part of the world, they then pluck the salmon from the stream and carry them into the forest to eat them and avoid conflict with other bears. And again, think of the millions of wild salmon coming in, and this place has a high density of both brown and black bears in the entire world. So, that adds up to a lot of salmon that get dragged and dropped in the forest by all these bears. So, over time, nutrients

from the carcasses of the salmon decompose into the soil and the trees then absorb them through their roots.

"And scientists have actually been able to trace a particular form of marine nitrogen in trees near salmon streams here that they can link directly back to the fish.

"And so, in the Tongass National Forest, there are actually 'salmon in the trees' and to me, I think this is one of the most remarkable connections found anywhere on our planet, and to me it's still astounding that it exists, not only somewhere in the world, but in droves in the Tongass.

"And, I think one of my favorite experiences, here in this really rich time of life, salmon time in the Tongass...I was standing on a salmon stream, absolutely loaded with fish, and there were a lot of bears around at this time of year it's very normal. And I was photographing the bears, but what I really wanted to photograph were all these salmon that were right in front of me, but when you're on a salmon stream, there are a lot of bears coming and going, and it's really important that you're paying attention to where the bears are and where you are, you know, in relation to them, you don't want to get in their way. So it was pretty hard for me to focus on the salmon with all the bears around. So after a while, the bears kind of wandered off into the woods and there weren't any in my field of vision, and I thought 'Oh Great, I finally have some time to really kind of hunker down and focus on the salmon here and try to get some photos.'" And so, again, I'm kind of on the edge of the salmon stream, just loaded with fish, and I've got my face pressed up to the camera, looking through the viewfinder, focusing very intently on the salmon, and I don't know why, I didn't hear anything, I didn't see anything out of the corner of my eye, but for some reason I looked up from my camera and there was a bear very close to me, and it startled me, but in a situation like this, all you can do at that point is kind of keep your wits about you. So I stood there and I looked at the bear, but what I quickly realized was that the bear was doing the exact same thing I was doing. He was staring at those fish, focusing very intently on them, and really didn't seem to be bothered by the fact that I was very close to him. And what it made me realize, because as a nature photographer I always feel I'm a witness to nature and I'm a spectator to all these incredible things that I see out in nature, but I don't really feel like I'm a part of it. And it really took that moment in time, you know, me being on the salmon stream standing virtually shoulder to shoulder, next to this bear and we were doing the exact same thing. We were both focusing intently on the salmon in the stream, and it took that moment for me to realize that I was very much a part of nature and of that spectacle, and that we are all a part of nature and we're not just on the outside looking in and just witnessing all this. We're very much a part of it, too. And for the first time, I really felt connected to not only that great spectacle that goes on in the Tongass every year during salmon time, but just to the natural world that we all live in."

NARRATOR:

For more information about our National Forests and the International Year of Forests, please visit the links provided at w-w-w-dot-my-alaska-forest-dot-com.

Alaska Forest Reflections is produced for the U-S Forest Service Alaska Region Public Affairs Office.

In Juneau, I'm Bob Belongie for the U-S Forest Service.

Music up and out: "BLISS" By George Wood (Used by Permission)