

# Interpreting the Chugach National Forest from a Blue Canoe

By Lezlie Murray, Visitor Services Specialist, Chugach National Forest



Left: Purser Lynn Olsen, Interpreter Jim Sumner, Captain Garr Henning, and Chief Bill Whitmore in the pilot house of Alaska Marine Highway's M/V Aurora. Right: The M/V Chenega departs Whittier en route to Valdez. Photo by Lezlie Murray.

After days of heavy wind and rain, the clouds lifted to reveal the verdant green slopes of Prince William Sound's islands and mainland as well as the brilliant blue-white of numerous glaciers. Passengers traveling from Valdez to Whittier aboard the M/V *Aurora* were delighted with the new weather and took every opportunity to get out on deck to drink in the glorious view. Forest Interpreter Jim Sumner had been providing programs and colorful commentary for the passengers all day, so it was a pleasure to be invited onto the bridge for a visit with Captain Gar and his crew.

This year marks the 39<sup>th</sup> year of the storied partnership between the Alaska Marine Highway and the Forest Service in Southcentral Alaska. This remarkably long-lived relationship exists for many reasons, but without the support of both organizations it could not continue. As a result of the quality interpretive services provided by the Forest interpreters, the passengers have the opportunity to learn about everything from glaciers and marine mammals and sea birds, to the communities of Prince William Sound. In addition, programs and narrations share information about cultural heritage, history, wildlife, fisheries, geology, geography and forest management.

The Chugach Marine Highway Interpretive Program currently provides service four days per week in Prince William Sound, from early June through the third week of August. The M/V *Aurora* and the M/V *Chenega*, are the Alaska Marine Highway vessels that most commonly serve the Sound. Interpreters from the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center, like Sumner, provide narration and programs for the *Aurora*'s passengers, while interpreters from the Cordova Ranger District serve those who travel aboard the M/V *Chenega*.

On this particular voyage, Purser Olsen shared how much she values the work the Forest Service interpreters do aboard the vessels and said that she wished we could be aboard all summer long. Each year the agency re-evaluates its funding priorities. So far the Chugach Marine Highway Program has managed to stay afloat. As the *Aurora* pulled into Whittier, Sumner thanked the passengers for their attentiveness and received a warm round of applause for his efforts. Their response suggests that if the public could choose, the Forest interpreters would be onboard the Alaska Marine Highway for many years to come.

Thank you for visiting or contacting the Alaska Region of the Forest Service. We hope your experience has been enjoyable. Please help us provide the best services and facilities by filling out this comment card.

Date of Visit: Aug 8, 2009  
Aug 11, 2009

Name of office/facility visited or contacted: Chenega

What was your reason for contacting or visiting us? Naturalist

Comments? Suggestions for improvement?  
Our trip from Valdez to Cordova was greatly enhanced by the Naturalist on Board. Please do all you can to retain this service. The trip from Cordova to Whittier was not as enjoyable without this service.

By traveler from Eagle River, Alaska

Thank you for visiting or contacting the Alaska Region of the Forest Service. We hope your experience has been enjoyable. Please help us provide the best services and facilities by filling out this comment card.

Date of Visit: 06-26-09

Name of office/facility visited or contacted: Ferry from Valdez AK to Whittier

What was your reason for contacting or visiting us? To travel from Valdez to Whittier AK

Comments? Suggestions for improvement?  
We definitely enjoyed the cruise and the Forestry Service Guide was exceptional! She made our travel time enjoyable and informative. Thank You so much.

By traveler from Watkinsville, Ga.