



Fire Funding Impacts

Alaska

Tongass and Chugach National Forests

FOREST OVERVIEW

The Tongass is the largest national forest in the National Forest System, comprising over 2,000 remote islands, with abundant wildlife, rugged terrain, and intact ecosystems. It is home to 32 tourism-dependent communities in Southeast Alaska, only 3 of which have populations greater than 4,000 and few opportunities for alternative industries.

The Tongass receives more than 2 million visits per year, equal to approximately one-fourth of visitation in all of Alaska. Tourism generated more than \$268 million annually for local economies in 2008-2009, provided almost 2,800 direct jobs and generated \$80 million direct personal income in the local communities.



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The Chugach National Forest's stunning landscape stretches across south-central Alaska, from the salty waters and snowy peaks of Prince William Sound to the fabulous salmon and trout streams of the Kenai Peninsula, covering an area the size of New Hampshire. It is a destination for adventurers and nature enthusiasts the world over. You'll see Alaskans living and working in the Chugach National Forest. They are guiding visitors on kayak adventures, working gold claims, and commercial fishing for Copper River reds, following a traditional way of life.

Redirected funds will restrict the ability to accomplish mission critical programs, such as the following.

RECREATION

Funding allocations for recreation have been severely curtailed creating difficulties in meeting program objectives and sustaining basic operations and maintenance.

Further budget cuts could potentially lead to loss of jobs, loss of outfitting and guiding and other recreation opportunities, and loss of or reductions in youth and veteran volunteer employment programs. This could severely impact the economic viability of the tourism-dependent communities already negatively impacted by changes in timber and fishing industries.

Reductions in recreation infrastructure could affect local economies, Alaska subsistence programs, tourism, hunting, fishing and the weather-related remote safety net for vessels at sea. It would be difficult to provide critical safety management needs at recreation sites. Staff reductions may result in site closures at major visitor centers, including the Alaska Public Lands Information Center on the Tongass National Forest.

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On the Chugach National Forest, the Russian River Campground/Day Use Area is the highest visited facility with more than 70,000 annual visitors and has a world-renowned salmon fishery. Funding is needed to address critical infrastructure health, safety, and resource issues totaling over \$7 million. There is no funding to repair a failing retaining wall, which affects the only access road into the site. Failure threatens to cause resource impacts from a slide into the Kenai River.



Begich-Boggs Visitor Center is at risk.

The Begich Boggs Visitor Center on the Chugach was a world premier viewing spot for Portage Glacier, however, the future of this center is at risk without funding to assess, explore and implement options for its use.

WATERSHED RESTORATION

The Tongass National Forest's watershed restoration program is central to the Alaska Region's mission. The forest is the foundation for a multi-billion dollar fishing industry that is remarkable in both its productivity and the overall contribution to Alaska's economy. Watershed restoration projects emphasize the improvement and enhancement of salmon habitat on National Forest System lands.

Since fiscal year 2005, funds for watershed restoration work have declined by 30 percent and funds used to improve fish passage have been cut in half. Program cuts have adversely impacted the ability to plan, partner on and implement watershed restoration projects in an integrated fashion. This makes it difficult to maintain working relationships with partners who need certainty that a project will be funded over the typical 2-3 years before they make the up-front investment to initiate a project (bringing human capital and equipment to remote Alaskan locations).

The ups and downs of our annual appropriation have had the greatest impact on the partnership between The Nature Conservancy and the forest. Uncertainty regarding funding has led to additional administrative costs at the district, forest and regional levels, caused less work in streams and has endangered the funding from external sources.

INVASIVE SPECIES

Since 2008, lack of funds and personnel to complete a timely inventory of the aquatic invasive plant, Elodea, allowed its spread to a degree that it is a threat to critical fish and wildlife habitat in the Copper River Delta on the Chugach National Forest.

PARTNERSHIPS

A 30+ year partnership to provide summer interpretive services onboard the State ferries in Prince William Sound has been discontinued, resulting in the loss of approximately 18,500 resident and visitor visits per year.