

**Begich, Boggs Visitor Center Recreation Fee Program**

**Portage Valley, Alaska**

**Chugach National Forest, Glacier Ranger District**

**Amended Business and Communication Plan**

**2007**

***This plan has been reviewed and approved by the following:***

**/s/ Lezlie L. Murray**  
**Lezlie Murray, Visitor Center Director**  
**Glacier Ranger District**

**May 11, 2007**  
**Date**

**/s/ Judy E. Lange (for)**  
**James Fincher, District Ranger**  
**Glacier Ranger District**

**5/11/07**  
**Date**

**/s/ Joe L. Meade**  
**Joe L. Meade, Forest Supervisor**  
**Chugach National Forest**

**5/14/2007**  
**Date**

## **I. Executive Summary**

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center is exploring options to leverage and enhance the center's services and its ability to recover costs for operations. It is doing this in order to make up the shortfall it is experiencing due to flat to declining Federal budgets, inflationary impacts, deferred maintenance and a change in Recreation Fee Program rules. As a result of this shortfall we've had to close the visitor center to the general public this winter for the first time since we opened our doors in 1986. By expanding our existing fee program, and looking for new opportunities to leverage and recover costs for facilities and services, including partnerships, we can work to bridge this gap. Doing so will allow the visitor center to reopen its doors to the public on weekends and special events, from October through May. In addition, the new proceeds generated will allow us to expand upon our existing interpretive services and provide a full educational program to better assist the public. This plan will examine possible options to help the center continue to offer relevant, meaningful interpretive and educational opportunities about the natural and cultural history of the Chugach National Forest, while it works to become fiscally more self sufficient.

### **Project Description**

*Standard Amenity Fee* - The visitor center currently charges \$1 per adult to see the movie "Voices From the Ice" through the Recreation Fee Program. We are proposing to change that fee to a Standard Amenity Fee that would include the movie, the exhibits and interpretive walks and presentations given in and around the visitor center. The fee could be set at \$3.00, \$4.00 or \$5.00 per adult depending upon the response to the alternative fee schedules presented in the plan. The public would be welcome to enter the facility at no charge to ask questions, shop in the Alaska Natural History Association Bookstore, and to use the lobby and restrooms.

*Facility Use Fee* - The visitor center can currently charge a Special Use Fee to groups that wish to use the facilities for special purposes that do not conflict with the mission of the visitor center. We are proposing that an additional amendment be made to the Recreation Fee Program at the center that would allow us to collect Facility Use Fees through that authority. This would mean that a higher percentage of the funds could be returned to the center to assist with its operation and maintenance costs.

*Potential Expanded Partnership* - The visitor center currently partners with the non-profit Alaska Natural History Association (ANHA) to operate our bookstore which provides us with a percentage of their sales to assist us with our interpretive program. We would like to consider expanding ANHA's responsibilities to include any Fee Program sales. We're also considering the possibility of an Outdoor Adventure Booking Service to leverage the services we provide to our visitors, while connecting them with National Forest Outfitter-Guides. A booking service fee would contribute to facility cost recovery. Another concept our communities have approached us with is a Guest Contribution Program that could be administered by ANHA or a Friends Group.

## **Use of Fee Revenues**

The following projects and activities will be leveraged through the additional revenue created by this amendment to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center's fee program:

- *Winter Staffing* - Provide sufficient funds for staffing so that we can re-open the visitor center to the general public on weekends from October 1 until Memorial Day Weekend; the week between Christmas and New Year's Day; and during Fur Rondy and the Iditarod Celebrations; and so that staff can offer programs for educational groups that meet State Standards and tell the story of the Chugach NF and the National Forest system.
- *New Film for Theater* - Provide additional resources to create a new film for the visitor center theater on other aspects of the Chugach National Forest that can be shown interchangeably with the film "Voices From the Ice" in order to enhance the visitor experience. The current film, though much loved and recently re-mastered, has been showing since 1986 and the number of folks seeing the film has been in a steady decline for many years.
- *Facility Maintenance* - Provide additional approaches or resources to achieve cost recovery goals for an established percentage of costs to operate and maintain the facility, and its interpretive exhibits and media.
- *Expand Visitor Services and Opportunities* - Provide additional approaches or resources to create new exhibits and media; host special exhibits; and create new interpretive program opportunities to enhance our visitor's experience.
- *Extend the Use of Appropriated Funds* - The increased collection of funds at BBVC will help to recover costs of operations and maintenance for the facility, (approximately \$600,000 annually) freeing up Forest appropriated funds for other important and prioritized programs throughout the Chugach National Forest's 3 Ranger Districts.
- *Fee Program Management* - Work to secure 100% cost recovery for overall operations of the BBVC and all its visitor services; additionally provide sufficient funds for staff to collect and administer the fee program (if not turned over to ANHA), Memorial Day Weekend through September; and provide funds to cover collection supplies and equipment.

## **Business Objectives**

The business objectives for Begich, Boggs Visitor Center complex are to:

- Expand the services and opportunities that we provide the public through high quality information services, interpretive media, special events and presentations about their Chugach National Forest and the National Forest system's natural and cultural history.
- Educate students from the Anchorage School District, and beyond, about our natural and cultural resources, and the stewardship of the Chugach National Forest, and the National Forest system, through well designed, educational activities that meet State Standards, while supporting the agency's mission, goals and objectives.
- Partner with a variety of entities, when appropriate, to help enhance the public's understanding of the Chugach National Forest, and the National Forest system, while supporting both the partner's and the agency's missions.
- Monitor the condition of the facilities and take action as necessary to maintain them in a fully functional way, with visitor and staff safety as the highest priority.
- Work with permitted transportation providers to assure the needs for their clients are being considered and addressed in the services provided and the pricing structure of fees.
- Develop new interpretive media and programs to keep the visitor center relevant to our visitors and to share new information about the Chugach National Forest, and the National Forest system.
- Offer to rent the facilities to the public, when appropriate, that provide them with a quality venue for special presentations, meetings, receptions, and events.

## **II. Overview**

### **Background**

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center (BBVC) is located 55 miles SE of Anchorage in Portage Valley and managed by the Chugach National Forest's Glacier Ranger District. Nestled between the Kenai and Chugach Mountains on the shore of Portage Lake in South-central Alaska, the center is near some of the State's largest population centers. These include Anchorage, and the communities of the Mat-Su Valley and the Kenai Peninsula. Its location, an hour's drive from Anchorage, makes the visitor center popular with locals and visitors from around the State and around the World. It is easily accessed by car following the Seward Scenic Byway, an *All American Road*, and the connecting Portage Glacier Highway, which continues past the visitor center, through the Whittier Tunnel to the hamlet of Whittier on Prince William Sound. Because it's close to over half of the State's population, transportation hubs and corridors, and fine outdoor recreation opportunities, the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center is well placed to assist the public.

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center is a multi-million dollar facility that first opened its doors to the public in 1986, as a result of Federal funding spearheaded by the Alaska delegation. Over the years visitors have been a mixture of cruise ship passengers bussed to the center, school children, residents of nearby Alaskan communities, and independent travelers. In 1995, the 17,020 square foot visitor center began charging a fee for the movie "Voices From the Ice" during the peak visitor season from Memorial Day through September. This \$1 per adult fee was collected under a concession permit issued to the Alaska Natural History Association until 1999 when the visitor center implemented a pilot demonstration program to take over collection of the fee. In 2005 Congress enacted the *Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act* making the Recreation Fee Program permanent. Between 1999 and 2006 over 200,000 people per year, on average, have visited the center. An average of \$26,000 has been collected per year for a total of \$237,689.50 over this 8 year period. 80% of these fees have been made available for facility maintenance, interpretive services and other visitor services at the visitor center, while 15% have been made available to administer fee collections at the site. 5% are used to administer the program regionally, with a percentage of that made available through a competitive grant process. During this period the visitor center has made an effort to save some of the revenue earned to contribute to the creation of a new film for the theater. In an average year, when the center is open 7 days a week in the summer, and on weekends and for educational programs in the winter, the average costs to operate and maintain the facility and its programs have been \$520,500. (See 'Relevant Costs' for a more detailed cost analysis.) The BBVC is able to provide World class scenery and visitor services, but has a significant fixed cost due in-part to its isolated location, its inclement weather, the size and complexity of the facilities, and the importance of retaining skilled uniformed agency officials and partners to provide visitor interpretation and education.

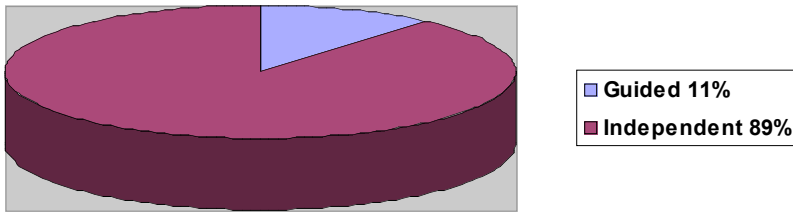
On June 11, 2001 the visitor center opened new state-of-the-art exhibits to the public that expanded the interpretive message from a focus on glaciers, to one that weaves together the natural and cultural history of the entire Chugach National Forest including glaciers. These high tech exhibits address all learning styles and abilities through a variety of media including interactive audio-visual programs, three-dimensional models, and graphic panels that have received rave reviews and National awards. Prior to the new exhibit's Grand Opening, the visitor center held three public meetings to assess the public's feelings about increasing the fee to include the movie and the exhibits, as well as interpretive walks and presentations. In general the public stated that an increased fee was warranted based on the amenities the visitor center had to offer. The public went onto say that they favored a \$3 charge per adult. There were two key stakeholders who did not favor an increased fee and as a result of their concerns, and less strain on the budget at the time, the fee was not amended. In 2005 the visitor center hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to highlight the addition of the 2,750 square foot Portage Valley Learning Center and its newly refurbished theater, featuring Dolby surround-sound speakers, all new digital AV equipment and the digitally re-mastered "Voices From the Ice." Then in the autumn of 2006 AV equipment and computer ports were wired into the new Portage Valley Learning Center, completing that project. In 2006 we hosted over 10,000 people in the classroom alone for conservation education and interpretive presentations, special events, and meetings, and trainings, and nearly 35,000 people viewed the film in the newly refurbished theater. All of this new work has helped to make the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center complex one of the best of its kind in the State and a great asset to the public. These enhancements have also made it more expensive to operate and maintain.

Part of the permanent status of the Recreation Fee Program enacted by Congress ruled that fees collected could not be charged to children 15 and under. Previously the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center had charged people over the age of 6, so this new rule led to less income from the fee program at the center than previously collected. In addition, we received a budget cut due to the declining Federal budget, and so we had to close our doors in the winter of 2006-2007. Previously we've been open to the public on weekends from October through May. These factors have led the visitor center to seek additional revenue. This may involve raising the existing fee, and/or increasing the array of services covered by the fee. It may also involve charging fees to various groups who wish to use the visitor center facilities, in order to help cover operation and maintenance costs. These options will all be examined in the Business Plan.

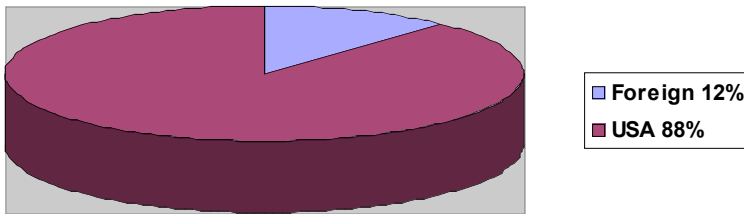
### **Description of Customer**

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center receives a wide variety of guests each year with the majority of visitors traveling independently. Based on our records, these independent travelers comprise approximately 89% of our visitors, and 11% are transported by tour companies who operate under special use permits. Approximately 8% of those who visit sign into our Visitor Log, and though this gives us only a partial glimpse at the origins of our visitors, it's worth noting here. In general 88% come from the United States, including Alaska. Alaskan visitors come from at least 57 different cities with most in-state guests arriving from Anchorage, Eagle River, Wasilla, Palmer, Kenai and Fairbanks and their suburbs. Those that come from the rest of the country visit from all States of the Union and Washington, D.C., though people from California, Texas, Florida, Washington, Minnesota, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Oregon visit in the largest numbers. The remaining 12% of visitors come from other parts of the World and herald from at least 67 different countries.

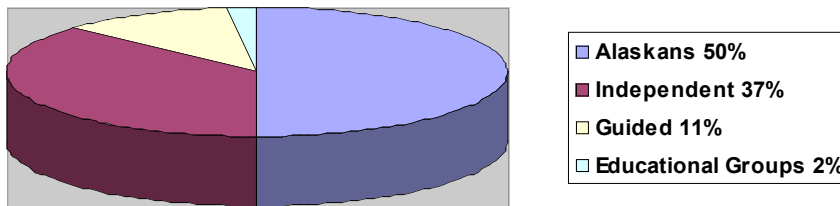
Most of our International visitors herald from Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, South Korea, Switzerland, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands and Taiwan. We believe that up to 50% of our guests are Alaskans, though we can't be certain because many locals don't sign the Visitor Log. Often local residents will visit several times a year, and they are frequently accompanied by friends and family visiting from other Alaskan communities, or from out of state. An additional 30-40% of our guests are independent travelers, which include family groups on vacation, flight crews and business people, retirees in RVs, young adventurers and foreign visitors. In general, these folks spend 2 to 4 hours at the center, and are likely to participate in one of our interpretive programs, take a day hike, and fish or camp in Portage Valley as well. As noted earlier, 11% of visitors arrive on bus tours, and these folks tend to be retired couples. Their visits are short, usually an hour, due to their tight tour schedule. These folks rarely have the opportunity to participate in any of the walks and presentations we offer at the center. School and other educational groups account for a little over 2% of the visitation. Students participate in educational programs designed to meet State Standards, which last from 2 to 4 hours. Though local residents visit the center all year, they represent most of the visitation in the winter months.



**Figure 1 – Visitors approach to experiencing BBVC**



**Figure 2 – Origin of visitors to BBVC**



**Figure 3 – Further breakdown of visitors to BBVC**

### **Key Components of the Facility**

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center is a 17,020 square foot facility with state-of-the-art, award winning, interactive exhibits installed in 2001. The entry area offers a large lobby, restroom facilities that accommodate 10 people at one time, an Information Desk, comfortable seating, a relief model of the Chugach National Forest, a huge satellite image of Alaska, brochure racks, an information board, public telephone, and the Alaska Natural History Association Book Store. From here the public can access the exhibit hall which will allow them to travel through “The Chugach National Forest Experience.” The exhibits weave together the natural and cultural history of the forest using graphic panels, dioramas, nature pianos, ambient sound tracks, video guide stations, audio listening stations, and touchable models that help transport you through Portage Valley, over Portage Pass and past Portage Glacier, through Prince William Sound, and then through the Alaskan’s and Their Stories Room. The Wild Side Room takes a playful look at the animals of the Chugach and features an “Ice Worm” couch, life size models of a mother and baby moose, a migration globe, larger-than-life insect models, a microscope and plasti-mounts to view the tiny critters of the forest, and a variety of other interactive exhibits.



Next a temporary Exhibit Gallery features changing exhibits on themes related to the forest. The capacity of the lobby and exhibits, based on Alaskan fire code, is 400 people at one time. From here you can enter the theater which is designed to comfortably seat an additional 200 people in faux-velvet theater seats. The theater shows the award winning documentary film "Voices From the Ice," on a Christie Digital Projector with Dolby Surround Sound 17 times a day during the summer, using an automated system. This new system was installed in 2004-2005 when the digitally re-mastered film was unveiled to the public. One can exit the theater and enter the Weather Lab, a room that looks out onto Portage Lake and displays exhibits on the wild weather in the area and the State. This room also covers the impacts glaciers have had on the landscape and the status of local glaciers today.

A new classroom facility, the Portage Valley Learning Center, is a 2,750 square foot addition built in 2004 and opened in 2005. The facility can be accessed from the lobby through a hallway that offers a coat racks and cubicles for students to place their belongings, as well as two bathrooms which can each accommodate 2 users at one time. The final phase of the project was completed in December of 2006, when a digital projection system, CD player, a drop down projection screen, two large flat screen monitors and a speaker system were installed. All of this equipment can be run a touch panel which is wired through the podium. The installation also included wiring 18 floor ports for power and computer connectivity which will allow online trainings to take place, as well as a phone connection for conference calls. This facility also includes a kitchenette, linoleum floors, radiant heating and chairs and tables that can be adjusted to seat up to 100 people. There are also 2 large storage closets that are organized with shelves that store our educational and interpretive program totes, and other supplies needed for our Conservation Education Program. Another large closet houses chairs and tables when they're not in use. A half-moon shaped ante-room with clearstory windows houses a traditional Chugach kayak, replica artifacts and a graphic panel with historic etchings of a Chugach man and woman in a reflective setting.

A new door counter system was installed at the main entry and exits to the visitor center in September of 2006. The facility also contains a mechanical room, a basement to store supplies, an office and a workroom for the staff, an office for the Alaska Natural History Association staff, and a janitorial closet.

### **Recreation Use - Annual Visitation of the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center**

Visitor numbers have been kept in a variety of ways over the 20 year life of the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. The records below begin in May of 1999 because prior to that time the door counter system was not functioning. The counters were repaired periodically and worked off and on, requiring a variety of methods to ferret out the visitor counts. This included hand counts, and an estimation of visitors based on the percentage of visitors that sign the visitor log and see the movie. Any other special points are noted below. The period for each year's count is that of the Federal Government's fiscal year, from October 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup>.

<b>Summer</b> (Memorial Day Weekend thru September)	<b>Winter</b> (October 1 to Memorial Day Weekend)	<b>Total Count</b>
1999 = 240,147	Door counters not functional	240,147
2000 = 210,377	21,855	232,232
2001 = 187,934	Closed for new exhibit installation	187,934
2002 = 210,557	17,738	228,295
2003 = 166,809	24,934	191,743
2004 = 204,095	19,317	223,412
2005 = 165,232	21,653	186,885
2006 = 124,903	16,023	140,926

Low visitation in 2006 was due to high fuel costs which greatly reduced the independent travelers coming to Alaska. In addition we had to hand count visitors all year as the door counter system finally broke down completely. Hand counting is very difficult to do with any accuracy during the busy summer months as the staff's main concern is helping the visitors. We believe that though visitation did decline, it was actually higher than the figures shown here. In September of 2006 a new door counter system was finally installed and it will provide us with much better accuracy.

### Relevant Costs

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center and the new Portage Valley Learning Center have been created through substantial investments by the Federal government. The costs shown below are to staff the center from 9 am to 6 pm, seven days a week from Memorial Day Weekend through September; and to staff the center from 10 am to 5 pm on weekends; and every day between Christmas and New Year's Day, from October 1<sup>st</sup> until Memorial Day Weekend. The winter salary costs include the Conservation Education Program which entails students coming to the visitor center as part of a MOU with the Anchorage School District. Salary costs also include the staff that maintain and operate the systems that support the facilities, and do the janitorial and grounds work around the visitor center complex. This includes extensive snow removal in the winter months and vegetation management in the summer months.

<b>Salaries/Benefits – Includes both seasonal and permanent staff</b>	<b>Costs</b>
Summer	\$285,000
Winter	\$125,000
<b>Maintenance/Operation</b>	
Fleet, snow removal equipment, alarm system, janitorial equipment, office equipment, electricity, phone, fuel oil, natural gas, etc.	\$85,500
<b>Supplies</b>	
Janitorial, paper products for the rest rooms, office supplies, interpretive and educational supplies, etc.	\$25,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$520,500</b>

In contrast, the Federal funding we received to manage the program in 2007 is \$423,928 which is \$96,572 less than needed to staff the program. These funds must be competed for in an overall declining budget environment against forest-wide recreation facilities and visitor services. In addition, there is currently \$30,488 in Deferred Maintenance (general plumbing, structural & interior repair) work that is unfunded, and needs to be taken care of, at the center.

### **III. History of the Fee Program and Recommendations for the Future**

The Begich, Boggs Visitor Center's fee program has been in existence since Memorial Day Weekend of 1999, and has been based solely on the collection of a fee for the movie "Voices From the Ice." During the life of the fee program the fee has only been collected from Memorial Day Weekend through September, with the exception of FY2000 when the movie fee was collected year-round as an experiment. The fee charged has been as follows:

#### **Movie Fee Schedule**

Adults = \$1.00 each

Adults & their families carrying a Golden Age or Golden Access Passport = .50 cents each

Children = Free (1999-2005 six and under; 2006 15 and under)

Educational Groups = Free

#### **Begich, Boggs Visitor Center Fee Proceeds History**

1999 = \$33,533

2000 = \$53,918 (We charged year-round this year only)

2001 = \$22,640

2002 = \$32,553

2003 = \$22,551

2004 = \$22,818

2005 = \$26,421

2006 = \$23,254 (The movie screen's break failure meant we lost 1/2 of June's sales)

**Total = \$237,689**

The fee program requires that the proceeds be deposited into three accounts, an 80% account to which \$190,151 has been deposited and some of which has been used to maintain the exhibits and AV equipment, while some has been saved for a new movie; a 15% account to which \$35,653 has been deposited and it has been used for staffing costs; and a 5% account to which \$11,884,480 has been deposited to a Regional Fee Program account. This last account is used to administer the program on a State-wide basis, and for the last several years, funds from this account have been made available through a competitive grant process and we have successfully applied for and obtained 2 grants worth a total of \$18,000. One grant allowed us to install security cameras on our building to assist law enforcement officials. The other allowed us to purchase two display cases which are being used for new exhibits at the visitor center. We have plans to apply for more grants in the future.

#### **Costs to Administer the Fee Program in 2006**

We collect fees from Memorial Day weekend through the end of September. Here are current costs:

Staff Time to sell tickets (63 hrs/wk x 18 wks = 1,134 hrs) x \$15/hr = \$17,010

Class D Cashier Time for banking & NFC paperwork = (8 hrs x 18wks = 144 hrs) x \$36/hr = \$5,184

Visitor Center Director off season reporting & administration = (24 hrs x \$36/hr = \$864)

**Total Cost = \$23,058**

### **Current Fee Program Observations & Recommended Amendments**

Since the current fee program charges a minimal fee for the movie only, our costs for administering the program range from 2/3 of the proceeds to nearly all of the proceeds we earn. This fact, and the declining Federal budget, points to a distinct need to increase the fees collected at the BBVC. We suggest the fee be called a "Standard Amenity Fee" and that it be increased to include the movie, the exhibits and interpretive programs offered in and around the center. We recommend pricing the Standard Amenity Fee at \$3, \$4 or \$5 per adult. This enhanced fee would not be an entry fee, because people would be welcome to enter the visitor center to use our visitor information services at the front desk, the exhibits in the lobby, the Alaska Natural History Association bookstore and the rest rooms. We propose to charge the fee during the key visitor season only, Memorial Day Weekend through the end of September, and to offer educational passes at no cost to student groups and other special educational groups. In keeping with the rules of the Recreation Fee Program adults would be charged a full fee, and those carrying America the Beautiful, Golden Age and Golden Access Passes would be charged ½ price for each member of their family, and children 15 and under would be free. The cost to administer the fee program would depend on the way we collected the fee.

If the Forest Service continued to handle the program our expenses would be very similar to what they are now, as the same number of staff hours would be required to do the work we currently do. We would just take in more money per transaction which would make our efforts much more worthwhile and would allow the visitor center to be more self supporting. If the fee program was handled by the Alaska Natural History Association staff the cost of the program would depend upon the amount of money earned, as they would keep a portion of the proceeds to cover their costs. An assessment of a range of possible Standard Amenity Fee scenarios is located in Section VI.

### **Facility Use Fees**

At the current time if a group wishes to use any of the visitor center facilities they make a request, and we determine on a case-by-case basis if they fit into our Mission, Goals and Objectives. Our first priority is use that includes the interpretation and education of the Chugach National Forest, and the National Forest system. If the group has a similar interpretive or educational mission, is a Federal or State Agency, a partner, or a non-profit educational group, and the facility is not in use, we will schedule them to use the visitor center, or new classroom. Most commonly these groups are interested in scheduling the classroom for meetings or trainings and currently there is no charge for these groups to use our facilities.

We have issued two Special Use Permits in the past, one for a wedding that took place in the theater after hours and another for a Ski Rotarians meeting. Both paid \$200 plus a fee to cover the costs of employees who stayed after hours to run the AV equipment and close up after they had gone. We could continue to charge through Special Use Permits, or we could add a range of "Facility Use Fees" through an amendment to our current Fee Program. We recommend the second approach as it would be easier to administer. We would like to expand our fee program, and/or create partnership or collection agreements, so that we could charge facility use fees for appropriate special activities such as remote guided hikes, film festivals, concerts and special events; and offer our facilities and staff in the off-season, and during non-business hours, to the private sector for meetings, small conferences or workshops, training, receptions, memorial services and weddings. An assessment of a range of possible facility use fees is located in Section VI.

### **Potential Expanded Partnerships**

*Vender Partnership Proceeds* - The visitor center currently partners with the non-profit Alaska Natural History Association (ANHA) to operate our bookstore. This is a very positive partnership for the visitor and ANHA. ANHA provides us with a percentage of their sales to assist us with our interpretive program. We would like to consider expanding ANHA's responsibilities to include any Fee Program sales. This would greatly enhance their ability to recover costs while helping to achieve our shared mission of providing quality interpretive and educational services for our visitors. We'd also like to consider having ANHA or a Friends Group administer a *Guest Contribution Program*. This would allow someone buying materials at the bookstore to donate money to benefit the interpretive and education program at the visitor center.

*Outdoor Adventure Booking Service* - We would like to consider the establishment of an outdoor adventure booking service that could be managed in partnership with ANHA or through a Friends Group. This would allow members of the public to book outdoor adventure services (such as guided site-seeing, fishing, boating, photography, skiing, and hiking, backpacking or hunting adventures) with Outfitter Guides who are permitted to Guide people for these specific activities on Chugach National Forest lands. The revenue would come from proceeds generated through a booking service charge which typically ranges from 5-15% of the cost of the activity being reserved. This service also provides assistance to our Outfitter and Guides by increasing their business, and helps to support our local communities by providing independent travelers with a reason to extend their stay in Alaska.

*Guest Interpretive and Adventure Service* - Another idea we'd like to consider is a cost recovery guest interpretive and adventure service program. This would allow a special group, such as a family, to pay a fee to have a uniformed Forest Service Interpreter, Alaska Natural History Association employee, or another of our partners, lead them on a specially designed exploration of some aspect of the forest's natural or cultural history.

### **IV. Market Value Analysis / Fee Determination Process**

There are many visitor center facilities managed by the Forest Service as well as other agencies in Alaska and the lower 48 States. There are also private and non-profit facilities in the State that provide visitor services, exhibits and in some cases interpretive and education presentations. Each one has determined what if any fees to charge visitors and other user groups. Below is a synopsis of the facilities that are the most similar to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center and their fee structure.

#### **Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, Tongass National Forest – Juneau, Alaska**

(Fee is through the Fee Program and is a per person charge providing each visitor a wrist band that allows them entry to the exhibits and presentations from May through September. Winter there is no fee. Collections are handled by the Alaska Natural History Association who retains 30% of fee proceeds collected on site. ANHA does not handle the billings for the Tour Operators, these are handled by the special uses staff at the Juneau Ranger District office. They don't charge for educational programs, and do book weddings for a \$250 rental fee.)

##### **Entry Fee**

**\$3.00** for Adults age 16 and older

**\$1.50** with one of the following: Golden Age, Golden Access, Golden Eagle, America the Beautiful, Senior Pass, and Access Pass

**Free** for children 15 and under

**Free** for educational groups

**\$2.00** for Permitted Tour Operators who pay pre-season

### **Southeast Alaska Discovery Center, Tongass National Forest – Ketchikan, Alaska**

(Fee is through the Fee Program and is a per person charge that allows visitor to see the exhibits and any presentations from May 1 through September. Forest Service collection officers sell the entry passes. They don't charge for educational programs. They don't allow weddings to occur there.)

**\$5.00** for Adults age 16 and older

#### **Entry Fee**

**Free** with one of the following: Golden Age, Golden Access, Golden Eagle, America the Beautiful, Senior Pass, and Access Pass

**Free** for children 15 and under

**Free** for educational groups

### **Mount St. Helen's National Volcanic Monument, Gifford Pinchot NF – Mt. St. Helens, Washington**

(Fee is through the Fee Program and covers one person per day to visit either the Silver Lake, Coldwater Ridge Visitor Center Complex or the Johnston Ridge Observatory, Summer or Winter. A multi-site pass is also available for \$6/adult in Summer, and \$5/adult in Winter. They don't rent their visitor centers out for weddings, and they don't allow alcohol in the facilities.)

#### **Monument Pass Fee**

**\$3.00** for Adults age 16 and older

**\$1.50** with one of the following: Golden Age, Golden Access, Golden Eagle, America the Beautiful, Senior Pass, and Access Pass

**Free** for Children 15 and under

**Free** for Educational groups

### **Lewis and Clark NHT Interpretive Center, Lewis and Clark NF – Great Falls, Montana**

**Facility Use Fees** (Fees are through the Fee Program. The top two fees are per person fees and allow the visitor to see the exhibits and film and enjoy interpretive presentations. The center also has a number of special conference rooms which can each be rented out for a flat fee of \$55 for 1-4 hours and \$5 for each hour beyond that time. They allow dinners and receptions with non-colored alcohol for \$100-\$350 for a 1-4 hour period and \$20-\$60 for each additional hour, depending on the space rented. They do this through the use of the Granger-Thye Act authority and issue Government-Owned Facilities Special-Use Permits for this purpose. Site does allow their facilities to be rented out for meetings, trainings and weddings too.)

#### **Entry Fee**

**\$5.00** for Adults age 16 and older

**\$2.50** with one of the following: Golden Age, Golden Access, Golden Eagle, America the Beautiful, Senior Pass, and Access Pass

**\$35.00** Annual Individual Membership

**\$55.00** Annual Family Membership

### **Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area Visitor Center, Inyo NF – Lee Vining, California**

**No Entry or Visitor Amenity Fee** (Visitors are invited to see the exhibits, movie and interpretive presentations from mid-March through mid-October. They do charge a fee for canoe led tours, and field seminars, as well as parking at a nearby day use site. They don't allow weddings to occur there.)

### **Alaska Islands and Ocean Visitor Center, Alaska Maritime NWR – Homer, Alaska**

**Facility Use Fees** (Visitors are invited to see the exhibits, movie and interpretive presentations year-round though hours of operation vary seasonally. They do accept donations. The center also has a number of special educational rooms, a seminar room, and an auditorium that can be rented out for appropriate purposes. Use fees for these spaces are on a per day basis and are as follows: Seminar room (capacity 50) \$125 per day (\$65 per day not-profit rate); Class Laboratory Rooms (capacity 16) \$75 per day; Auditorium (capacity 120-260) \$300 per day (\$125 per day non-profit rate). Additional fees are as follows: A/V Fee \$25 per day; Cleaning Deposit \$50 per day. Space Use and Rental Policy requires staffing, setup and cleanup to be covered by the individuals renting the facility, and are not provided by the facility staff.

#### **No Entry or Visitor Amenity Fee**

## **Alaska Sea Life Center – Seward, Alaska**

(Facility is a registered non-profit.)

### **Entry Fee**

\$15.00 for Adults age 13 and older

\$12.00 for Youth age 7-12

FREE for Children age 6 and under

## **Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center, City of Anchorage – Anchorage, Alaska**

**Facility Use Fees** (Facility serves as the Museum for the City of Anchorage, Alaska. The fees are per person fees and allow the visitor to view the galleries and exhibits, see any films and enjoy interpretive tours. The museum also rents out its atrium, galleries and auditorium at the following rates; Atrium \$1,000 (four-hour minimum) \$200 each additional hour, (non-profit \$600 (four-hour minimum) \$100 each additional hour), \$200 deposit upon booking; Galleries \$100 each (available only with Atrium rental); Auditorium (capacity 230) \$200 (two-hour minimum) \$100 each additional hour (non-profit \$100 (two-hour minimum) \$50 each additional hour) Projectionist \$50 per hour. Facility may be rented for weddings and special receptions of all kinds and alcohol is allowed, though food and drink must be catered by The Marx Bros., the Museum's exclusive caterer.)

### **Entry Fee**

\$8.00 for Adults

\$7.00 for Seniors/Military/Students with ID

FREE for Children 17 and under, but \$2 suggested donation

\$6.00 for Groups for 20 or more with free admission for the tour group leader

**Annual Membership Fee** (includes unlimited admission)

\$30.00-\$75 for a Range of Membership Rates; Basic - Individual to Family - Extended

\$125.00-\$1,000 for a Range of Membership Rates; Sustaining to Sponsor

## **Alaska Native Heritage Center – Anchorage, Alaska**

**Facility Use Fees** (Facility serves as the cultural heritage center for all Alaska Native Peoples.) The fees are per person fees and allow the visitor to view the exhibits, see the Native dance and music presentations, and to visit the replica houses of the Native Cultures around the State and to interact with Native Cultural Heritage Interpreters and Artisans. The Native Heritage Center also rents out its facilities at a range of prices depending upon the time of year and time of day. Rates vary from \$600-\$1,100 for the Theater, Hall of Cultures or Gathering Place per 1/2 day or whole day, each. The entire center may be rented for \$1,600 for the evening only. There are additional charges for other options offered, and for special entertainment options, which range from \$25-\$30 per hour for an artisan or a tour guide; or from \$100-\$350 per half-hour for a storyteller, dance performance or musical group. Facility may be rented for weddings and special receptions of all kinds and alcohol is allowed, though food and drink must be catered by Horizons Catering, the Center's exclusive caterer.)

### **Entry Fee**

#### **General Admission Rates**

\$23.50 for Adults

\$21.15 for Seniors/Military

\$15.95 for Children ages 7-16

FREE for Children 6 and under

\$15.95 for each additional family member

\$20.00 per person for groups of 20 or more

#### **Alaska Resident Admission Rates**

\$9.95 for Adults

\$9.95 for Seniors (62+) and Military

\$6.95 for Children ages 7-16

FREE for Children 6 and under

FREE for all Members including ANCSA Shareholder and Descendent Members

**Annual Membership Fee** (includes unlimited admission)

\$45-1,000 for a Range of Membership Rates; Senior - Individual to Heritage Circle -Family

\$250-\$9,999 for a Range of Corporate Membership Rates; Discovering to Perpetuating

## **Pratt Museum – Homer, Alaska**

(Private non-profit museum which focuses on the art, science and culture of Kachemak Bay, Alaska.)

### **Entry Fee**

\$6.00 for Adults

\$5.50 for Seniors

\$3.00 for Youth ages 6-18

FREE for Children 6 and under

\$20.00 for Family, covers 2 Adults and Children

**Annual Membership Fee** (includes unlimited admission)

\$25-2,500 for a Range of Membership Rates; Pioneers Club - Bald Eagle Club

## **Alyeska Prince Hotel, Alyeska Ski Resort – Girdwood, Alaska**

**Facility Use Fees** (Alyeska charges \$1,500/day for their 300 person conference room, and \$500/day for 100 person rooms.)

They charge \$200/day for Prince Hall which serves as their theater. We would compete to some extent with them so we have considered their fees when setting our fees.)

### **No Entry or Visitor Amenity Fee**

**Market Value Analysis Recommendation** - The Market Value (MV) method is the most appropriate method to calculate the fees for the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center/Portage Valley Learning Center Complex. MV is the price for a good or service based on competition in open markets that does not create a shortage or surplus. As noted above, there are a number of visitor centers, interpretive centers and/or museums offering similar kinds of opportunities to the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. Begich, Boggs has the most in common with the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, as it's also in a glaciated, mountain setting and has similar opportunities for visitors. However, the Mendenhall receives many more cruise ship passengers via permitted Tour Operators, while those who visit the Begich, Boggs are more likely to be independent travelers. In addition, the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center is further away from local communities, (it's 55 miles SE of Anchorage, and 84 miles NE of Seward), so it takes folks longer to get there than it does for a visitor to get to Mendenhall from downtown Juneau. There are also many other opportunities, both private and public, that compete with the BBVC for a visitor's attention in South-central Alaska, while in Juneau there are fewer opportunities.

## **V. Communication**

### **Public Notice**

During the 2007 summer season visitors to the Begich Boggs Visitor Center will be made aware of the potential to change the fee program at the center the following year. Details of the proposed Standard Amenity Fee and the Facility Use Fee Schedule will be posted prominently at the visitor center, and on our webpage, and visitors will be encouraged to comment. The public can submit a comment form at the visitor center, or Glacier Ranger District, or online at:

[www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/chugach\\_pages/bbvc.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/chugach/chugach_pages/bbvc.html)

The form will be available from June 1 – September 15, 2007.

### **Letters and Notice to the Public, Community Groups, Permitted Tour Operators**

In addition to the above public notice, a notice will be posted in the Federal Register in the autumn of 2007 announcing the range of possible changes to the fee program schedule at the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. Once approved, a notice of the fee proposal will be published in local



community newspapers, and a letter will be sent to organizations within the communities of Anchorage, Girdwood, Indian, Bird, Portage and Hope, and to the permitted tour companies advising them of the proposed fee schedule and asking them to submit their comments as noted above. In addition, public meetings will be held in Anchorage, Girdwood and Whittier to collect more public input.

### **Vendor Notification**

The Alaska Natural History Association will be made aware of the potential for them to take on the fee program collections on site for the Begich, Boggs Visitor Center. Should they be interested in this additional work, the Forest Service will work with them to detail an agreement to allow this to happen. In addition, permitted tour operators will be contacted to see if they're interested in providing their clients with a 10% break on the Standard Amenity Fee, by paying pre-season through estimated use, which would later be adjusted up or down based on final use figures.

## **VI. Alternatives**

### **Possible Standard Amenity Fee Scenarios**

The estimated visitation in 2006 was 140,926. Of that number 21,711 adults paid full price for the movie and 3,087 paid half price, while 2,889 were classified as "Children" and weren't charged, and 2,554 people saw it for free using educational passes. Below several alternatives are laid out at the **\$3, \$4, and \$5** level, using the percentage of movie attendees in each group as a way to estimate paying verses non-paying visitors.

**Alternative A** (Standard Amenity Fee would include access to the movie, the exhibits & daily interpretive programs.)

Adults = \$3.00 each

Adults = \$1.50 cents each (With a Golden Age/Golden Access/America the Beautiful/Senior or Access Pass.)

Children = Free (15 and under)

Educational Groups = Free

**Estimated Proceeds** (Based on 2006 visitation & percentage breakdown of movie attendance for each group.)

Adults (72% of 2006 visitation x \$3.00) = **\$304,401**

Adults w/Senior passes (10% of 2006 visitation x \$1.50 cents) = **\$21,139.50**

Children (15 and under) (9.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = **\$0**

Educational Groups (8.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = **\$0**

**Total Estimated Proceeds = \$325,540.50**

**Alternative B** (Standard Amenity Fee would include access to the movie, the exhibits & daily interpretive programs.)

Adults = \$4.00 each

Adults = 2.00 each (With a Golden Age/Golden Access/America the Beautiful/Senior or Access Pass.)

Children = Free (15 and under)

Educational Groups = Free

**Estimated Proceeds** (Based on 2006 visitation & percentage breakdown of movie attendance for each group.)

Adults (72% of 2006 visitation x \$4.00) = **\$405,868**

Adults w/Senior passes (10% of 2006 visitation x \$2.00) = **\$28,186**

Children (15 and under) (9.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = **\$0**

Educational Groups (8.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = **\$0**

**Total Estimated Proceeds = \$434,054.00**

**Alternative C** (Standard Amenity Fee would include access to the movie, the exhibits & daily interpretive programs.)

Adults = \$5.00 each

Adults = \$2.50 each (With a Golden Age/Golden Access/America the Beautiful/Senior or Access Pass.)

Children = Free (15 and under)

Educational Groups = Free

**Estimated Proceeds** (Based on 2006 visitation & percentage breakdown of movie attendance for each group.)

Adults (72% of 2006 visitation x **\$5.00**) = **\$507,285**

Adults w/Senior passes (10% of 2006 visitation x **\$2.50**) = **\$35,232.50**

Children (15 and under) (9.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = \$0

Educational Groups (8.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = \$0

**Total Estimated Proceeds = \$542,517.50**

### **Special Fee Option for Permitted Tour Operators**

Another thing to consider is how to handle the tour groups who are transported to the visitor center under special use permits. These tour groups account for 11% of the visitation to the center. The Mendenhall Visitor Center in Juneau, a facility very similar to this one, offers the permitted tour bus operators a special option. If they pay the fee for each of their guests in advance of the season, they receive a 10% reduction in fees. Golden Passes and America the Beautiful Passes will not be honored in the pre-paid option. However, tour operators could opt to turn this option down and let their guests pay at the visitor center in which case their clients would be on the same fee schedules as noted under the last set of alternatives. Using 10% 'guided guest' reduction in fee pre-paid scenario here is how the Alternatives would look:

**Alternative A2** (Standard Amenity Fee would include access to the movie, the exhibits & daily interpretive programs.)

Guided Guests = **\$2.70 each**

**Estimated Proceeds** (based on 2006 visitation & percentage breakdown of movie attendance)

Adults (72% of 2006 visitation, minus 11% for guided guests below x \$3.00) = **\$257,895**

Guided Guests (11% of 2006 visitation x **\$2.70**) = **\$41,855**

Adults w/Senior passes (10% of 2006 visitation x \$1.50 cents) = **\$21,139.50**

Children (15 and under) (9.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = \$0

Educational Groups (8.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = \$0

**Total Estimated Proceeds = \$320,889.50**

**Alternative B2** (Standard Amenity Fee would include access to the movie, the exhibits & daily interpretive programs.)

Guided Guests = **\$3.60 each**

**Estimated Proceeds** (based on 2006 visitation & percentage breakdown of movie attendance)

Adults (72% of 2006 visitation, minus 11% for guided guests below x \$4.00) = **\$343,860**

Guided Guests (11% of 2006 visitation x **\$3.60**) = **\$55,807**

Adults w/Senior passes (10% of 2006 visitation x **\$2.00**) = **\$28,186**

Children (15 and under) (9.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = \$0

Educational Groups (8.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = \$0

**Total Estimated Proceeds = \$427,853**

**Alternative C2** (Standard Amenity Fee would include access to the movie, the exhibits & interpretive programs)

**Guided Guests = \$4.50 each**

**Estimated Proceeds** (based on 2006 visitation & percentage breakdown of movie attendance)

**Adults** (72% of 2006 visitation, minus 11% for guided guests below x \$5.00) = **\$429,825**

**Guided Guests** (11% of 2006 visitation x \$4.50) = **\$69,759**

**Adults w/Senior passes** (10% of 2006 visitation x \$2.50) = **\$35,232.50**

**Children** (15 and under) (9.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = **\$0**

**Educational Groups** (8.5% of 2006 visitation x \$0) = **\$0**

**Total Estimated Proceeds = \$534,816.50**

### **Costs to Administer the Fee Program in the Future**

There are two ways to administer the program in the future. One is to continue to hire and train Forest Service collection officers to handle all fees, and the other is to turn the collection duties over to the Alaska Natural History Association through an agreement, as they have done at the Mendenhall Visitor Center in Juneau. If ANHA collected the fees they would receive a portion of the proceeds to cover their costs for administering the program, which would include staffing the fee station and taking care of the accounting of those funds. This arrangement for fee collection would relieve the Forest Service of the responsibility of dealing with the Fee Program on a day to day basis. Here's how much it would cost to administer the fee program under each scenario:

#### **Scenario 1 – Forest Service Handles Fee Collection**

We would collect fees from Memorial Day weekend through the end of September.

Here are the estimated costs:

**Forest Service Staff Time to collect fees (66.5 hrs/wk x 20 wks = 1,330 hrs) x \$15/hr = \$19,950**

**Class D Cashier Time for banking & NFC paperwork (8 hrs x 20 wks = 160 hrs) x \$36/hr = \$5,760**

**Forest Service Fee Administration Costs = \$25,710**

**(This amount could be higher if more fees were collected as it would take more time to handle more funds.)**

#### **Scenario 2 – ANHA Handles Fee Collection**

ANHA would collect fees from Memorial Day weekend through the end of September.

Here are the estimated costs:

**ANHA Staff Time to collect fees (66.5 hrs/wk x 20 wks = 1,330 hrs) x \$9/hr = \$11,970**

**ANHA Staff Time to account for fee transactions (8 hrs x 20 wks = 160 hrs) x \$15/hr = \$2,400**

**ANHA's Fee Administration Costs = \$14,370 or based on a 5% rate \$16,277 to \$27,125**

**(Depending upon proceeds earned in a given year.)**

#### **Forest Service Special Uses Costs**

These costs would exist regardless of who was collecting the fees as the Forest Service would still be responsible for sending out Bills for Collection to the Guides with Special Use Permits to bring their guests to the visitor center. However, if one or more of the Guides decides to pay their clients Standard Use Fees in advance we would offer them a 10% reduction as noted earlier in the Special Fee Option for Permitted Tour Operators. This would mean up to 11% less fee revenue would be collected at the Fee Station in the visitor center, regardless of who was collecting the fees. However, it would add to the workload of the Forest Service Special Uses team. The potential cost to the team would be as follows:

**FS Time to send out billings (100 Bills for Collection x 30 min/ea x \$25/hr) = \$1,250**

### Wrist Band Costs

Wrist bands will need to be purchased by the Forest Service and will be provided to wear to all who have paid a fee. This will allow the staff to easily tell if a visitor has paid their fee and can therefore visit the exhibits, see the movie or attend a presentation. Cost is .02/each and it is likely that we would buy 164,000-200,000 wrist bands for the first year = \$3,280-\$4,000.

### Proposed Facility Use Fee Schedule

Key: Portage Valley Learning Center (PVLC), Begich, Boggs Visitor Center (BBVC), Theater

<b>Facilities</b>	<b>Type of Event</b>	<b>1-4 hrs</b>	<b>4-8 hrs</b>	<b>add. hr</b>
PVLC *	Presentation (100 max)	\$250	\$500	\$50
	Reception (75 max)	\$400	N/A	\$50
	Meeting (50 max)	\$250	\$500	\$50
BBVC & Theater	Special Event (600 max)	\$1,200	\$2,400	\$100
BBVC only	Special Event (400 max)	\$750	\$1,500	\$60
Theater only	Special Event (200 max)	\$500	\$1,000	\$60
Entire Facility	Special Event (650 max)	\$1,450	\$2,800	\$250

\* Food is allowed in the PVLC only.

#### Note:

Check with the ANHA Manager for Book Store opening. No additional cost for this service.

Additional after hours staffing will be charged at \$30/hour.

Additional cleaning charges will be charged at \$50/hour.