

## Recreation and Tourism

**Goal:** Provide a range of recreational opportunities consistent with public demand, emphasizing locally popular recreation places and those important to the tourism industry.

**Objectives:** Manage the Forest's recreation settings in accordance with the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) standards and guidelines for each Land Use Designation. Construct or reconstruct at least an average of 7 miles of hiking trails per year. Construct or reconstruct enough developed recreation sites to annually increase or improve the developed site capacity for an average of 190 people at one time.

**Background:** Southeast Alaska, of which the Tongass National Forest makes up about 80 percent, possesses a remarkable and unique combination of features. These include inland waterways with over 11,000 miles of shoreline, mountains, fiords, glaciers, and large or unusual populations of fish and wildlife populations that provide a wide range of excellent outdoor recreation experiences. Many of these opportunities cannot be duplicated elsewhere in North America, or most other places in the world. Southeast Alaska imparts a feeling of vastness, wilderness, and solitude. A relatively small resident population, and absence of development compared to most other National Forests also contributes to the wild nature of these lands.

### **Recreation and Tourism Question 1: Are areas of the Forest being managed in accordance with the prescribed Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class in Recreation and Tourism Standards and Guidelines?**

In 2006 districts did considerable work on improving information to the ROS GIS layers to better reflect existing conditions. Overall, the districts have reported that areas on the Tongass are being managed in accordance with the prescribed ROS classes as described in the Recreation and Tourism Standards and Guidelines.

Many sites selected to monitor for 2006 were primarily based on the location of existing recreation facilities and areas of the districts where high use traditionally occurred. Some remote locations were visited during the course of regular patrols of the roads and waterways. Outfitter/guide special use permit records along with written and verbal accounts of guiding activity helped determine high commercial use areas. Observations were also made during the course of completing condition surveys for trails and developed recreation facilities. Additional monitoring was accomplished during the course of other project work, such as during timber sale environmental document preparation.

### **Monitoring Results**

In 2006, individual districts tracked changes to ROS inventories in GIS at each Ranger District. Districts accommodated monitoring work as a normal course of business. Overall, forest wide monitoring indicates that recreation visits to day use areas, campgrounds and cabins are stable but there are some areas of change. The Forest Service hosted a series of meetings with the public regarding recreation facilities and their out year management. In some locations, the threat of cabin closures has generated additional paid use of facilities or interest in help to maintain existing facilities. The forest will likely see some reductions of the number of facilities over the next few years in response to reductions in program funds. In some cases, such as in

wilderness, the elimination of some facilities may actually improve the wilderness character and objectives for a more primitive recreation experience.

### ***Ketchikan/Misty Ranger District***

#### **Fixed point visitor use monitoring**

This methodology allows Monitoring Crew to gather site specific temporal encounter data by remaining in one location recording every visitor observation and social encounter. Information collected includes, exact time of encounter, direction of travel and mode of transport. Fixed point visitor use observations were performed periodically throughout each monitoring trip this season. Collected fixed point visitor use observations are entered in an Access Database which was developed specifically for MFNMW. This visitor use observation database can then be queried and analyzed serving as a useful tool for Wilderness managers.

Table 2 provides a summary of the fixed point monitoring data collected during the 2006 field season. The four areas monitored (Big Goat Lake, Carp Island, New Eddystone Rock and Walker Cove) have Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class designations of Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) and Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM). The Social Encounters Setting Indicators established by the TLMP for these two ROS classes are, “User meets less than 10 parties per day (6 parties per day in Wilderness) on trails and waterways during 80% of the primary use season” (*TLMP p.4-47&4-48*).

ROS guidelines were exceeded at one of the four areas monitored. Social encounter levels recorded at Big Goat Lake exceeded established social encounter guidelines for SPM area. All social encounters recorded at Big Goat Lake were floatplane lake landings. There were no social encounters recorded at Walker Cove, New Eddystone Island and Carp Island despite frequent over-flights and saltwater boat traffic.

**Table 2. FIXED POINT MONITORING SUMMARY - For Locations Monitored in 2006**

(Includes fixed point monitoring data from 2004 and 2005 for comparison)

		Total Days	Total Hours	Total Visitor Observations	Average Visitor Observations per Day	Average Social Encounters per Day	Visitor Observation Type
<b>Big Goat Lake</b>	Yr.						
ROS Class SPM	04	2	19.5	109	54.5	10	Floatplane 100%
	05	3	38.5	79	26.3	2	Floatplane 100%
	<b>06</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Floatplane 100%</b>
<b>Carp Island</b>							
ROS Class SPM	04	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	
	05	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	
	<b>06</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Floatplane 50% Boat 50%</b>
<b>New Eddystone Rock</b>							
ROS Class SPM	04	10	82	815	81.5	0	Floatplane 90% Boat 8% Other 2%
	05	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	
	<b>06</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Floatplane 90% Boat 10%</b>
<b>Walker Cove</b>							
ROS Class SPNM	04	3	23.75	29	9.7	0	Floatplane 38% Boat 62%
	05	no data	no data	no data	no data	no data	
	<b>06</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Floatplane 78% Boat 22%</b>

**Petersburg Ranger District**

Condition surveys of 20% of the recreation facilities and 20% of the trails did not reflect any visitor impact conflicts with ROS class.

Use at the Ohmer Creek Campground did not exceed 80% of the design capacity. There were 144 camping permits issued from May until September, with approximately 358 visitors.

The use levels at individual cabins met standards and guidelines for ROS.

The Petersburg Visitor Information Center had 2,754 visits during the high use season of May through September.

Visual surveys of dispersed recreation places indicate almost all places meet the standards and guidelines for number of encounters. The use at the mouth of Petersburg Creek on the Petersburg Lake Trail may have exceeded the Semi-Primitive Motorized encounter guideline of six parties on several occasions. This was a qualitative observation since there was not any standardized sampling method performed to monitor this site. This site also receives a substantial amount of use from boats on short daytrips from Petersburg, and many of the people do not get out on shore.

### ***Ketchikan/Misty Ranger District***

#### **Monitoring Results**

Monitoring results from 2006 indicate that recreation and tourism use in non-Wilderness GFA areas occurs frequently but use levels fall generally within prescribed ROS classes. Some high use areas near Ketchikan utilized by outfitter guide companies may approach the threshold for social encounters established by the Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) ROS class. Use levels and impacts in these areas will be inventoried and monitored during the 2007 season. GFA saltwater cabin use continues to be popular while use at GFA lake cabins has been variable but on a gradual but steady decline over the last several years. For example, one GFA lake cabin had no user days logged for 2006. In town trails connected to the road system continue to receive frequent use, with areas such as the Ward Lake/Creek Trail complex being incredibly popular. All GFA trail use meets the guidelines established by ROS classes.

Recreation and tourism use and impacts in Misty Fjords National Monument (MFNMW) is minimal for a large portion of the Monument. Wilderness monitoring efforts in 2006 focused on the higher use areas of MFNMW, including popular saltwater travel corridors and the Misty Core Area (MCA) which is comprised of Rudyerd Bay and the surrounding area. Use at Wilderness cabins is low and has been decreasing gradually over the past several years, with the exception of two Wilderness saltwater cabins which receive a moderate amount of use. Wilderness trail use continues to be low. The Punchbowl Lake trail, the most popular trail in MFNMW, was monitored for several weeks this season. Low to moderate use levels were observed during this time, never exceeding the social encounter guidelines for the established ROS class.

Encounters with aircraft over-flights/landings and large tour boats in the MCA continue to be high. Aircraft landings at Big Goat Lake this season exceeded the allowable social encounters per day in just four hours. In previous years of monitoring high use levels at Big Goat lake corresponded with high numbers of aircraft over flights and landing in Rudyerd Bay and another Wilderness lake.

## **Evaluation of Results**

Information related to the ROS and the Recreation and Tourism Standards and Guidelines were being incorporated into special use decisions. In reviewing documents for management actions, there was a review of changes to the ROS based on proposed alternatives. All documents appeared to be consistent with direction in the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the recreation resource.

### **Recreation and Tourism Question 2: Is Off Road Vehicle (ORV) use causing, or will it cause considerable adverse effects on soil, water, vegetation, fish and wildlife, visitors or cultural and historic resources of the Forest?**

The primary ORV use on the Tongass is snowmobiles and three and four wheeled All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs).

Snowmobiles generally make use of forest roads and higher alpine areas during the winter months, although some use does occur on the Stikine River within the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness and in the Yakutat Forelands. Use of this equipment in designated wildernesses during winter months is restricted to times when there is adequate snow cover as provided by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

The Region received training regarding travel management in preparation of the completion of Access and Travel Management Plans that are required to be completed by 2010. Also, suggested changes to forest plan direction was included in the update to the Forest Plan to reflect changes in national direction regarding the use of ORV use on National Forest System lands. The changes to the forest plan language will be included in the final decision expected sometime in 2008.

## **Monitoring Results**

Snowmobile use on the Tongass in general is not causing adverse effects on soil, water, vegetation, fish and wildlife, visitors or cultural and historic resources. It is not generally a management concern on the forest.

### ***Yakutat Ranger District***

The data set collected for work on a master's degree has reached the limit of its utility in analyzing the effect of motorized use on habitat use by moose. The primary limiting factor is sample size; the number of collared moose. In order to more definitively investigate these effects, we would have to obtain locations from additional individuals. Lack of use data for various roads/ORV routes as well as inadequate vegetation classification also limited the analysis.

The GIS analysis technique employed did not show any displacement related to the location or existence of ORV routes. Cow moose appeared to avoid areas typed as willow in the GIS cover "timtype" during the hunting season. The threshold for avoidance behavior was 3000 meters from ATV routes classified as high use. However, additional work, research and analysis will be needed before definitive management guidelines can be developed.

## **General findings**

Most of the other districts had minor adverse resource impacts that could be grouped into the following two areas.

- Rutting and vegetation loss in muskeg areas, where the wet, organic soils of these areas are impacted by repeated passes by ORV users.
- Degradation of fish habitat by using stream courses as travel routes and diverting or blocking water flow at small stream channel crossings.

## **Evaluation of Results**

Off Road Vehicle (ORV) impact to the soil productivity and water quality monitoring showed that in general, ORV use is causing neither considerable impact nor adverse effects on soil and water resources on the Tongass. The primary ORV use on the Tongass has been ATVs and snowmobiles. Snowmobiles generally use forest roads and higher alpine areas although some use was reported in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness. Use of this equipment is restricted to times when there is adequate snow cover as provided by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).

Generally, the impacts caused from ATV use have been minor damage to wetlands and soil rutting. In response to these site-specific impacts, the districts worked to educate the public on soil and water resource protection and enforcement to ensure compliance. Monitoring has shown some disturbance to soil, water, and wetland resources and evaluation of the impacts is ongoing.

## **Action Plans**

### ***Recreation***

The recreation monitoring and refinement of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes will continue. Sites with existing recreation facilities and areas of traditional high-use are the focus of the monitoring. Emphasis will be placed on monitoring sites where potential conflicts with users or ROS were reported and monitoring needs were identified. The outfitter/guide special use permit records along with records of guiding activity will continue to be used to identify areas of potential high use.

Districts plan to accommodate monitoring work as a normal course of business. Information related to the ROS and the Recreation and Tourism Standards and Guidelines will be incorporated into special use decisions.

Monitoring will also be completed during the course of completing condition surveys for trails and developed recreation facilities, and completion of assessments for environmental documents.

### **Off Road Vehicle Use**

Evaluation of the Off Road Vehicle (ORV) monitoring shows that some impacts to the soil and water resources were reported. Although most of these impacts were minor, increased use of ATVs and snowmobiles could significantly increase the effect on the soil and water resources.

Working with the public on the Access and Travel Management Plans over the next few years will better define the use of ORVs on the forest. Maps will be made to show areas where OHV use is accepted (snowmachines are not affected by the Access and Travel Management work).

Continued monitoring of the impacts associated with ORVs is recommended. Emphasis should continue on high use areas and focus on evaluation of wetland and other high sensitivity areas. Soil and botany specialists should be involved in these site evaluations. The Sitka Ranger District will develop an Access and Travel Management Plan which should be completed by the end of FY 2007.