



Tongass National Forest

News Release

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Duke Island Recognized for Cultural Significance

KETCHIKAN, Alaska—For generations of Southeast Alaska Natives, Duke Island has held significant cultural value. Now, the U.S. Forest Service and the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) have made an effort to recognize this area, naming the island eligible for listing as a “traditional cultural property” in the National Register of Historic Places.

A traditional cultural property (TCP) is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places because of its association with cultural practices or beliefs of a living community. The site must be one that is both rooted in that community's history and important in maintaining the continuing cultural identity of the community.

The Forest Service received several letters of support for this effort, including letters from Alaska Native Brotherhood and Sisterhood, Ketchikan Indian Community, Native Sites Guardianship Council, and several elders. For many Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian Alaskans, Duke Island is part of an ancestral homeland, where ancestors are buried and where familial histories are embedded in the forest, the cemeteries, and the remains of former camps and subsistence activities.

There are 55 known archaeological and historic sites within the Duke Island Area TCP including villages, burials, shell middens, fish traps, fort sites, battle grounds, fish camps, an abandoned customs house, homesteads, old trapper cabins, and a Light House. The oldest site on Forest Service land is a shell midden dating to 3,500 ± 50 years Before Present.

The Duke Island Area, like other eligible sites, will now be managed to protect its eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. As part of this, the Forest Service will undergo an extensive review and consultation process whenever an activity is proposed that may impact the area. While this may not preclude activities from taking place, it ensures that the Alaska Native communities who have a connection to the area are involved in the decision on whether and how to work in the area.

For more information, please contact District Ranger Jeff DeFrest, 907-225-2148.

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