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# Use of Recreation Fees on the Tongass National Forest



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service  
Alaska Region

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## Summary of the past five years

Since President Bush signed the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) in 2004, the Tongass National Forest has collected \$14 million in recreation fees. These funds have been used to grow the program through partnerships and matching funds to \$17 million. As a result, the Tongass has been able to provide safe, world-class experiences in high quality settings for people from all over the world. Without these funds, outfitter and guide use levels would have been capped, increasing conflicts. Recreation and tourism opportunities and experiences have:

- increased the number of jobs in Southeast Alaska,
- given visitors high valued, quality lifetime experiences,
- accommodated people that otherwise would not have been able to travel to remote and wild locations, and
- promoted an increase in commercial tourism, which improved the economies of local communities.

## Introduction

More people recreate on national forests and grasslands every year. The Forest Service's challenge is to meet visitors' needs with high quality opportunities, while protecting natural resources.

To help address this challenge, the 10-year FLREA, permits agencies to charge fees at campgrounds, rental cabins, high-use recreation areas, and day-use sites. FLREA also allows forest units to reinvest the fees paid by outfitters and guides into programs and projects. (<http://www.fs.fed.us/passespermits/about-rec-fees.shtml>.)

## Background

Based on FLREA, the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish & Wildlife Service, and National Park Service charge and retain fees from recreation sites. The fees help to repair, improve, operate, and maintain recreation sites and programs to enhance the visitor experience.

FLREA established an interagency pass program that helps reduce confusion about recreation fees and discounts between agencies. FLREA also allows for the collection and retention of fees paid by commercial special use permit holders (outfitters and guides) and recreation events. Annually, about 240 outfitter and guide permits are issued on the Tongass.

Outfitters and guides provide essential services for the recreating public, such as kayaking, fishing, hunting, boat tours, camping, hiking, bear viewing, and flightseeing. They make the national forests more accessible to the public, especially on wild and remote forests like the Tongass. They also provide ways to educate and inform visitors.



# Tongass National Forest Recreation Fees

Recreation fees support 1/3 of the cost of maintaining a high quality outdoor recreation program on the Tongass.

Over the past 5 years, 61% of the collected revenue came from recreation site fees, 38% from outfitter and guide fees, and less than 1% came from visitor passes (Figure 1). The Tongass retains 95% of these fees. Site fees support facilities, operation and maintenance of visitor centers, cabins, campgrounds or host and interpreter services. Special use permit fees support the outfitter/guide program, including staffing and projects. Visitor pass fees go to the office that sold the pass (Table 1). The Alaska Regional Office retains 5% of all fees for grants to support the overall recreation program in the Region.



Guide drops visitors on a glacier.

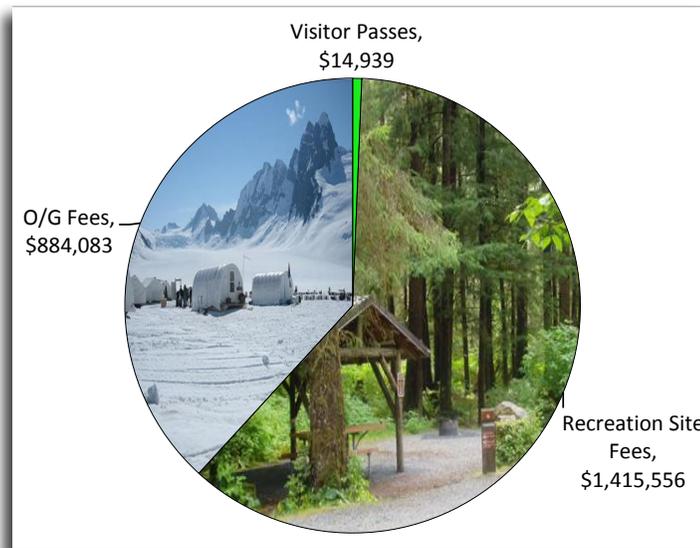


Figure 1. Average annual collection (2005 - 2009).

Table 1. Total recreation fee collections for the Tongass National Forest

	Visitor Passes	Recreation Site Fees	*O/G Fees	Total
2005	\$6,522	\$1,400,254	\$644,029	\$2,050,805
2006	15,879	1,507,650	940,398	2,463,927
2007	15,565	1,343,100	870,707	2,229,372
2008	15,630	1,514,246	986,556	2,516,432
2009	21,100	1,312,532	978,726	2,312,538

\*Outfitter and guide fees charged for the commercial use of National Forest System lands.

# Annual Expenditures of Recreation Site Fees

Recreation site fees contribute about 49% of the total funds used for operations, maintenance and programs at fee sites like Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, Anan Wildlife Viewing Area, Starrigavan Campground, and public use cabins (Figure 2). The dollars listed for cabins, campgrounds/shelters, visitor centers, and bear viewing sites show annual fee expenditures averaged from 2005-2009.

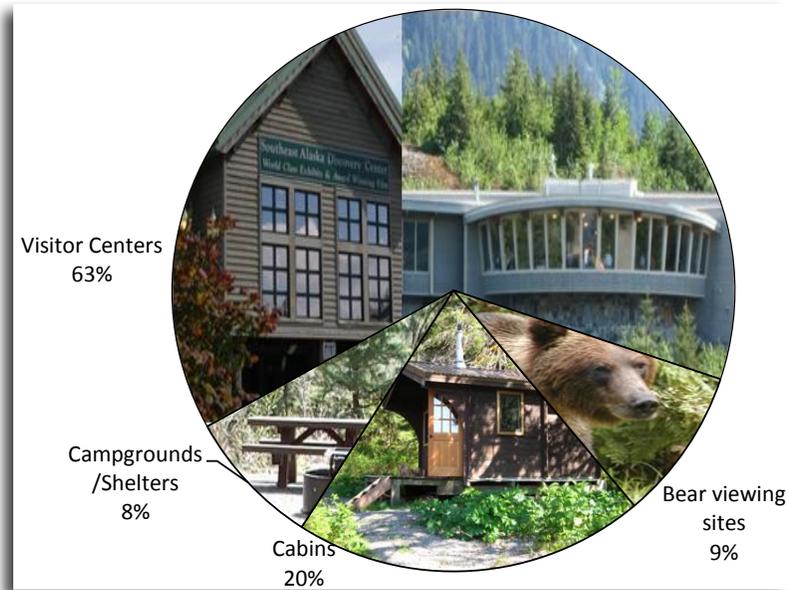


Figure 2) Average Recreation Site Fee Expenditures

The dollar figures in each of the following sections represent the average annual recreation fee funds spent to maintain the item listed. For instance, on average, \$230,000 is spent annually from the recreation fees to maintain cabins across the Tongass.

## Cabins – \$230,000

The forest operates almost 150 public use cabins. Cabin fees go to ongoing cabin operations and maintenance. The National Recreation Reservation System manages the requests for cabins and charges \$9/reservation. The Tongass had 3,231 reservations for our recreation cabins in 2009.

## Campgrounds /Shelters - \$90,000

The forest charges fees at ten campgrounds and four shelters. These fees support site operation and maintenance. The Tongass had 614 campground reservations in 2009.

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8 Fathom Cabin, Hoonah  
Ranger District

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## Visitor Centers - \$720,000

The Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center in Juneau and the Southeast Alaska Discovery Center in Ketchikan collect visitor fees. These fees account for almost 70% of the funds for operations and maintenance, including staff and site improvements. A forest visitor center board reviews the operations and finds ways to improve programs and address needs. For example, fees paid a portion of the cost of filming new movies for each center, which will enhance visitor experiences.

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Mendenhall Glacier Visitor  
Center, Juneau Ranger District

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## Bear viewing sites - \$95,000

The Tongass staffs three bear viewing sites each summer to protect both people and bears. Fish Creek near Hyder, Anan near Wrangell, and Pack Creek near Juneau are staffed to provide interpretive information, manage visitor use, and provide for the safety of visitors.

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Bear Photographers at Pack Creek,  
Admiralty National Monument

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## Permit administration - \$400,000

Considerable time is required to administer special use permits for the 240 holders on the Tongass. These fees fund about nine full time positions. Without these people, fewer permits would be authorized. Outfitter and guide use increased dramatically in the 1990s but has stabilized over the last few years. The permit administration provided by these fees has improved the working relationship with our permit holders and the experience for visitors to national forest system lands (Figure 3). Over the last five years, \$50,000 in annual fees paid for law enforcement patrol, which has resulted in the conviction of several illegal guides.

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Forest Service ranger checks a drop box for outfitter and guide trip cards.

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Figure 3. Average annual forest expenditures of outfitter/guide fees.

## Out Year Planning/Environmental Analysis - \$325,000

A district ranger must analyze and determine effects on natural resources and users and determine if the use is consistent with the Forest's land and resource management plan before issuing a commercial use permit to an outfitter or guide. Some of the fees support forest specialists that do analysis and monitor the projects. This analysis and periodic public review help the district ranger to balance use levels between unguided and guided visitors so that everyone has a positive recreation experience. In the next few years, each district will complete a district-wide outfitter and guide use analysis. This analysis will allow a district ranger to issue outfitter or guide permits for up to 10 years.

In addition, the fees pay for the survey, design, environmental analysis, and construction of some trail and facility projects. These projects support outfitters and guides and benefit guided and unguided visitors.

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Forest Service law enforcement officer offloads his patrol vehicle from agency watercraft.

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Over the last few years, planning projects have included:

- Capacity study at Windfall Harbor on the Juneau Ranger District - \$11,300
- Lake Eva Trail reconstruction, environmental analysis and project design on the Sitka Ranger District (this analysis and design allowed us to compete and receive a million dollar grant to repair this trail) - \$16,532
- Commercial services needs assessment for the Wrangell Ranger District - \$21,000
- Juneau Icefield environmental analysis review - \$150,000
- Commercial needs assessments for wilderness on the Sitka Ranger District - \$22,000
- Environmental analysis for guided use on Petersburg, Wrangell, and Ketchikan ranger districts and Prince of Wales Island - \$492,400.
- Planning to improve visitor facilities like the Anan dock and Dog Salmon Viewing Site - \$42,200
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game black bear and mountain goat surveys - \$45,000
- Mendenhall Visitor Center public transportation study to reduce congestion - \$70,000



## Enhancement projects - \$150,000

Enhancement projects include:

- Interpretive displays - \$26,500
- Interpretive program support - \$29,000
- Informational brochures - \$81,900
- Field monitoring of outfitter and guide use – \$24,600
- Leave No Trace training - \$35,300
- Improvements to recreation sites– \$291,900  
(examples include; Margaret Creek wildlife site, Anan interpretive signs, Cascade Creek and Hot Springs trail reconstruction, and Petersburg Lake Trail Toilet)

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A worker pauses after attaching planking on the boardwalk trail at Hot Springs, Wrangell Ranger District.

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## Example Fee Use Sites on the Tongass

### Margaret Creek Wildlife Site, Ketchikan-Misty Fiords Ranger District

Margaret Creek Wildlife Site is remote and accessible only by floatplane or boat, followed by a hike along a gravel road and trail. The site was developed in response to an outfitter/guide who wanted to take clients to Margaret Creek. At that time, there was a fish ladder and smaller platform used for fish surveys, which was not suitable for recreation use. In the late 1990s, the district built a viewing platform and improved the trail.

The site was a success. Because of the site's popularity, people raised concerns about the amount of use. Fees from outfitter/guides using Margaret Creek were used to make improvements including an increase in staffing, a covered area to provide a rain shelter, new interpretive signs and a restroom.

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The trail to Margaret Creek wildlife viewing platform winds through the forest's flora.

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A visitor pauses to read the interpretive sign at the Margaret Creek wildlife viewing platform.

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A brown bear catches a salmon in Margaret Creek within view of the platform.

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Outfitter and guide clients get a good view of spawning salmon and feeding bears from the wildlife viewing platform.

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# Nugget Falls Trail

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## Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center, Juneau Ranger District

The Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and recreation area attracts about 400,000 cruise ship passengers, 35,000 independent travelers, and 30,000 Juneau residents (some repeat visits) each year.

In response to a demonstrated need, a partnership formed to build a 0.8-mile easy, environmentally sensitive trail to Nugget Falls. Funding came from a State of Alaska Trails Initiative grant and outfitter/guide use fees. Trail work began in 2009. The trail construction included bridges, an elevated walkway, interpretive signs and benches.



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Workers lay the cobble bed for the construction of the easy, fully accessible, trail to Nugget Falls.

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Visitors stroll toward the falls on the recently completed Nugget Falls trail.

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# For more information please contact your local Tongass National Forest office.

## **Tongass National Forest Supervisor's Offices**

### [Ketchikan Office](#)

Ketchikan Federal Building  
648 Mission Street  
Ketchikan, AK 99901-6591  
(907)225-3101 / TTY (907)228-6222

### [Petersburg Office](#)

P.O. Box 309  
123 Scow Bay Loop Road  
Petersburg, AK 99833-0309  
(907)772-3841 / TTY (907)772-4636

### [Sitka Office](#)

204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, AK 99835-7316  
(907)747-6671 / TTY (907)747-4335

## **Tongass National Forest Ranger Districts**

### [Admiralty National Monument](#)

8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907)586-8790

### [Craig Ranger District](#)

P.O. Box 500  
900 Main Street  
Craig, AK 99921  
(907)826-3271

### [Hoonah Ranger District](#)

P.O. Box 135  
430A Airport Way  
Hoonah, AK 99829  
(907)945-3631

### [Juneau Ranger District](#)

8510 Mendenhall Loop Road  
Juneau, AK 99801  
(907)586-8800 / TTY (907)790-7444

### [Ketchikan-Misty Fiords Ranger District](#)

3031 Tongass Avenue  
Ketchikan, AK 99901  
(907)225-2148 / TTY (907)225-0414

### [Petersburg Ranger District](#)

P.O. Box 1328  
12 North Nordic Drive  
Petersburg, AK 99833  
(907)772-3871 / TTY 907-772-4636

### [Sitka Ranger District](#)

204 Siginaka Way  
Sitka, AK 99835  
(907)747-6671 / TTY (907)747-4335

### [Thorne Bay Ranger District](#)

P.O. Box 19001  
1312 Federal Way  
Thorne Bay, AK 99919  
(907)828-3304

### [Wrangell Ranger District](#)

P.O. Box 51  
525 Bennett Street  
Wrangell, AK 99929  
(907) 874-2323

### [Yakutat Ranger District](#)

P.O. Box 327  
712 Ocean Cape Road  
Yakutat, AK 99689  
(907) 784-3359

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*National Forest*

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