



Children's Forest

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

A L A S K A



Strategic Plan

UNITED STATES FOREST SERVICE +
ALASKA GEOGRAPHIC, DECEMBER 2010

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Executive Summary

The Chugach Children's Forest

What is it?

The Chugach Children's Forest (CCF) builds connections – connections between kids and everything National Forests and the outdoor world offer. The Children's Forest is creating new and enhanced programs, events and facilities leading to a new generation of opportunities on public lands. These opportunities exist for kids (and their kids too), for schools and for whole communities. The Children's Forest is a symbolic designation for the entire Chugach National Forest. But it's more than just a place: It's a new way of doing business. The connections at the heart of the Children's Forest also include a new set of partnerships and collaborative processes. These partnerships bring together the complementary skills and vision of the United States Forest Service (USFS), Alaska Geographic and a range of other partners.

“Making the Connection” – Four Overarching Themes

1. Connections to **HEALTHY OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES** for kids, families and adults

2. Connections leading to **CLIMATE CHANGE** understanding and local solutions



3. Connections to pathways to outdoor-oriented education and careers, leading to **ECONOMICALLY VITAL COMMUNITIES**

4. Connections to expanded public lands **STEWARDSHIP AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION** in the future of forests

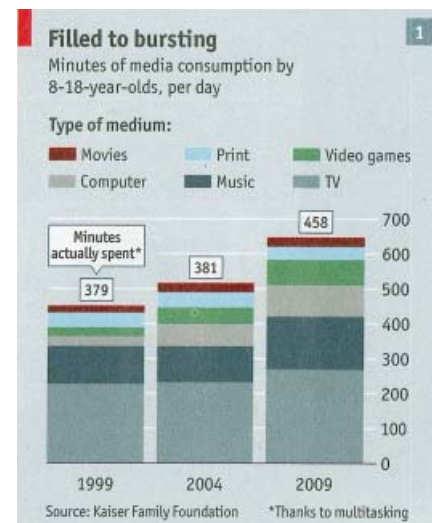
Why Now? Why the USFS?

The CCF is a response to the growing disconnect between people – particularly young people – and the natural world we all depend on. Why is this “experience gap” happening? Changing demographics, the distractions offered by new technologies and America’s steady evolution from a rural to an urban society are a few reasons. This lack of connection is a real issue in Alaska, though it’s perhaps even more common in the Lower 48. People come from all over the world to experience Alaska’s wilderness, yet children from many Anchorage neighborhoods have never set foot in the forest. Kids spend less and less time outdoors. Nationally, experts cite a number of specific factors behind this sharp decline: parental fears aggravated by excessive media; single parents or two working parents leave little time for unstructured play; the lure of “safer” indoor activities like computers and video games.

Whatever the reason, as few as eight percent of children nationwide regularly spend time playing outdoors. Many of Alaska's children – including increasingly urbanized Alaska Native children – are following a similar path. As a result, an entire generation is missing the physical, emotional, psychological and economic benefits of exposure to nature. These benefits include critical thinking skills, self-confidence, reduced stress and improved cognitive development.

Simultaneously, the health of America's children is in alarming decline. Alaska follows that national trend. Studies show that isolation from nature may be a significant contributing factor to a wide range of childhood maladies including obesity, attention disorders and depression. Today's generation of "indoor children" is missing the physical, emotional, and developmental benefits of active outdoor play. Instead, children are "wired" an average of more than six hours per day to television, the internet, video games and cell phones. Experts ranging from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to the Kaiser Family Foundation are starting to agree: Children may need access to nature the same way they need good nutrition and adequate sleep.

"Wired" Children



People are losing their connection to the outdoors and the natural world is increasingly distressed, particularly in Alaska. Alaska is at the "melting edge" of global climate change. During the last four decades, average temperatures increased in Alaska more than anywhere in the country. Changes are both subtle and severe – environmentally, culturally and economically. Continental and sea ice are melting. Wildfires are intensifying. Entire villages in western and northern Alaska are facing relocation from traditional lands and lifestyles. Businesses and conservation organizations are forming alliances to encourage innovation and collaboration. Ultimately, however, our children will bear the consequences and must manage the solutions of a warming world.

The Children's Forest is one response. This effort aims to make the outdoors more relevant in our modern lives. The Children's Forest is an organizing force to engage increasingly diverse communities in the benefits and stewardship of national forests and public lands. One goal is simply the health and joy that comes from getting outside. Beyond this, the intent is to help all of us understand, care about and ultimately help solve the challenges of today and tomorrow – from climate change to local economies. While the Children's Forest aims to create broad public benefits, it also offers real value to the Forest Service. The effort expands USFS's base of partners and resources; makes the USFS more relevant to the life of communities; and helps build staff morale and sense of purpose.

Where is it?

The Children's Forest focuses on Forest Service lands but reaches out to build bridges to all public lands and the outdoors in general. National Forests offer unique advantages for this effort. These areas provide natural landscapes in the backyards of major cities, and are generally managed for multiple uses to serve diverse users. The Chugach National Forest, in particular, is the wild backyard of more than half the state's population – where children and adults ski, hike, hunt, fish, explore and learn.

Core Principle A: *Build from existing staff, programs, partners; expand cross-forest / agency collaboration.*

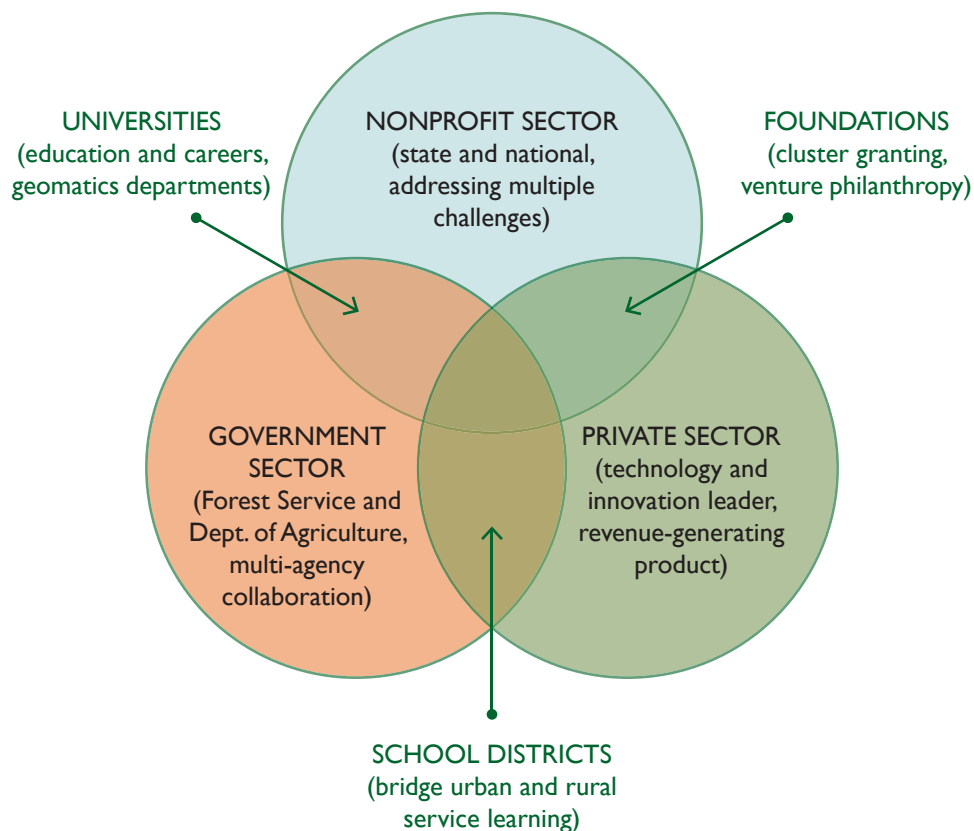
The Children's Forest is not a set of new programs or new facilities to be managed independently of traditional USFS activities. Instead, the Children's Forest is a new way of doing business. It's a fresh new lens for evaluating existing programs and where necessary, incubating new ones. The Children's Forest connects to virtually all aspects of a forest's existing budgets, staff, programs and facilities. A particular goal includes improving collaboration among USFS staff so, for example, the lessons learned in one district can be efficiently used throughout the Forest.

Core Principle B: *Multi-sector engagement*

Building connections between the public and National Forests is not a job the USFS can do on its own. The process requires collaboration across jurisdictions. It requires the skills, resources and support of multiple agencies, nonprofits and businesses. One particular key is a strong partnership with a core, coordinating nonprofit partner. Alaska Geographic has a 50-year history of working with Alaska's public lands managers and staff. Most recently, Alaska Geographic has assisted with youth program development planning, fund-raising and implementation.

This collaborative approach is partially driven by the realities of tightening budgets. Regardless of the level of funding available, this strategy creates new capacity and relevance for the Forest Service to meet Children's Forest goals.

Children's Forest: Sustainability and Social Innovation



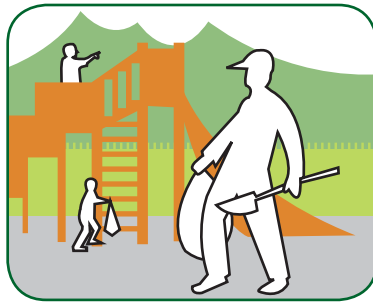
Core Principle C: *Stepping Stone Approach – “Meet people where they are today”*

Building connections to the outdoors often requires a series of steps spanning both landscapes and lifespans. Enjoying and learning from the outdoors might begin with experiences in your backyard. This, in turn, could lead to enjoying a nearby park, then camping in Portage Valley and ultimately a kayak or backcountry adventure. Each of the four overarching themes of the CCF use this strategy. The strategy aims to offer programs, facilities, access to gear, education and information. This improved access can help people go from the easy and accessible, toward a more full experience of wild Alaska.

Stepping Stone Approach



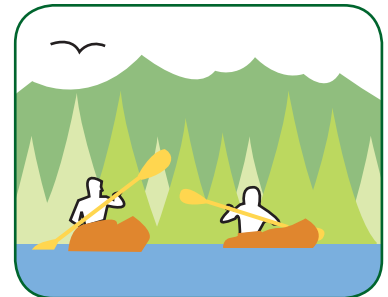
BACKYARD, PLAYGROUND
outdoor play



CITY OR STATE PARKS
service-learning



ACCESSIBLE USFS,
DAY-USE CAMPING AREA
internships, jobs and careers



YOUTH-MANAGED FORESTS
wilderness adventure,
lifelong stewardship

This stepping stone approach shows the importance of the multi-sector, multi-jurisdiction strategy mentioned above and explores opportunities with unique authorities of state and private forestry. Two examples include the Forest Service’s partnership with the Alaska Railroad and the partnership with Anchorage Parks and Recreation. The partnership with the Alaska Railroad developed and marketed “whistle stop” day and overnight facilities south of Anchorage. This partnership brings new passengers to the Alaska Railroad and provides an opportunity to experience the Chugach Forest backcountry to a new generation of users. The partnership with Anchorage Parks and Recreation currently invests in Youth Employment Program by which local teenagers work to maintain and improve city parks.

Core Principle D: *Respond to the needs of a diverse, changing world.*

To be relevant in the new century, the USFS must connect with users from different backgrounds, with different interests, who face different distractions than those of the past. It also requires recognizing the overlapping challenges kids, communities and forests face. Community needs cannot be separated into one-dimensional “environmental issues” or “children’s issues.” The Children’s Forest in particular aims to reach out to underserved populations – people who may lack the resources, gear or background to enjoy the experience of wild public lands.

Core Principle E: *Range of outcomes*

Building connections also requires a wide range of actions. These range from education programs in schools to websites and clearinghouses linking interested youth with job and volunteer activities or creating new or adapting existing facilities offering a new generation of outdoor experiences. One example in this last category includes building better group camping/dining areas to cater to people who prefer “gathering the clan” over camping as a single family.

What priority programs and actions?

Over the last five months, a wide range of individuals, organizations and other partners considered options for moving ahead with CCF vision. Highest priorities are listed below:

Education + Career Pathways

- Jobs, jobs, jobs: Develop a CCF year one, two and three pilot project getting youth into jobs that provide a safe, meaningful work experience.
- Support a clearinghouse organization + communication platform: Support Alaska Geographic as connection to diverse nonprofits, school groups, parents and environmental education groups. Institutionalize and professionalize USFS capability to work with partners and volunteers. Develop clearinghouse website to inventory, analyze and tie together existing mentoring, employment, internship and seasonal hire opportunities – both internal and external.
- Increase access to outdoor programs: Support and coordinate with schools to develop programs and activities that increase environmental education and connections to the outdoors.

Healthy Communities

- Involve community in planning: Take a fresh look at facility needs. Involve kids, partners and the community in the design and management of a creative new (potentially adapted) generation of facilities.
- Share USFS “icons” with partners and communities: Focus on facilities that are readily accessible and better connected to a wide range of users like Kenai River, Portage Valley and the Granite Creek area at the beginning of the Johnson Pass Trail.
- Initiate new partnerships: Partner with medical community to develop “outdoor prescription toolkits” and integrate health messages into our interpretive messages.

Shared Stewardship + Civic Participation

- Build on youth-managed forest concept: Develop a clear approach to and identity for the idea of a “Youth Managed” section starting with Portage Valley. Potentially create more “Youth Managed” forest section(s) and projects.
- Coordinate volunteers: Better communicate and recruit for volunteer opportunities to the public, especially youth. This includes physical communication (posters or flyers) and on-line, website, organization, social media, Twitter and Facebook communication.

Climate and Environmental Change Understanding + Local Solutions

- Link to partner efforts: Work on climate change issues with groups like the University of Alaska Anchorage and Fairbanks. Collaborate to sponsor a statewide climate change symposium (youth, educators, researchers) May-June 2011.
- Cultivate meaningful field experience: Continue to refine and support the field-based “expedition” approach to climate learning.
- Develop stories and data forum: Work with Alaska Geographic and ESRI to develop an on-line forum for sharing experiential and scientific information on climate and environmental change (possible intersection with Prince William Sound Stories Project).

Who is responsible? How is it managed?

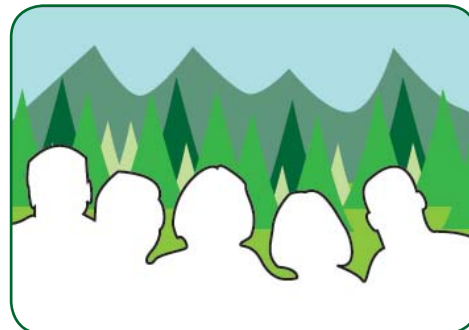
Collaboration is at the heart of the Children’s Forest. The Forest Service’s primary partner is Alaska Geographic. The nonprofit has more than 50 years of success working cooperatively with Alaska’s public land managers. Alaska Geographic brings skilled staff and the proven capacity to connect with a range of partners. Together, the USFS and Alaska Geographic will work with a wide range of businesses, nonprofits, schools, agencies and other partners.

Making it Work: Who is Responsible?



CCF LEADERSHIP TEAM

U.S. Forest Service and Alaska Geographic with option for additional major partners to participate



CCF WORKING GROUP

U.S. Forest Service and Alaska Geographic and potential other entities planning and doing the work

U.S. FOREST SERVICE PROGRAM and FACILITY STAFF and OTHER PARTNERS
“Frontline” staff and partners who implement programs, events, activities and operative facilities

What is the purpose of this strategic plan?

How do I (staff, partner, public) use it?

This strategic plan presents a framework for action. The full document offers a condensed overview of the CCF purpose and background and recommendations for carrying out the CCF vision. This draft includes a template – in progress – that will identify specific priorities and the responsibilities for making them happen. The ultimate purpose of this strategic plan is to provide a tool for USFS, Alaska Geographic and other partners that will help implement the CCF mission in an efficient and effective way.

Strategic Plan

Introduction

The Chugach Children's Forest Strategic Plan is the product of a yearlong planning process initiated in September 2009 by the United States Forest Service (USFS) and its coordinating nonprofit partner Alaska Geographic (See Appendix A for a detailed outline of the planning process). The plan starts with the items below:

1. A three-year "big picture" vision, mission and organizing themes to guide the future of the Chugach Children's Forest.
2. Criteria for selecting priority projects.
3. For each organizing theme, a set of goals, objectives and practical, achievable strategies to reach these ends.
4. A list of top priorities for action in 2010-2013.

The remainder of the plan outlines a recommended organizational management structure for directing Chugach Children's Forest efforts; including suggestions for developing a sustainable funding model, program evaluation guidelines and measures for gauging progress on plan components. The final section of the plan is an action planning matrix that for each priority clearly identifies: specific action items (what), lead entity (who), estimated date of completion (when); and resources are needed to accomplish an action (how).



I. Vision, Mission + Organizing Themes

The Heart of the Chugach Children's Forest Strategic Plan

Outlined below are the Children's Forest vision and mission and an introduction to four organizing themes. As noted above, these concepts were defined over an approximately nine month planning process and represent the foundation of the strategic plan. These concepts help define the Chugach Children's Forest (CCF) desired future state, what the CCF aims to do, and the organizing themes that determine and direct CCF programs and facilities.

Vision

Connected, engaged, healthy youth and communities – the future of our public lands

Mission

To better connect kids (and their kids, too) with everything National Forests and the outdoor world have to offer

Organizing Themes

- **Education + Career Pathways:** Support socially and economically vital communities by providing new pathways and a ladder of opportunities for outdoor-oriented education and careers.
- **Healthy Communities:** Connect kids, families and adults to healthy, outdoor activities.
- **Shared Stewardship + Civic Participation:** Expand public lands stewardship, volunteerism and civic participation.
- **Climate and Environmental Change Understanding + Local Solutions:** Build community understanding of climate and environmental changes through interpretation, education and locally developed and implemented solutions.



2. CCF Priority Projects Selection Criteria

There are many, many compelling actions that might be undertaken to reach CCF goals. This is reasonable given the breadth and ambition of the Chugach Children's Forest. The selection criteria below represent the lens through which all recommended projects are viewed to determine which best align with the Children's Forest vision, mission and organizing themes.

Broadest Range of Benefits

- Focuses on youth (under age 25); but linked to people of all ages
- Responds to locally identified community interests and needs
- Keeps existing users and creates new types of users, new interest in Chugach National Forest (CNF) – residents, businesses and visitors
- Provides services to underserved populations (e.g. lower income, minorities) and provides services to special needs populations
- Promotes year-round activities

Most Effective Use of Resources

- Generates support by public, private and nonprofit partners
- Leverage – increases capacity for USFS and its partners
- Enhances services provided by existing staff, programs and facilities
- Creates maximum “bang for the buck” (given reality of finite resources)
- Establishes sustainable, durable programs, facilities, events
- Offers potential for revenue generation

Strongest Links to Vision, Mission and Organizing Themes

- Fun!
- Hands-on – involves doing; physical participation
- Single action that serves multiple goals (healthy activity and career pathways)
- Fills key gap on “stepping stone” path
- Capitalizes on place-based interests

Tangible Outcomes

- Leads to direct readily tangible short-term benefits (see Evaluation section for specific examples by organizing theme) and longer term positive outcomes
- Measures of success – allows for objective, qualitative and quantitative evaluation

3. CCF Goals, Objectives + Strategies

This section represents the key elements of the strategic plan and provides direction at four levels:

- **Organizing Themes:** Broad categories that define the four main CCF focus areas.
Example: Education + Career Pathways
- **Goals:** Clearer statements of the CCF vision by organizing theme that specifies desired future state for specific areas of the CCF and feed into realization of big picture vision.
Example: Develop sustainable youth employment opportunities (mentorships, internships, part-time or full-time jobs).
- **Objectives:** More specific than goals; will help accomplish goals and in most cases, can be quantified.
Example: Inventory, analyze, and tie together existing mentoring, employment, internship, seasonal hire and other employment opportunities, both internal and external.
- **Strategies:** Statements that clearly define how objectives will be accomplished and provide measurable steps toward achieving objectives.
Example: Determine if people are using existing CIP, SCEP, STEP programs.

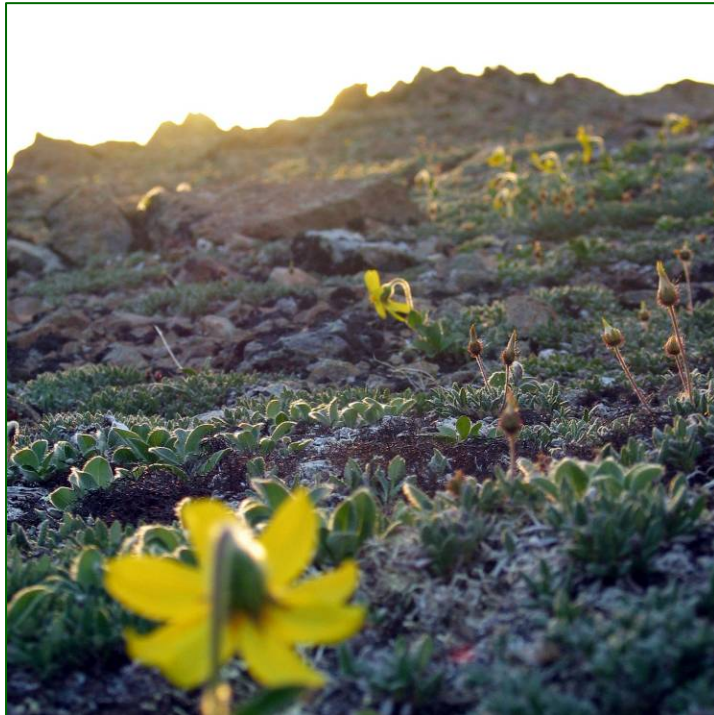
General (permeates all four organizing themes)

Goal 1: Meet young people on their ground.

- **Objective 1A:** Use communication tools that are recommended and most widely used by youth, like online social networks (Facebook, My Space), for outreach to youth.

Goal 2: (longer-term; 5-10 years out): Build and support a regional and/or statewide system of “Alaska’s Children’s Forest, Parks and Public Lands.”

Goal 3: (longer-term; 10 years out): Become a contributing member to a national system of Children’s Forests.



Theme: Education + Career Pathways

Goal 1: Develop a sequence of “classroom to career” programs.

- **Objective 1A:** Develop a CCF year 1, 2, 3 pilot project getting youth into jobs that provide a safe, meaningful work experience.

Strategies

- Train USFS staff to work with youth but also use partners and existing programs and recruiting networks (e.g. Youth Employment in Parks, Student Conservation Association, Youth Conservation Corps, Department of Natural Resources to offer work opportunities).
 - Target pre-16 kids to engage in service learning opportunities and volunteer programs, which may then lead to a job.
 - Work with local universities to offer course credit for job shadowing, internships and project opportunities.
- **Objective 1B:** Ensure that every school offers outdoor programs – e.g. recreation, education, stewardship, fire ecology and natural resources.

Strategies

- Improve regional coordination between school districts, between USFS and communities, schools, agencies (e.g. Girdwood School Trail).
 - Advocate for more service learning, in-school programs and summer school programs that connect youth to the outdoors.
- **Objective 1C:** Support Alaska Geographic as connection to diverse nonprofits, school groups, parents and environmental education groups. Institutionalize and professionalize USFS capability to work with partners and volunteers. Develop a web-based tool to inventory, analyze and connect existing mentoring, employment, internship and seasonal hire opportunities, both internal and external.

Goal 2: Develop sustainable youth employment opportunities (mentorships, internships, part-time or full-time jobs).

- **Objective 2A:** Develop a children’s forest website component to inventory and connect existing mentoring, employment, internship and seasonal hire opportunities, both internal and external.

Strategies

- Determine if people are using existing USFS programs (e.g. CIP, SCEP, STEP).
- Identify partners’ programs and opportunities to synthesize with USFS program.
- Assess and market existing programs before creating new programs.

- **Objective 2B:** Action Phase

Strategies

- Target youth in standard USFS hiring practices and gear recruitment toward youth.
- Train staff on how to work with kids.
- Formalize existing USFS mentorship programs that are currently ad hoc.
- Build relationships with business and nonprofit partners and use their hiring programs.
- Employ creative recruitment methods: Kids talk with kids; college students recruit high school students, high school recruit junior high, etc.
- Look to develop internships across all programmatic areas.

Goal 3: Build access to higher education opportunities into programs and projects.

- **Objective 3A:** Engage local institutions of higher learning (e.g. develop an expanded partnership with UAA building from ANSEP agreement).

Strategies

- Pay for younger employees to go to school (e.g. existing program SCEP).
- Make education and training scholarships and grants available to past program participants.

Goal 4: Diversify the workforce.

- **Objective 4A:** Diversify the USFS workforce.

Strategies

- Intentionally integrate diverse staff into youth programs.
- Offer diversity training for welcoming work environment.
- Do work force planning to utilize participants from CCF programs.

- **Objective 4B:** Work with existing partners to assist in recruitment of more diverse, and local, youth.

Strategies

- Inventory and understand existing local programs that focus on diverse populations and work with them to make linkages and build opportunities within the CCF for their participants.
- Target recruitment efforts to diverse schools and diverse communities.



Theme: Healthy Communities

Goal 1: Using the “stepping stones” approach, better understand why more people aren’t outside today.

- **Objective 1A:** Investigate specific barriers, for example, lack of gear, fear, lack of information, lack of knowledge.
 - Identify transportation barriers (e.g., need for shuttles to Hillside, subsidized train trips to Portage).
- **Objective 1B:** Investigate existing programs and facilities at each step, and identify gaps where new activities, facilities and partners are needed
- **Objective 1D:** Inventory, connect to and coordinate with existing outdoor activity programs.

Goal 2: Develop a new approach for adapting and/or developing new facilities and programs that build constituencies, and better meet future recreation and tourism needs.

- **Objective 2A:** Take advantage of the upcoming, USFS recreation facilities analysis, to examine the need for and develop new USFS facilities that support the CCF mission.

Strategies

- Take a fresh look at facility needs; involve kids, partners and the community in the design and management of a creative new (potentially adapted) generation of facilities.
 - More group camping areas that allow group activities
 - Better located day use facilities
 - Clusters of public use cabins in not so remote areas
 - Easy day drive facilities
 - Hut-to-hut systems
- Prepare a “gap analysis” evaluating current USFS facilities and opportunities for improvements. Identify a handful of improvements that can occur ASAP, in the next couple of summer seasons, as well as longer-term projects.
- Find and engage new resources and new partners to help develop needed, priority facilities.
- Share USFS icons: Focus on facilities that are readily accessible and better connected to a wide range of users like Kenai River, Portage Valley and the Granite Creek area at the beginning of the Johnson Pass Trail. Specific recommendations:
 - Prepare a comprehensive recreation plan for Portage Valley; start with an informal “SWAT team” to identify options; work with partners, focus on “youth managed” options.
 - Improve Williwaw Campground; include group camping/group event space, e.g., a pavilion. Again work with partners to meet their needs and gain their contributions and support
 - Engage youth and partners in new exhibits for the Begich Boggs Visitor Center and ideas for the classroom space.
 - Follow through on previously planned Granite Creek improvements (stream, RV potential, link to campground)
- **Objective 2B:** Make better use of visitor centers, district ranger facilities and virtual outreach to introduce people to the outdoors.
- **Objective 2C:** Create a better process for coordinating volunteers and linking to partners with the capacity to help build and maintain facilities.

Goal 3: Support community events and activities that entice kids of all ages and families to get outside.

- **Objective 3A:** Focus on events that reach out to underserved, mixed ability populations
- **Objective 3B:** Link with existing popular outdoor activity programs, e.g. competitive race series, geocaching, orienteering, etc.
- **Objective 3C:** Identify successful existing events (e.g., National Get Outdoors Day, Shorebird Festival, Environmental Awareness Days, Fungus Fairs, etc) that can be built upon, expanded.
- **Objective 3D:** Promote school-based and non-school outdoor activity programs for kids and adults. Improve regional coordination between districts, between USFS and communities, schools, agencies in delivering outdoor experiences. The trails associated with the Girdwood School are a great example.
- **Objective 3E:** Identify partners and programs to better engage and attract families to get outside for day and overnight outdoor activities (one suggested option: work with partners to develop a “sponsor a family” camping program, so experienced campers can introduce new campers to the outdoors.)
- **Objective 3F:** Initiate new partnerships. Partner with medical community to develop “outdoor prescription toolkits” and integrate health messages into our interpretive messages (e.g. “Medical Mile” in Arkansas).

Goal 4: Partner with the health community movement to more effectively communicate benefits of outdoor recreation opportunities.

- **Objective 4A:** Implement communication tools that provide necessary information for getting outdoors (e.g., current weather conditions, locations of trails and campgrounds, reservations to use campgrounds, recreation programs available, training in camping and kayaking, first person testimonials).
- **Objective 4B:** Engage non-outdoor users through better education, internships and outreach.
- **Objective 4C:** Expand efforts to reach audiences who are not getting outside.



Theme: Shared Stewardship + Civic Participation

Goal 1: Support robust and self-sustaining volunteer programs (that get people out on public lands and provide opportunities to be involved in forest management).

- **Objective 1A:** Build and nurture a more volunteer-minded culture.

Strategies

- Increase incentives for field staff (and at all levels districts through SO, all units and departments) to work with volunteers.
- Expand USFS capacity to receive volunteers and work with partner organizations on shared stewardship.
- **Objective 1B:** Expand base of volunteer groups and diversity, including:
 - Multi-generational volunteer programs
 - Youth and community organizations
 - School groups through service-learning
 - Corporate entities
 - Require student community service hours through school district collaboration
 - Court-ordered community service programs
- **Objective 1C:** Build in an educational component for all volunteer programs.
- **Objective 1D:** Develop better partnerships with local communities and empower them to be engaged in USFS programs; mesh projects with community/partner interests.

Strategies

- Establish a clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities through the Children's Forest web presence and other tools in order to better communicate these to the public, especially youth – physical (e.g. posters or flyers), on-line, website, organization, Twitter, Facebook.
- Dedicate a staff person to coordinate (at Forest scale, Project Level Coordinator/Manager), direct volunteer force and to improve continuity.
- Identify position at Forest scale; Project Level Coordinator/Manager.
- Work with partners to advertise volunteer opportunities.
- **Objective 1E:** Use new technologies and social media tools that reach public in new and interesting ways and galvanize participation.

Strategies

- Get help from youth to use cutting-edge technologies to market volunteer opportunities.

Goal 2: Involve community members (particularly youth) in decision-making for public lands.

- **Objective 2A:** Create more “Youth Managed” forest section(s) and projects, starting with Portage Valley
- **Objective 2B:** Bolster Youth Conservation Corps type-programs.
- **Objective 2C:** Build family involvement with existing programs and/or develop new programs and activities that require youth, family and community decision-making.

Theme: Climate and Environmental Change Understanding + Local Solutions

Goal 1: Educate communities on climate change effects by sharing information and knowledge about the Forest through interpretation and education.

- **Objective 1A:** Integrate climate change concepts into well-suited USFS programs and explore need for new programs.

Strategies

- Develop affordable climate field or “expedition” experiences for youth that offer more in-depth, hands-on understanding, data collection and mentoring with Forest Service and partner scientists.
- Take existing Forest Ranger Academy and expand climate change piece to all components – Aqua, Tree and Storm Rangers.
- Use I-TREC to connect kids to existing monitoring programs – youth do the monitoring.
- **Objective 1B:** More effectively share climate and environmental change (from the Chugach region) information with a wider local and national public.
 - Work with Alaska Geographic and ESRI to provide an on-line forum/web portal for sharing experiential and scientific information of climate and environmental change and (possible intersection with Prince William Sound Stories Project).
 - Collaborate to sponsor a statewide climate change symposium (youth, educators, researchers) May-June 2011.
- **Objective 1C:** Work on climate change issues with partners groups like the University of Alaska Fairbanks and Environment and Natural Resources Institute (ENRI).

Strategies

- Implement Alaska-specific climate change curricula.
- Work with existing programs to build cohesive citizen science program.
 - ADF&G Citizen Science (bats, wood frogs, loon counts)
 - Audubon Christmas Bird Count
 - Project Bud Burst
- Build social networking/map-based online tool to foster exchange between schools, teachers, scientists where youth inspire youth.
- Explore need to alter permit process to encourage universities to partner with USFS to do citizen science.
- Incorporate ESRI web platform/Geoforum to facilitate wider use by schools and researchers.



Goal 2: Develop local solutions to act on this global issue.

- **Objective 2A:** Integrate importance of understanding climate change as it influences land management into youth managed forest programs.
- **Objective 2B:** Support and provide opportunities for youth and community members to actively address climate change issues.

Strategies

- Work with partners, researchers, and communities to identify climate change related issues affecting CNF and select a set of problems for students to develop solutions.



4. CCF Priority Projects: 2010-2013

The list below presents projects that satisfy the selection criteria. Particular emphasis is placed on actions that can happen now. All priorities share the common characteristics of having support from multiple partners, and making good use of existing USFS and/or partner resources.

Education + Career Pathways

Jobs, jobs, jobs

- Develop a CCF year 1, 2, 3 pilot project getting youth into jobs that provide a safe, meaningful work experience.

Clearinghouse organization

- Support Alaska Geographic as connection to diverse nonprofits, school groups, parents, environmental education groups. Institutionalize and professionalize USFS capability to work with partners and volunteers. Develop a web-based tool to inventory, analyze and tie together existing mentoring, employment, internship and seasonal hire opportunities, both internal and external.

Access to outdoor programs

- Support and coordinate with schools to develop programs and activities that increase environmental education and connections to the outdoors.

Healthy Communities

Community involvement in planning

- Take a fresh look at facility needs; involve kids, school districts, partners and the community in the design and management of a creative new (potentially adapted) generation of facilities.

Share USFS “icons” with partners and communities

- Focus on facilities that are readily accessible and better connected to a wide range of users like Kenai River, Portage Valley and the Granite Creek area at the beginning of the Johnson Pass Trail.

Initiate new partnerships

- Partner with medical community to develop “outdoor prescription toolkits” and integrate health messages into our interpretive messages.



Shared Stewardship + Civic Participation

Build on youth-managed forest concept

- Develop a clear approach and identity to the idea of a “Youth Managed” section starting with Portage Valley; potentially create more “Youth Managed” forest section(s) and projects.

Volunteer Coordination

- Better communicate and recruit for volunteer opportunities to the public, especially youth – physical (e.g. posters or flyers), on-line, website, organization, Twitter, Facebook.

Climate and Environmental Change Understanding + Local Solutions

Link to partner efforts

- Work on climate change issues with groups like the University of Alaska Anchorage and Fairbanks. Collaborate to sponsor a statewide climate change symposium (youth, educators, researchers) May-June 2011.

Meaningful Field Experience

- Continue to refine and support the field-based “expedition” approach to climate learning.

Stories and Data Forum

- Work with Alaska Geographic and ESRI to develop an on-line forum for sharing experiential and scientific information on climate and environmental change (possible intersection with Prince William Sound Stories Project).



Children's Forest Implementation

This section of the strategic plan outlines the following key components for CCF strategic plan implementation:

- Management Structure for the CCF: Defines two managing bodies for the CCF, including membership and a summary of roles of responsibilities. This structure was developed and approved by the Chugach Forest Leadership Team.
- Operational Strategies + Funding Model Guidelines: Overarching approach for operating all facets of the CCF including steps toward developing a sustainable funding model.

CCF Management Structure

CCF Leadership Team

Definition

A high-level body that provides broad direction, leadership and oversight to the partnership and work of the Children's Forest. The group will provide insight and assistance in securing and directing a wider array of potential resources to support the effort, and will review and assess the annual slate of Children's Forest priority work and projects. The Children's Forest Leadership Team will meet twice a year.

At-a-Glance Roles + Responsibilities

- Large scale strategic planning
- Has big picture vision
- Sets priorities
- Garners and direct resources
- Gives marching orders to staff
- Recruits regional partners
- Reports back to FLT
- Monitors performance and results

Membership (seven members)

- R10 Regional Forester
- Chugach Forest Supervisor
- One (rotating) lead for Chugach District Ranger Team
- Executive Director, Alaska Geographic
- One rotating member of Alaska Geographic Board of Directors
- Region Partnership Position
- Rotating youth representative

CCF Working Group

Definition

This coordinating group will be the aggregator of CCF project ideas and plans; a group through which staff across the Forest can coordinate and vet proposed “budget line items” that relate to CCF goals and criteria. They will meet quarterly, provide bi-annual updates and draft an annual report to both the leadership team and full FLT. The group will also be responsible for recommending ways to integrate Children’s Forest goals into employee performance plans. More immediately, this team will be responsible for helping to refine and finish the current strategic planning effort, identifying and carrying out priority implementation projects, and expanding strategic coordination with partner organizations.

At-a-glance Roles + Responsibilities

- Is and represents the on-the-ground “eyes” and “ears” of the CCF
- Works with staff and partners to implement programs, facilities, events, activities
- Uses strategic plan as a guide
- Represents all USFS disciplines and key partners
- Reports back to CCF Board of Directors on a quarterly basis (liaisons report to the leadership team)
- Drafts annual and update reports for CCF Board of Directors, liaisons

Membership

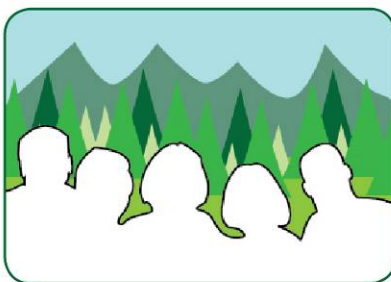
- Public Affairs + Partnership Staff Officer: co-facilitator and liaison to Board
- Chugach Coordinator, Alaska Geographic: co-facilitator and liaison to Board
- RHLM + Resources Staff Officers (ideally one always present)
- Six nominated representatives (two from each district)
- Diversity Team Leader, Partnership Coordinator and Interpretation and Education Team Member
- Partner representatives (rotating position that is dictated by current CCF priorities)
- Alaska Geographic Children’s Forest or education program manager or coordinator

Making it Work: Who is Responsible?



CCF LEADERSHIP TEAM

U.S. Forest Service and Alaska Geographic with option for additional major partners to participate



CCF WORKING GROUP

U.S. Forest Service and Alaska Geographic and potential other entities planning and doing the work

U.S. FOREST SERVICE PROGRAM and FACILITY STAFF and OTHER PARTNERS
“Frontline” staff and partners who implement programs, events, activities and operative facilities

Operational Strategies + Building a Sustainable Funding Model

Central to the success of the Chugach Children's Forest is the adoption of operational strategies and a sustainable funding model that ensures a thoughtful process for developing, implementing and operating the Chugach Children's Forest. Discussions with staff, key partners and research on entities in Alaska and the Lower 48 implementing comparable programs informed the development of the CCF operational strategies outlined below (see Appendix A for a detailed summary of interviews):

Operational Strategies

- Merge existing staff and programs with some new programming and partnership to create the CCF.
- Budget Planning: Set aside a percentage of every budget line item for approaches associated with Children's Forest: partnerships, volunteers, outreach.
- Be realistic about purpose of working with partners and volunteers: More about building constituents than a source of funds and inexpensive labor; be entrepreneurial: bring in new partners and more resources.
- Diversify funding base: Diversification of funding is key, both to achieve sustainability and to broaden buy-in and interest from a wide spectrum of partners.
- Don't be afraid to charge a fee for your services: Charging a fee for services can add to base level funding and can give partners and the public a sense of the value of a service and the knowledge and satisfaction that they have contributed to the big funding picture.
- Hold to CCF mission: Beware of mission drift. Avoid programming outside your mission to focus (for you, your partners, the public) fundraising and stabilization efforts.
- Be transparent: Competition for funding can be fierce, especially in the current economic climate. Transparency on program goals and an invitation to participate and provide feedback helps.
- Be flexible and dynamic: Encourage programs to evolve and change over time.
- Sustainable: Ensure the CCF takes root; that it is durable and sustainable.
- Incorporate projects already in progress for 2010 (e.g. summer expeditions)
- Overall: Be more relevant to communities, to prospective and current forest users.



Funding Models

The operational strategies above formed the basic criteria for researching possible funding models for the Chugach Children's Forest. The three models that most closely satisfy the criteria were: Anchorage Parks and Recreation and the Anchorage Parks Foundation; the San Bernardino Children's Forest and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. All three represent funding models for successful nonprofit and public entity collaborations. Key characteristics of each funding model are outlined below (see the spreadsheet in Appendix D for detailed budget information for each model).

Anchorage Park Foundation (APF) + Anchorage Parks and Recreation Anchorage, AK

- Nonprofit that partners with city to support city park system.
- Started in 2005.
- Consistent base of city support (financial and other) is critical to sustainability; city provides annual operational grant to support foundation staff - both partners working consistently to raise funds, bring in new partners.
- City operates and maintains parks, programs, facilities.
- Funded through combination of legislative allocations, city funds, grants, member/donor base and in-kind donations. Largest percentage of funding (annual revenue of approximately \$2,200,000 in FY10) comes from local, federal and state grants, followed by indirect and in-kind support.
- Youth Employment Program comprises 13 percent of APF budget.
- Nonprofit offers small matching grants to local residents and community organizations to do programming, and parks and trails development and/or improvement.

San Bernardino National Forest Association (SBNFA) + San Bernardino National Forest San Bernardino, CA

- Nonprofit, working to fund programs, facilities: Both a specific geography and approach.
- Started in 1992.
- San Bernardino Children's Forest is one of six programs managed by the San Bernardino National Forest Association; Children's Forest comprises approximately 5 percent (\$150,000) of the \$3,000,000 SBNFA budget. Forest Service staff contribute their time and Forest resources to Children's Forest programs and activities on a consistent basis. Other programs included in the full SBNFA budget include: Forest Care, Urban Conservation Corps, Off Highway Vehicles, Forest Lookouts and Big Bear Discovery Center.
- Children's Forest program funded mostly through Forest Service via a participating agreement; remaining funds provided through private donors for a total of approximately \$136,000.
- Children's Forest has recently expanded private donor base to include work with Disney, REI and smaller contributors (individuals, local businesses).
- Children's Forest staff partner closely with school districts to deliver programming.
- SBNFA receives funding for other programs through combination of partnerships with public and private entities including:
 - Two hotels in National Forest: Hotels charge a \$3/stay conservation fee; these funds (approximately \$2,000/month) go toward the Forest Care Program; donors have option to go on a guided hike or kayak tour of the Forest
 - City of San Bernardino and federal grants (Housing and Urban Development and others): Funds go toward the Urban Conservation Corps and work on city parks

Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (GGNPC) + Golden Gate National Recreation Area San Francisco, CA

- Started in 1982; history and base of partnerships fundamental to success.
- More than 14,280 members and donors.
- Types of Donations: The William Kent Society, Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund Presidio Trails Challenge, Golden Gate Keepers, Silver Lupine Circle, Tribute and Memorial Gifts, Matching Gifts, Volunteers in Parks.
- Most funding comes through private donations, but strong relationship and partnership with Park Service to provide in-kind services for program delivery.
- Approximately 82 percent of GGNPC expenses (\$28,354,083) in 2008 went to “Aid to Parks” including: interpretation (7 percent), park enhancements (56 percent), community programs (16 percent); approximately 21 percent of expenses went to “Visitor Program Services”.
- Youth in Parks: Like the proposed CCF Stepping Stones approach, the GGNPC supports educational programs for children, youth and young adults that the multifaceted purpose of growing future stewards and natural resource workers that are connected to the outdoors. Specific examples include: Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders program at Crissy Field Center, Institute at Golden Gate.

Recommendations for CCF Funding Model

A discussion of what funding model or combination of funding models will help sustain the Chugach Children’s Forest quickly becomes a conversation about the funding of all components of the Chugach National Forest. The CCF is not one program, project or activity. It is a vision and set of goals for a new approach to conducting business in the Chugach. However, models for delivering youth-focused programming, like the ones summarized above still share a set of common characteristics that are relevant to the development of an appropriate, effective and sustainable model for the CCF. They are as follows:

- Strong relationship with Alaska Geographic with the resources and focus needed to sustain CCF efforts.
- Strong partnerships between public, private and nonprofit entities: Continued, consistent commitment from base.
- Funding picture does not necessarily look the same every year, but there are some stable factors that help create a sustainable funding foundation.
- Provide tangible public benefits.
- Be patient and persevere.
- Strong commitment from public entity is a healthy start and usually acts a catalyst.

Specific steps CCF partners can take toward the development of a long-term, self-sustaining funding model for the CCF are:

- Demonstrate USFS commitment to CCF by dedicating a percentage of each budget line item to priority projects identified in the strategic plan.
- “Shop” priority projects to partners and gain support: With consistent USFS commitment, partners are more likely to contribute initially and for the long-term.
- Research fee structure and possibility of expanding and/or increasing current user fees.
- Commit to using the strategic planning process and conducting regular updates and revisions, especially priority project section criteria, to assess which projects accurately reflect and will contribute realization of the CCF vision and goals.
- Develop and pilot a memorandum of agreement with relevant partners for 2010-2013 priority projects.
- Evaluation the success of plan implementation, partners and priority projects every year. Continue support to only those efforts that are providing real tangible benefits to all CCF partners and the public.
- Develop innovative funding strategies available to government-nonprofit partnership (e.g. opt-out program with corporate programs, expanding donation and grant opportunities).
- Identify and carryout a set of specific tangible projects and document positive impact on CCF goals.



Evaluation

How well are we doing? How far have we come? Are Children's Forest programs and facilities really making a difference? Are our priority projects and actions successfully working toward achievement of our goals? What have we learned from our experiences so far? How can we improve on plan objectives and strategies? Are we involving the right partners? Do we have the right combination of resources to complete objectives and strategies? These are all questions the CCF Board of Directors, staff and CCF partners should answer for themselves and partners. The overarching goal should be to establish a clear, objective set of qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria that will help to:

- Verify actions, what we are doing is what we think we are doing (in the form of the strategic plan goals, objectives and strategies).
- Measure successes and evaluate areas that need improvement.
- Improve delivery of CCF programs and services to be more efficient and potentially less costly.
- Communicate clearly the CCF vision and associated successes to all stakeholders.
- Provide accurate and valid comparisons between programs and facilities to decide which should be retained.
- Establish a clear, objective set of qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria.
- Use criteria to demonstrate effectiveness to funders, partners and within the agency.
- Integrate external evaluation program.

Listed on the following page are potential measures of success for the CCF by organizing theme. Following those measures, an action plan matrix provides specific measures of success for 2010-2013 priority projects.



Education + Career Pathways

- Increase in percentage of seasonal positions filled by local youth
- Tracking students who've participated in CCF programs who go on to higher education/careers in forest
- Employing USFS person to do school and teen recruitment: Track number presented to and how many get jobs
- Utilization of technology: Track improvement to USFS website and number of hits, Facebook page, etc.
- Number of mentorships
- Trail to every classroom implemented
- Education and career-focused objectives and priorities are actually built into budget – not ad hoc
- Number of new internships/volunteer match
- Improved grades from students participating in outdoor activities/learning opportunities
- USFS profile matches the face of AK (age, race, gender, etc.)

Healthy Communities

- Increased visits to CNF (school, family, etc.) - monitor changes in number of people using trails and campgrounds
- Reduced obesity/diabetes in Alaska youth (YRBS)
- Percent of youth using forest in a three-year national survey
- Increase in outdoor/physical activities of youth (like online tracking offered by Healthy Futures Project)
- Increase in number of times classrooms use/visit the forest
- Increase in number of physical improvements to forest, e.g. camps, trails, youth directed facilities

Shared Stewardship + Civic Participation

- Repeat volunteers
- Increased participation in existing programs
- USFS retirees leading volunteer programs
- Increased partnerships with community organizations, schools and other educational programs
- Increased financial and in-kind support for CCF
- Number of self-sustained community volunteer programs
- Other intangible measures: Testimonials

Climate and Environmental Change Understanding + Local Solutions

- Alaska-specific climate change curricula in schools
- Increased number of youth leading and participating in monitoring activities
- Number of youth-submitted stories on web forum

Action Plan Matrix: Priority Projects, 2010-2013

Note: The action plan matrix below was developed during the planning process and includes only the organizing themes and key strategies. It is not meant to stand as the final action plan. In October of 2010, the Children's Forest Working Group met and developed a detailed action plan. The revised action plan includes all of the key elements shown here and will be revisited on a quarterly bases by the Working Group.

Action Item	Timeframe (completion)	Primary Responsibility (Who?)	Resources (What do we need to make this happen?)
Education + Career Pathways			
Jobs, jobs, jobs: Develop a CCF year 1, 2, 3 pilot project getting youth into jobs that provide a safe, meaningful work experience.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Clearinghouse organization: Support Alaska Geographic as connection to diverse nonprofits, school groups, parents, environmental education groups. Institutionalize and professionalize USFS capability to work with partners and volunteers. Develop clearinghouse website to inventory, analyze and tie together existing mentoring, employment, internship and seasonal hire opportunities, both internal and external.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Access to outdoor programs: Ensure that every school offers outdoor programs.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Healthy Communities			
Community involvement in planning: Take a fresh look at facility needs; involve kids, partners and the community in the design and management of a creative new (potentially adapted) generation of facilities.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Share USFS "icons" with partners and communities: Focus on facilities that are readily accessible and better connected to a wide range of users like Kenai River, Portage Valley and the Granite Creek area at the beginning of the Johnson Pass Trail.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Action Item	Timeframe (completion)	Primary Responsibility (Who?)	Resources (What do we need to make this happen?)
Initiate new partnerships: Partner with medical community to develop “outdoor prescription toolkits” and integrate health messages into our interpretive messages.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Shared Stewardship + Civic Participation			
Build on youth-managed forest concept – Develop a clear approach and identity to the idea of a “Youth Managed” section starting with Portage Valley; potentially create more “Youth Managed” forest section(s) and projects.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Volunteer Coordination: Better communicate and recruit for volunteer opportunities to the public, especially youth – physical (e.g. posters or flyers), on-line, website, organization, Twitter, Facebook.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Climate and Environmental Change Understanding + Local Solutions			
Link to partner efforts: Work on climate change issues with groups like the University of Alaska Anchorage and Fairbanks. Collaborate to sponsor a statewide climate change symposium (youth, educators, researchers) May-June 2011.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Meaningful Field Experience: Continue to refine and support the field-based “expedition” approach to climate learning.			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
Stories and Data Forum: Work with Alaska Geographic and ESRI to develop an on-line forum for sharing experiential and scientific information on climate and environmental change (possible intersection with Prince William Sound Stories Project).			
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Children's Forest

CHUGACH NATIONAL FOREST

A L A S K A

Strategic Plan

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