A gravel trail winds through a forest of tall evergreen trees and dense undergrowth. The trail is made of dark gravel and is surrounded by tall grasses and ferns. The trees are mostly evergreens, some with bare branches, suggesting a late autumn or winter setting. The sky is overcast and grey.

# Tongass Sustainable Trails Strategy Petersburg Ranger District

Prepared by: Alaska Trails

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## **CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS**

- Kake is a primarily Tlingit community and Tlingit values are reflected in how the community uses, cares for and connects with the adjacent lands, including land within the Petersburg Ranger District.
- There are four road-accessible United States Forest Service (USFS) trails near Kake, within the Petersburg Ranger District. All are more than ten miles from the community.
- Subsistence, hunting and fishing are community priorities for trail use on Forest Service system lands.
- Grave Island, west of Kake on Forest Service system lands, holds cultural and spiritual significance for the community.
- Kake is poised and hoping to expand their cultural tourism industry.
- The number of small cruise boats arriving in Kake is expected to increase significantly with the construction of the Kake cannery cultural tourism destination.
- Historically, independent travelers interested in tourism or recreation have not come to Kake in significant numbers.



Goose Lake and the terminus of Goose Lake Trail; Photo: Haley Johnston

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the direction of the United States Forest Service (USFS), Alaska Trails has taken a community-driven approach to developing the Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trails Strategy. This work was prepared under a Challenge Cost Share Agreement between the USFS and Alaska Trails. This chapter specifically highlights the current trails status in and around the community of Kake within the Petersburg Ranger District. For a more in depth introduction to the entire project, consult the overall Tongass Sustainable Trails Strategy Introduction and for more insight into the regional issues, consult the Forest-wide Chapter.

Within this chapter is a discussion of the issues and opportunities facing this community and Ranger District in their pursuit of a sustainable trail system. For the purposes of this project, a **sustainable trail system is defined as socially relevant and supported, ecologically resilient, and economically viable**. Building on this information, the chapter identifies priorities for new trails, trail maintenance and trail decommissioning. The chapter also highlights other general approaches, policy changes or actions which could lead to a sustainable trail system.

The goal of every planner, including those who prepared this strategy, is that their work will create tangible results. For this strategy to improve the sustainability of the Petersburg Ranger District's trail system, these recommendations will need to be considered and, where deemed appropriate, implemented.

The staff at Alaska Trails, who prepared this Strategy, are immensely grateful to the USFS staff, the community of Kake, community organizations, individuals and Alaska Native Tribal entities that generously offered their wisdom, insight and feedback as this chapter was developed.

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Petersburg Ranger District Overview**

The 1.8 million-acre Petersburg Ranger District is centrally located in the mist-shrouded Alexander Archipelago in Southeast Alaska. The district includes Mitkof, Kupreanof, and Kuiu islands along with numerous smaller islands, and a portion of the mainland extending to the Canadian border. The Ranger District offices and much of its resources are located in the community of Petersburg on the northern tip of Mitkof Island. Petersburg is located 40 miles southeast of Kake. No roads connect the two communities.

### **Kake Community Overview**

Kake (pop 557) is a first class City located on the northwest coast of Kupreanof Island along Keku Strait and Frederick Sound, 95 air miles southwest of Juneau in the Petersburg Ranger District of the Tongass National Forest. Kake is approximately 40 air miles west of the community of Petersburg.

Kake is a Tlingit village rich in cultural history and tradition. The region of Kake has been inhabited by the Tlingit people for thousands of years. Nearly 70% of the village's residents are of Tlingit heritage, and Tlingit traditions remain the foundation of the community. Many residents of Kake continue to live off of the land through hunting, fishing, and gathering on the lands and waters surrounding the community.

Kake is home to one of the tallest totem poles in the world, towering over the village at 132 feet, carved in 1967 for the Alaska Purchase centennial.

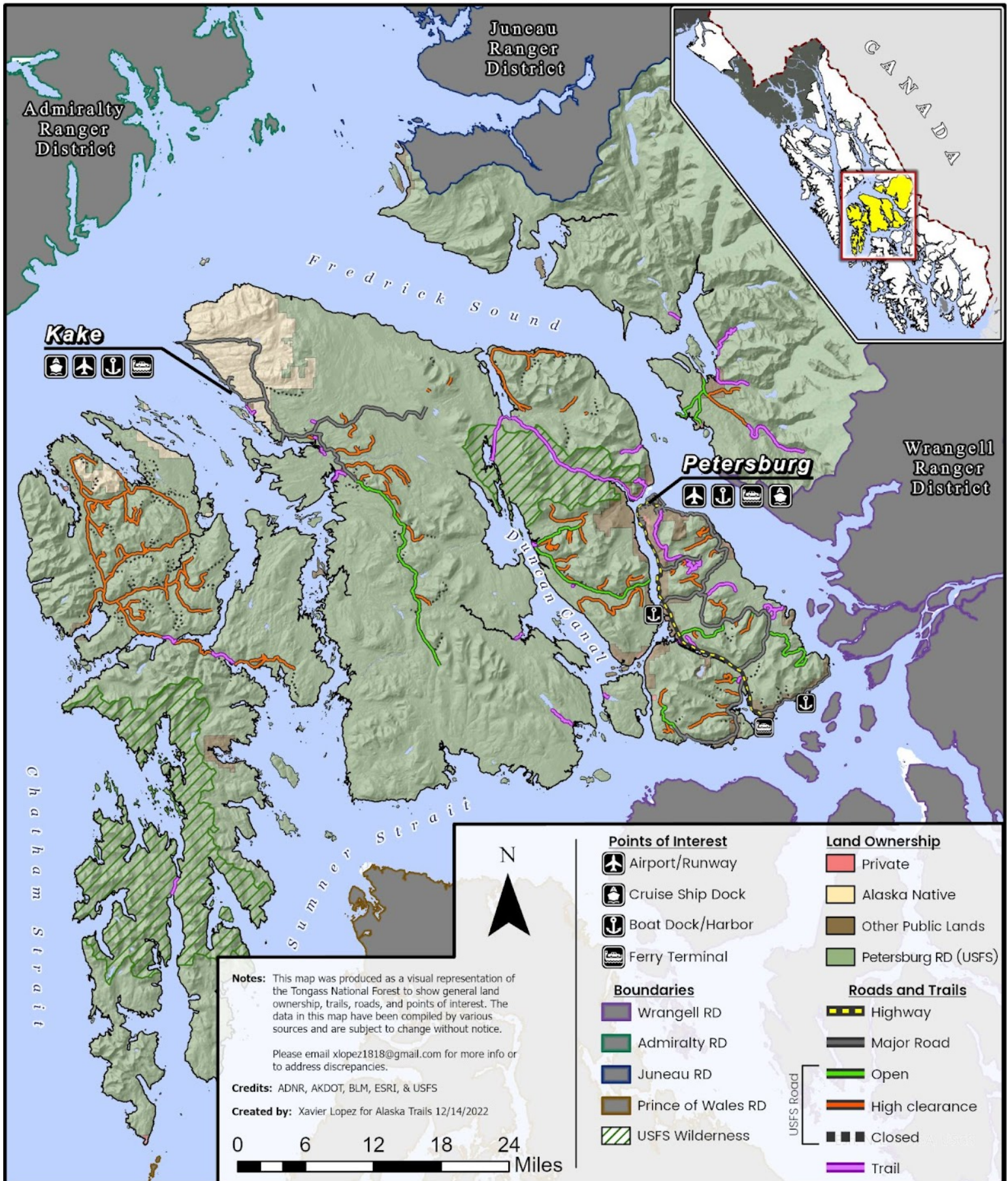
Kake is a prime spot for viewing whales. Whales migrate through the Kake area in large numbers. Kake also has a large black bear population, with moose, Sitka black-tailed deer, wolf, bald eagles, sea otters, and seals thriving in the area. Fishing for salmon and halibut is superb in Kake. Freshwater streams in season are abundant in trout, steelhead, and salmon.

Kake has a K-12 school, a store, a Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium health clinic, and several small businesses - including arts, construction and lodging establishments. Important entities affiliated with the community include the federally recognized Organized Village of Kake and the for-profit Kake Tribal Corporation.

Kake is located within the Tongass National Forest and Petersburg Ranger District, but the lands directly abutting the community are held by Keex Kwaan Corporation.

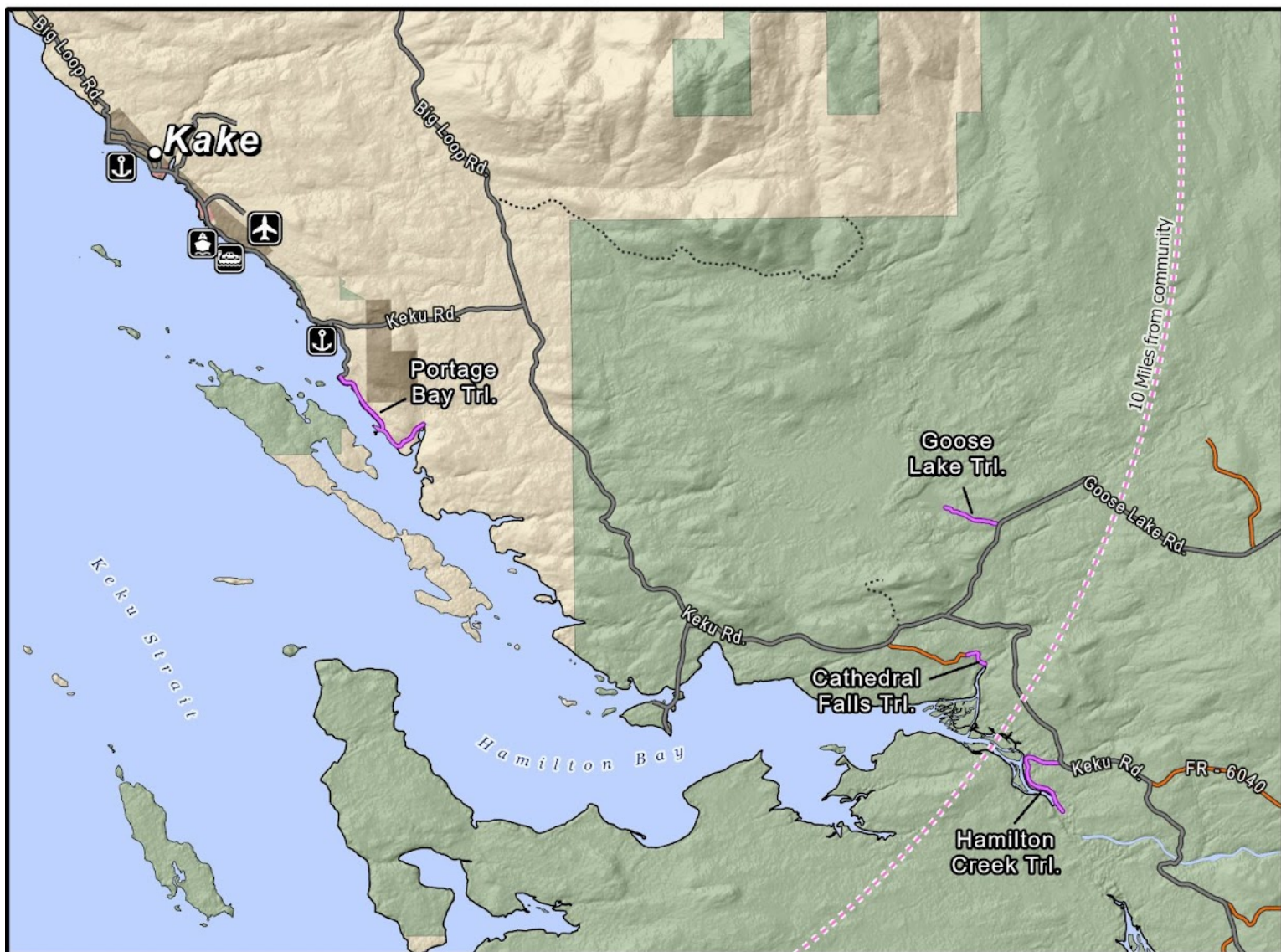
# Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trails Strategy

## Petersburg Ranger District



# Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trails Strategy

## City of Kake



**Notes:** This map was produced as a visual representation of the Tongass National Forest to show general land ownership, trails, roads, and points of interest. The data in this map have been compiled by various sources and are subject to change without notice.

Please email [xlopez1818@gmail.com](mailto:xlopez1818@gmail.com) for more info or to address discrepancies.

**Credits:** ADNR, AKDOT, BLM, ESRI, & USFS

**Created by:** Xavier Lopez for Alaska Trails 12/14/2022

### Points of Interest

- Airport/Runway
- Cruise Ship Dock
- Boat Dock/Harbor
- Ferry Terminal

### Land Ownership

- Private
- Alaska Native
- Other Public Lands
- Petersburg RD (USFS)

### Roads and Trails

- Highway
- Major Road
- Trail
- Open
- High clearance
- Closed





## **CURRENT USES AND TRENDS**

### **Community Use Trends**

While limited formal records are available, anecdotal observation and conversations with community members indicate that hunting, fishing, and gathering traditional and subsistence foods are the highest priority for Kake community members when using USFS roads and trails.

### **Tourism Trends**

The community of Kake is transitioning from a logging and fishing economy to a more diversified economic model with a strong emphasis on tourism, particularly tourism focused on authentic Tlingit culture. Visitors can immerse themselves in a rich heritage that includes traditional dancing, storytelling, basket weaving, beading, and carving. Or visit the village's 132-foot totem pole, an expression of one of the most iconic Tlingit traditions. The totem pole was created by a trained Native carver and raised according to the traditional ceremony. The totem pole is recorded as one of the largest in the world.

Kake Tribal Corporation owns Kake Tourism which helps to bring small cruise ships to Kake each summer; Kake Tourism plans to bring over 30 boats in 2022. Kake Tourism also has plans to renovate a historic cannery in Kake as a tourist attraction. Kake has limited capacity for large volumes of visitors, but it is especially well suited to providing authentic and intimate cultural tourism opportunities to independent visitors and small cruise ship travelers. There is currently no capacity to bring visitors to USFS trails or sites outside of the city of Kake. Below is an extract from visitkake.com, regarding the cultural tourism efforts currently in development at the historic cannery located in Kake (just west of the airport):

*"Original construction took place from 1912 to 1940. It has played a significant role in the lives of local Kake Tlingit Indians. It is about to be unveiled and again bring a valuable asset to the people of Kake and visitors from around the world.*

*Special thanks to the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development and the Organized Village of Kake. Through the partnership of the State of Alaska and OVK this Historic Cannery is going to be restored to its original splendor. Attractions include Charter sports fishing, Canning of "fresh caught wild Alaskan Salmon", Tlingit Artwork, and a Historic Cannery Museum.*

*This is just the tip of the iceberg as a Black Bear observatory will be constructed to see first hand Black Bears catching salmon. Bald Eagles are common in Kake and can be seen flying around and catching salmon.*

*This Historic Cannery Restoration and Dock Project will be a launching ground for tourism and economic development in the Kake area. Preserving a valuable heritage and carefully sharing that with our welcome guests. People will be greeted by Tlingit Indians of Southeast. They will get to appreciate the many beauties that this place has to offer and see a fully restored Cannery that dates back to 1912."*

In addition to cultural tourism, Kake and the greater Petersburg Ranger District are destinations for out of town/out of region hunters and sport fishermen, who come each year to hunt and fish, specifically for salmon, halibut, deer, moose, black and brown bear, wolves and wolverines.

Alaska Visitor Statistic Program - VII (2016) Data of Interest<sup>1</sup>

Because the annual number of out of state visitors to Kake was low (< 5000), the Alaska Visitor Statistic Program - VII (2016) produced no data for the community of Kake.

USFS National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) Data of Interest<sup>2</sup>

The most recent NVUM Data for Petersburg Ranger District is from 2017. The NVUM was designed for National and Forest-level analysis, not Ranger District level. Unfortunately, the NVUM data lumps together visitors to Yakutat, Petersburg and Wrangell Ranger Districts, making the data of limited value for individual Ranger Districts or communities

The aggregated data does show that the most common activity by far in these three Ranger Districts is hiking/walking, followed by viewing natural features and fishing. The top 10 activities, as ranked by % participation by visitors to the Forest, are shown in the following table:

| Activity                  | % Participation | % Main Activity | Avg Hours Doing Main Activity |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Hiking/Walking            | 47.4            | 26.1            | 1.5                           |
| Viewing Natural Features  | 34.1            | 10.4            | 1.4                           |
| Fishing                   | 31.0            | 23.5            | 5.7                           |
| Driving for Pleasure      | 27.6            | 103.3           | 3.1                           |
| Viewing Wildlife          | 21.6            | 5.4             | 5.2                           |
| Relaxing                  | 19.4            | 3.6             | 12.7                          |
| Gathering Forest Products | 8.9             | 5.3             | 1.3                           |
| Hunting                   | 6.2             | 5.9             | 10.7                          |
| Nature Study              | 4.5             | 0.4             | 7.2                           |
| Visiting Historic Sites   | 4.2             | 0.2             | 3.0                           |

While the NVUM does not specifically gather data on subsistence use of the Forest, some of this use is likely captured in the categories of fishing, gathering forest products and hunting. Combined those activities are engaged in by up to 46.1% of visitors to the Forest.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.alaskatia.org/wp-content/uploads/12.-AVSP-7-Summ-Profiles-Southeast.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/nvum>

## ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Issues

- All USFS trails are over 10 miles from town, making it necessary for community members or visitors to drive to use trails for recreation or subsistence.
- Dilapidated, damaged and outdated signage along USFS Roads and at trailheads conveys an air of abandonment to visitors and makes navigation difficult.
- Community sentiment regarding the USFS. An anonymous quote from a community member: *"the community is pretty 50/50 on the Forest Service"*

### Opportunities

- For several years, the Keex' Kwaan Community Forest Partnership has been leading a local field crew in the community of Kake. This crew has the potential to perform maintenance and some trail building on the Petersburg Ranger District near Kake. Building this crew's capacity and skill set could allow them to assist the Forest with more technical trail maintenance and/or construction.
- The Alaskan Youth Stewards program in Kake - a partnership between the USFS, the Organized Village of Kake and the Tlingit Haida Central Council - also performs trail maintenance on the Petersburg Ranger District near Kake. Building this crew's capacity and skill set could allow them to assist the Forest with more technical trail maintenance and/or construction.



Trail signage in need of improvement for Cathedral Falls Trail (left) and Hamilton Bay Trail (right); Photos: Haley Johnston

**SUMMARY OF EXISTING RELEVANT PLANS**

**Relevant Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Projects:**

There was one trail project that received 2022 GAOA funds near Kake - Cathedral Falls. Details below:

| Year | Project Title                        | Asset Type | Project Description   | Project Background   | Multi-year Project | # Years to Completion |
|------|--------------------------------------|------------|---|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 2022 | Cathedral Falls Trail Reconstruction | Trail      | This project will reconstruct and relocate the trail to provide a safer and more sustainable location and tread type. The trail is about 0.4 miles long. The project will eliminate \$35,913 in deferred maintenance and reduce future maintenance costs. | Cathedral Falls Trail is located 12 miles from the Native village of Kake. Locals use it for views of the falls, picnics, and fishing. The existing trail was reconstructed in 2000, but it is now causing resource damage and is adversely affecting user experience. | No                 | 1                     |

**Recent Relevant RAC (Resource Advisory Committees) Funded Projects:**

Note: These are the recent RAC funded projects adjacent to the community of Kake, other RAC funded projects have been completed in other areas of the Petersburg Ranger District.

| Year | Project Description  | Amount Funded | Completion Date   |
|------|--|---------------|---|
| 2016 | Cathedral Falls Trail Survey and Design  | \$25,720      | Completed FY19  |
| 2020 | Clearing and maintenance on Grave Island (west of the community of Kake) to improve access and safety for community elders.  | n/a           | Proposal was withdrawn due to work being done by Kake Youth Conservation Corps (an earlier version of Alaskan Youth Stewards) crew in 2020 using a different federal grant. |
| 2021 | Improve the trail on Grave Island that leads to the northernmost grave sites on the island in order to promote safe access to heritage sites and increase available land areas for burial. Work will be completed by the Alaskan Youth Stewards Kake youth crew, under the direction and guidance of the USFS. | \$17,000      |   |

## **COMMUNITY & USER GROUP GOALS**

These goals were articulated in conversations with USFS staff, local residents, other stakeholders and individuals associated with the community of Kake. Additional feedback was received via online surveys. While this plan hopes to capture, to the best of its abilities, the goals of the community of Kake, it is acknowledged that there may be community goals that were overlooked, misunderstood or were not captured through these methods.

**Big John Bay Cabin** - Restore access to the Big John Bay cabin and vicinity via the Big John Bay Trail.

**Forestry roads** - Following the leadership of the local community, develop the forestry roads above the community of Kake into recreation and/or tourism assets. These roads are on Organized Village of Kake and Kake Tribal lands, but USFS expertise in planning and design could be helpful to bring any future community-initiated projects to fruition.

**Subsistence resources** - Maintain and/or expand access to subsistence resources and destinations as determined by the community

**Community employment** - Provide expanded employment opportunities to the community of Kake through the development of assets within the Forest that are beneficial to the community's tourism goals. Provide expanded employment opportunities to the community through paid trail, facilities and maintenance work within the Forest. Provide clear career paths for youth participating in the Alaskan Youth Stewards program to become long-term employees and stewards of the forest.



Hamilton Bay Trail near Kake, AK in the Petersburg Ranger District; Photo: Haley Johnston

## **RECOMMENDED TRAIL PROJECTS**

The following are the specific recommendations for trails to build, maintain, plan, and/or decommission that have been identified through conversations with USFS staff and the Kake community, while addressing the community goals outlined above. In this Ranger District, and throughout the Tongass Sustainable Trails Strategy, those trail projects that are simultaneously beneficial to residents, visitors, and could help increase business and employment opportunities have been prioritized, when possible.

There are four trails accessible via the road system from the community of Kake. Each trail is located more than ten miles south of town. See prior page map above for context regarding distance from town.

### **Recommendations for Trail Building**

***Support community developed trails*** - If possible, the USFS should utilize their expertise to help the community of Kake to develop (plan, design and construct) the extensive road network above town (OVK Land) for recreational purposes if and when requested by the City of Kake and OVK.

***Cathedral Falls Trail*** - A short connection could be built between the Cathedral Falls Trail and the nearby USFS road to make a loop back to the Cathedral Falls Trailhead.

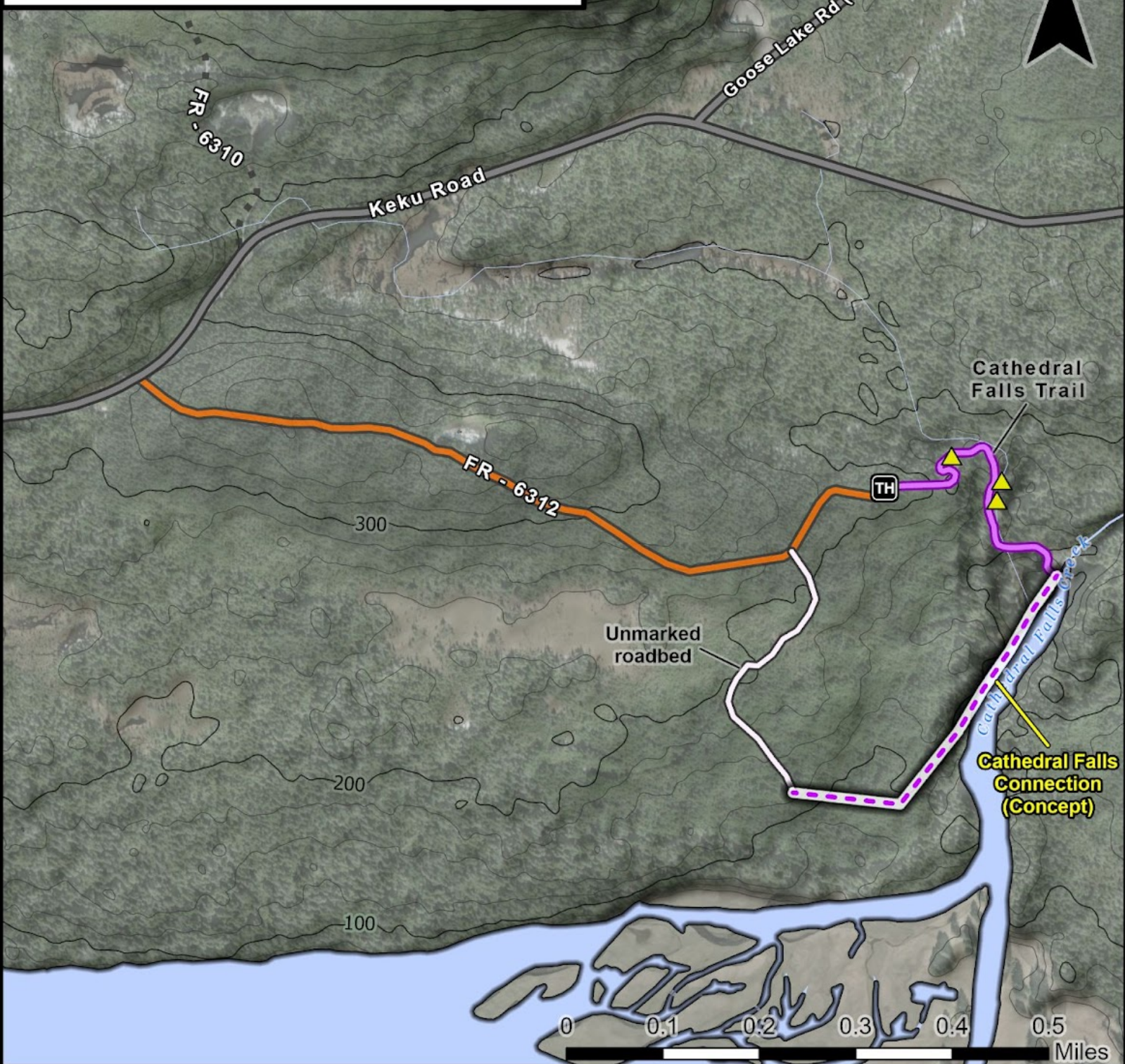
***\*See map on following page. Note, this map is not intended to represent an official alignment. It is instead illustrative of an idea for a possible trail. Further community engagement and design and planning will be necessary to evaluate this trail's feasibility and appropriateness.***

***Waterfront Trail*** - Between the community of Kake and the USFS building located to the south, a waterfront trail could be developed which would have positive community and public health implications (if would give walkers an alternative to the highway shoulder) and recreation benefits (it would give visitors arriving at the Ferry Terminal or the Cannery dock the option to walk south along the shorefront). This has the potential to be a great collaboration between the Organized Village of Kake, Kake Tribal, the City of Kake and the USFS, but further coordination and study would be necessary to evaluate community interest, land ownership status and viability of the project. Map below.

***\*See map on page 15. Note, this map is not intended to represent an official alignment. It is instead illustrative of an idea for a possible trail. Further community engagement and design and planning will be necessary to evaluate this trail's feasibility and appropriateness.***

# Petersburg Ranger District

## Cathedral Falls Loop



### Trails

- Trail Concept
- Existing Trail

### Point of Interest

- Existing Trailhead/Access Point
- Trail damage

### Roads

- Highway
  - Major Road
  - Existing Road Corridor
  - Open
  - High clearance
  - Closed
- } USFS Road



\*Contours: 25ft - 100ft Bolded

# Petersburg Ranger District

## Kake Coastal Trail

N



### Trails

Trail Concept

Existing Trail

### Land Ownership

Private

Alaska Native

Local Government

State of Alaska

USFS

Undetermined

### Point of Interest

Ferry Terminal

USFS Building

Historic Landmark

### Boundary

Petersburg RD

### Roads

Highway

Major Road

Open

High clearance

Closed

USFS Road





## Recommendations for Maintenance

**Cathedral Falls Trail** - Significant work is needed to repair three areas with significant erosion. With RAC funding, survey and design work was completed for this trail in 2019. This trail is funded for construction in 2023-2024 using GAOA funds.

**Big John Bay Trail** - For all intents and purposes, this trail has become impassable. The community is very interested in utilizing this trail - it was the most talked about trail during community conversations - for hunting and subsistence use. This trail also, when usable, provides rare, land-based access to a USFS cabin - the Big John Bay Cabin. Many of the cabins of the Tongass National Forest are accessible only via boat. By repairing this trail, the community of Kake and visitors to the Petersburg Ranger District would be able to access a cabin via a short hike. As of 2021, the recreation.gov cabin rental portal lists the cabin as accessible via a trail from the town of Kake, which, given the current trail conditions, is incorrect.

## Recommendations for Decommissioning

**Big John Bay Trail** - *only if the FS is not prepared to maintain or rebuild this trail*, it should be a candidate for decommissioning. However, this trail is important to the community and decommissioning would be unpopular and potentially detrimental to the relationship between the community and the USFS.



Gravel tread on Goose Lake Trail; Photo: Haley Johnston



Deep flooding on Big John Bay Trail; Photo: Haley Johnston

## **RECOMMENDED GENERAL APPROACHES**

While this strategy primarily focuses on recommendations of trails to build, maintain or decommission, it is also necessary to highlight other general approaches, policy changes or actions which, if enacted, could lead to a more sustainable trail system. Addressing these recommendations may be necessary before trails are considered for building, maintenance or decommissioning. In other cases, addressing these recommendations can happen concurrently with trail work, but doing so is still critical to achieving a sustainable trail system in the Ranger District. This strategy recommends the following actions for the Petersburg Ranger District, specific to the community of Kake:

### **Deepen partnership with the Kake Alaskan Youth Stewards Program**

Background from the Sustainable Southeast Partnership website<sup>3</sup>: The Alaskan Youth Stewards (an umbrella title for Training Rural Alaskan Youth Leaders and Students (TRAYLS) and Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) programs in Southeast Alaska) blends experiential education, on the job training, career counseling and job placement for youth in rural Southeast Alaska to get on the path to higher education and employment in natural resource stewardship.

*"Our mission is to make Kake a more sustainable Southeast community by enriching our native and public lands through hard work and dedication. YCC/TRAYLS Crew serves our community while learning leadership skills by building a foundation for our future."*

- The Alaskan Youth Stewards Crew in Kake; Mission Statement

The excellent Alaskan Youth Stewards program has the potential to be a truly transformative program for not just communities, but also the Tongass National Forest. The program provides:

- Employment to local youth
- Career training and inspiration
- A local workforce with local knowledge and existing housing (a barrier to employment across the forest)
- Celebrate and increase the ethos of stewardship within the community

Through proper partnership, the program also has the potential to create a career pipeline for local youth. To do this, the forest needs to:

- Provide meaningful training that sets these young people up for future employment with the forest
- Write job descriptions for advanced positions that honors and values these youth experiences on par with other western methodologies of education
- Find ways to maintain employment and connection between these young people and the forest, if they pursue training and education off the forest

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<sup>3</sup> [https://sustainablesoutheast.net/sub\\_focus\\_area/alaskan-youth-stewards/](https://sustainablesoutheast.net/sub_focus_area/alaskan-youth-stewards/)