

A wooden boardwalk with a metal grate center leading through a forest of tall pine trees. The boardwalk is made of wooden planks with a central section of metal grate. It curves slightly to the right as it recedes into the distance. The forest consists of tall, thin pine trees with green needles. The ground is covered in green and brown vegetation. The sky is overcast and grey.

# Tongass Sustainable Trails Strategy Prince of Wales Ranger District (Craig and Thorne Bay)

Prepared by: Alaska Trails

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>OVERVIEW</b>	<b>5</b>
Prince of Wales Ranger District Overview	5
Background Documents	8
Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis (POWLLA)	8
Relevant Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Projects	9
<b>CURRENT USES AND TRENDS</b>	<b>10</b>
Community Use Trends	10
Tourism Trends	11
USFS National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) Data of Interest	11
<b>ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS</b>	<b>13</b>
Issues	13
Opportunities	13
<b>COMMUNITY &amp; USER GROUP GOALS</b>	<b>14</b>
Summary Goals	14
<b>RECOMMENDED TRAIL PROJECTS</b>	<b>15</b>
Recommendations for Trail Building	15
Recommendations for Maintenance	23
Recommendations for Decommissioning	24
<b>RECOMMENDED GENERAL APPROACHES</b>	<b>25</b>

## **CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS**

- Prince of Wales Island (POW) is home to a population of approximately 5500 year round residents, spread through twelve diverse communities ranging in size from just a handful of residents in Edna Bay to over 1,000 residents in the City of Craig.
- Visitors to Prince of Wales Island are unique among visitors to Southeast in many categories, including: income, spending, duration of stay, purpose of visit, method of travel, and activities.
- There are few opportunities for residents of or visitors to Prince of Wales to access a United States Forest Service (USFS) trail without having to drive. In some cases, communities have no nearby trails.
- Recent improvements to and the subsequent increase in use of the Sunnahae trail near Craig demonstrate a public desire for high quality trails and trails that access alpine environments.
- Unlike most of the Tongass, Prince of Wales Island has an abundance of roads. POW Island, notably, has 30% of the entire road network on the Tongass. There is a paved and gravel road system that is suitable for passenger vehicles in addition to a vast network of USFS roads that range in suitability from appropriate for passenger vehicles, requiring 4x4 capabilities, ATV accessible, accessible only by foot or bike, or entirely impassable. This road system presents a variety of recreation opportunities, both for residents and visitors, not as easily available in other parts of the Forest.
- Most, but not all, of Prince of Wales' communities are connected to the extensive road system.
- Short connections between existing USFS roads could easily create recreation loops on Prince of Wales Island - suitable for hiking, biking and in many cases, motorized use.
- Sportfishing is the primary motivation for out of state travel to Prince of Wales Island, and the area includes a number of long established, large and successful fly-in or road-accessible fishing lodges.
- Growing the capacity to sustain and improve trails is a central challenge for the Ranger District. This challenge is particularly acute on POW Island because POW saw a significant reduction in USFS staff prior to 2021. It is also difficult to organize local volunteers due to the island's large land mass and scattered communities.

## **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 Prince of Wales 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 Prince of Wales 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 organizations and individuals who have generously offered their wisdom, insight and feedback as this chapter was developed, including USFS staff, the City of Craig, the City of Thorne Bay, the City of Coffman Cove, various other community organizations, Alaska Native Tribal organizations, and local residents.

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Prince of Wales Ranger District Overview**

The Prince of Wales Ranger District encompasses the entirety of Prince of Wales Island (POW) and numerous adjacent islands. The 2,577 square mile island (135 miles long x 65 miles wide) is the largest island in Southeast Alaska and the third largest in the United States. There are two wilderness areas on Prince of Wales Island - the Karta River Wilderness and the South Prince of Wales Wilderness - and five within the Ranger District.

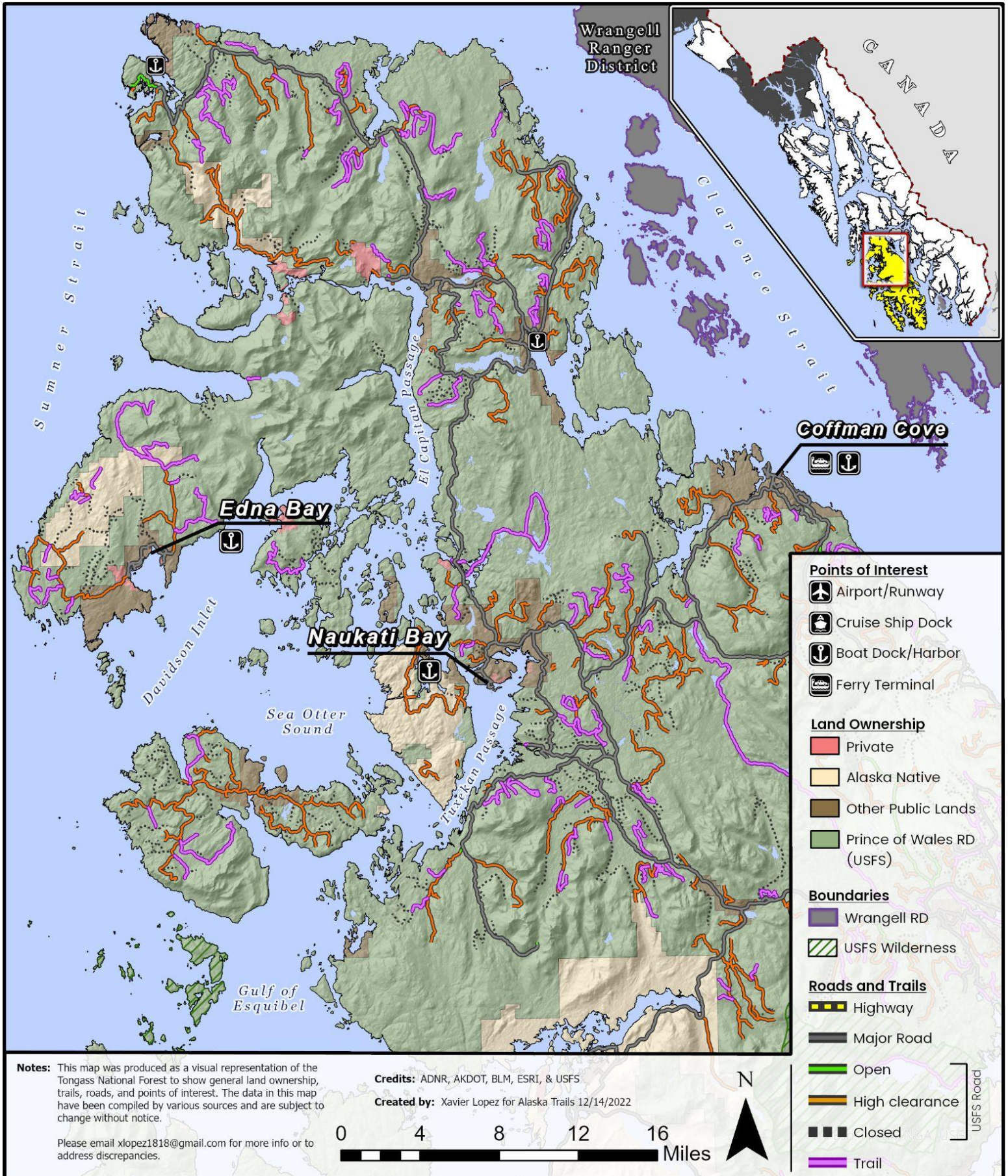
Prince of Wales Island has the most extensive road system in Southeast Alaska - in fact 30% of the total Tongass road system - ranging from paved scenic byways to logging roads that require four-wheel drive. These roads provide access to numerous areas where locals and visitors alike can fish, hike, camp, hunt, boat and view wildlife. POW is also home to karst topography and cave systems that offer a unique recreation opportunity for visitors and a valuable research area for scientists. Paddlers can take advantage of water trails found in the Ranger District and in marine waters between the District's many islands. Since many of the communities on POW are along the road system, residents not only utilize the trails adjacent to their homes, but also travel across the island to use trails for hunting, fishing, exercise, recreation, and subsistence.

Prince of Wales' population of 5,559 is spread among several small communities including Coffman Cove, Craig, Edna Bay, Hollis, Hydaburg, Kasaan, Klawock, Naukati Bay, Point Baker, Port Protection, Thorne Bay and Whale Pass. POW can be accessed by air via Ketchikan, Sitka or Juneau and by water via Ketchikan or Wrangell. The Inter-Island Ferry Authority offers a near-daily connection from Ketchikan to Hollis. Communities range in size and amenities; some feature restaurants, bed and breakfasts, schools, stores and health clinics, while others do not.

Prince of Wales Island is the homeland of the indigenous Kaigani Haida people. The island is also the traditional territory of the Tlingit people. Craig Tribal Association, Hydaburg Cooperative Association, the Organized Village of Kasaan and Klawock Cooperative Association are the federally recognized tribes of Prince of Wales Island.

# Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trails Strategy

## Prince of Wales Ranger District (North)

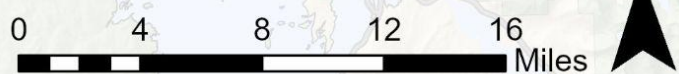


- Points of Interest**
- Airport/Runway
  - Cruise Ship Dock
  - Boat Dock/Harbor
  - Ferry Terminal
- Land Ownership**
- Private
  - Alaska Native
  - Other Public Lands
  - Prince of Wales RD (USFS)
- Boundaries**
- Wrangell RD
  - USFS Wilderness
- Roads and Trails**
- Highway
  - Major Road
  - Open
  - High clearance
  - Closed
  - Trail
- USFS Road

**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.

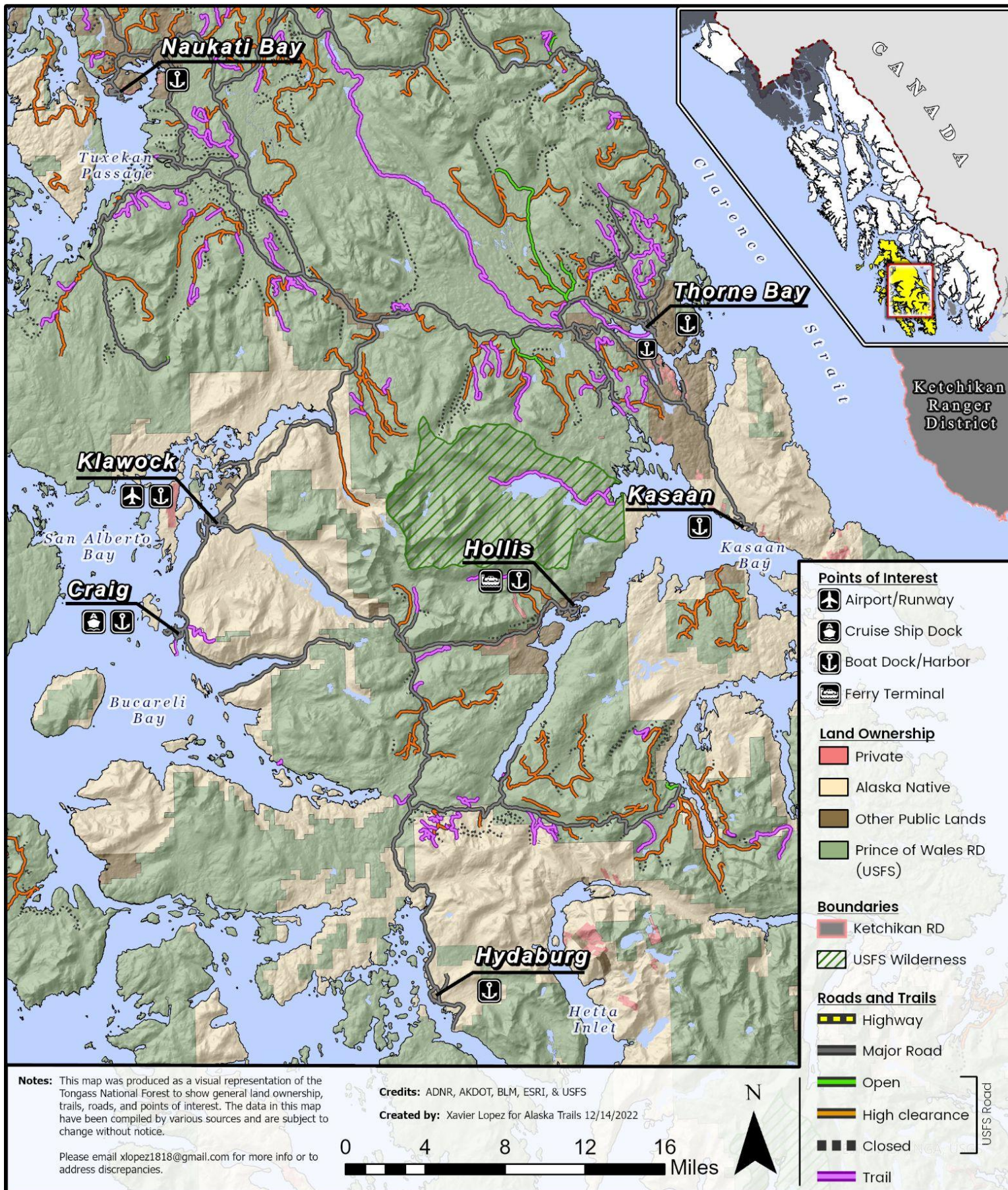
Please email [xlopez1818@gmail.com](mailto:xlopez1818@gmail.com) for more info or to address discrepancies.

**Credits:** ADNR, AKDOT, BLM, ESRI, & USFS  
**Created by:** Xavier Lopez for Alaska Trails 12/14/2022



# Tongass National Forest Sustainable Trails Strategy

## Prince of Wales Ranger District (South)



**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.

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

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

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



- Points of Interest**
  - Airport/Runway
  - Cruise Ship Dock
  - Boat Dock/Harbor
  - Ferry Terminal
- Land Ownership**
  - Private
  - Alaska Native
  - Other Public Lands
  - Prince of Wales RD (USFS)
- Boundaries**
  - Ketchikan RD
  - USFS Wilderness
- Roads and Trails**
  - Highway
  - Major Road
  - Open
  - High clearance
  - Closed
  - Trail

USFS Road



## Background Documents

Significant prior work has been done to identify community-supported recreation and trails-related projects within the Prince of Wales Ranger District. Some community members have expressed frustration at having participated in so many processes without seeing significant progress on many of the projects discussed. Prior processes have included the ongoing Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (RAC), the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis (POWLLA), Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), and others. Through these processes many excellent, community-supported trails projects were identified.

### Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis (POWLLA)

The Prince of Wales Landscape Assessment Team (POW LAT), formed in May of 2016, developed a mission statement to assist the USFS in the development of a Prince of Wales Island Landscape Level Assessment document. The group's mission focused on developing and providing proposed projects to the USFS that contribute to the well-being of the National Forest and to lasting economic and social resilience within the landscape assessment area. After a series of organizational meetings, POW LAT hired a meeting facilitator to meet the POW LAT goal of developing a project list for USFS system lands on the Prince of Wales Island ranger districts for the next 10-15 years. The recommended trail related projects included:

Title	Location	Description
Control Lake Recreational Complex	Control Lake, Cutthroat Road, Big Salt Road, Thorne Bay Highway, Eagle's Nest campground, Balls Lake picnic area, Balls Lake trail	Develop the Control Lake Recreational Complex: Ensure Balls Lake Trail is completed on schedule, and include a spur from the trail to the Cutthroat Road. Improve the bridge over the creek on the Cutthroat Road for pedestrian access to the lake. Improve trail access to the Control Lake Cabin. Include a bike path on the Thorne River Road and Big Salt Road to accommodate pedestrian traffic between the cabin, the campground, the picnic area and the trailhead
Deweyville Trail Improvement	North POW - Deweyville	Improve the existing trail to make it more usable. Put in a trailhead marker (currently cannot find the trailhead). Perhaps add a picnic area out at Deweyville
Harris River Trail System, including: Connect Gandláay Háanaa and Harris River Interpretive Sites; Hut-to-hut trail system; Additional Improvements	Harris River Drainage, Craig-Klawock-Hollis Highway; Hollis Ferry terminal to Craig; 26 mile Trailhead at Harris River Campground	The Gandláay Háanaa/Harris River Trail and the Harris River Interpretive Trail provide less than an hour of walking time and end within sight of each other across the Harris River. Create a stream crossing so that people can move from one area to the other. There are other short trails in the Harris River subdivision closer to Hollis. The Harris River Campground is underutilized. The trails could be connected with a bridge or two and some trail building to connect the Hollis Ferry terminal by developed trail to the campground, creating a destination-level facility and attraction. Build a three-sided shelter along the Craig-Klawock-Hollis Highway to provide a non-motorized route from Hollis to Craig that includes the connected trail system. Model this on the Hut to Hut system in New Zealand. Construct shelter from young

		growth.
Luck Creek Trail	Timber stand near Luck Creek bridge outside Coffman Cove	Existing user trail is in a riparian area. Improve existing trail. Add parking for 2-3 cars. Add interpretive signage. (Use stewardship funds from the timber sale that is used to fund the Luck Creek Restoration work.)
Old Growth Trail	8.5 mile on Thorne Bay Road, Memorial Beach	Develop and maintain trails through old growth forest. Recommend renaming the 8.5 mile trail as Rio Beaver hiking trail.
Rabbit Ears - ORV Trail - Coffman Cove	Coffman Cove Area	ORV trail with obstacles. Most of the infrastructure is already in place.
Rio Roberts Fish Pass Access through different forest types.		Improve Rio Roberts Fish Pass Boardwalk Access. This is a road accessible facility that lost its trailhead in the re-engineering of the Thorne Bay Road. Re-establishing the trailhead, parking, and performing some basic maintenance on the stairs seems like a low cost way to open a trail back into an interesting section of forest
Sarkar Old Growth Trail	Sarkar	Improve and maintain existing trail and portages.
Sumez Island Trail	Sumez Island	Develop a trail route across Sumez Island including a boat landing and a trail that goes to Arena Cove
Hydaburg Bridge to Bridge Trail	Hydaburg Bridge to Bridge	Encourage USFS to support development of a trail through old growth forest.

#### Relevant Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Projects

Proposed 2022 trail-related projects in Prince of Wales Ranger District are included in the table below.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Asset Type</b>	<b>Additional Information</b>	<b>Amount Allocated</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>One Duck Trail Reconstruction and Shelter Replacement</b>	Trail, Rec Area		\$385,000
<b>2022</b>	<b>El Cap Recreation Area</b>	Trail, Rec Area	This is a multi-year project with guaranteed out-year funding of: \$1,126,755 in 2023 and \$1,061,844 in 2024.	\$876,401 (FY2022)
<b>2022</b>	<b>Sunnahae Trail Reconstruction</b>	Trail	This is a multi-year project, initially funded in 2021 with \$49,000 for design work.	\$1,200,000 (FY2022)

## **CURRENT USES AND TRENDS**

### **Community Use Trends**

Per conversations with community members, residents of Prince of Wales Island utilize USFS trails, trail-roads, and roads regularly for hunting and fishing access, exercise, recreation, and subsistence. While hunting and fishing appear to be the most common activities by residents, there is also a dedicated group of hikers and walkers on the island. Some community members articulated a preference for using trail-roads and roads for hiking, running, etc. due to the wider trails and better visibility.

The newly re-constructed Sunnahae Trail near the community of Craig is an interesting case study in what types of trails are most desirable to residents and visitors, and makes the perhaps obvious case that the quality of trails is key to the amount of use they receive. The Sunnahae Trail is used by many people on a near-daily basis. Over a week-long period in June 2021, it was observed that during daylight hours, there was nearly always at least one car in the Sunnahae Trail parking lot. Not only are members of the Craig community using the trail, but trail users from other parts of the island regularly drive to the trailhead to hike, run, and/or walk. This indicates a strong desire for trails generally, and trails that reach the alpine specifically, like the Sunnahae Trail, on Prince of Wales Island. It is by far the most popular trail on the island. The second most popular trail within the Ranger District, based on anecdotal observation, is the One Duck Trail, which also accesses the alpine.



A bridge on the Trocadero Trail west of FS Road 913 (Hydaburg Highway); Photo: Haley Johnston

## Tourism Trends

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

- 1% of total Alaska market - 16,000 visitors in 2016
- Visitors to Gustavus and Prince of Wales were much more likely to travel to and from Alaska by air (76 to 77 percent). Overall, only 11 percent of Southeast visitors traveled to and from Alaska by air.
- Seven out of ten Prince of Wales Island visitors participated in fishing while in the community – the highest among Southeast communities. A large portion of this use occurs at fishing lodges vs. independent anglers. The focus on lodge-based fishing helps explain the earnings and spending information shared below.
- Visitors to Prince of Wales were less likely to report using travelalaska.com than visitors to other Southeast communities (7 percent, compared to 13-27 percent).
- POW visitors were far more likely to intend to return to Alaska in the next five years (79 percent), compared to 31 percent of all Southeast visitors. POW visitors were also more likely to rate their Alaska trip as a much better value for the money compared to other destinations (43 percent rated Alaska much better, compared to 17 percent of Southeast visitors).
- Visitors to POW are more likely to be from the Western United States (68%), compared to 28 to 36 percent of visitors to other Southeast communities.
- Prince of Wales visitors reported higher average annual incomes (\$135,000), compared to visitors to other communities and to the overall average for Southeast visitors (\$116,000).
- Southeast visitors spent an average of \$760 per person in Alaska, much lower than the statewide average of \$1,057. However visitors to POW spend on average \$1,724.
- Highest percentage (19%) of any southeast community polled of visitors coming to POW to visit friends/family and the lowest percentage (69%) of visitors coming for vacation/pleasure.
- Visitors to POW were the least likely to do each of the top 10 activities polled, except for fishing, which they were the most likely to participate in as compared to other visitors to Southeast.
- POW visitors are the most likely of all southeast visitors to have been to Alaska before.

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

The most recent NVUM Data for Prince of Wales Ranger District (technically an aggregate of the data from the Craig and Thorne Bay Ranger Districts) is from 2019. The NVUM was designed for National and Forest-level analysis, not Ranger District level. Unfortunately, the NVUM data lumps together visitors to Misty Fjords, Ketchikan and Prince of Wales (shown in the data as Craig and Thorne Bay) 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 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:

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

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

Activity	% Participation	% Main Activity	Avg Hours Doing Main Activity
Hiking/Walking	66.1	52.3	1.8
Nature Center Activities	23.6	19.9	1.2
Viewing Natural Features	19.1	3.8	1.0
Some Other Activity	13.4	4.8	1.5
Viewing Wildlife	12.7	1.5	1.1
Fishing	7.5	6.3	1.4
Relaxing	6.3	0.1	21.0
Hunting	4.2	4.2	2.9
Gathering Forest Products	3.3	1.9	1.9
Picnicking	2.1	1.1	2.6

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 15% of visitors to the Forest.

## **ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS**

### **Issues**

- **Desperate need for maintenance** - Across the island there are multiple USFS recreation assets that appear abandoned - moss covered, broken, dilapidated, overgrown, etc.
- **Staffing reductions** - The USFS's capacity to solve recreation issues, complete routine maintenance, and consider new recreation projects is severely limited by the reduction in Ranger District recreation staff and the Ranger District's inability to retain employees.
- **Small, scattered population** - A collection of small communities make it harder to organize or mobilize enough people to form the trails-related nonprofit or volunteer groups that have helped other locations in the Tongass advocate for, expand, and maintain their trail systems. While there are passionate trails advocates on Prince of Wales, most are also busy small business owners and few reside in the same community, making coordination and cooperation difficult. Ways to maximize local capacity to advocate for and support trail improvements should be explored

### **Opportunities**

- **Create looping trails from existing infrastructure** - In many places, the existing network of USFS roads would require only short connectors to create loops suitable for hiking, biking and in many cases, motorized use. Anecdotal, nation-wide observation reveals that recreational trail users prefer looping trails to "out-and-back" trail experiences. Locally, residents have expressed an interest in opportunities to complete loops - such as linking the alpine zone of the One Duck trail to the USFS road just south of it, connecting the Cutthroat Trail-road with the Balls Lake trail system to the east, and connecting the ends of Half Dog, One Dog and Two Dog Roads outside of Coffman Cove, which access the alpine.
- **Promote cycling for residents and visitors** - Small improvements to the extensive road network of Prince of Wales Island could make the island one of the best biking destinations in Alaska. Small upgrades, connections, wayfinding and signage, and options to get out of the rain at the end of day could significantly increase the usability and popularity of Prince of Wales as a cycling destination. As logging projects conclude and the Tongass transitions away from a timber economy, some roads may be candidates for decommissioning. However, the recreational value of roads should be considered along with impacts to fish, wildlife and ecosystems.

## **COMMUNITY & USER GROUP GOALS**

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

### **Summary Goals**

- **Return Prince of Wales Ranger District recreation staff and capacity to prior levels.** Throughout field time in the communities of Prince of Wales Island in 2021, multiple community members commented on the reduction of Ranger District staff as well as their reduced visibility and connection to the community. Comments included:
  - “Does the Forest Service still have staff on the island?”
  - “We used to know who worked there”
  - “It seems like all the employees are gone”
  - “I’m not sure what they’re doing anymore”
- **Focus on basic maintenance.** During field visits to Prince of Wales Island in 2021, several recreation assets were inaccessible due to a lack of maintenance. Issues encountered included trails closed due to unsafe conditions, campgrounds closed, bathrooms closed due to lack of servicing, illegible signage due to damage, trails difficult to find due to lack of signage.
- **Build community connector trails.** Trails that connect committees and/or begin and end near residential areas have the potential to promote public health and improve safety for pedestrians. Listed below are a few potential options, but further outreach to communities should be conducted to identify the communities and areas with the greatest need for these types of trails. Options include:
  - A pedestrian trail connecting Klawock to Craig along the Craig-Klawock Highway
  - A looping trail through Coffman Cove
  - A pedestrian trail from Coffman Cove to Luck Lake along FS Road 3030
- **Maintain and continue to expand access to the alpine.** The One Duck and Sunnahae trails’ popularity is a testament to resident and visitor desire to access the alpine environment via trails on Prince of Wales Island. The planned extension of the Sunnahae Trail and improvements to the tread and erosion issues on One Duck will help to maintain and improve these valuable and beloved community trails.

## **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 communities of Prince of Wales, 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.

### **Recommendations for Trail Building**

#### ***One Duck Trail and FS Road 2016000 Connector\****

*Description:* The One Duck Trail is one of the few trails on Prince of Wales Island that accesses the alpine and is popular with locals and visitors alike.

*Recommendation for building/connections:* A short connection from the top of the One Duck Trail which traversed the alpine muskeg south to USFS Road 2016000 (locally known as “Spike’s Road”) would create a looping trail, a rarity on Prince of Wales Island. This trail idea has significant community support but additional outreach should be done to be sure that all users of “Spike’s Road” have been consulted.

***\*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.***

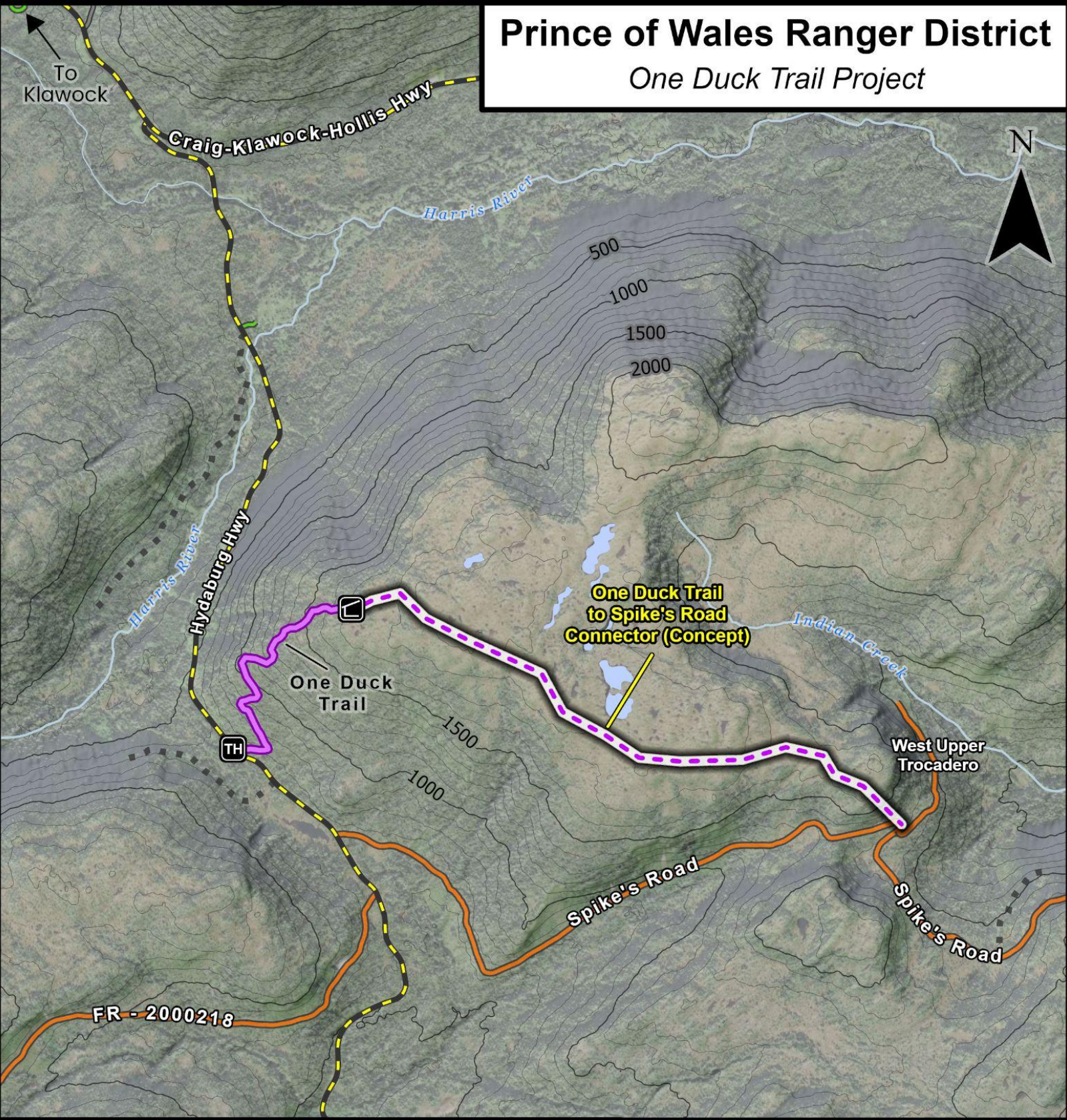


Trail and resource damage along the One Duck Trail; Photos: Haley Johnston



# Prince of Wales Ranger District

## One Duck Trail Project



<p><b>Trails</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trail Concept</li> <li>Existing Trail</li> </ul>	<p><b>Point of Interest</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trailhead (TH)</li> <li>USFS Shelter</li> </ul>	<p><b>Roads</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highway</li> <li>Major Road</li> <li>Open</li> <li>High clearance</li> <li>Closed</li> </ul>
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Scale: 0 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

\*Contours: 100ft - 500ft Bolded



### ***Harris River Trail Connections\****

*Description:* There are Harris River Access Trails that depart from both the Hollis Road and the Hydaburg Highway. The trail that departs from the Hydaburg Highway is an excellent section of trail, although there is no signage to indicate its location when traveling in either direction on the Hydaburg Hwy. This section of trail features several small bridges and an excellent larger bridge built by the Nature Conservancy, before a dead end at the river. The Harris River Access Trail that departs from the Hollis Road begins in good condition and is connected to the excellent, looping Harris River Interpretive Trail. However, eventually this trail becomes narrow and overgrown. From this side, the trail also dead ends at the river.

*Recommendation for building/connections:* A bridge is necessary to connect the two unconnected Harris River Access Trails over the Harris River. Another potential connection would be to extend these trails west to the Harris River Campground and the existing trail system adjacent to the campground. Completing these connections would create a longer trail system, suitable for fishermen, bikers and pedestrians on the south side of Hollis Road. The proximity to the Hollis Ferry Terminal makes this a potentially high value visitor resource. Note: Improvements to this trail system were also identified through the POWLLA process.

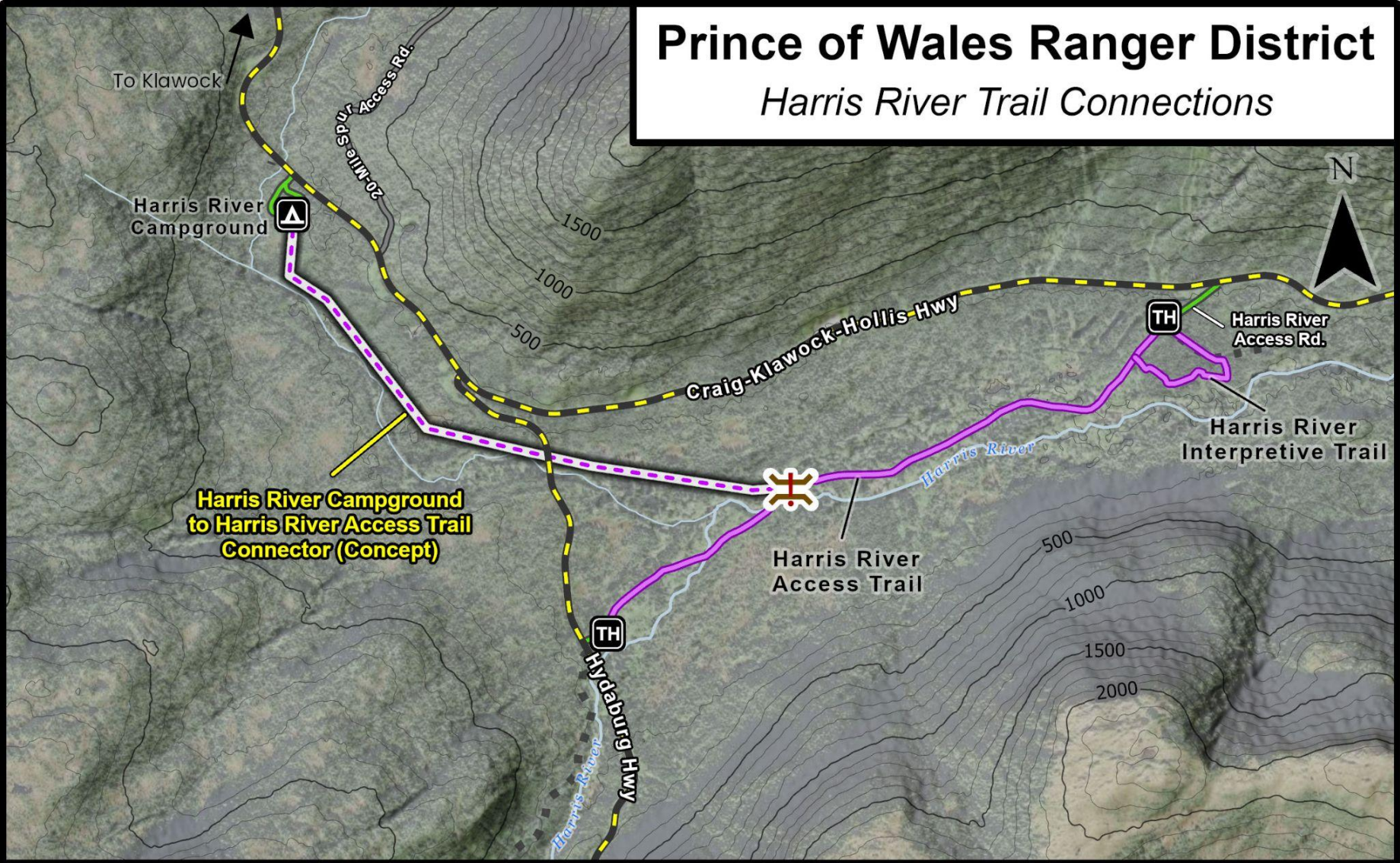
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Harris River; Photo: Haley Johnston

# Prince of Wales Ranger District

## Harris River Trail Connections



- |                |                          |                |
|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Trails</b>  | <b>Point of Interest</b> | <b>Roads</b>   |
| Trail Concept  | Trailhead                | Highway        |
| Existing Trail | USFS Campground          | Major Road     |
|                | Bridge Needed            | Open           |
|                |                          | High clearance |
|                |                          | Closed         |
|                |                          | } USFS Road    |



\*Contours: 100ft - 500ft Bolded



**Cutthroat Trail-road to Balls Lake Connector\***

*Description:* The Cutthroat Trail-road is very popular with hikers, runners, walkers and hunters. Users, especially those that travel solo, noted that they preferred traveling on the road because of the wider sightlines. The nearby Balls Lake Trail and its accompanying outdoor recreation amenities are popular with walkers, families, fisherman and picnickers.

*Recommendation for building/connections:* Connecting these two excellent and popular trails, would allow for longer outdoor adventures for a variety of users. This idea has strong community support and was the subject of many conversations during community visits in 2021. Note: This connection and other trail improvements in the area were identified through the POWLLA process.

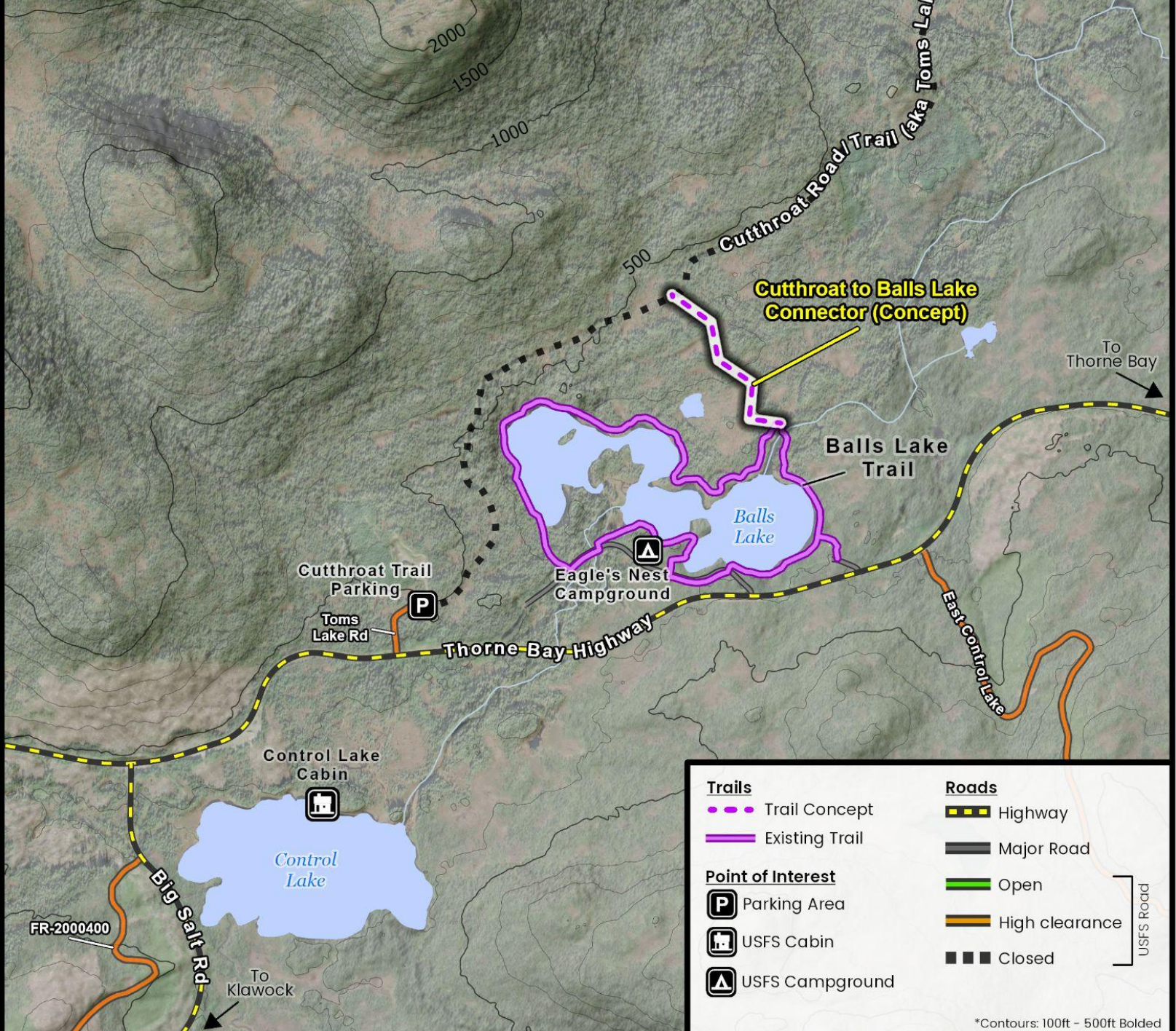
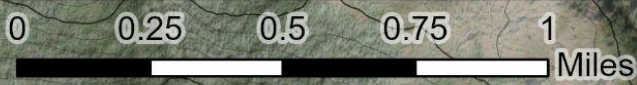
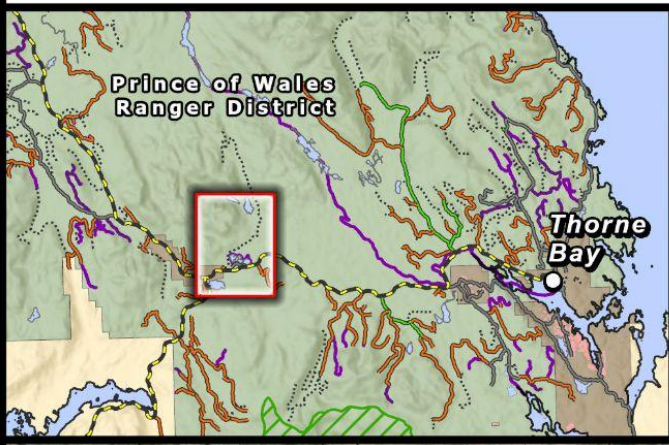
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Left: Cutthroat Trail/road; Right: A new section of boardwalk on the Balls Lake Trail; Photos: Haley Johnston

# Prince of Wales Ranger District

## Cutthroat Trail-Road to Balls Lake Project



Trails		Roads	
	Trail Concept		Highway
	Existing Trail		Major Road
Point of Interest			Open
	Parking Area		High clearance
	USFS Cabin		Closed
	USFS Campground		USFS Road

\*Contours: 100ft - 500ft Bolded

**20-Mile Spur Trail Connection/Extension (FS Road #2026 Loop and/or Black Bear Lake Extension)\***

*Description:* The 20-Mile Spur Trail is poorly marked at the turn off from Hollis Road, excellent in its lower reaches and nearly impassable as it enters the swampy terrain towards its terminus. Improvements to the upper portion of this trail would be necessary if any extensions or connectors were considered. Running parallel, west of the 20-Mile Spur Trail is USFS Road 2026 and a couple miles north of the trail's end sits Black Bear Lake, where a USFS cabin is located (currently only accessed via float plane)

*Recommendation for building/connections:* A short connection could be built between the end of the 20-Mile Spur Trail and FS Road 2026. Doing so would create a roughly six mile looping trail that could easily be accessed from the Harris River Campground, further expanding the options in the area for residents and visitors. Another option is to extend the 20-Mile Spur Trail two miles north to Black Bear Lake to access the Black Bear Lake cabin - which would likely significantly increase the use of this hard-to-access cabin.

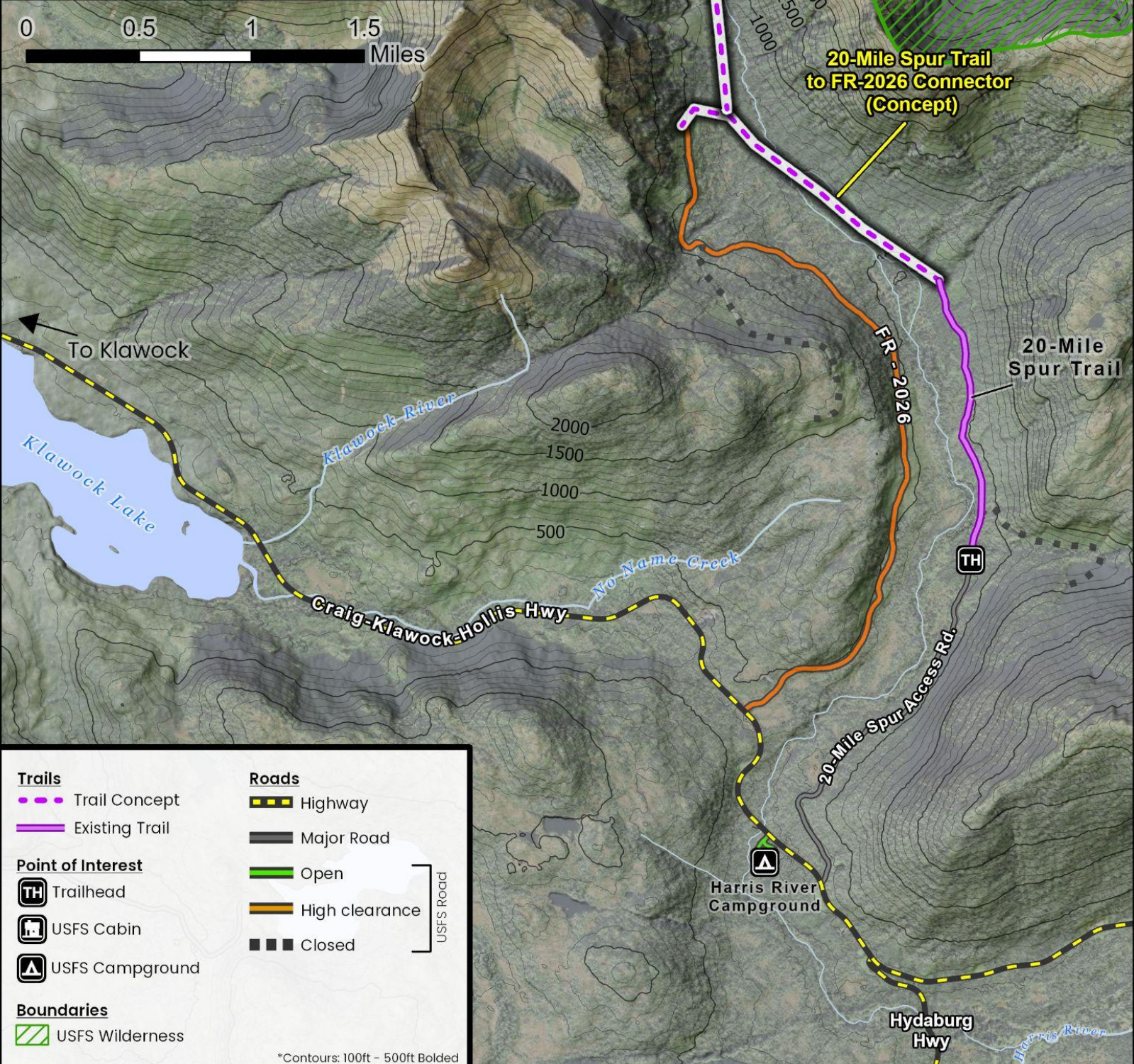
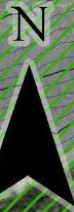
***\*See map on following page. Note, this map is not intended to represent an official alignment. It is instead illustrative of an idea for a possible trail. Further community engagement and design and planning will be necessary to evaluate this trail's feasibility and appropriateness.***



Left: The 20-Mile Spur "trail"; Right: 20-Mile Spur Trail Trailhead sign; Photos: Haley Johnston

# Prince of Wales Ranger District

## 20-Mile Spur Trail Extensions



<b>Trails</b>		<b>Roads</b>	
Trail Concept	Highway	Major Road	} USFS Road
Existing Trail	Open	High clearance	
<b>Point of Interest</b>	Closed		
Trailhead			
USFS Cabin			
USFS Campground			
<b>Boundaries</b>			
USFS Wilderness			

\*Contours: 100ft - 500ft Bolded

## Recommendations for Maintenance

**One Duck Trail** - This trail is utilized by hunters, snowmachiners, and hikers. Hikers especially appreciate this trail for its access to the alpine. While the One Duck trail is in excellent condition near the road, water has damaged and washed away some of the gravel from the upper trail. Above the three-sided shelter, there are multiple braided, muddy trails through the muskeg up to the higher point on the ridge. Great American Outdoors Act funds have been allocated to repair some upper sections of this trail and rebuild the three-sided shelter at the edge of the alpine.

**Beaver Falls Trail** - This is a rare trail on Prince of Wales Island in that it is clearly marked from the highway, has excellent and abundant parking, bathrooms at the trailhead and high-quality boardwalk and tread. Unfortunately a portion of this trail has been destroyed by a Karst sinkhole. There is an adjacent boardwalk that allows users to bypass the damaged, and unsafe, section of trail. The damaged section needs to be repaired, rerouted, or decommissioned.

**Karta River Trail** - This trail needs a complete log-out and serious erosion mitigation. To complete this would require a C-level crosscut team or, perhaps, the USFS could write a chainsaw MRDG for a one-time opportunity to improve this wilderness trail. Improving the Karta River trail would improve visitors and residents' abilities to utilize and connect the three wilderness cabins along this route.

**Honker Divide Canoe Route** - This route has received national attention with an article in the New York Times, but is in no condition to see high numbers of users. This trail needs a total overhaul, including improving trail markings and signage and rebuilding portage trails.

**Hatchery Creek Trail** - This is the nearest trail to the community of Coffman Cove, which has no community adjacent trails, but is home to many enthusiastic walkers and recreators. This community could be a viable source of volunteers to help maintain this trail.

**Balls Lake Trail** - The Balls Lake Trail also boasts impressive parking space and a decent campground. Recent work has improved the quality of the boardwalk around the lake; however, additional traction netting is needed on old and new sections of boardwalk.

**20-Mile Spur Trail** - This trail begins two miles up FS Road #2025 and could be accessed on foot from the Harris River Campground, just across the Highway from FS Road #2025. The first mile of the 20-Mile Spur Trail is excellent. The next mile has multiple flooding issues and the next half mile is in a washed out creek bed with old and new flagging on either side of the creek. Eventually the trail just peters out. There is an additional spur off of the 20-Mile Spur Trail that travels up a creek towards Harris Peak. This trail is significantly overgrown but has seen some recent brushing (by non FS individuals) that appears to have been done over the snow - there are 6-12" stumps and stems along the trail that have been cut. Eventually, the brush becomes so dense it is impassable. The upper 1.5 miles of 20-Mile Spur Trail need maintenance, marking and water issue remediation. If the additional spur trail is to remain in inventory and on the map, this too needs significant brushing.



## **Recommendations for Decommissioning**

**Trocadero Trail** - This trail is used by bear and duck hunters with limited hiker or other recreational use due to its deteriorated condition. This trail was previously utilized by school groups for educational purposes but reportedly has not been used for this purpose in recent years. While there is a large pull-off on the Hydaburg Highway where this trail begins, there is no signage along the road in either direction indicating the location of the trail, nor is there any signage at the start of trail.

The Trocadero Trail starts off in excellent condition through a tunnel of Alder. There is a decent boardwalk after the left hand turn in the trail, although there is no signage indicating that a trail user should turn left. Once the trail reaches the river, there is no good crossing (very deep for the average hiker). There is a trail marker on the other side of the river, but the trail across the river is generally flooded, wet and muddy - with one decent section along an old road bed - from the river all the way to the estuary.

*Unless* a bridge is installed at the deep crossing and serious maintenance is completed (especially between the river and the estuary) then this trail should be a candidate for decommissioning.

**Honker Divide Canoe Route** - Unless the USFS is willing to spend a significant amount of staff time and money on this trail, it should be decommissioned. Currently there are miles of poorly maintained or nearly impassable portage trails. The cabin in the middle of the route has seen little maintenance or use, due to the difficulty in accessing it. While this could be a spectacular, visitor-attracting, long trail on Prince of Wales Island, it appears that the USFS has not recently had the capacity to maintain it and therefore it is a candidate for decommissioning.

**Deweyville Trail** - Some community members thought that this trail had already been decommissioned as it has fallen into disrepair.

**Soda Lakes Trail** - It is no longer possible to find or access this trail. If it has not officially been designated as a decommissioned trail, now would be the time to do so.

**Twenty-Mile Spur Trail** - If, extending this trail to either FS Road #2026 or Black Bear Lake is not possible, then the trail should be decommissioned after the first mile, as it becomes essentially impassable once it enters the swamp.

**Big Lake Fish Pass Trail** - This short, slippery, boardwalk trail is accessed by driving one mile up a slightly rough road. This trail is of little recreation value to either residents or visitors and is a candidate for decommissioning.

**Karta River Trail** - Maintenance of this trail is difficult, time consuming and expensive due to its location in the Karta River Wilderness. User reports indicate severe resource degradation and difficult travel conditions. Unless the Ranger District can invest in maintaining this trail soon, it should become a candidate for decommissioning.

## **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 Prince of Wales Ranger District:

### **Improve Signage Across the Island**

Universally across Prince of Wales Island, signage of trails and other outdoor recreation assets is lacking. In some cases signage only exists when approaching a trail or trailhead from one direction, in others no signage exists at all. Trails with confusion offshoots are unmarked and interpretive signage is sparse. Residents, and especially visitors, would benefit from increased signage. This should be a high priority for the Ranger District to make outdoor recreation more accessible to their communities and Prince of Wales Island a more enjoyable and compelling visitor destination.

A truncated list of signage needs (as of summer 2021) is below:

- a. Trocadero - There is no signage whatsoever at the parking lot and trailhead for this trail. There is also no signage along the trail, despite the fact that there are several offshoots and spurs along this trail.
- b. 20-Mile Spur Trail - There is no signage regarding this trail when approaching from the east. When coming from the west,, the sign indicating the road to access the trail is obscured.
- c. Sunnahae Trail - This trail needs a hiker/trail sign along the highway from both sides.
- d. Balls Lake Trail - There is little to no signage indicating that there is a pleasant hiking trail which circumnavigates the lake. Signage is needed both from the highway and in the campground.
- e. Harris River Access Trail (from Hydaburg Highway) - No signage indicates the parking area or trail when approaching from either direction on the Hydaburg Highway.



Fairly typical "signage" on Prince of Wales; Photo: Haley Johnston

### **Outsource maintenance to outfitter/guides**

There are some examples on Prince of Wales and across the Tongass of Ranger Districts offsetting outfitter/guide use fees in exchange for maintenance of trails, boat launches and cabins. This policy is a great temporary solution to the lack of recreation staff on Prince of Wales Island. Even once fully staffed, transportation costs to access various cabins and trails across the Ranger District are high. There is an undeniable efficiency to having outfitter/guides - who are already using and accessing areas - complete some maintenance projects. Candidates for trails that could be maintained by outfitter/guides include the Harris River Access Trail and the Sarkar Canoe Route, among others.

### **Investigate using mechanized equipment (i.e. chainsaws) in Wilderness areas**

This Strategy seeks not to comment on land protection status and the regulations that govern these areas. Trail maintenance in Wilderness areas can be more expensive, labor intensive and time consuming due to the prohibition on the use of chainsaws to clear downed and/or dangerous trees. There are past examples of Ranger Districts, with the appropriate plans and authorizations in place, using chainsaws to expedite maintenance of trails in Wilderness areas and return these trails to functional and safe standards. Within the Prince of Wales Ranger District this approach should be considered in the Karta River Wilderness Area to prevent the loss of the Karta River Trail.

### **Deepen partnership with the Prince of Wales 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.

The excellent Alaska 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/)