

# SOUTHEAST ALASKA CLUSTER INITIATIVE

Juneau Economic Development Council  
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RE: Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act

Dear Senator:

As you are aware, The Juneau Economic Development Council Cluster Initiative, funded through a contract with the U.S. Forest Service, has been meeting regularly over the past two years to discuss and implement programs directly related to economic vitality in Southeast Alaska. The Visitor Products Cluster has flagged the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (specifically, the expiration of this Act in 2014) as an especially important issue to follow.

We understand that the expiration of the Act, and the subsequent loss of user generated fees, will be significantly detrimental to Tongass National Forest programs that visitors to Southeast Alaska have come to depend on. These include the issuance of special use permits, services such as extended hours at Visitor Centers, maintenance of trails used by the public and Outfitter Guides, brochures, current interpretive displays, restroom facility maintenance and upgrades, and more. User fees also help fund planning for commercial Outfitter/Guide activities, such as the Shoreline II analysis, and the long overdue update of the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area Management Plan.

The Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area will be especially impacted by the loss of revenue collected through user fees. Staffing would likely be reduced to the point that only the most basic services needed to protect essential infrastructure and resources would be provided. Development necessary to meet present and future demands, including more restrooms, covered viewing areas, platforms, additional trails, and parking would not likely occur for many years.

The funding provided by Commercial Users of the Tongass National Forest through the renewal of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act will allow the continuation of programs and projects necessary to serve the visiting public. Employment opportunities will be sustained, both through the services of Outfitter Guides, and through the continued activity of construction and maintenance crews. Simply put, the renewal of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act will allow the retention of fees paid by visitors to the Tongass National Forest. Fees will be put to work in places where they are generated; an issue especially important to the vitality of Southeast Alaska.

Thank you for your continued attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Kirby Day, Visitor Products Cluster Working Group Chair

Bob James, Tongass Fee Initiative Champion

Members of the Southeast Cluster Initiative Visitor Products Cluster