Summer 2022

The Boreal Forest Newsletter

This printing was paid for by the Renewable Resources Extension Act (RREA).

From the editor:

Summer is moving along and we can certainly see its progression with ripening berries, garden harvests, growing fireweed, damage to tree leaves and generally declining daylight hours.

In this edition we look at Forest Landowners: The State of Alaska; the Forest Stewardship Program; a little about the NRCS Conservation Plan Program; and reducing forest fuels to protect forests, homes and property from rapidly burning wildfires.

Keep us posted on what you would like to read or learn about regarding Alaska forestry.

We have several years of Boreal Forest Newsletter back editions on the RREA webpage: https://www.uaf.edu/ces/naturalresources/rrea/

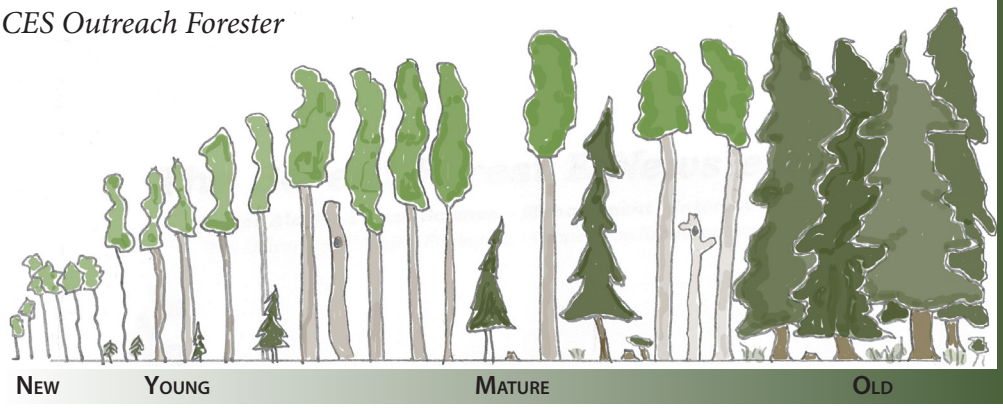
Access our RREA Forestry Blog pages at: https://uafrreaforestry.wordpress.com/

Have a great rest of your summer and I hope to see you in the woods!

Contact me personally at my email: ggholt@alaska.edu or call/text me at: 907-978-5001.

Glen Holt
CES Outreach Forester

What's Inside



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Forest ownership: state-owned forest land

Photos and text by Glen Holt
CES Outreach Forester

Alaska has approximately 126 million acres of forest land, which is about 35% of the state's total area. Eleven million acres of that are coastal forest and 115 million acres include Interior boreal forest.

The state of Alaska manages forest resources on state land, which includes approximately 20 million acres of state forest land through its Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry. State forest lands are managed for multiple uses and a sustained yield of renewable forest resources.

Thousands of acres of state-owned forest not in designated state forests are also managed sustainably by law through the Alaska Division of Forestry.

State forests include the Tanana Valley, Haines and Southeast state forests. Only 2% of the forest land managed by the state of Alaska are in designated "state forests."

The Alaska Division of Forestry makes available, offers and conducts personal-use timber for firewood, saw logs and cabin logs and also a commercial timber sale program. The emphasis on state commercial timber sale offerings is "in-state" timber for local value-added processing to create employment, products and economic diversity in Alaska for Alaskans.

Tanana Valley State Forest

With public input, the state periodically revises forest management plans for each state forest. The Tanana Valley State Forest (TVSF) Management Plan is being revised. For more information, go to the Forest Management Plan Revision webpage: *http://forestry.alaska.gov/TVSFrevision*

The TVSF is 1.81 million acres and lies almost entirely within the Tanana River basin in Alaska's east central Interior. It extends 265 miles west from near the Canadian border to Manley Hot Springs, and varies in elevation and topography from 275 feet along the Tanana River to more than 5,000 feet above sea level in the Alaska Range.

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The TVSF has productive forest land seasonally accessible by winter ice roads and winter-only logging. All-season access and logging are available in certain locations.

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Almost 90 percent of the TVSF land (1.59 million acres) has Alaska birch, quaking aspen, balsam poplar, black spruce, white spruce and tamarack. About half the Tanana River basin's productive commercial forest land (1.1 million acres) is located within the state forest. Nearly 85 percent of the forest is located within 20 miles of a state highway.

State of Alaska commercial timber sales are managed by local Alaska forestry area offices and provide materials Alaskans need, along with economic diversity.

The TVSF is also open to mining, gravel extraction, oil and gas leasing and a small amount of grazing — all under appropriate permits. Timber production is the major commercial activity in the TVSF. The Bonanza Creek Experimental Forest, located near Fairbanks, is a 12,400-acre parcel within the TVSF dedicated to ongoing forestry research.

The TVSF is rich in a variety of recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, trapping, camping, rafting, canoeing, boating, hiking, dog mushing, skijoring, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, snowmachining, gold panning, berry picking, mushrooming, and world-class views of the aurora borealis.

Here are some highlights on the TVSF webpage.

- *Map of the Tanana Valley State Forest (PDF)*
- *Tanana Valley State Forest Inventory (PDF)*
- *Tanana Valley State Forest Citizens' Advisory Committee*
- *Tanana Valley State Forest Roads Information and Pictures (PDF)*

Berry picking is a popular personal use activity on forest lands managed by the Alaska Division of Forestry.

Haines State Forest

The Haines State Forest (HSF) was established in 1982 and contains 286,000 acres within its boundary including the Chilkoot, Chilkat, and Ferebee river watersheds. Rugged topography here ranges from sea level to over 7,000 feet, with a climate that transitions from wet coastal rainforest to dry, cold, Interior Alaska forest.

Alaska birch is a minor tree species in the HSF, but years ago birch sap was commercially made into a variety of birch syrup products in Haines.

Timber species in the HSF includes western hemlock, Sitka spruce and black cottonwood. Willow species are an important component of wildlife habitat.

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Lodgepole pine and Alaska birch occur as minor species. Approximately 42,000 acres of the managed state forest lands here are dedicated to timber harvest with a current annual allowable harvest of 5.88 million board feet per year.

New seedlings regenerate naturally in the HSF, however, all the large commercial timber sales there have been replanted with appropriate seed source seedlings since the 1970s, to ensure proper and timely forest regeneration.

Mining occurs in many areas and has since the turn of the century. Logging roads, rivers and hiking trails provide access to remote areas and abundant recreational opportunities and several commercial operators provide seasonal tours here.

Alaska Division of Forestry links for the Haines State Forest.

- *Map of the Haines State Forest (PDF)*
- *Haines State Forest Inventory (PDF)*

Southeast State Forest

Southeast State Forest (SESF) was designated by the Alaska Legislature starting in 2010, and expanded the following year. It includes about 46,592 acres in central and southern southeast Alaska. Many SESF management units are on Prince of Wales Island. Others are located on Dall, Gravina, Heceta, Kosciusko, Kuiu, Mitkof, Revillagigedo, Suemez, Tuxekan, and Wrangell islands.

Forestry activities were allowed prior to this legislation but the new SESF designation enables the Division of Forestry (DOF) to actively manage resources for a long-term supply of timber to local processors.

State Forestry is investing in pre-commercial thinning on previously harvested lands. This will reduce the time required for timber stands to reach commercial maturity, improve understory browse for deer, and provide short-term employment opportunities.

State forest designation helps the state justify making

SESF has the largest trees and most productive forest lands within state ownership.

long-term investments in forest management activities, such as pre-commercial thinning, tree planting, road access construction and log landing/tide-water transfer sites as a realistic management investment option.

- *Southern Southeast Area Operational Forest Inventory And Annual Allowable Cut Analysis For State Forest And General Use Lands (PDF)*

From the Alaska State Forestry's website, note the following SESF links and maps:

Maps of Southeast State Forest

- *Vicinity Map of Southeast State Forest (PDF)*
- *Petersburg Management Area + Unit Maps (PDF)*

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The proposed Susitna State Forest allows long-term commercial timber sale planning when feasible as part of sustainable forest management.

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- *Wrangell Management Area + Unit Maps (PDF)*
- *Ketchikan Management Area + Unit Maps (PDF)*
- *Prince of Wales and Outer Islands Management Area + Unit Maps (PDF)*

Alaska, through its Timber Task Force, envisions additional state forest land being added to the state forest system, including more than a million acres of forest-classified lands in the TVSF and transferring 2 million acres of national forest lands from the Tongass National Forest to the Southeast State Forest.

In addition, they have proposed the following new state forests:

- Copper River State Forest - 435,179 acres
- Icy Bay State Forest - 34,686 acres
- Kenai State Forest - 154,726 acres
- Susitna State Forest - 763,200 acres

The Timber Task Force's final report envisions a more robust state forest system encompassing 6,646,000 acres in six state forests, within the multiple-use sustained yield model that includes commercial timber harvests and access that creates economic development, jobs and economic diversity for Alaska families.

Forestry research links

Glen Holt
CES Outreach Forester

Alaska doesn't have a ton of information coming out about forestry. Interestingly however, there is quite a bit of forest ecology research going on in Alaska. We will post and reference it as we find it and appreciate those that forward relevant forestry research and information to us so we may share with all. Many governmental agencies, local agencies, industry, Native corporations and private forest landowners are interested in how they might manage the forest they have or utilize it, in the many diverse locations throughout our state.

Here is a good link to relevant forestry and forest research in Alaska and the Pacific Northwest: Forest Service Research News via the Pacific Northwest Research Station: *https://www.fs.usda.gov/pnw/*

A changing climate, larger and more frequent catastrophic wildfires, changing land-use management policies, insects and diseases, etc., are all threats to the vitality of old-growth forests. Scientists and partners through the USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station, conduct long-term studies on how to conserve, restore and manage vulnerable forests.

UAF Extension Forestry Professor Emeritus Tony Gasbarro stands in an old-growth white spruce forest in the Bonanza Creek Experimental Forest.

Previous research has examined the effects of active forest management and natural disturbances over time and the fundamental structure of those forest systems being studied.

Alaska has several experimental forests, and one is through the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) called the Bonanza Creek Experimental Forest (BCEF). It is also called the Bonanza Creek LTR. Its research and projects may be accessed through the following link: *https://www.lter.uaf.edu/*

The Alaska Community Forestry Council

Adapted from the Alaska Community Forestry Fact Sheet

The Alaska Community Forestry Council is a nonprofit organization promoting and supporting the preservation, planting, and care of Alaska community forests and trees. Its purposes are to:

• Encourage public education and involvement in community forestry that increases public knowledge and appreciation of the benefits of community trees and their management;

• Encourage and support community interaction that is sensitive and responsive to the cultural, economic and geographic diversity in Alaska;

• Promote and build effective partnerships between agencies, industry, businesses, local governments, schools and volunteer groups;

• Provide a public forum for sharing useful information about community forestry policies and practices;

• Advocate for and provide leadership on appropriate community forestry policies, programs, and practices in Alaska;

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The Alaska Community Forestry Council facilitates conferences and workshops that help communities care for and improve their community forest landscape.

Forestry Council, continued from page 6

• Provide public recognition and support for urban and community forestry achievements in Alaska.

The council is advisory to the state forester for the Alaska Community Forestry Program. Members give advice on appropriate ways to define, develop, direct, and deliver the program to Alaska communities and provides advice on program priorities and feedback on its effectiveness. It reviews the criteria and guidelines for community forestry grants administered by the Division of Forestry, and recommends projects for funding.

The council strives to represent the professional, geographic, cultural, ethnic, economic and community diversity of Alaska by including members from around the state so as to make the council a valuable source of information.

Urban and community forests are composed of the trees, vegetation and other natural elements of a forest, plus the roads, buildings, utilities and other developments found where people live. Healthy, well-maintained trees and forests improve the quality of life in communities. Coordinating management of the natural and built environment is necessary to maximize the benefits of each and to allow them to complement each other and public opinion.

The council sponsors conferences and workshops on community forestry, tree planting and tree care. Community Forestry Council members aid grant recipients, local governments, schools, and community groups

Community Forest Council members help orchestrate tree planting activities around the state.

and are asked to make the necessary time commitment to prepare for and attend all meetings; handle the normal business responsibilities of a nonprofit corporation; serve on a working committee; participate in council discussions; and work toward consensus on issues, programs and projects.

Council members are responsible for raising funds to support council activities and urban and community forestry efforts in the state. Members participate in an orientation before the first meeting and are provided many excellent educational experiences and opportunities for hands-on training.

Council membership is voluntary; however, the Alaska Community Forestry Program covers the costs of teleconferences and travel to regular meetings.

The council meets all day on the second Friday of March, May, August and November, usually in Anchorage. Members of the public are encouraged to attend meetings and serve on committees to help achieve council goals.

The Alaska Community Forestry Program encourages comprehensive community forest resource management. Program staff provide information on how to maintain healthy, attractive, productive and safe community trees and forests. Two state Forestry staff members and the council work together to foster partnerships between government agencies, businesses, and community volunteers that promote and support urban forestry.

Wildfire defensible space is part of a working Community Forest Plan

State Forest Stewardship and NRCS forestry assistance

Glen Holt
CES Outreach Forester

The Alaska Division of Forestry has stewardship foresters who answer questions and offer free forestry advice about private woodland management and improvement to help meet landowner objectives. These foresters can help you write and implement a Forest Stewardship Plan or Wildfire Defensible Space "Fire Wise" plan. Contact the Alaska DNR Forest Stewardship Program at this link: *http://forestry.alaska.gov/stewardship/*.

The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) assists private landowners with Conservation Plans and programs. They assist agricultural, forestry, wildlife and conservation planning and assistance. Contact the NRCS at this link: *https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/ak/home/* , which will link you to technical and financial assistance.

A Forest Stewardship Plans often begin with a site visit to discuss landowner objectives.

Conservation plans are written through local NRCS field offices.

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This forestland owner identified objectives through a Forest Stewardship Plan and planted seedlings to improve his forest ownership.

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The Juneau office may be reached at 907-586-7220. Samia Savell is the office supervisor and her extension is 100.

The NRCS forester in Alaska is Chris Tcimpidis. Contact Chris at 907-982-5017.

Both the state Forestry and NRCS programs assist forest landowners to manage their woodlands by giving them appropriate advice, education, cost-share, and help with writing and implementing Forest Stewardship or Conservation Plans.

An NRCS district conservationist writes Conservation Plans to assist forest landowners with forestry projects and planning.

The purpose of the Forest Stewardship Program is to encourage long-term stewardship of non-industrial private forest lands by assisting those landowners to more actively manage their forests and related resources. Benefits occur for the landowner, the surrounding area and the nation as a whole through healthy watersheds, healthier, less fire-prone forests, improved wildlife habitat and other attributes.

Stewardship Plans help woodland owners actively manage their forests to keep them healthy for present and future generations. Plans are tailor-made to landowner objectives utilizing appropriate and successful forestry practices.

Many forest landowners have benefited from the Forest Stewardship Program since its inception in 1992. Stewardship Plans have helped woodland owners improve forest health, woodland productivity, wildlife habitat, increased natural aesthetics, improved resilience from insects and wildfire, created and improved trails for private internal access, enhanced environmental benefits like water quality, carbon sequestration by trees planted, timber stand improvement and appropriately harvesting timber for long-term benefits, including revenue and aesthetic forest improvement.

Forest management is active and accomplished to improve your forest land, keep it healthy, beautiful, and productive. It takes time, often years, but plans also consider changing conditions and changing goals. Plans are a working document.

Forest Stewardship and Conservation Plans, while flexible, are useful in helping the landowner identify, organize and implement their personal goals and objectives through active forest management.

Alaska's Forest Stewardship program

Trevor DoBell-Carlsson: Forest Stewardship Program Manager—Alaska Division of Forestry & Fire Protection

Stewardship: *the conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially, the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care (Merriam-Webster).*

If you own forested property, you likely want it to be healthy, productive, sustainably managed, and fully able to provide all the ecosystem services that forests give us — fresh water, clean air, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, recreation, and forest products, to name a few. Stewardship of the land means caring for what has been entrusted to you — the Alaska forest and all the visual beauty and wildlife habitat values that go along with it.

Forest Stewardship Plans outline landowner objectives. A plan helps them to determine ways and means to improve their forest.

We can use our privately owned forests for responsible and sustainable timber harvesting (such as a firewood or cabin log harvest), creating or enhancing wildlife habitat, increasing wildfire resiliency, and ensuring that future generations have the same ability to enjoy these benefits.

While forests can naturally restore and regenerate themselves following disturbances such as wildfire or timber harvesting, there are actions that landowners can take to help keep forested land intact, healthy, and productive while meeting their personal goals.

A thinned forest reduces forest fuels and helps residual trees improve growth rate and health.

In boreal forest ecosystems, we typically recommend thinning and pruning spruce trees near homes to reduce volatile forest fuels around them and to encourage the growth of hardwood trees (which are typically more fire resistant) such as birch, willow, aspen, alder and cottonwood. Landowners can transplant trees and shrubs or plant purchased seedlings in areas where the overstory has been removed after creating wildfire defensible space.

Animals often benefit from having different types of habitat in a given area—mosaics of forest types and tree ages improve species diversity. This leads to using knowledge of basic forest management to make slight changes to the forest to benefit the landowner as well as wildlife or other ecosystem values.

For wildfire protection; creating or managing for a mosaic variety of forest types and different forest age-classes can be beneficial by creating and having non-continuous forest fuels, especially around homes, buildings and access to them.

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Determining the age and growth rate of trees in the forest helps determine feasible management strategies.

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Silviculture *is the art and science of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, health, and quality of forests and woodlands to meet the diverse needs and values of landowners and society on a sustainable basis (USDA Forest Service 2004).*

Understanding your forest is the first step that leads to knowing how to tend and keep it resilient from wildfires and pests, along with establishing trees for future generations to enjoy.

A goal to reach future conditions through tending your forest with silvicultural prescriptions is best achieved by having a plan in place, such as a Forest Stewardship Plan. This can be written by a professional forester from the Alaska Division of Forestry and Fire Protection's Forest Stewardship Program, or you can start your own plan by downloading the Stewardship Self Study Guide available at: *http://forestry.alaska.gov/stewardship/index*.

Identifying what type of forest you have leads to knowing more about how your actions affect how the forest will look decades from now. Understanding forest diversity, age, composition, and soil type will give a better understanding of what tree species can grow in certain areas; having a better understanding of these factors will lead to healthier forests in the future. Learning how your actions can impact the health, productivity, and composition of your forest can ensure your forest continues to provide all the ecosystem services forests give us.

A Forest Stewardship Plan helps provide forest landowners with knowledge and tools to manage their forests and reduce wildfire danger.

Forest thinning, controlled burning and water conservation in California

From the National Science Foundation
News Release 18-029

We in Alaska have few problems with available supplies of water. In other North America locations, drought is increasingly becoming a serious issue, especially in areas with unmanaged forests. This article has been adapted from one written by the National Science Foundation.

Tremendous amounts of water are given off through the pores in tree leaves and needles through a process called evapotranspiration.

New research in California's Sierra Nevada region indicates that billions of gallons of water can be saved by thinning forests through active forest management. Scientists with the National Science Foundation's Southern Sierra Critical Zone Observatory (CZO) are finding that an overabundance of trees growing in Sierra Nevada forests are responsible for depleting their local water supply.

Trees use lots of water to grow and stay healthy. Their root systems utilize reserves of ground water and then that water is given off quickly through the tree's leaves and needles back to the atmosphere during a process known as "photosynthesis."

During photosynthesis, growing leaves and green stems release this freshly drawn ground water and leave behind the nutrients and minerals needed for tree growth. This expelling of water out through pores in the leaves and needles is called "evapotranspiration."

Research in California found that excessive evapotranspiration in the Southern Sierra Nevada may be negatively impacting water supplies during prolonged periods of warm dry weather and drought.

New research shows that water loss from evapotranspiration has decreased significantly over the past three decades due in large part to forest thinning projects, designed to mitigate the severity of wildfires there. Forest managers and research projects reduced the number of trees per acre and the fuel loads in certain locations and research findings indicate important implications for forest and ground water reserves, conservation and management.

A century of nearly total forest fire suppression allowed Sierra Nevada forests to grow uncommonly dense. In addition to forest thinning projects, in recent decades, new policies are allowing nature to take its course by allowing smaller, more frequent wildfires to help thin overgrown forests.

Fire in the Sierra Nevada region is part of a healthy forest ecosystem. Thinning projects carefully cut out trees, reduce the fuel load, allow trees that remain more growing space, and produce healthier, faster growing trees left in the stand. Where carefully managed, thinning and/or prescribed fire can reduce water stress in forests and ease water shortages during drought. Reducing the amount of water used by trees means that more rainfall flows into rivers and is allowed to accumulate as groundwater.

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Wildfire is much more difficult to catch and control in an unmanaged forest.

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Forest thinning reduces fuel load and conserves ground water in a managed forest.

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The U.S. Forest Service says that 6 to 8 million of the 21 million acres it manages in California need immediate restoration. For California alone, restoration costs are estimated at $5 billion to $10 billion. But, according to the study, restoration might help pay for itself by alleviating more intensive suppression costs and hugely expensive insurance losses due to property loss by uncontrollable wildfires.

Offsetting the cost of wildfire reduction projects

Summit County, Park City, Utah

Summit County, Utah, estimates it could take $200 million to treat local forests with projects that reduce catastrophic wildfire risk. One idea takes turning dead trees into jet fuel. Summit County received a grant to study the idea and $4.6 million in grants were awarded to Summit County to reduce forest fuels. Of that, $60,000 was earmarked as a "Green Energy Biomass Facility Analysis."

Overstocked trees in an unmanaged forest seldom make lumber due to their small size.

One version of the facility analysis makes jet fuel from dead, thinned, and pruned trees to reduce fuel loads and "ladder fuels." This is the sort of within-forest wood that contributes to the rapid and devastating spread of wildfires and that the county hopes to remove from its forests as part of the grant projects.

The biomass facility could turn that wood into marketable products including maybe jet fuel, which would provide a financial incentive and a feasible way of accomplishing costly forest fuels reduction projects. Grant-funded fuels reduction projects are essential, but having a viable use for that wood is doubly desirable to put an economic basis behind forest health initiatives. Just utilizing grants to reduce forest fuels won't be nearly as effective as also having a viable economic reason to remove, thin out or prune wildfire-prone material, which would get the job done in a much more timely manner.

Forest fuels treatments include thinning, removing dead trees, creating fuel breaks, pruning trees left after thinning to remove "ladder fuels" and clearing excessive underbrush that can spur a ground fire to jump into the treetops and cause a highly destructive, difficult to control, "crown-fire."

Summit County has identified 73,000 acres of fuels treatment to protect the headwaters and drinking water resources of the Weber River. At $2,500 per acre, (a low estimate) it would cost more than $182 million to treat that area. It is hoped a biomass facility would incentivize removal of forest fuel overload within a profitable venture for companies to do so.

The $60,000 facility analysis grant will pay a contractor to study proposed county forest fuels to determine whether private industry could use it profitably to make jet fuel and other biomass products.

U.S. Forest Service wood and biomass utilization coordinator, Julie Kies, said there is no predetermined end product at this time for those removed fuels. She said the study might find materials suitable for wood pellets, biochar for agriculture, lumber and fuel. Kies went on to say the study would be one of the first of its kind on the economic feasibility issue in Utah, and the envisioned facility would be the first in the state.

Utilizing wood thinned during fuels reduction programs might include manufacturing wood pellets for home heating fuel.

The study will consider the accessibility of potential fuels, if they're on steep hillsides and if road networks

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exist to access the wood and move it to fuel processing plants. Other considerations in the analysis would look at whether there's a local workforce to staff a biomass facility.

County Councilor Glenn Wright said they might be well positioned for this kind of facility and went on to say, "Economically, it's the only way we're going to solve our forest health issues," he said. "I think there's significant opportunities for us if it becomes economically viable. Delta Airlines has a goal to be 100% bio-jet fuel in the next 20 years. With our proximity to Salt Lake airport, this might be a viable project. But we shall see."

Summit County continues to pursue traditional forest health grant initiatives and projects to remove volatile fire-prone fuels. Officials claim $6.2 million in grants have been raised over the last year, with the expectation that more will come in shortly.

A market for wood cut to reduce hazardous forest fuels is much more efficient than relying solely on grant funding to afford projects.

Alaska region's annual Southeast Alaska sawmill survey expands its focus

2022 Sawmill Survey Team
USDA Forest Service

New communities visited. New data gathered. New emphasis on young growth. These were three of the new elements added to the Alaska Region's annual survey of southeast Alaska sawmills.

Since 2000, Forest Service staff have compiled the Sawmill Capacity and Production Report, which will soon be available online, that summarizes key survey findings, provides a brief supplemental discussion, and presents a longitudinal perspective of regional sawmill performance over time.

The mill survey team, consisting of Alaska region employees Jean Daniels and Dan O'Leary alongside Priscilla Morris from state and private forestry, traveled for the first time to mills in the communities of Kake, Tenakee Springs, Wrangell, Coffman Cove and Craig, in addition to the usual visits to mills in Hoonah, Petersburg, Klawock and Thorne Bay.
The purpose of the onsite visits was to examine equipment and gather information about current sawmill operations including total estimated production capacity, actual production, employment, wood supply source, types of forest products, and domestic and international market destinations.

During the yearly visits, staff can see sawmill operations firsthand, while also listening to the concerns and challenges of the operators. "This year saw a lot of the mills actively making improvements to equipment and operations," Jean Daniels, regional economist. "I look forward to revisiting next year to see how recent improvements are making a difference, in terms of forest product output, and stimulating economic activity in our rural Southeast communities."

Twenty-one years of mill surveys have documented

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Sawmill survey, continued from page 15

significant changes within the industry. Over time, the existing sample size shrank from 22 sawmills in operation in years past, to five in 2019 due to mill closures. The survey was not conducted in 2020 owing to staffing issues and travel restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, the sawmill survey pool was expanded for the first time to better represent the current industry, which is composed of one large and several small operations scattered across the region. Eight mills were added to the survey pool after a rigorous selection process.

Expanding the survey pool will help staff gain a better perspective of the business landscape and raw material needs of the current industry, as well as economic impacts such as employment in rural communities. "We chose mills with a history of purchasing timber from the Tongass that have a valid Alaska business license to manufacture wood products and were recommended by forest management staff. It was a team effort," Daniels said.

In addition, the survey instrument itself was expanded to collect more data relevant to current planning efforts. These efforts are guided by the 2016 Forest Plan goal to transition away from old growth to second-growth timber harvest. There is considerable interest in quantifying the extent that second growth timber is being used by sawmills in the region. This year, mill operators were asked to estimate how much second-growth timber they milled. Survey data collected will help staff gauge industry demand for second-growth timber, which is critical for the transition to succeed.

In another new question, respondents were asked what size of timber sale, in terms of volume, would be ideal to meet the raw material needs of their mill. This information helps tailor the forest's timber sale program to supply timber for all sizes of operators across the region.

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