

## **RECORDS OF THE NATIONAL FOREST SERVICE**

### **RECORD GROUP 95**

The Native cultures of Southeastern and Interior Alaska made extensive use of forest products, the former in particular developing a highly sophisticated society skilled in woodcraft. The Russians raised exploitation of Alaska's timber to industrial levels, including significant shipbuilding. The Russians also experimented with expanding timber resources and, in 1805, started a plantation of spruce trees at Unalaska. While some of these trees still survive, the attempt at forestation on the Aleutians was not a success.

However, between the purchase of Alaska in 1867 and the gold rushes at the turn of the century, the United States government, characteristically, did nothing about forestry in spite of the obvious value of the timber. Individual settlers started a number of logging operations and sawmills which rapidly expanded with the gold rushes and associated railroading. There was no government involvement, however, until Congress passed the General Revision Act of March 3, 1891, whose Section 24 became known as the Forest Reserve Act. The Act contained several sections that concerned Alaska even more directly than did "24". Section 14 permitted the Commission of Fish and Fisheries to establish fish culture stations on Kodiak and Afognak Islands, actions advocated for several years to conserve salmon runs in that area. On August 24, 1892, using the authority of these sections, President Harrison created by executive proclamation the Afognak Forest and Fish Culture Reserve. The impetus behind the Afognak reserve was fisheries conservation and true forestry efforts had to wait another decade. On August 20, 1902, President Roosevelt used the authority of the Act of 1891 to create the Alexander Archipelago Forest Reserve by executive proclamation.

In 1905, when the Forest Service was constituted, responsibility for the forest reserves transferred from Division R of the General Land Office to the new Service. This change had direct impact in Alaska. First, it shifted the forests to an agency headed by Gifford Pinchot, a man whose philosophy of resource management was markedly different than the GLO's Richard Ballinger. The philosophical struggle between Ballinger and Pinchot over conservation of the country's resources

assumed national political significance and, in Alaska, set a tone that continues today over use of the forests. More practically for Alaska, the controversy helped inspire a conservation-minded President to create and then enlarge two national forests.

In early 1907, the new Forest Service made known its desire to incorporate almost all of the heavily timbered Southeast panhandle into a Baranof National Forest. This plan came under sharp attack by Ballinger and commercial interests already entrenched in the area, especially since plans to create another forest in the Prince William Sound region were already progressing.

On July 23, 1907 and despite vocal opposition from Ballinger, President Roosevelt established the Chugach National Forest by executive proclamation. The new reserve had 4,960,000 acres in the vicinity of the Sound and nearby copper mining areas. Although the idea for the Baranof reserve was temporarily shelved, Roosevelt proclaimed the Tongass National Forest on September 10, 1907. Both forests were quickly enlarged and consolidated with the two existing reserves. On July 1, 1908, the Alexander reserve merged into the Tongass N.F. The following day, the Chugach N.F. incorporated the Afognak Forest and Fish Culture Reserve and, the following February 23, was enlarged by executive proclamation to include the Kink and Kenai regions, bringing its size to almost 11,300,000 acres.

Until 1921, Ketchikan, and from then until 1956, Juneau served as the headquarters for the Tongass N.F. In the latter year, the headquarters was divided into two regions: N. Tongass with headquarters in Juneau and S. Tongass based in Ketchikan. Subsequently, the N. Tongass headquarters were moved to Sitka and, in the 1970s, three supervisor's districts were established: Ketchikan, Stikine (at Petersburg), and Chatham (at Sitka). The headquarters of the Chugach National Forest were located at Cordova until 1956 when it moved to the current site of Anchorage.

The national forests in Alaska originally were part of District 6 headquartered in Portland. In 1921, Alaska became part of District 8. Two years later, the districts were restructured as "regions" and, in 1934, Alaska became Region 10.

## **RECORDS DESCRIPTION**

Dates: 1908-1989. Volume: 129 cu. ft.

These are records of the Chugach National Forest and the Tongass National Forest, including its Stikine, Ketchikan, and Chatham Areas, and document a variety of Service activities in Alaska. The records document the mundane to the exotic: collecting fees for special use permits to dealing with Anchorage's "red light district" which was entrenched on Chugach National Forest land. There are some CCC records in the 1940's on restoration of totems and houses near Sitka. The records consist of general subject correspondence files reflecting the development and use of forest resources, arranged in decimal file order; special uses permitted within the forests; diaries of forest rangers (1908-1965); and Alaska Native Claims (1972-1973).

The Alaska forests were unique in that most of the land could only be reached by boat and the Service maintained a small fleet of craft, some of whose logs are included (*Langville* (1956-1959), *Restless* (1911-1914), *Ranger* (1923-1962), *Weigle* (1956-1957), *Forester* (1932-1960), *Marmot* (1947-1953), *Nunatak* (1955), and the *Chugach* (1952-1960)). The special use permits allow such individual and commercial activities as timber cutting, rights-of-way, fox farming, recreational use and development of recreational sites like ski areas, gravel pits, home-sites, roads, and water pipelines (1946-1984 [1909]). The general subject correspondence files include press releases, directives, reports, management plans, correspondence, and other administrative material.

**RELATED RECORDS:** RGs 22 ( Records of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and 75 (Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs) contain records relating fox-farming. 22 contains records relating to salmon fisheries; 75 contains material on timber resources. RGs-111/342/187 all contain information on relations between those agencies and the Forest Service.

#### **RELATED MICROFICHE/FILM**

- J-87 Annual Reports of the Office of the Governor, Alaska
- M-1127 General Photographic File of the U.S. Forest Service, 1886-
- M-1128 Shelf List of Captions for the General Photographic File of the U.S. Forest Service
- P-2258 Annual, Monthly, and Miscellaneous Reports of the Alaska Railroad, 1915-1954,

#### **FINDING AIDS**

- Folder Lists
- Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Forest Service (1969) [PI-18]