

Forest Legacy Federal Grant Program

FY2009 Request: \$2,516,500
Reference No: 34881

AP/AL: Appropriation

Project Type: Planning

Category: Natural Resources

Location: Statewide

Contact: Leta Simons

House District: Statewide (HD 1-40)

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Estimated Project Dates: 07/01/2008 - 06/30/2013

Brief Summary and Statement of Need:

The Forest Legacy Program provides federal funding for acquisition of high-value private forestland that is threatened with conversion to non-forest use. Legislative intent targets private in-holdings adjacent to, or within, existing conservation units (parks, refuges, etc.) that are primarily used for fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation and traditional access that would be disrupted, destroyed, or degraded if the private properties use were to be converted. This allows State Parks to conserve the land for outdoor recreation opportunities and maximize the use of critical areas for all members of the public.

Funding:	FY2009	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014	Total
Fed Rcpts	\$2,516,500	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$7,516,500
Total:	\$2,516,500	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$7,516,500

<input type="checkbox"/> State Match Required	<input type="checkbox"/> One-Time Project	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - new	<input type="checkbox"/> Phased - underway	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> On-Going
0% = Minimum State Match % Required		<input type="checkbox"/> Amendment	<input type="checkbox"/> Mental Health Bill	

Operating & Maintenance Costs:

	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Staff</u>
Project Development:	0	0
Ongoing Operating:	0	0
<u>One-Time Startup:</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Totals:	0	0

Additional Information / Prior Funding History:

SLA2007/CH30	\$ 50,000	Active/on-going
SLA2006/CH82	\$ 976,500	Final Negotiations
SLA2005/CH3	\$ 630,000	Final Negotiations
SLA2004/CH159	\$ 4,500,000	Final Negotiations
SLA2002/CH1	\$ 500,000	Complete

Project Description/Justification:

The principal objective of this project is to acquire a conservation easement and subsurface rights to a forested 20,783-acre property within the Wood-Tikchik State Park and two complementary strategic Native allotments. The outcome will conserve forested habitats and wetlands that support a major anadromous fish system and perpetuate the fish, wildlife, habitat, and public benefits they support within the Park. This project significantly supports the goals and objectives of the Alaska Forest Legacy program as identified in the Assessment of Need.

The project location is within 25 miles of Nushagak Bay, a major estuary of Bristol Bay, the world's greatest wild salmon producing region. The 20-mile-long Wood River drains Lake Aleknagik into which the Agulowak flows.

This project proposes to acquire a conservation easement on 6072.57 acres of high value habitat dominated by timbered lands in phase III of this 20,783 acre, three-phase project. Aleknagik Natives Limited owns the property, which includes the entire length of the four-mile long Agulowak River and forty-two miles of timbered shoreline along Lake Aleknagik and Lake Nerka. The subsurface will be acquired in full fee from Bristol Bay Native Corporation. The Agulowak property is the most strategic tract in the 1.6 million acre Wood-Tikchik State Park, which is located near the towns of Aleknagik and Dillingham

in Southwest Alaska. This conservation easement is complemented by the acquisition of two highly strategic Native allotments in the vicinity of the easement property. The allotments encompass 305 acres.

These Native corporation lands comprise a strategic part of the internationally renowned Wood-Tikchik State Park. The Agulowak property is the most ecologically significant, productive, at-risk forest in Southwest Alaska. The Agulowak River is a major anadromous fish system, providing spawning habitat and passage for nearly two million adult salmon representing all five North American Pacific species, and rearing habitat for untold millions of juvenile salmon. This three-phase project and complementary Native allotment acquisitions will protect the largest individual in-holding in the largest state park in the United States.

The Park is in serious danger of habitat loss and fish and wildlife decline because of an active real estate market for in-holdings. Conversion to development is an imminent threat. Other private lands in the area are rapidly being developed. The Agulowak River lands are highly desirable for development, which would have tremendous impacts on fish, wildlife, subsistence, recreation, and other forest and park uses. The market is built upon the region's prolific anadromous and resident fisheries, abundant wildlife, spectacular scenery, high quality recreation and close proximity to the communities of Aleknagik and Dillingham. Recent demand for high quality fish and wildlife rich property combined with steep declines in the value of the historically robust commercial salmon industry, and demands by Native corporation landowners have created the active real estate market. Land is being converted from historically benign forest land uses to lodge development, subdivision and recreational property development with little regard for watershed and habitat impacts. Incompatible development at these sites increases conflicts with existing users such as anglers, hunters, subsistence users, and existing outdoor recreational businesses.

Anadromous fish are the heart of Southwest Alaska, forming the basis of the ecology, economy, and culture. Nowhere else in the world do such robust fisheries flourish. The millions of returning salmon feed bears and bald eagles, their spawn feed rainbow trout and char, and their decaying carcasses release nutrients imported from marine and estuarine ecosystems into freshwater wetlands that allow the annual cycle to continue. Commercial fishing, sport fishing and hunting, and other outdoor recreation have flourished for decades, while subsistence use of fish and wildlife has been a way of life for thousands of years because of this cycle.

The Agulowak River project area is highly valuable for fish and wildlife. The Agulowak is a world-class anadromous fish river and part of the enormous Wood River-Tikchik Lakes System. The system is diverse in its habitats and prolific in its production of fish and wildlife. The Agulowak provides spawning habitat for up to 300,000 sockeye salmon. An additional 1.4 million sockeye pass through the Agulowak enroute to their spawning grounds. Lesser numbers of chum, pink, chinook, and silver salmon spawn in the Agulowak. The Wood River System, of which the Agulowak is a major contributor, produces sockeye salmon worth \$8-10 million annually to commercial fishermen on average, but the value has been as high as \$42 million. The Agulowak is a major contributor to the average 65,000 salmon harvested annually for subsistence in the Nushagak River Drainage. The river supports large numbers of dolly varden, arctic char, grayling and rainbow trout. The project area is the most heavily used area in the Park for recreation and subsistence hunting and fishing. The area provides approximately 5,000 angler days. However, the Agulowak property's private land status makes public recreational access uncertain and the fish and wildlife habitat values unsecured.

The 1.6 million acre Park is the nation's largest state park. Scenic mountains, large pristine lakes and clear, free-flowing rivers dominate the Park. The Park provides significant habitat for the 50,000 strong Mulchatna caribou herd. Brown and black bears, moose, furbearers, and water and forest birds are widespread and abundant.

This conservation easement will perpetuate habitat and the existing wild character of the Park. The Agulowak River lands will be integrated and managed as part of the Park consistent with the easement rights acquired. Commercial fishing, subsistence, sport fishing and hunting, wilderness touring, and wildlife viewing all benefit from the easement. The Park's increased rights and authorities will enhance resource management.

Why is this Project Needed Now?:

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The conservation easement and associated allotment acquisitions are timely. Development, which can severely impact wetlands, fish and wildlife populations, fragment forest habitat, and magnify user conflicts, is proliferating. Land managers consistently identify incompatible development of in-holdings as the largest long-term challenge.

This project will prevent incompatible development on the forested properties and reduce conflicts between subsistence users, other local residents, anglers, hunters, wilderness users, and commercial operators. The easement will help protect the land and waters from contamination and destruction, thereby, preserving the habitat for wildlife and spawning areas for fish, so these activities can be enjoyed by future generations. Additionally, public access will be secured. The project will prevent or reduce resource depletion, wildlife displacement, competition with historic uses and management problems for Native landowners and state and federal agencies.

This project is complemented by other acquisitions within the watershed and within the project area. In recent years, five strategic Native allotments were acquired including two on the Agulowak River within the project area and three along nearby salmon streams. The properties total 511 acres.

Specific Spending Detail:

<u>LINE ITEM</u>	<u>DOLLAR AMOUNT</u>
Personal Services	\$ 30,000
Travel	\$ 2,000
Services	\$ 20,000
Capital Outlay	\$ 2,464,492

Project Support:

Nushagak-Mulchatna/Wood-Tikchik Land Trust, Southwest Alaska Conservation Coalition, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Bristol Bay Native Association, General Communication, Inc., Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, Orvis, Woolrich, Vital Ground, Wildlife Forever, Dallas Safari Club, Dallas Ecological Foundation, Tikchik Narrows Lodge, Mission Creek Lodge, Royal Coachman Lodge, Wood-Tikchik State Park Management Council, Pacific Coast Joint Venture, Frontiers International Travel, Alaska Fly Fishers, Donna Shade, owner Hillside Haven, Alaska's Bearclaw Lodge, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Scott Stouder/Holly Endersby, Katmai Fishing Adventures, Tikchik Air Adventures, Bear Bay Lodge, Wood-Tikchik State Park, City of Dillingham, Bay Air, Inc., Tucker Aviation, Inc., The Nature Conservancy.

Project Opposition:

None identified.