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Department of
Natural Resources

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: November 5, 2021

Alaska State Parks Kenai staff join to remove beetle-killed trees

(Kenai, AK) – Visitors to two of Alaska State Parks’ most popular Kenai Peninsula recreation areas will have safer, more enjoyable experiences next summer, thanks to an all-hands tree-thinning and road improvement project in October.

Beetle-killed trees remain a hazard to visitors in the Kenai River Special Management Area and Captain Cook State Recreation Area, which together draw thousands of fishermen and campers for summer sport and personal-use fisheries. In October, \$40,000 in federal funds helped pay for crews to remove trees to reduce hazards and improve access, said Jack Blackwell, Kenai area supervisor for Alaska State Parks.

“For example, we widened the cleared area alongside the road into the Bing’s Landing boat launch out of concern that if there was a wildfire and folks needed to get off the river fast, or emergency crews needed to get onto it, we wanted to have a wide road with cleared shoulders, instead of a narrow, choked road,” Blackwell said. “The work also helps reduce the risk or severity of wildfires by reducing fuel loads, so it’s a win all around.”

The funding allowed four seasonal trail maintenance or campground staffers working in Seward, Homer and Kasilof this summer to extend their season to the end of October. The skilled chainsaw operators worked one day each week to fell trees, burn limbs and slash, and leave stacks of 6-8-foot logs. Members of the public interested in obtaining the logs for firewood should contact the Alaska State Parks Kenai area office.

Blackwell said the seasonal workers were joined in the project by State Parks administrative, permitting and maintenance staff, plus two Department of Fish and Game staffers who work on the Kenai.

“Last Friday we had a dozen people working on this effort,” Blackwell said. “In addition to the clear public benefits, one of the side benefits of this kind of work is that it builds morale and cohesion by having everyone involved in taking on a project like this, and

accomplishing it together.” The crew will conduct its final day’s work on Tuesday at The Pillars boat launch.

Blackwell said his crew’s tree clearing efforts complement work done at Morgan’s Landing by the Division of Forestry, which is engaged in a major effort to reduce fuel loads near the campground to help reduce the risk of wildland fire and provide defensible space near the campground and residential area.

The funds State Parks used for its work were part of about \$2 million in U.S. Forest Service beetle kill mitigation funds obtained by Sen. Lisa Murkowski.

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