

Federal crews begin surveys in Yakutat area

Field mapping crews from the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Forest Service are working in the Yakutat area to obtain data that will be used in producing six new large-scale topographic maps of the Situk River floodplain threatened by rising water trapped by the surging Hubbard Glacier.

Hubbard Glacier closed off Russell Fjord in June, turning the fjord into a 75-square-mile lake that is increasingly changing from saltwater to freshwater. Precipitation, meltwater from the glacier and water runoff from nearby mountains are raising the lake's water level about 1 foot a day.

The rising lake threatens to spill over at its southern end into the Situk River, a prime salmon spawning and fishing waterway which supports the fishing-based economy of the Yakutat community.

The topographic mapping is being expedited to assist U.S. Forest Service and USGS scientists in determining the potential extent of flooding near the village of Yakutat and in the valley of the Situk River.

Helicopters are being used to transport the mapping crews and equipment to the field areas. The field surveying work is expected to be completed by the end of this month.