

APPENDIX A

ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

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Issue Identification

Introduction

This Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) responds to a March 2001 U.S. District Court Order that directed the Forest Service to prepare a SEIS that evaluates and considers roadless areas within the Tongass for recommendations as potential wilderness areas. This is discussed further in Chapter 1 of the SEIS. This SEIS is a supplement to the 1997 Tongass Land Management Plan Revision Final EIS (USDA Forest Service, 1997a). Appendix A of the 1997 Final EIS discusses the issue identification process used in the Tongass National Forest planning process.

Identification of issues helps define or predict what resources or uses could be most affected by the planning alternatives under consideration. These issues are then used as a basis to formulate alternatives or to measure differences between alternatives. The following sections describe the process used to identify the issues for this SEIS and the key issues identified.

Issue Identification

The scope of this SEIS was initially determined by the Court in its ruling on the 1997 ROD. Additional information was analyzed to help clearly define the issues for this Draft SEIS and for use in the development and analysis of alternatives. For this Draft SEIS, we evaluated comments and information from a wide variety of public inputs that were related to wilderness and management of roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest. This included a review of information compiled from past planning efforts that spanned more than a decade, extending back to 1989. Sources reviewed included:

- ◆ public comments that were generated during the Forest Plan Revision process that related to wilderness and roadless area issues,
- ◆ Tongass Forest Plan Revision appeals,
- ◆ public input on the Forest Service's 2001 National Roadless Area Conservation Rule that was specific to the Tongass National Forest,
- ◆ congressional proposals for wilderness that have been developed recently and during the Forest Plan Revision process,
- ◆ public input related to roadless areas, expressed during project-level EIS analyses over approximately the past 10 years, and
- ◆ public input on the National Forest Transportation Rule and Policy that was specific to the Tongass National Forest.

In addition, public involvement has occurred during the development of the SEIS over the past 8 months and the public input that has been received so far was also considered as part of this issue identification process employed for this SEIS. This input has been reviewed and synthesized into a Supplemental Scoping Report which is maintained in the SEIS planning record.

This information in the aggregate provides an overview of public opinion with respect to roadless area protection and wilderness designation on the Tongass. This may be considered the first step in the issue identification process. These issues will also be evaluated in the light of additional public input during the public comment period and public involvement activities that will follow publication of this Draft SEIS.

The remainder of this section is divided into two parts. The first part briefly describes the sources of information from past planning efforts that were used in the issue identification process. The second part discusses the SEIS public involvement activities that have taken place to date.

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Past Planning Efforts

Tongass Forest Plan Revision

Appendix L of the 1997 Final EIS presents summaries of all substantive comments received during the three public comment periods for the Tongass Forest Plan Revision, as well as presenting Forest Service responses to these comment summaries. All public comment periods held during the Tongass Forest Plan Revision were announced in the Federal Register, by news release, in local newspapers, and through newsletters. Informational meetings and open houses, followed by hearings, were held in most Southeast Alaska communities during each comment period. Over 3,000 individuals, organizations, interest groups, and agencies provided written or oral input on the 1990 Draft EIS. More than 7,000 and 21,000 responses were received on the 1991 Supplement and the 1996 Revised Supplement, respectively.

Comments summarized in Appendix L were identified by location and issue and entered into a database that had more than 850 entries. Information developed through this review was used to help identify public interest in specific roadless areas, as well as in the issue identification process.

Tongass Forest Plan Revision Appeals

A total of 23 appeals were received on the 1997 Tongass Land Management Plan Revision Record of Decision (ROD). These appeals were reviewed and comments were summarized by location and issue and entered into a database. Information developed through this review was used to help identify public interest in specific roadless areas, as well as in the issue identification process.

National Roadless Area Conservation Rule

A total of 1,155,000 separate pieces of public input were received on the National Roadless Area Conservation Rule Draft EIS. The results of the Forest Service's content analysis of these comments are presented in Volume 3 of the Roadless Area Conservation Final EIS along with the Forest Service's responses to the identified comment summaries (USDA Forest Service, 2000). The portion of these comments that specifically pertained to the Tongass were reviewed as part of the issue identification process for this SEIS. Comments were received in support of and against roadless area conservation on the Tongass. Issues identified through this review included:

- ◆ Preservation of roadless areas as habitat for wildlife and endangered and threatened species.
- ◆ Effects of roadless area conservation on the regional economy, in terms of potential reductions in timber employment and the positive effects that limiting road building could have upon the recreation and tourism industry.
- ◆ Effects of roadless conservation on subsistence use. Some commenting indicated that limiting road construction would limit access for subsistence, while others noted that there are already sufficient roads on the Tongass to meet subsistence needs.

Congressional Proposals for Wilderness

Information was compiled from the House version of what became the Tongass Timber Reform Act of 1990 (House Resolution [HR] 987) and a current congressional proposal (HR 2908, the Alaska Rainforest Protection Bill).

Project-Level EIS Analyses

Public input related to roadless areas and wilderness that has been expressed during project-level EIS analyses over approximately the past 10 years was reviewed and entered into a database. Public comments received on a total of 39 project-level EIS/EAs were reviewed. These projects included proposed timber sales and landscape planning analyses. Many of the comments that addressed wilderness and roadless area issues were made in response to proposals to build roads. Issues identified through this review included:

- ◆ Preservation of roadless areas on the Tongass in a wilderness condition because there are very few other temperate rainforests with intact, functioning ecosystems
- ◆ Protection of fish and wildlife species and stream resources by not allowing road construction and timber harvest in certain proposed timber sale areas.
- ◆ Protection of scenic resources, primitive recreation, and recreation and tourism opportunities, as well as subsistence, heritage resources, and traditional cultural properties.

National Forest Transportation Rule and Policy

Public input on the National Forest Transportation Rule and Policy that pertained specifically to the Tongass was also reviewed as part of this issue identification process.

Public Input for the SEIS

Public involvement activities that have taken place during the development of this SEIS include:

- ◆ the Notice of Intent was published in the Federal Register in September 2001;
- ◆ a notification letter was sent to a mailing list of approximately 550 in November 2001;
- ◆ an SEIS Web site was developed and has been maintained to inform and engage the public beginning in November 2001; it is updated as new information is developed or published and provides a mechanism for public input; a number of comments and questions have been received through the Web site;
- ◆ a working interdisciplinary team meeting, that was open to the public, was held in November 2001 regarding the definition of issues and alternatives (specific public input was received at this meeting regarding these topics);
- ◆ a project update (newsletter) was sent to a mailing list of approximately 600 in January 2002
- ◆ in response to the above items, a number of letters have been received containing comments regarding the issues and alternatives (these have included letters from environmental organizations, the timber industry, Southeast Alaska community organizations, and a number of individuals from Southeast Alaska and across the nation);
- ◆ a number of specific meetings have also occurred with various organizations (including Alaska native groups).

The public comments that have been received to date have identified a number of issues including the following:

- ◆ Timber sales should not be permitted in roadless areas; roadless areas should be preserved while they can still be saved.
- ◆ Roadless areas on the Tongass should be preserved because the Tongass is the last, relatively intact, temperate rainforest on earth, one of the world's last great places, and a national treasure.
- ◆ Ecological values of the land types in the remaining Tongass Roadless Areas; values of roadless areas as fish and wildlife habitat and primitive recreation.
- ◆ Contribution to the National Wilderness Preservation System in terms of old growth.
- ◆ Consideration of the long-term economic benefits and deficits associated with wilderness designation.
- ◆ Additional wilderness and the continued threat of an injunction will negatively affect the timber industry with the potential closure of existing mills, as well as affecting the ability of timber operators to make mill and other needed improvements.

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- ◆ A potential loss of mill jobs would have significant negative effects upon residents of potentially affected communities.
- ◆ Road access, timber sales, recreation site development, and utility developments are crucial to the economic well-being of Southeast Alaskan communities, and the region as a whole.

Key Issues

Based on the public input examined, it was clear that the specific issues to be considered in this analysis should be grouped into two broad issue categories, which are referred to as key issues in the following sections. These key issues are the major issues driving the alternatives and the analysis. In general, they represent two very different sets of strongly held values and viewpoints.

Key Issue 1 – Additional wilderness designation will provide greater long-term protection of roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest than is provided by the 1997 Forest Plan.

Approximately 6.6 million acres of Congressionally designated wilderness, National Monument, or LUD II lands occur throughout the Forest. Aside from wilderness, there are approximately 9.7 million acres of inventoried roadless areas (including designated LUD II) on the Tongass. The 1997 Forest Plan allocated 74 percent of the roadless areas to non-development LUDs; however, because that designation is not permanent (and may be subject to future Forest Plan amendments and revisions) some segments of the public would rather have permanent protection status. There is concern by some that the Forest Plan does not provide sufficient recognition and long-term protection for Tongass roadless areas. Much of this concern is with roadless area protection, rather than wilderness designation. Some also hold the belief that many areas would be of more value to Americans as wilderness than as other LUDs. However, there is no consensus on which areas should be recommended for wilderness.

While recognizing the existence of a variety of wilderness values, Hendee et al. (1990) identify three central themes that have consistently emerged in the discourse surrounding wilderness. These themes are the *experiential*, *scientific*, and *symbolic and spiritual* values of wilderness. The review of public input conducted for this SEIS indicated that concerns for additional wilderness protection primarily center around two broad themes. These can be generally characterized as the *symbolic* and *spiritual* value of wilderness and the value of wilderness as a means for additional *ecological* protection, including protection of wildlife viability, biodiversity, and fish populations. These themes, which are discussed in the following paragraphs, are important to segments of the public in Southeast Alaska, across the nation, and possibly internationally.

Symbolic and Spiritual Value of Wilderness – In a world characterized by rapid change and complexity, the symbolic and spiritual values of wilderness may be increasingly important. Wilderness can be viewed as symbolic of the nation's heritage. It may also be viewed as a symbol of restraint, a self-imposed limit on technological and economic development that reflects a wider awareness of environmental responsibility. The spiritual values associated with wilderness can be specific religious and cultural values attributed to particular places or types of landscapes. Alternatively, they may represent the feelings that people have for wild, natural landscapes that are often difficult to put into words. Although difficult to characterize or value in monetary terms, these types of values are very important for a lot of people.

Segments of the public place high value on the knowledge that wilderness exists, whether they use it or not. This value increases as more areas and larger areas are designated. Economists generally refer to this type of value, as non-use or passive use value. These types of values include the value that individuals obtain from knowing the wilderness exists (existence value), knowing that it would be available to visit in the future should they choose to do so (option value), and knowing that it would be left for future generations to inherit (bequest value). Economists have tried to measure these values via surveys that ask people how much they would be willing to pay to preserve a particular area. Loomis (2000) found that household willingness to pay increases with an increase in the number of acres proposed for wilderness protection, but at a decreasing rate.

There is interest in preserving large portions of the Tongass because the majority of the Forest is in a natural condition, unlike most other national forests, and the Tongass represents a significant portion of the world's remaining temperate rainforests.

Indicators: Analysis relative to this issue compares the amount and proportion of land protected as wilderness and in other non-development LUDs. Also, the values of the lands protected are considered. Non-use values are discussed qualitatively, with examples provided from other studies.

Ecological Values of Wilderness – Many people believe that roadless areas should be allowed to evolve naturally through their own dynamic processes and should be afforded permanent protection to ensure that this will occur.

The ecological value of wilderness theme that consistently emerges from public input concerning roadless area and wilderness management on the Tongass may be considered a subpart of the broader scientific value that Hendee et al. (1990) identify. Hendee et al.'s scientific value is more generally concerned with the value of wilderness for scientific study, but the concerns with ecosystems, landforms, and wildlife habitat that they identify are consistent with the concerns that have been identified for the Tongass. The Tongass includes very large undeveloped land areas, with several portions of the Forest consisting of contiguous roadless areas that exceed one million acres and represent large, unfragmented blocks of wildlife habitat. This scale of habitat protection is not possible elsewhere in the National Forest System, except on the Chugach National Forest.

Ecological protection can be achieved through a number of Forest planning approaches, including wilderness designation. Wildlife population viability is addressed on the Tongass by a conservation strategy consisting of two key components of the Forest Plan; the forest-wide system of reserves (including all non-development LUDs), and the standards and guidelines that apply in development LUDs. The 1997 Tongass Forest Plan Revision Record of Decision concluded that the old-growth conservation strategy and specific species management prescriptions represent a balance of wildlife habitat conservation measures that consider the best available scientific information and, within an acceptable level of risk inherent in projecting management effects, will provide sufficient fish and wildlife habitat to maintain well-distributed viable populations of vertebrate species in the planning area, and maintain the diversity of plants and animals on the Forest. Providing long-term protection for additional areas could further reduce these risks.

Indicators: Analysis relative to this issue compares the amount of productive old-growth forest and inventoried roadless areas that would be protected under each alternative, as well as the percentages of ecoregions and biogeographic provinces that would be protected.

Other Wilderness Values

A third broad type of wilderness value identified by Hendee et al. (1990) is the experiential value. This category is meant to encompass the direct value of the wilderness experience, which is typically viewed as synonymous with wilderness recreation. Consistent experiential themes include closeness to nature, freedom, solitude, education, and simplicity, as well as the aesthetic, spiritual, and mystical dimensions of the wilderness experience (Hendee et al., 1990). There is clearly some overlap between this and the symbolic and spiritual values that people may assign to wilderness. While the review of public input conducted for the SEIS has identified concern for preserving roadless areas as wilderness, little emphasis has been placed on preserving roadless areas as wilderness for recreation purposes. As such, while it is generally important to recognize the experiential value associated with wilderness, it is not included as part of this key issue.

Key Issue 2 – Additional wilderness designation will affect the social and economic well-being of the communities of Southeast Alaska.

Many communities in Southeast Alaska depend on the Tongass National Forest to provide the foundation for natural resource-based industries, including wood products, commercial fishing and fish processing, recreation, tourism, mining, and mineral development. Many residents also depend on subsistence hunting and fishing to meet their basic needs. There is very little private land throughout the region to

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provide these resources. Some people are concerned that wilderness recommendations could negatively affect employment and income generated by natural resource-based industries, including wood products, mining, and recreation and tourism. The employment and income associated with these industries is important to the economic and social well-being of many Southeast Alaskan communities. In addition, wilderness designation could affect transportation and utility projects that are considered by some as essential for continued economic development and well-being in the region.

This issue focuses on the social and economic effects of recommended wilderness designation on communities in Southeast Alaska. There are three central themes to this issue: natural resource-based industry, transportation and utility projects, and the regional economy and local communities.

Natural Resource-Based Industry

Wood Products –The Southeast Alaskan timber industry has undergone significant changes over the past decade with closure of the two large pulp mills in Ketchikan and Sitka. Harvest levels on the Tongass and wood products employment in the region has consistently declined since peaking in 1990. Wood products employment declined from 3,543 jobs in 1990 to 993 jobs in 2000. With the closure of the pulp mills, the Southeast Alaska wood products industry is currently experiencing a period of significant structural change.

Sawmills in Southeast Alaska are dependent on the availability of timber resources from the Tongass National Forest, which provided 92 percent of the volume processed in local mills in 2000 (USDA Forest Service, 2001a). Timber harvest would not be allowed in areas recommended for wilderness or LUD II and reductions in the supply of available timber could have short- and long-term effects on the wood products industry.

Indicators: The analysis of short-term effects on the wood products industry focuses on the existing Tongass Sale Volume under Contract (i.e., National Forest timber sales that have been sold but not yet harvested) and proposed sales that are not yet under contract. The long-term effects analysis focuses on the number of acres suitable for timber production, as well as potential changes to the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ), which is the maximum quantity of timber that may be scheduled from suitable lands on the entire Forest for a 10-year period.

Mining– The Tongass National Forest contains many important mineral resources, from precious metals to chemical-grade minerals. Except for designated wildernesses and other withdrawn areas, all Tongass National Forest lands are open to mineral exploration and development. Recommendations for additional wilderness may have an effect on the exploration and development of minerals. However, recommended areas would remain open to mineral exploration and development until Congress acted to designate areas as wilderness.

Indicators: Analysis related to the mining issue focuses on changes in the amounts of identified mineral tracts and undiscovered mineral areas that could be withdrawn from mineral production or made more costly to develop.

Recreation and Tourism – The recreation and tourism industry in Southeast Alaska has grown significantly over the past decade. Visitor-related employment was estimated to account for 4,185 jobs or 11 percent of total Southeast Alaskan employment in 1999. Much of the growth over the past decade is due to a dramatic increase in the number of cruise ship passengers visiting the region. Cruise ship passengers docking at Juneau increased from approximately 237,000 in 1990 to 632,000 in 2000, approximately eight passengers for every Southeast Alaska resident (USDA Forest Service, 2001c). Seventy-three percent of surveyed commercial recreation businesses reported an increase in business between 1995 and 2000, with cruise ship passengers accounting for 41 percent of total clients for all the surveyed businesses (Alaska Division of Community & Business Development [DCBD], 2001).

Changes in the land base available for tourism and recreation developments could affect this industry. In addition, potential use restrictions associated with wilderness designation could affect the size of commercially guided groups visiting particular locations.

Indicators: Analysis related to the recreation/tourism issue considers the effects of wilderness designation on Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) settings, outfitter/guide use, recreation places important for tourism, and the percent of the Forest available for tourism developments. The ROS system identifies the appropriate combination of activities, settings, and experience for different types of recreation experience, ranging from primitive to urban settings.

Transportation and Utility Projects

Residents of the region are dependent on air and water transportation for travel between most communities. A roaded transportation system has been developed on National Forest System land, largely in support of timber harvest. The 1999 Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 1999) identified future investments in roads, ferry terminals, and ferries to develop a comprehensive regional transportation system. Several other corridors have been considered for major transportation routes, including a Juneau to Skagway linkage and the East Bradfield River corridor connection to Canada. Full implementation of these transportation plans would require construction of new roads and facilities within the National Forest.

Proposals also exist to develop a power grid to inter-connect electrical generating facilities with most of the communities throughout Southeast Alaska. The State of Alaska has proposed corridors for transmission lines and/or undersea cables to link many Southeast Alaska communities with one another and British Columbia. An intertie corridor, connecting the Swan Lake project (near Carroll Inlet) with the Tye project (on the Bradfield Canal) has been permitted and is planned for construction beginning in summer 2002. A number of other potential interties and power generation projects have been proposed on National Forest System lands. Many Southeast Alaska communities use diesel powered generation plants for electricity.

Recommendations for additional wilderness may have an effect on the development of potential transportation or utility corridors or other land uses.

Indicators: Effects on transportation and utilities are analyzed by identifying the corridors that could be precluded or otherwise affected by the alternatives.

Regional Economy and Local Communities

As noted above, many communities in Southeast Alaska depend on the Tongass National Forest to provide the foundation for natural resource-based industries, as well as subsistence hunting and fishing. Recreation opportunities associated with the Tongass also play an important role in the quality of life of many Southeast Alaskans. Many families have favorite places where they fish, hunt, beachcomb, or just go to get away.

Regional Employment and Income

Natural resource-dependent employment accounted for approximately 23 percent of total employment in Southeast Alaska in 1999, with wood products, recreation and tourism, and mining accounting for 3 percent, 11 percent, and 1 percent of total regional employment, respectively. Wilderness recommendations could affect Southeast Alaskan communities and residents by affecting employment and income in natural resource-based industries. Wilderness recommendations may also restrict proposed transportation and utility projects and affect future economic development and associated employment opportunities, as well as travel between communities and, in some cases, local power sources.

Indicators: This analysis focuses on the potential effects on wood products and recreation and tourism employment and income at the regional level. Short-term effects on wood products employment focus on the potential effects associated with reductions in the existing volume under contract. Long-term effects on wood products employment address the potential effects of changes in the ASQ. Changes in recreation and tourism employment are based on projected changes in Recreation Visitor Days (RVDs). The potential effects of restrictions on mining and transportation and utility projects are also considered.

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Local Communities

Employment - Timber and logging activities play an important role in at least 10 of Southeast Alaska's 32 communities. These communities would be affected by reductions in wood products employment.

Subsistence - For many rural Alaskans, subsistence means hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering natural resources to provide needed food and supplement rural incomes. For Native Alaskans and other rural Alaskans, subsistence is that and more: a lifestyle that preserves customs and traditions reflecting deeply held attitudes, values and beliefs. Concerns about subsistence include maintaining subsistence opportunities and protecting traditional subsistence areas. The alternatives considered here would result in the same or greater protection for subsistence resources; however, the effects are evaluated in Chapter 3 and by community.

Recreation - Resident recreation patterns may be affected by new wilderness recreation proposals, due to potential restrictions on recreation facility developments and numbers of visitors, as well as the long-term effects of maintaining areas in the primitive ROS.

Indicators: The discussion of community effects focuses on changes in jobs and income, subsistence, and recreation opportunities, and the resultant effects on the communities as a whole. The subsistence analysis is based on the subsistence analysis conducted for the 1997 Forest Plan Revision Final EIS, which used deer as the main "indicator" species for potential subsistence resource consequences. The percent change in the amount of productive old growth available after 120 years relative to the current (1997) Forest Plan is used as an indicator. The percent of the inventoried recreation places within 20 miles of one or more communities that would be in Wilderness or Recommended Wilderness is used as an indicator for recreation.