



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Alaska Region
Tongass National Forest

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File Code: 1950/1920

Date: May 1, 2002

Dear Planning Participant:

Enclosed is the Tongass Forest Plan Revision Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for evaluation of roadless areas for Wilderness recommendations on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. The SEIS was ordered by the Federal District Court of Alaska, in *Sierra Club v. Rey*, because the 1997 Forest Plan Revision Final EIS did not include alternatives that considered Wilderness recommendations. The Draft SEIS has evaluated 115 inventoried roadless areas that make up about 9,680,000 acres, or 58 percent of the Tongass National Forest.

Alternative 1 is the Preferred Alternative for the Draft SEIS. It is the No-Action Alternative, and represents the 1997 Forest Plan Revision land allocations and standards and guidelines, which are used to provide resource protection and emphasis for the Tongass National Forest. The main reason for identifying Alternative 1 as the Preferred Alternative for the Draft SEIS is that the 1997 Forest Plan Revision decision was based on a significant collaborative effort to seek a balance for how best to protect and manage the Tongass National Forest. This effort was undertaken to assure that many wild and beautiful areas along with the abundant fish and wildlife resources on the Tongass are protected, and that some of the Tongass is available for more intensive resource management in support of the economies of Southeast Alaska and its scattered small communities. This collaborative effort included representatives from State of Alaska and Federal agencies, Tribal governments and organizations, communities and related organizations, industry and environmental organizations, research scientists, and many individuals working with the resource professionals of the Tongass National Forest.

Before preparing this draft SEIS, we evaluated past public comments from a variety of planning efforts relative to Wilderness recommendations. Two key issue areas emerged; 1) *Is Wilderness designation the most appropriate level of protection for roadless lands on the Tongass National Forest?* 2) *What would be the social and economic effects of Wilderness designation on the 32 communities, and the recreation and tourism, fishing, timber, and mining industries in Southeast Alaska?*

The 1997 Forest Plan Revision designated about 74 percent of the inventoried roadless areas for non-development. Many people believe this is adequate while many others believe that additional acreage and the permanent protection status of Wilderness for these lands is necessary.



Questions that we need your input on include: *Is the current mix of wilderness and non-wilderness proper? Which of the 115 inventoried roadless areas should be recommended for Wilderness? Is Wilderness designation the best means of permanent protection?*

The 32 communities of Southeast Alaska, ranging in size from 20 people to more than 30,000, rely to varying degrees on the resources of the Tongass National Forest. Some are economically dependent on timber production, while others are more dependent on recreation and tourism, commercial fishing, and mining. In many areas, community infrastructure such as roads, electrical transmission lines and water lines must be located on National Forest System lands. Only Hyder, Haines and Skagway currently have a road connection to the Alaskan and Canadian Highway System, and many communities are not connected to an electrical grid. Questions for your input include: *What would be the effects of designating inventoried roadless areas as Wilderness on these communities? On the industries that make up much of their economy? On their desires to have interconnected transportation and utility systems?*

Along with the No Action Alternative (Alternative 1), the SEIS evaluates seven other alternatives that respond to the issues identified in the SEIS and the capabilities associated with each inventoried roadless area for Wilderness consideration. These alternatives range from a low of 723,000 acres recommended for wilderness to a high of 9.5 million acres.

We recognize that many of the 115 inventoried roadless areas have excellent resource and wildland values important to Southeast Alaska and the nation. Additionally, we recognize that the industries of Southeast Alaska are changing and there is heightened interest in roadless areas on National Forest System lands across the nation. Thus, it is appropriate and timely to consider the inventoried roadless areas for different levels of protection than those that were determined to represent the best balance in 1997. Preparing the SEIS has also given us a chance to bring our inventory of roadless areas up to current conditions, and to better respond to the local, regional and national interest in roadless lands on the Tongass.

We would like to have your input on all of the alternatives in this Draft SEIS, and more importantly, input on specific individual roadless areas and why they should or should not be considered for Wilderness recommendations. This type of information will be most helpful as all areas are given additional consideration in the Final SEIS. This public input will also be essential information for collaborative efforts planned to be used for development of the Final SEIS. **Public comments need to be submitted by August 17, 2002.**

Three methods are available for submitting comment on the Draft SEIS. Electronic comments can be submitted at the Tongass SEIS website located at www.tongass-seis.net. Comments can be mailed to: USDA FS Tongass NF, Content Analysis Team, PO Box 9079, Missoula, MT 59807. Comments can also be submitted by FAX to 406-239-3556.

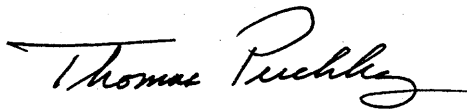
Public open house meetings, followed by formal public hearings, will be conducted throughout Southeast Alaska in late June and early July. The open houses will be designed to answer questions you may have related to the Draft SEIS, and to help people in making comments by the end of the comment period. The formal hearings are intended to provide an opportunity for people to testify relative to the Wilderness recommendations for the inventoried roadless areas

on the Tongass National Forest. Testimony related to potential effects on subsistence, as defined in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, will also be accepted at the hearings. A list of scheduled hearings is attached. Hearings in other locations in Southeast Alaska will be considered if requested.

Because of the high national interest in how roadless areas on the Tongass National Forest are managed, we will also be holding a virtual open house and hearing on the internet using the SEIS website (www.tongass-seis.net) on July 8, 2002. These will follow similar formats and timeframes as the regular meetings/hearings held in Southeast Alaska. The open house portion will be an open forum where questions can be asked and the Forest Service can post responses as appropriate. The hearing portion will be designed so that people can sign in and submit their testimony.

We look forward to your involvement in the Tongass Forest Plan Revision Draft SEIS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Thomas Puchlerz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

THOMAS PUCHLERZ
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

**SCHEDULE FOR
OPEN HOUSES AND HEARINGS**

COMMUNITY	LOCATION	DATE
Juneau, Alaska	Centennial Hall	June 18, 2002
Wrangell, Alaska	Wrangell Ranger Station	June 18, 2002
Yakutat, Alaska	Kwaan Conference Room	June 18, 2002
Petersburg, Alaska	City Council Chambers	June 19, 2002
Angeon, Alaska	ANB Hall	June 20, 2002
Take, Alaska	Community Building	June 20, 2002
Ketchikan, Alaska	Discovery Center	June 24, 2002
Craig, Alaska	Craig Community Hall	June 25, 2002
Skagway, Alaska	City Council Chambers	June 25, 2002
Tenakee Springs, Alaska	Community Hall	June 25, 2002
Thorne Bay, Alaska	Bay Chalet	June 26, 2002
Haines, Alaska	City Council Chambers	June 27, 2002
Port Protection, Alaska	To Be Announced	June 27, 2002
Sitka, Alaska	Centennial Hall	July 2, 2002
Nationwide	www.tongass-seis.net	July 8, 2002
Hoonah, Alaska	Hoonah Ranger Station	July 10, 2002
Gustavus, Alaska	Community Assoc. Hall	July 11, 2002