

Appendix C

INDIVIDUAL ROADLESS AREA DESCRIPTION

ROADLESS AREA NAME: Aaron (205)

ACRES (NFS): 79,147

BIOGEOGRAPHIC PROVINCE: Central Coast Range and the Ice Fields Province

ECOLOGICAL SECTION: Boundary Ranges and Inside Passage Fjordlands

2003 WILDERNESS ATTRIBUTE RATING: 27

I. Overview and Description

(1) **Location and Access:** The area is located on the mainland approximately 10 air miles east of Wrangell and is bounded on the north by the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness; on the west by the Madan Roadless Area; on the south by Blake Channel and the Harding Roadless Area; and on the east by the Cone Roadless Area. The only reasonable access to the area is by boat or floatplane from Berg Bay or by helicopter access to the limited potential landing sites within the area (primarily in the alpine). Good anchorage is available in Berg Bay for small boats. There are no sites suitable for landing wheeled aircraft. There is no ferry service or road access to the area from outside. There is an old trail from saltwater up Berg Creek to one of the mining prospects.

(2) **History:** The area was used by the Tlingit in prehistoric times. A former camp occurs near the mouth of Aaron Creek. Extensive prospecting has occurred in the area over the years, resulting in the filing of numerous mining claims. Some mineral development once occurred in Berg Basin. Beach logging was conducted in two areas on the north side of Aaron Creek estuary in 1960. In the late 1980s, Aaron Creek was considered as an alternative route for a road from saltwater to the Canadian border. A connection to Wrangell is also possible. The tidal flats at Aaron Creek once provided storage for log rafts.

(3) **Geography and Topography:** The area is generally characterized as highly-complex terrain dominated by rugged mountains, many of which reach elevations of over 3,000 feet; the tallest is over 5,000 feet. Between the mountains are deep, broad valleys containing several sizable streams that ultimately feed into the main channel of Aaron Creek. Near its mouth, Aaron Creek forms a wide floodplain and ends in a large grassflat at tidewater. Dominant waterforms include relatively small glaciers which occupy the highest mountains, Aaron Creek, Oerns Creek (a tributary of Aaron Creek), Berg Creek, and numerous small cirque lakes at high elevations. The freshwater lakes account for approximately 64 acres, snow and ice for another 11,094 acres, and rock covers 19,518 acres. Alpine accounts for 3,436 acres. The area contains 15 miles of saltwater shoreline and 53 acres of islands.

(4) **Ecosystem:**

(a) **Classification:** Biogeographic Province. The majority of the area is classified as being in the Central Coast Range Biogeographic Province. However, the higher elevations in the north and east are within the Ice Fields Biogeographic Province. The region containing the roadless area is generally characterized as a core of massive, angular mountains capped with ice fields at high elevations along the Canadian border, with somewhat lower mountains, deeply-incised valleys, and glacier-fed streams near the coast. This roadless area is more characteristic of the lower coastal portion of the region. There are no known areas of unique or uncommon plant/soils associations in the area. There is a band of karst north of Aaron Creek estuary.

Ecological Section/Subsection. The Aaron Roadless Area is contained within the Boundary Ranges Ecological Section (M246B) and the Inside Passage Fjordlands Ecological Section (M247E). These areas are represented by three ecological subsections (see table below). The Boundary Ranges Icefields Ecological Subsection represents the more than half of the Aaron Roadless Area. A northwest-southeast trending batholith of resistant granite and granodiorite underlies this portion of the Coast Mountains. It

consists of a discontinuous mix of icefields and glaciers separated by river valleys and pierced by nunataks and scree fields. Forests comprise a minor part of the vegetation along coasts and rivers. The Eastern Passage Complex Ecological Subsection is the other principal subsection, covering 40 percent of the roadless area. Lying west of the Coast Range megalignment, the underlying geology of this subsection is rugged sedimentary and volcanic formations, dissected by numerous streams, extending from Bradfield Canal to Thomas Bay. Mineral soils, of sedimentary and plutonic origin predominate, with organic soils relatively common on poorly drained sites. The Bell Island Granitics Ecological Subsection covers approximately 7 percent of the roadless area. It is characterized by rounded hills and narrow, glacially scoured valleys. Mountain slope soils are usually well-drained, mineral soil (Nowacki et al., 2001).

Ecological Section	Ecological Subsection	Percent of Roadless Area
Boundary Ranges	Boundary Ranges Icefields	53%
Inside Passage Fjordlands	Eastern Passage Complex	40%
	Bell Island Granitics	7%

(b) Soils: Soils in this area are formed in a wide variety of parent materials, including bedrock and glacial drift. In general, well- or moderately-well-drained soils are on moderate to steep mountain slopes with permeable parent materials. These soils are acidic, have cold soil temperatures, and are very high in organic matter. Rooting is largely limited to the surface organic layers and the top few inches of mineral soil. These soils are usually moist, sometimes wet, but are never dry.

More-poorly-drained soils developed on less sloping areas and/or areas with impermeable soil materials. These soils are very acidic, have deep accumulations of organic matter and range from scrubby forested wetlands to open muskeg.

Alpine soils, generally above 2,000 feet elevation, are mostly shallow, very wet organic soils or are extremely shallow and rocky. Estuary soils, located in the flats around the mouth of Aaron Creek, are mostly deep, wet, and tend to have a basic pH due to the influence of saltwater.

(c) Vegetation: Alpine vegetation (mapped as 3,436 acres) dominates above an elevation of 2,500 feet. Below that elevation, the mountains, hills, and well-drained outwash plains, are dominated by heavy stands of western hemlock, Sitka spruce, Alaska cedar, and scattered stands of western redcedar. There are pockets of poorly-drained land along the valley bottoms that are covered with muskeg and scrub shore pine. Approximately 402 acres of muskeg are mapped for the area; however, due to their small size and association with forested sites, accurate acreage estimates are difficult. The many snowslide and landslide paths on the steep slopes are typically covered with grass, alders and willows.

There are approximately 31,857 acres mapped as forest land, of which 17,099 acres or 54 percent are mapped as productive old-growth forest. Of the productive old growth, 7,338 acres or 43 percent are mapped as high-volume old-growth forest. The productive old growth includes about 787 acres of high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. There are about 89 acres of second growth resulting from beach logging in 1960.

(d) Fish Resources: Fish resources are considered to be of high value in the area. Aaron Creek is the largest salmon producer with pink, chum, coho, and king salmon, as well as steelhead.

(e) Wildlife Resources: The area supports all of the major species that inhabit the mainland portion of Southeast Alaska, including Sitka black-tailed deer, black bears, wolves, and small numbers of mountain goats, moose, and brown bear. The lower elevations of Aaron and Oerns Creeks contain a considerable amount of higher volume old-growth forest habitat.

(5) Management Direction and Current Uses: This area was allocated to six Land Use Designations (LUDs) in the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan. These six LUDs are Recreational River, Scenic

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Viewshed, Minerals, Semi-remote Recreation, Scenic River, and Remote Recreation. The Minerals LUD is a secondary LUD that overlays the other land uses.

LUD	Acres
Scenic Viewshed	46
Minerals*	7,362
Semi-remote Recreation	67,878
Scenic River	5,935
Recreational River	5,266
Remote Recreation	23

*Note that acres in the Minerals LUD are included in the Semi-remote Recreation and Wild River LUD acres.

Less than 1 percent of the roadless area (not including the Minerals LUD overlay) was allocated to a development LUD (Scenic Viewshed). A band, extending south from the Madan Roadless Area and across the western portion of the area, covering Berg Mountain and along the northeastern side of Berg Creek and across Aaron Creek, was allocated to the Minerals LUD overlay. Approximately 9 percent of the roadless area was allocated to the Minerals LUD overlay.

Most of the roadless area was allocated to a non-development LUD (Semi-remote Recreation, Scenic River, Remote Recreation). Approximately 86 percent of the roadless area was allocated to the Semi-remote Recreation LUD. A half-mile wide corridor along the mainstem of Aaron Creek, including a portion of the east fork of Aaron Creek, and along Oerns and Berg Creeks, were allocated to both the Scenic River LUD and the Recreational River LUD. The Aaron, Oerns, and Berg Creeks represents a total of 21 river miles of eligible scenic river and 15 river miles of eligible recreational river that will be recommended for inclusion in the national Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Adjacent to the Scenic River LUD in Oernes Creek, less than 1 percent of the roadless area was allocated to the Remote Recreation LUD.

The narrow channel and small bay at the mouth of Aaron Creek are used by small pleasure and commercial fishing boats. There is a public recreation cabin on Berg Bay near the mouth of Aaron Creek. The cabin receives moderate to high use and is seasonal in nature. Aaron Creek Trail provides access from the cabin to the grassflats beyond (4 miles), and continues in a more primitive (unmarked and not maintained) condition up Berg Creek into Berg Creek basin (8 miles), a total of 12 miles. There are no commercial overnight facilities in the area. Available information indicates that some subsistence activities occur in the area primarily from residents of Wrangell. Waterfowl hunting occurs at the grassflats, moose and brown bear hunting occurs in the lower elevations, and mountain goats are hunted in the higher elevations.

The band of land allocated to the Minerals LUD overlay is known as the Groundhog/Glacier Tract, which contains deposits of silver and lead. The area is managed to encourage the prospecting, exploration, development, mining, and processing of minerals, in an environmentally sensitive manner. The trail up Berg Creek was originally established to access a mining claim (now abandoned). There are no current mining claims in the area.

(6) Appearance (Apparent Naturalness): Overall, the area has high scenic quality with a natural appearing landscape and provides spectacular scenery from Berg Bay, parts of Blake Channel, and elsewhere within the area. Modifications have occurred at limited sites including the recreation cabin, at sites where there was activity on mining claims, and at sites where beach logging occurred in 1960.

(7) Surroundings (External Influences): This roadless area is part of a large unroaded area that stretches from the Misty Fiords National Monument south of the area, to the Skagway Juneau Icefield Roadless Area near Juneau. The Stikine-LeConte Wilderness lies to the north and other roadless areas border the area on the south, west, and east. The narrow entrance to this area and the high mountains on the boundaries effectively cut off outside influences. Public interest has historically been expressed in developing a road to Canada along Aaron Creek, which would change the roadless character of the area. This potential route has not, however, received much recent public attention. Recent discussions and studies have focused on the Bradfield Canal route. However, a route that follows the coastline around Berg Bay from Wrangell to the Bradfield is included as a route for consideration by Southeast

Conference in their ongoing assessment of long-term transportation needs for Southeast Alaska. Moderately-heavy boat traffic frequents the Berg Bay area.

(8) Attractions and Features of Special Interest: The area contains two inventoried recreation places that cover 4,318 acres, or 5 percent of the roadless area. Special features of this area include: the public recreation cabin; the secure anchorage; the spectacular scenery; the trail; and the opportunity to view or hunt waterfowl, bears, moose on the grassflat and river valley, and mountain goats in the higher elevations.

(9) Differences between the 1989 and 2003 Roadless Area Boundary: The roadless area boundaries have not changed between 1989 and 2003, except for the addition of the area around a beach-logged unit in 2003.

II. Capability for Management as Wilderness

(1) Natural Integrity and Appearance (Apparent Naturalness): The area is essentially unmodified, except for minor effects from mining and at the cabin site. Approximately 99 percent of the area is natural appearing, where only ecological and geological change has occurred.

(2) Opportunity for Solitude and Serenity, Self-reliance, Adventure, Challenging Experiences, and Primitive Recreation: There is a high opportunity for solitude and serenity within the area. The only reasonable access to the area is by boat or floatplane from Berg Bay. Helicopter access to the limited potential landing sites within the area (primarily in the alpine) is also possible. Low-flying aircraft follow Blake Channel and boats bypass the area. Present recreation use levels are low except in the immediate vicinity of the recreation cabin and around the grassflats during the fall waterfowl hunting season. Generally, a person camped inland is unlikely to see others. Based on harvest data compiled from 1985 to 1994, the VCU that comprises this area was identified within the top 25 percent of brown bear harvest areas on the Tongass (ADF&G, 1998).

Because of the high degree of isolation experienced by visitors in the area, the steep terrain, and the difficult accessibility of the majority of the area, opportunities for self-reliance, adventure, and challenging experiences are high. As with all backcountry areas on the Tongass, the opportunity for challenge and risk in this area is high. The climate, the rugged terrain, the isolation and distance from population centers with medical facilities, the barriers to communication, and the presence of large wild animals all contribute to the need for good preparation and knowledge of backcountry survival skills for anyone using this area. Hypothermia and bear encounters are just two examples of the many risks that must be considered before traveling in the backcountry of Southeast Alaska.

The area provides primarily primitive recreation opportunities. The table below lists the acreage and percent of the various Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classes that have been inventoried in the roadless area.

ROS Class	Acres	Percent of Total ROS
Primitive (P)	71,448	90%
Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM)	4,559	6%
Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM)	2,943	4%
Roaded Natural (RN)	197	0%

The area contains two inventoried recreation places that cover 4,318 acres, or 5 percent of the roadless area.

ROS Class	# of Rec. Places	Total Acres
P	0	0
SPNM	1	1,899
SPM	1	2,420
RN	0	0

There is one public recreation cabin and one maintained short trail in the area. The character of the landforms generally allows the visitor to feel remote from the sights and sounds of human activity. The area is accessible by boat from the community of Wrangell in less than 2 hours on somewhat protected waters. Because of this proximity to Wrangell, the area receives some use for hunting waterfowl, deer, and bears, moose on the grassflat and river valley, and mountain goats in the higher elevations.

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(3) Wilderness Attribute Rating System: In 1977, a Forest Service task force developed the Wilderness Attribute Rating System (WARS), which was used to inventory the wilderness characteristics of roadless areas during the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation process conducted by the Forest Service (referred to as RARE II). The purpose of WARS was to provide a measure of the area's wilderness quality, based on the key attributes of wilderness as defined in the Wilderness Act. It is largely based on the attributes described above in items 1 and 2 of this section (natural integrity, apparent naturalness, outstanding opportunity for solitude, and primitive recreation opportunities).

The inventoried roadless areas of the Tongass National Forest were rated according to this system in 1989 for the Analysis of the Management Situation developed in support of the Forest Plan Revision. At that time, the Aaron Roadless Area was given a rating of 27 out of 28 possible points. The rating was re-evaluated for this updated version of the Analysis of the Management Situation. Based on this re-evaluation, the area was also given a rating of 27.

(4) Ecologic and Geologic Values: This area is part of a very extensive mainland roadless area that includes portions of western British Columbia. As such, it contributes to one of the largest areas of North America that has essentially only been affected by ecologic and geologic processes.

A little less than half of the roadless area is forested and the remainder is dominated by alpine vegetation, rock and ice/snow. Forested areas are primarily located along Aaron and Oerns creek valleys, and along the beach fringe. A relatively high percentage of high-volume old growth occurs in the Oerns Creek valley.

(a) Fish Resources: The Tongass Fish and Wildlife Resource Assessment does not list any VCUs in this area as primary salmon or sport fish producers (ADF&G, 1998). Two Alaska Department of Fish and Game numbered salmon producing streams are present within the area. Aaron Creek, the largest producer, has an average annual escapement of 1,500 pink, and 2,600 chum, coho, and king salmon. Aaron and Oerns Creek have coho, chinook, and steelhead. Oerns Creek provides pink and chum spawning habitat, while Aaron offers intertidal habitat to pink and chum. Substrate in Aaron Creek is inappropriate for extensive pink and chum spawning. Both of these streams offer high value productive fish habitat.

(b) Wildlife Resources: A small population of mountain goats lives in the area. Black bears and Sitka black-tailed deer are found in the area, as are brown bear and a small population of moose. Wolves are occasionally seen on the grassflats. The Aaron Creek drainage is a major, forested, north-south travel corridor connecting the Stikine River (over a low pass and along Andrew Creek to the north) with the Berg Bay area and areas along the Blake Channel and Bradfield Canal and River. There are no known concentrations of marine wildlife or sea lion haul-out sites.

Based on harvest data compiled from 1985 to 1994, VCU 503, surrounding Berg Bay and extending north, was identified within the top 25 percent of brown bear harvest areas on the Tongass (ADF&G, 1998).

(c) Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species: The only federally listed threatened or endangered species likely to occur within or adjacent to the roadless area are the humpback whale (endangered) and the Steller sea lion (threatened). Both of these species are found in adjacent marine waters. Three Forest Service Region 10 Sensitive Species are suspected or known to occur within the area: the trumpeter swan, Peale's peregrine falcon, and the Queen Charlotte goshawk. Trumpeter swans nest in the lowlands on small lakes and along large rivers and winter in ice-free areas throughout the Tongass. Peale's peregrine falcons nest on cliff faces and islands and feed primarily on seabirds. Inhabitants of late seral forests, Queen Charlotte goshawks are closely associated with productive old growth. In addition, eight sensitive plant species are known or suspected to occur in the Wrangell Ranger District.

(d) Karst, Cave, and Other Geologic Resources: A small band of high vulnerability karst lands occurs in the southwestern corner of the area, northeast of Berg Bay. There are 112 acres of high vulnerability karst resources mapped in the area. No other karst topography is known to occur.

(5) **Scientific and Educational Values:** There are opportunities to observe and study fish, wildlife, forest and alpine ecology, ice fields, karst and other geologic formations, and the forces and processes which formed the mountains.

(6) **Scenic Values:** The vast majority of the area appears unmodified. However, minor intrusions such as the recreation cabin and the results of activities on mining claims, are evident when one is close to them. In addition, there are two stands of trees on the steep hillside on the north side of the larger bay that were harvested in 1960; the difference in vegetation is noticeable from a distance, but not readily apparent from the Aaron Creek Trail, which passes through the stands. The area exists in a predominantly natural condition, except near the Berg Bay cabin, where some of the foreground around Berg Bay and the larger bay is visible from boats using Blake Channel. A striking view of high peaks framed by the narrow entrance to Aaron Creek is also seen from the channel. Overall, the area provides spectacular scenery from Berg Bay, parts of Blake Channel, and elsewhere within the area.

Visual Priority Routes and Use Areas identified by the Forest Plan, that are within or adjacent to the area include: Blake Channel, which is used by tour ships; Aaron, Oerns, and Berg Creeks, which are recommended for Wild River status; the Berg Bay/Aaron Creek saltwater use area and boat anchorage; the Berg Bay public recreation cabin; and the Aaron Creek/Berg Bay Trail (#527).

Most of this roadless area, 96 percent, is inventoried as Variety Class A (possessing landscape diversity that is unique for the character type). About 1 percent is inventoried as Variety Class B (possessing landscape diversity that is common for the character type) and the remaining 3 percent is inventoried as Variety Class C (possessing a low degree of landscape diversity).

Almost the entire roadless area, 99 percent, has an Existing Visual Condition (EVC) Type I, where only ecological and geological change has occurred on the landscape. About 1 percent of the area has an ECV Type IV, where changes in the landscape are easily noticed by the average person and may attract some attention.

(7) **Social, Cultural, and Historical Values:** Limited evidence of extensive historical use of the area exists. According to Goldschmidt and Haas (1946) a former Tlingit camp occurs at the mouth of Aaron Creek. Available information indicates that some subsistence activities occur in the area, especially in the vicinity of Berg Bay and primarily by residents of Wrangell. The VCUs of the area were not listed among the VCUs with highest community use values or among the VCUs with the highest sensitivity to disturbance of subsistence use areas (ADF&G, 1998).

(8) **Manageability as Wilderness and Boundary Conditions/Changes:** The area is very well defined by natural boundaries, including the ridges surrounding the Aaron, Oerns, and Berg Creek watersheds and saltwater. Feasibility of management as wilderness or in a roadless condition is high unless mining claims are developed or the State decides to construct a highway through it to Canada.

III. Availability for Management as Wilderness (including effects of wilderness designation on adjacent areas)

(1) **Recreation, Including Tourism Potential:** There is potential for additional trails and shelters located at high elevations. Because of its proximity to Wrangell, there is potential for helicopter tours and access to the alpine and glaciers of the area. There is potential for increased use of the area for hunting waterfowl, brown bears, mountain goats, moose, and deer. In 1996, the Alaska Visitor Association proposed a leased proprietary camp with a capacity of 15 camp units for Aaron, Oerns, and Berg Creeks in their comments on the 1997 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan.

(2) **Subsistence Uses:** The existing patterns of subsistence activities in the area would not be affected by wilderness designation or management in an unroaded condition.

(3) **Fish Resource:** No fish habitat enhancement projects have been identified for this area.

(4) **Wildlife Resource:** The grassflats have been burned several times to improve waterfowl habitat. Enhancement opportunities include slashing portions of the older, decadent willow to promote new growth for moose, and improvement of habitat for waterfowl. The Aaron Creek drainage is a major, forested, north-south

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travel corridor connecting the Stikine River (over a low pass and along Andrew Creek to the north) with the Berg Bay area and areas along the Blake Channel and Bradfield Canal and River.

(5) **Timber Resources:** There are approximately 17,099 acres mapped as productive old growth in the roadless area. In addition, approximately 89 acres of second-growth spruce and alder have resulted from timber harvest in 1960. Of these acres, 6,789 acres are categorized as tentatively suitable for timber production. Based on the Forest Plan LUDs assigned to this area (and estimated falldown and scheduling reduction factors), less than 10 acres (less than one percent) of this roadless area are estimated to be suitable for timber production. Less than 10 acres are mapped as high-volume old growth and none are mapped as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth.

The potential for managing timber in this roadless area would be closely linked to the development of an access road up the Aaron and Oerns Creek valleys and the development of a log transfer facility (LTF).

(6) **Fire, Insects, and Disease:** The area has no significant fire history. Endemic tree diseases common to Southeast Alaska are present; there are no known epidemic disease occurrences.

(7) **Minerals:** The roadless area contains 10,522 acres of land identified as a mineral activity tract having a high potential for experiencing mineral exploration and development of locatable minerals (Coldwell, 1990; USDA Forest Service, 1991). A total of 7,362 of these acres are allocated to the Minerals LUD overlay. The Minerals LUD is intended to encourage the prospecting, exploration, development, mining, and processing of locatable minerals in areas with the highest potential for minerals development. The Minerals LUD is also intended to ensure that minerals are developed in an environmentally sensitive manner, and that other high-valued resources are considered when minerals development occurs. In addition, the roadless area contains an estimated 48,197 acres of undiscovered locatable mineral resources (Brew et al., 1990; USDA Forest Service, 1991); 5,285 of these acres are considered to have high potential for development.

The land allocated to the Minerals LUD overlay is located in the western portion of the area, covering Berg Mountain and along the northeastern side of Berg Creek and across Aaron Creek. This area is known as the Groundhog/Glacier Tract, which contains deposits of silver and lead, and was estimated to have a gross value of \$238 million (USDA Forest Service, 1997). This area also contains a few abandoned mining claims.

(8) **Transportation and Utilities:** There are no existing roads within or adjacent to the area. Road development for the purpose of timber harvest is planned in the adjacent Madan Roadless Area. Two routes were considered for a possible road link between saltwater and the Canadian highway system in the late 1980s. One of these routes would pass through the Aaron Roadless Area. It would come from Wrangell, up Aaron Creek, and would enter the adjacent Cone Roadless Area and travel down the West Fork of the Katete River, accessing the main Stikine River Valley. This potential route has not, however, received much recent public attention. Recent discussions and studies have focused on the Bradfield Canal route. The road link project was not included in the March 1999 Southeast Alaska Transportation Plan (Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 1999). However, a shoreline route from Wrangell to the Bradfield is included as a route for consideration by Southeast Conference in their ongoing assessment of long-term transportation needs for Southeast Alaska. The flats at Aaron Creek once provided storage for log rafts.

(9) **Water Availability and Use:** There are no existing or planned hydropower or domestic water projects in the area.

(10) **Areas of Scientific Interest:** The mapped karst resources encompass approximately 112 acres or less than one percent of the roadless area. The area contains no inventoried potential Research Natural Areas. The area has not been specifically identified for any scientific studies.

(11) **Land Use Authorizations:** There are no land use authorizations in the area. A log storage area was historically located at the mouth of Aaron Creek under permit with the State. This permit has expired and the log storage pilings have been removed.

(12) **Land Status:** The entire roadless area, including adjacent lands, is National Forest System lands.

IV. Wilderness and Roadless Area Evaluation

(1) Public and Congressional Interest

(a) Interest Expressed by Local Users and Residents: Local Wrangell residents have a moderate degree of interest in maintaining the integrity of the area. Some have historically expressed interest mining development and the construction of a road connecting Wrangell to the Canadian road network. Others support maintaining the roadless character of the area for wildlife and scenic values.

(b) Congressional Interest: Two bills from the U.S. House of Representatives included wilderness proposals for Southeast Alaska. In 1989, U.S. House of Representatives Bill HR 987 did not include this area. In 2001, HR 2908 did not propose the area for wilderness, but did propose it to be classified as a Congressionally Designated LUD II area and managed in an unroaded condition.

(c) Public Input During Forest Plan Revision and Appeals: No specific recommendations for wilderness were made. The Wrangell Resource Council recommended that the area be managed under the Primitive Recreation LUD. In 1996, the Alaska Visitor Association proposed a leased proprietary camp with a capacity of 15 camp units for Aaron, Oerns, and Berg Creeks; this would be consistent with the Semi-primitive Recreation designation. Comments from the timber industry recommended that the area be available for unrestricted timber harvest and roading.

(d) Public Input During Roadless Area Conservation Rule and Road Management Policy Review: This area was not specifically identified in the comments received on the Roadless Area Conservation Rule or Road Management Policy Review. However, some commenters wanted all unroaded lands in the Tongass to be protected from development.

(e) Public Input Expressed for Project-level EISs and Other Input: No project level comments were identified for this area.

(f) Public Input Expressed During Supplemental EIS Process: The U.S. Department of the Interior identified this roadless area as having important fish and wildlife habitat and populations; although not a top priority for protection, it ranked in their top third among all roadless areas. They indicated that protection of this area, in combination with the Madan (#204) and Harding (#207) Roadless Areas, would conserve valuable remaining undisturbed forested habitats on the mainland of southeast Alaska

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game rated the Aaron roadless area as the fifth highest priority for protection in the Stikine Area. This rating is based on the VCUs with the highest value fish and wildlife resources needing additional protection. VCUs are prioritized for their very high productivity, essential role in connectivity, and/or very high value as community use areas.

The city of Petersburg said they were opposed to designation of this area as wilderness because of the potential long-term economic impacts on the city.

The Alaska Rainforest Campaign (a coalition of national and Alaska conservation groups) identified Roadless Areas 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 528, and 529 as a contiguous complex of roadless areas that should be considered one roadless area and recommended it for permanent protection as LUD II. SEACC recommended that the Madan, Aaron, Cone, Harding, and Bradfield complex should be considered one roadless area and should be recommended for permanent protection as LUD II.

The Wrangell Resource Council recommended the portion of this area around Berg Bay be included with the Madan Roadless Area under LUD II protection.

Some individuals recommended this area for permanent protection as wilderness.

(2) Nearby Roadless and Wilderness Areas and Uses: The Aaron Creek area is part of a much larger mainland, unroaded land mass that includes the adjacent areas: the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness to the north, the

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Madan Roadless Area to the west, the Cone Roadless Area to the east, and the Harding Roadless Area to the south. The adjacent mainland areas generally receive light use, primarily near saltwater. Inland use is generally very light with the exception of the Stikine River corridor in the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness and the Virginia Lake area in the Madan Roadless Area.

(3) Distance From Population Centers (Accessibility): Approximate distances from population centers are as follows:

Community	Air Miles	Water Miles
Ketchikan (Pop. 14,070)	60	105
Wrangell (Pop. 2,308)	10	25
Petersburg (Pop. 3,224)	40	50
Juneau (Pop. 30,711)	150	175

Wrangell is the nearest stop on the Alaska Marine Highway.

(4) Relative Contribution to the National Wilderness Preservation System: The Aaron Roadless Area is located on the mainland approximately 10 air miles east of Wrangell and is bounded on the north by the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness; on the west by the Madan Roadless Area; on the south by Blake Channel and the Harding Roadless Area; and on the east by the Cone Roadless Area. The area is generally characterized as highly-complex terrain dominated by rugged mountains, many of which reach elevations of over 3,000 feet; the tallest is over 5,000 feet. Between the mountains are deep, broad valleys containing several sizable streams that ultimately feed into the main channel of Aaron Creek. The mountains include relatively small glaciers and small cirque lakes at high elevations. Near its mouth, Aaron Creek forms a wide floodplain and ends in a large grassflat at tidewater.

The roadless area is mostly unmodified. The area has outstanding natural integrity and apparent naturalness. The opportunity for solitude is very high and the opportunity for primitive recreation is outstanding. The area has very high scenic values; approximately 96 percent of the landscape is considered distinctive from a scenery standpoint.

The roadless area includes about 7,338 acres of high-volume, old-growth forest. Of these acres, 787 are mapped as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth.

Approximately 55 percent of the Aaron Roadless Area lies within the Central Coast Range Biogeographic Provinces and makes up about 6 percent of the province. It is one of nine inventoried roadless areas found in the province that collectively make up about 59 percent of the province. Portions of the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness lie within the Central Coast Range province and make up about 38 percent of the province. The remaining 45 percent of the roadless area lies within the Ice Fields Province and makes up 1 percent of that province. It is one of nine roadless areas found in the province that collectively make up about 67 percent of the province. The Ice Fields Province includes several wildernesses, which make up approximately 33 percent of it.

The Aaron Roadless Area lies within two ecological sections; it represents 1 percent of the Inside Passage Fjordlands Ecological Section and 1 percent of the Boundary Ranges Ecological Section. Both of these ecological sections are well represented by existing wilderness (20 and 33 percent, respectively) and by other existing non-development LUDs (32 and 62 percent, including 2 and 1 percent in LUD II, respectively).

Approximately half (53 percent) of this roadless area is within the Boundary Ranges Icefields Ecological Subsection; this portion of the roadless area represents 1 percent of the entire ecological subsection, which is well represented in existing wilderness (32 percent) and by other existing non-development LUDs (61 percent). Forty percent of this roadless area is within the Eastern Passage Complex Ecological Subsection; this portion of the roadless area represents 13 percent of the entire ecological subsection. Approximately 23 percent of this ecological subsection is in existing wilderness, 3 percent is in existing LUD II, and an additional 29 percent is protected by other existing non-development LUDs. The Bell Island Granitics Ecological Subsection represents 7 percent of the roadless area; this portion of the roadless area represents 2 percent of the entire ecological subsection, 14 percent of which is in existing wilderness, 9 percent in LUD II, and is well represented by other existing non-development LUDs (57 percent).

The Aaron Roadless Area was rated 27 out of a possible 28 points under the Wilderness Attribute Rating System (WARS). As such, its WARS rating is ranked 2nd from the highest (along with two other roadless areas) among the 109 Tongass inventoried roadless areas.

There is both local and national support for management of the area in an unroaded condition, but very little support for designation of the area as wilderness. The area receives relatively high recreation use, especially for hunting. The factors identified here indicate that the relative contribution of this area to the National Wilderness Preservation System would be very high.

V. Environmental Consequences

The Aaron Roadless Area would be managed under the existing Forest Plan if Alternative 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 7 is implemented. Nearly all of the roadless area would be managed under non-development LUDs, which maintain the high wilderness attributes of the area, including the option of expanding the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness to the south in the future. Timber harvest and road development could occur in the remaining less than 1 percent. The land in the development LUDs provides an estimated 4 acres that are suitable for timber production (less than 1 percent of the suitable land on the Wrangell Ranger District). None of those suitable lands are classified as high-volume, coarse-canopy old growth. The roadless area contains 10,522 acres of land identified as a mineral activity tract having a high potential for experiencing mineral exploration and development of locatable minerals. In addition, the roadless area contains an estimated 48,197 acres of undiscovered locatable mineral resources; 5,285 of these acres are considered to have high potential for development. The recreation, minerals, and special use programs would continue.

Under Alternative 6, the entire area would be converted to Recommended LUD II LUD. The ongoing recreation, mineral, and special use programs would continue similar to current conditions. No timber harvest would be allowed. Although LUD II designation would not expand the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness as such, it would provide for long-term management in a mostly natural condition. The values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area would be provided long-term protection if designated LUD II.

Under Alternative 8, the entire roadless area would be converted to Recommended Wilderness LUD, which if designated, would expand the Stikine-LeConte Wilderness to the south. No timber harvest would be allowed and the ongoing recreation, minerals, and special uses programs could be restricted. Mineral prospecting would be allowed up to the time that the area is actually designated as wilderness by Congress. The values associated with the natural settings of the roadless area would be provided long-term protection if designated wilderness.

Land Use Designation Allocations and Suitable Timber Lands by Alternative for Roadless Area 205 (in acres)								
Land Use Designation	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5	Alt 6	Alt 7	Alt 8
Recommended Wilderness								79,147
Wilderness								
Recommended Wilderness Nat. Mon.								
Wilderness National Monument								
Non-wilderness National Monument								
Research Natural Area								
Special Interest Area								
Remote Recreation	23	23	23	23	23		23	
Enacted Municipal Watershed								
Old-growth Habitat								
Semi-remote Recreation	67,877	67,877	67,877	67,877	67,877		67,877	
Recommended LUD II						79,147		
LUD II								
Wild, Scenic, Recreational River	11,201	11,201	11,201	11,201	11,201		11,201	
Experimental Forest								
Scenic Viewshed	46	46	46	46	46		46	
Modified Landscape								
Timber Production								
TOTAL	79,147	79,147	79,147	79,147	79,147	79,147	79,147	79,147
Suitable Timber Lands	4	4	4	4	4	0	4	0