



Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Webinar

Questions & Answers

March 27, 2024

1) About the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS), given the large amount of wilderness and other primitive areas on the forest, recreation access and group size in these areas is limited. On the Tongass, most recreation is water-based, with these waterways acting like roads in a sense. In some plans, I have seen how within a certain distance (say a mile) of a road, you can have larger group sizes (20 instead of 12, for example). Will you be considering this as part of the plan revision process? Also, currently the group size limitations seem inconsistent across ranger districts.

Yes, ROS class allocations and what associated group size limits will be considered during the plan revision process. We don't yet know what the final limitations or ROS classes will be in each area since we are at the very beginning - the assessment phase. During the assessment, we'd like your input on things like this, what is and isn't working well with the current forest plan.

Also, keep in mind that wilderness is a congressional designation and there are specific requirements for managing these areas that we need to abide by, including the need to preserve opportunities for solitude.

2) The first presentation tonight focused on economic impacts of various sectors or industries. It would be nice to have the same discussion focused on the environmental impacts of these industries to provide a more broad and holistic perspective.

We'll keep that in mind as we put together future material. Tonight's presentation was focused on introducing the Forest Service framework for addressing recreation in the forest plan revision process. The environmental impacts of recreation and tourism will be a part of the assessment.

3) Are the six classes on the recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) already defined? I am concerned the most primitive class lumps together the wildest experiences with those that are qualitatively less so.

The recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) is a national framework that is pre-defined. Forests do have the discretion to define the classes more narrowly or more specifically. Forests can also develop subclasses within

those six classes. Establishing a subclass requires a higher level of review and could be considered as part of this forest plan revision.

4) I'm concerned that if economic growth continues to happen, that there will be negative ecological impacts and that ecological sustainability won't be maintained. The six recreation opportunity spectrum classes describe the availability of different recreation opportunities. I'd like to understand the relative proportion of each class and how this affects economic or ecological sustainability. The more area there is in the more developed classes, while this will contribute to the economy, the greater impact there is on ecological sustainability. This should be considered forest-wide, but it's also important to think specifically about each community and island.

That is a key question we'll need to address during the forest plan revision process – how do we ensure ecological, social, and economic sustainability. As part of that, we'll consider the area devoted to each particular ROS class. ROS will be used to describe what types of recreation are appropriate where on the forest and factoring in the current communities across the Forest.

We are striving for healthy communities that are economically viable as well as a thriving environment. And finding the right balance between economic growth and ecological impacts as there is a dynamic tension between those factors.

While the ROS process will be completed forest-wide, the intent is to treat each area with the attention it needs. Thresholds and the distribution of ROS classes may vary across the forest.

5) It's difficult fitting into the Forest Service framework. Even the word "recreation" doesn't really talk about being out on the land. Nowhere in the presentation did I see the word "gathering". But this is essential. Gathering, healing, and recovering...I don't see these in the Forest Service framework.

It is absolutely true that different people are drawn to make connections with the land for different reasons. The things that draw you to the land and the environments you need to support that are some of the key pieces of information we need during the assessment phase of the plan revision. Tonight's presentation was focused on introducing the Forest Service framework for addressing recreation in the forest plan revision. This is the start of the conversation regarding recreation in the revised Tongass forest plan, not the final statement on how people enjoy the forest.

6) I'm concerned about large-scale tourism. The cruise ship industry is 1.7 million passengers. The associated fuel problem and environmental impacts are large. Glacier Bay National Park doesn't allow those discharges. What can the Forest Service do to enforce and insist that these massive air and water emissions don't occur? We need to ask deep questions about this industry and the large group of visitors associated. It impacts locals, who can't find an empty bay. We need to examine the future of commercial tourism forest-wide and the impacts of this.

Thank you for your comment. We'd like to hear more about the environment you need and how the Tongass can provide it and support the ways you enjoy the land. It is important to note that unlike Glacier Bay National Park, the Tongass National Forest does not have jurisdiction over the marine environment. In the forest plan revision, the Forest Service will address how it supports and manages recreation and tourism on Forest Service land, including how environmental impacts can be minimized.

7) How is the Forest service capturing the economic impacts of tourism AND recreation? Is there an effort to do a new economic impact study?

Assessments leading up to a forest plan revision are intended to rapidly evaluate *existing* information. At this point, no new economic impact studies are planned. Additionally, it is difficult to parse apart the economic impacts of different types of recreation, such as independent recreational use and what might be considered tourism. For example, if someone from another country comes to the Tongass and charters a flight to stay at a cabin, is that independent recreation-related economic activity or tourism-related economic activity? Within the socioeconomic assessment section, we do plan to capture that existing information about the more general impacts/influence of tourism on the economy of the region (as it is an important economic sector) with consideration of how Tongass recreation opportunities may influence the industry. Further down the line if management changes reflect the need for it, we will consider the economic impacts on any tourism related developments, but we are currently not in that phase of the planning process.

8) How is the Tongass going to show the public where it has allowed/ permitted commercial tourism?

We are working on the best method to describe and/or show this information for the 17 million acres of the forest and hope to have something available by the time the assessment phase of the plan revision process is complete.

9) Will the plan discuss commercial tourism as separate than independent recreation?

Yes, commercial tourism and independent recreation will be discussed separately to the extent that information is available that allows for distinguishing between these two types of recreation. In some instances, information may not be available that allows us to discuss these topics separately, and recreation will be addressed more broadly. Where information exists and the distinction is relevant, commercial tourism and independent recreation will be addressed separately.

Given the interest in engaging on this topic, and the limited time we had allotted during this introductory presentation, the USFS will be looking for ways to continue this conversation. Any new opportunities will be advertised on our [website](#).

For more information or to sign up for our email distribution list, please refer to the Tongass Revision Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd1105492>