

Tongass National Forest Forest Plan 5-Year Review

CRAIG PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

1.0 Introduction

The Tongass National Forest (TNF) is operating under the 2008 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Forest Plan (Forest Plan). As promised when the plan was completed, a 5-year review is now occurring to determine whether any actions are needed to clarify or adjust the plan.

Craig District Ranger Matt Anderson, Acting Thorne Bay District Ranger Perry Edwards and Tongass Forest Planner Sue Jennings hosted a Prince of Wales public meeting at the Craig Tribal Association Hall on February 20, 2013, from 6:00-8:00 pm. The public meeting objectives are to help the public understand the Forest Plan 5-year review process; provide information to help the public prepare effective comments; and provide an opportunity to ask questions or provide comments. Ranger Anderson provided an overview of the five-year review process, and Ranger Edwards presented a PowerPoint reviewing the Forest Plan including what will occur during and following the comment period. After the meeting conversation continued, which is also documented in this report.

In addition to the TNF team, there were 11 meeting attendees, five of whom provided public comment.

2.0 Clarifying Questions and Answers

This section summarizes the clarifying questions and responses discussed at the meeting and the post-meeting comments.

Sealaska Lands Bill

How would the Sealaska Lands Bill, if passed, affect the Forest Plan? (Note: The Sealaska Lands Bill would transfer approximately 70,000 acres from the Tongass National Forest to Sealaska ownership to complete the Corporation's remaining ANCSA land entitlement).

- Answer: If the Sealaska Lands Bill passes, the Forest Service will decide what changes can and should be made at that time. It is not yet clear what the final bill will include, making it difficult to predict what changes might be needed to the Forest Plan.

Roadless Rule

What is the timeline for the process to determine if the Tongass will be exempted from the Roadless Rule? What is the effect of the Roadless Rule on the Forest Plan if the Tongass is not exempt?

- Answer: The Tongass was exempt from the Roadless Rule when the Forest Plan was prepared; however, that rule is now in effect in the Tongass due to a court decision and is already having an impact. Subsequent litigation is still challenging its application, and the decision-making timeline is not known. An example of how the Roadless Rule is having an impact is the Big Thorne Timber Sale on Prince of Wales Island where areas for timber harvest were removed from the sale because they are in Roadless areas. The Forest Service has prepared a map showing the Roadless Inventory overlaid on the Forest Plan LUDs, which you can review today, and will be added to the Forest Service website.

Access Travel Management Plan

Will comments that were submitted as part of the Access Travel Management (ATM) Plan be automatically resubmitted as part of this 5-year review? There were 40 to 60 people in attendance for ATM meetings who would like their comments heard for this process as well. Does the Forest Service have a map showing the ATM Plan overlaid on the Forest Plan LUDs? How will the Access Travel Management Plan be impacted by the 5-year review process? The Forest Service did not sufficiently incorporate the majority of comments that were submitted during the ATM process into the final plan. Additional concerns are that hunting, berry picking, and mushroom picking are becoming increasingly difficult to do with so few roads left open.

- Answer: Comments made during other public comment periods are not included in the 5-year review. Relevant comments must be re-submitted. Most of the comments made during development of the ATM were addressed in the Plan. The Forest Service does not yet know what changes will result to the Forest Plan as a result of the 5-Year review process as the review is just beginning. The Forest Service welcomes comments on aspects of the ATM as part of the 5-year review.

Subsistence

How will subsistence concerns be considered during the 5-year review process?

- Answer: Subsistence always is a consideration. Please submit your subsistence comments and the Forest Service will respond as part of this process.

Firewood

Does the Forest Service have a designated area for firewood harvesting? A conversation was overheard regarding tree girdling and the individuals intend to do this now and return to the area the following year to collect the trees then as firewood.

- Answer: If a tree is already dead and it is in an appropriate LUD, it can be collected as firewood. There are many areas on the island to collect firewood and the Forest Service can provide information about where to go. However, it is illegal to kill trees in order to harvest them. Forest Service law enforcement can assist to ensure these types of illegal activities do not take place.

Two Coffman Cove residents are curious to know what the Forest Service does with “blowdown” along the road. They want to know if the Forest Service sells it or uses it for firewood. They are interested in the timber harvest areas where all of the slash and brush are left, and wondered why the Forest Service does not make timber companies clean up the resulting slash?

Wolves

Wolves are currently being relocated off of Gravina Island. Where are they being placed?

- Answer: The Alaska Department of Fish and Game is responsible for wolf management in the area, not the Forest Service.

Viking Lumber Supply

Is there enough wood on Prince of Wales Island to sustain the Viking Lumber sawmill for the next 10 years?

- Answer – When the Big Thorne sale comes out that will provide wood for three to four years for Viking and for several of the smaller mills. It is difficult to know what the conditions will be like in the future as there are many unknowns, including the continued application of the Roadless Rule to the Tongass; potential passage of Sealaska Land Bill; the rates of young growth; and changing markets. The Forest Service just signed a NEPA document for 54-acres of young growth commercial harvesting at Dargon Point via clearcut, and it will be informative to observe the bidding process. While young growth is not yet ready to be harvested on a large-scale on Prince of Wales, in about 20 years it will be economical to harvest young growth. In the meantime, the Forest Service will continue to plan old growth timber harvest. The Forest Service is interested in your observations on young growth stands that may be ready to harvest.

Forest Restoration

What is being done in regards to tree thinning on Forest Service lands?

- Answer: It costs about \$350 an acre to thin previously harvested lands. The Forest Service thins approximately 1,500 to 2,000 acres annually on Prince of Wales Island. However, there is a considerable amount of thinning that remains to be done. The Forest Service often leaves a screen by roads to reduce visual impacts and to provide protection for deer.

Salmon

A concern was noted regarding the lack of sockeye in several drainages that had salmon runs historically, including drainages on the north side of Big Salt Chuck.

Special Forest Products

A resident wanted to know where harvest of cedar bark is allowed. He is concerned about being confined to too small of an area. Additionally he is interested in collecting hellebore plants, along with other natural remedies for various health ailments.

3.0 Comment Summary (grouped by topic)

This section summarizes the formal comments offered by individuals at the meeting.

The Forest Plan needs amendment due to significant changes that have taken place since it was prepared. These changes include: (one commenter)

- **Changes in Southeast Alaska's economy:** The timber industry has significantly declined since 1997. The highest economic use of the Tongass has shifted from the timber industry to the fishing and visitor industries. There is a tremendous demand for minerals that did not exist 15 years ago. Moreover, the rising cost of fuel has made everything associated with the Tongass more expensive.
- **Changes in science.** Global warming and climate change are affecting the forest. The Forest Plan should be changed to reflect the best available scientific evidence. New studies regarding local wolves and deer species on Prince of Wales Island, such as the fawn mortality study currently underway, should be reflected in the Forest Plan.
- **Changes in legal requirements.** The Forest Service should update the Forest Plan to include application of the Roadless Rule to the Tongass; as well as to account for the Sealaska land-selection legislation and other land transfers.

Development LUDs with roads will be the basis of a sustainable young growth timber industry in Southeast Alaska and on Prince of Wales Island. (one commenter)

- Development LUDs with roads are critical to the continued economic growth of Prince of Wales Island.
- Further designations of LUD IIs—or other restricted designations that preclude opportunities for present and future timber programs—should be implemented only in the most critical of habitat-protection areas.
- The vast majority of timber and other resource management needs can be accomplished by adaptive management prescriptions and plans.

Continue to Use New Road Management Concepts (one commenter)

- Further use of newer road management prescriptions is encouraged. Such prescriptions use modified management techniques to allow the broadest road access possible, while maintaining protections for roads that the Forest Service cannot maintain.

Water Yield is not Being Adequately Addressed. (one commenter)

- Water yield is being overlooked in timber harvested watersheds and should be incorporated into monitoring and timber sale analyses to better evaluate how water yield is changing – especially in relationship to climate change.

General Forest Plan (one commenter)

- The Standards and Guidelines in the Forest Plan are well matched to the conditions of the environment and how they react to timber management.

Special Forest Products (one commenter)

- Alaska Natives have a lot of uses for the different resources of the forest. There are a number of great resources in the Tongass that Native communities use, including berries, bark, tea, blueberries, and devil's club, among others. Continued access to these renewable, seasonal, local resources is important.

Meeting Attendees

1. Jon Bolling
2. Chris Cummings
3. Bob Claus
4. Spencer Beckman
5. Ronald Swellcamsh Williams
6. Michael Kampnich
7. Tom Cady
8. Art Demmert
9. Jerry Lutton
10. Misty Fitzpatrick
11. Brandy Prefontaine

TNF Team

Matt Anderson, Craig District Ranger
Perry Edwards, Thorne Bay Acting District Ranger
Sue Jennings, Forest Planner
Barbara Sheinberg, Sheinberg Associates
Meilani Schijvens, Sheinberg Associates

4.0 Comments offered for the record at Craig Public Meeting

Bob Claus

My name is Bob Claus. I work for the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council. I am currently working on detailed written comments for the record.

Things have changed since this Forest Plan was first prepared. The Plan is based on assumptions from the 1997 Plan, and that was a long time ago. Major changes have occurred in the economy of Southeast Alaska since that time. Currently, the primary industries of the Tongass include the salmon and tourism industries. Timber has greatly declined since 1997. These changes to the rural economy need to be reflected in the Plan.

There have been changes regarding what we know about science. We know that global warming and climate change are affecting the forest, but we do not yet know how exactly. We are getting new information about local species on the Prince of Wales Island, especially wolves and deer; such as the fawn mortality study that is currently under way. The Forest Plan should reflect the best available science and that requires changes to the Plan.

Commodity prices have changed since 1997. Everything in the Tongass is more expensive due to rising fuel costs. There is a tremendous demand for minerals that did not exist 15 years ago that needs to be reflected in the Plan.

Finally, there have been changes in legal requirements. The Roadless Rule is still under appeal, however, that Rule did not apply to the Plan when the Plan was last written and the Forest Plan needs to address this change. There are land transfers. There will likely be 68,000 acres coming out of the Forest Service land base that will be transferred to Sealaska. These changes are significant and need to be reflected in the Plan. Conditions that were the basis of the Forest Plan have changed, and, therefore, the Plan needs to be changed by amendment or through a major revision.

Michael Kampnich

My name is Michael Kampnich. I am a resident of Craig and have lived here approximately 33 years. My general comments focus on Land Use Designations. Development LUDs with roads will be the basis of the future of a young growth sustainable timber industry in Southeast Alaska and on Prince of Wales Island. Roaded development LUDs are critical to maintaining a diverse and thriving economy on Prince of Wales. Further designation of LUD IIs—and other restricted designations that would preclude opportunity for present and future timber programs—should be implemented only for the most critical of habitat protection needs. The vast majority of timber and other resource management needs can be accomplished by adaptive management prescriptions and plans.

Regarding public access and road closures, I would encourage further use of some of the newer road management prescriptions that use modified management techniques to allow the broadest access possible while still accomplishing the protections on roads that the Forest Service can no longer maintain. Overall the Forest Service does a good job dealing with a number of competing interests. I appreciate the work that all of you do.

Ronald Swellcamsh Williams

I overheard a conversation regarding tree girdling in the area of 12 mile and Upper Staney Creek area. The individuals intended to return to the area the following year and collect the girdled trees as firewood.

Tom Cady

I am a resident of Craig and a Forest Service employee. My comments are specific to aquatic resource protection and timber management. On a positive note, the Standards the Guidelines in the current Forest Plan are well matched to the conditions in this environment, including how they react to timber management in specific areas. On a negative note, I am concerned that the subject of water yield is being overlooked in heavily managed watersheds. Monitoring requirements should be incorporated into the Forest Plan to better evaluate how water yield is changing in the managed landscapes of the Tongass. Climate change (hot summers, dry years) can be a significant factor. I do not think that the Forest Plan or timber sale analyses sufficiently address water yield. Water yield refers to how water moves across the landscape (how fast it moves, when it moves). The Tongass environment is heavily impacted by precipitation and there is evidence that as you remove vegetation from the landscape, water transfer occurs much more quickly, and in drier years this is exacerbated. Water yield is a concern that has not been adequately addressed.

Art Demmert

My name is Art Demmert. I am on the Klawock Heenya Corporation Board of Directors.

How does Viking Lumber on Prince of Wales Island fit into the Forest Plan? Is there enough wood on the Island to sustain Viking Lumber for ten years? After this contract is up will the Forest Service be looking to young growth? I am curious because we lease land to Viking, and are in a negotiations process. I am not saying that Viking Lumber should be cut off, but I grew up here I was in awe one day when I walked up from the beach and saw how much logging had occurred in the area of El Capitan. Greenpeace came and assisted in settling that matter. What is the Forest Service doing in regards to tree thinning on Forest Service land? I am a fisherman and other than deer hunting I do not know much about the woods. I went with Ron Wolfe onto Sealaska land and I was amazed to see such a significant difference between the Forest Service and Sealaska thinning process and stages. If you drive down the roads and look at the trees on Forest Service land, the trees are just inches apart.

I know the Forest Service is discussing the 5-year review with tribes, but I do not know to which tribes you are talking. Tribes are not represented here tonight. Alaska Natives have a lot of uses for the different resources of the forest. There are a number of great resources in the Tongass that the Native communities use, including berries, bark, tea, blueberries, and devil's club, among others. Those resources are all renewable, seasonal, and local. I collect and utilize these products. I do not sell them, but I give them away or use them for personal purposes. Devil's club balm is amazing. If you have a burn and put devil's club balm on and it makes the scar go away. Where can I find information regarding how Alaska Natives can utilize these products for commercial purposes? There is a book that presents the different Special Forest Products that Alaska Natives in the area use. For example, you can look up Devil's Club and see what you can and cannot do with Devil's Club. Where can this book be obtained? It would be interesting to see if that book addresses anything in the Forest Plan.