

Tongass National Forest Forest Plan 5-Year Review

SITKA 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.

Sitka District Ranger Carol Goularte, Fisheries Watershed and Soils Staff Officer Greg Killinger, and Tongass Forest Planner Sue Jennings hosted a public meeting at the Harrigan Centennial Hall on February 13, 2013, from 6:00-8:00 pm. The public meeting's 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.

Carol Goularte provided an overview of the five-year review process, and presented a PowerPoint on Forest Plan and what will occur during and following the comment period.

In addition to the TNF team, there were 13 meeting attendees. No attendees provided formal public comments.

2.0 Clarifying Questions and Answers *(grouped by topic)*

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

Sealaska Bill

If the Sealaska Bill is passed, what would be the impact on the Forest Plan?

- Answer: This could have an effect on the Conservation Strategy and the Adaptive Management Plan. The Forest Plan would need to be reviewed.

Roadless Rule

How is the Roadless Rule incorporated into the Forest Plan?

- Answer: The Tongass National Forest was exempt from the Roadless Rule when the 2008 Forest Plan Amendment was made. In 2011, the Roadless Rule was reinstated for the Tongass and the Forest Plan currently adheres to this rule.

However, the State of Alaska has challenged this application of the Roadless Rule and the outcome is uncertain at this time.

Hydroelectric Projects and Takatz Lake Hydroelectric Project

(There were a number of questions related to hydroelectric development summarized below.)

The Transportation and Utility System (TUS) corridor across Baranof Island to Takatz Lake that is depicted in the Forest Plan is a general approximation only and now that more specific options/routes are being developed, is not in the 'right' place. Given that these TUS were general only, the application of the TUS should be considered approximate. However the TNF and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) are not interpreting it this way and this has eliminated possible environmentally and economically preferable alternatives from consideration. During feasibility work on the City and Borough of Sitka (CBS) Takatz Lake Hydroelectric Project, they were unable to consider alternative corridors across Baranof Island that may have been more economically viable and better suited for the landscape because the TUS isn't in the exact right spot in the Forest Plan. The alternative corridor would pass through a Remote Recreation LUD which doesn't allow electric transmission lines unless there is a TUS overlay. The Sitka Ranger District notes they have been working with the CBS on this issue, and recommends submitting a comment on this matter and needed Forest Plan changes.

The New Planning Rule

Which Planning Rule will be used for a Forest Plan amendment?

- Answer: The new Planning Rule.

Monitoring Reports

How will monitoring reports be used in the Forest Plan review? Current monitoring reports mention that over half of salmon buffers have blown down in places, which calls into question the effectiveness of the standard and guideline about what is needed for buffer zones in salmon streams. Will this monitoring data be used in the revision process?

- Answer: A 5-Year Monitoring & Evaluation Report is being prepared that will review trends that are now apparent after multiple years of data compilation. This information, including data on the salmon stream buffers, will be incorporated into the review process.

Public Involvement Process *(There were a number of questions concerning the public involvement process. The responses are summarized below.)*

- Since the Sitka meeting occurred, the comment period for the 5-Year Review has been extended until the end of June 2013.
- An interdisciplinary team of scientists from every resource will consider comments submitted during the 5-Year Forest Plan Review. In early 2014, a report will be released with responses and will also likely indicate the level of priority and proposed action, if any. Similar comments will be grouped and have a common response. If a comment is unique, such as a comment about a specific location, that could warrant an individual response.
- There are currently no plans to hold internal meetings for Forest Service resource areas. Internal staff is highly encouraged to submit comments.

Type of Action to the Plan *(There were a number of questions concerning actions that can be made to the Forest Plan. The responses are summarized below.)*

- The date when the type of action(s) that will be recommended as a result of the 5-Year review has not yet been determined (e.g. Minor Plan amendment or Plan revision). It is dependent on the scope and type of comments that are received. If you have signed in tonight, you will be added to the project contact list and will be notified upon the release of this information. It will be sometime in 2014.
- Changes in LUD boundaries and LUD classifications require an amendment. Whether the amendment is major or minor is determined by the significance of the change and action.
- The scale of the change, whether it is forest-wide or at a specific location, is a determining factor in whether the amendment is significant or not. The Forest Supervisor makes the final determination on whether an amendment is significant.
- Each amendment includes a NEPA review.

Wildlife Conservation Strategy

Why is the Forest Service doing a special review of the Wildlife Conservation Strategy (WCS)?

- The Forest Supervisor finds it appropriate to review many aspects of the Forest Plan during the 5-Year Review. The Southeast Conference and the US Fish and Wildlife Service are also working on alternative Wildlife Conservation Strategies. There will a scientific meeting to review the alternative WCS; however no public review is planned at this time, as this will be a scientific peer-based discussion. The public will be welcome to attend the meeting.

3.0 Comments

There was no public comment offered for the record at the Sitka meeting.

Meeting Attendees

1. Clarence Clark
2. Frank Barnes
3. Austin Williams
4. Melissa Dinsmore
5. Pat Heuer
6. Paul Slenkamp
7. Paul Valley
8. Jennifer MacDonald
9. Scott Harris
10. Darrin Kelly
11. Andrew Thoms
12. Judi Lehman
13. Milt Fusselman

TNF Team

Carol Goularte, Sitka District Ranger
Greg Killinger, Fisheries Watershed and Soils Staff Officer
Sue Jennings, Forest Planner
Barbara Sheinberg, Sheinberg Associates
Donovan Bell, Sheinberg Associates