

APPENDIX K
OLD-GROWTH HABITAT
RESERVE MODIFICATION
PROCEDURES

Appendix K

Old-growth Habitat Reserve Modification Procedures

Introduction

This appendix describes criteria for changing the boundaries of old-growth reserves (OGRs) at the project level as described in the Old-growth Habitat Land Use Designation (LUD) Standards and Guidelines (Wildlife section). For a complete review of the Conservation Strategy, including assumptions for the design of the OGR system, refer to Appendix D of the 2008 Final EIS.

Significant modifications to OGRs (e.g., in the case of a land exchange) require consideration of other factors outside the scope of this appendix. Factors include connectivity, size, and shape of the reserve, as well as basic assumptions behind the location of the reserves. Some activities (i.e., major land conveyance or substantial timber harvest in non-development LUDs) could significantly affect the integrity of the Conservation Strategy. In this case, an overall review of the effects on the Conservation Strategy would be necessary. These activities are anticipated to be infrequent events.

Review of OGRs

During the 2008 Amendment process, the USDA Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) reviewed all of the small OGRs and a few of the medium and large OGRs. These were reviewed primarily because under the 1997 Forest Plan, small OGRs were not adequately mapped, so it was necessary to review and designate them at the project level. Medium and large OGR locations were finalized in the 1997 Forest Plan and brought forward. This decision finalizes the location of the majority of the small OGRs; therefore, project-level reviews are not necessary, except as outlined below.

Minor modifications to any OGR boundary as a result of imprecise mapping are considered a “correction of map errata.” The changes will not be considered changes in the Forest Plan and may be completed without project level or other review provided that changes meet OGR goals and objectives. Changes should only be completed to follow physical and other recognizable on-the-ground features or defined boundaries (e.g., roads, streams, LUD, watersheds).

Under limited circumstances, a line officer may decide to modify the size and location of an OGR. Modifications of OGRs, other than minor as described above, will require the completion of a project level review. This review may be necessary if:

- A. The project occurs in VCUs 1930, 2010, 5371, 5620, 6100, 6140, 6150, 6160, 6170, 6320, 6710, 6750, and 6760. A project-level review is required because critical site-specific information for these small and medium OGRs was not available for this decision. This review requires an assessment of landscape connectivity (refer to Appendix D of the 2008 Final EIS). Once a review and approval through the NEPA process is complete, no further review for these OGRs is necessary.
- B. Site-specific information for a small OGR indicates that the OGR habitat criteria are not met in the mapped location.
- C. Actions are proposed within the OGR that will reduce the integrity of the old-growth habitat in the OGR.

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- D. The OGR will be affected by a land conveyance, power line, mine, or other project that was not considered in the Forest Plan. An overall review of the Conservation Strategy is not necessary for a modification to an individual small OGR, but it could be necessary for modifications to medium and large OGRs, or if a proposal affects multiple OGRs. If an overall review is deemed unnecessary by the line officer for modification to medium and large OGRs, documentation of the rationale will be done through the NEPA process.

Project-Level Review

Project-level reviews will ensure that OGRs meet Forest Plan OGR criteria while addressing forest-wide multiple use goals and objectives. There are two levels of review included in the project-level review: 1) the interagency review, and 2) the decision process.

Step 1, Interagency Review Process—The purpose of an interagency review is to identify the biologically preferred location for the OGR. An interagency team of USDA Forest Service, USFWS, and ADF&G biologists will jointly evaluate the location and habitat composition of the OGR by reviewing all the large productive old growth blocks within a Value Comparison Unit (VCU). The interagency review team will develop a proposal for the OGR that meets the criteria of this appendix and document why other proposals were not recommended.

The review will include the following steps:

- A. Review the purpose and rationale for current location of the Forest Plan OGR as documented in the current Tongass Old Growth database.
- B. Assess whether the purpose and rationale for the location of the OGR has changed.
- C. Use the design criteria to define the biologically preferred location for the OGR.
- D. Document this proposal as the interagency proposed OGR in the Tongass Old Growth database and in an Interagency OGR Review report.

Step 2, Decision Process—Line officers will incorporate the interagency review team OGR recommendation in the NEPA process, considering the best biological location for the OGR while balancing other considerations. The interagency team will work with the decision maker to develop alternate proposals, if necessary to meet other Forest Plan objectives. The implemented OGR must meet the minimum criteria as described below.

The Decision process will include the following steps:

- A. Attempt to develop a viable project that avoids conflicts with the biologically preferred OGR. At a minimum, the biologically preferred OGR will be considered in an alternative in the NEPA document.
- B. Where modifications to the biologically preferred OGR are required to meet Forest-wide multiple use goals and objectives:
 - 1. Follow the management prescriptions as defined for the Old-growth Habitat LUD; and
 - 2. Document the rationale for modifications to the biologically preferred OGR.
- C. Changes to the OGR LUD require a NEPA analysis and are generally a non-significant Forest Plan amendment.
- D. Analyze the amount of suitable Forest land impacted by the change in OGR.
- E. Add the updated information (including the rationale for the final location) to the Tongass Old Growth database.

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Criteria for Small OGRs

- A. Review Appendix D of the Final EIS, which includes the assumptions for the design of the old-growth reserve system.
- B. Small reserves are a contiguous landscape of at least 16 percent of the National Forest System land area of each VCU and at least 50 percent of the small reserve, should be productive old growth. The size and location of small OGRs will consider the following:
 1. OGRs shall contain a minimum of 400 acres of productive old-growth forest. Do not map isolated reserves with less than 400 acres of productive old growth.
 2. The preferred biological objective is for each reserve to contain at least 800 acres of productive old-growth forest.
 3. In VCUs that are partially allocated to a Non-development LUD, compare the computed acreage required to the acres of productive old growth in the Non-development LUD. If the Non-development LUD acres are less than the area necessary for a small reserve, first use the productive old growth acres in the existing Non-development LUD to establish a small reserve, and then add additional acres of productive old growth to achieve the required small reserve size and composition.
 4. In VCUs that are separated by saltwater channels, reserves may be separated, but attempt to retain 800 acres of productive old growth in each.
 5. In very large VCUs, generally larger than 10,000 acres, the allocated old growth may be mapped in separate reserves as long as each reserve has a minimum of 800 acres of productive old growth. However, larger contiguous reserves are preferred to multiple smaller reserves.
 6. In very large VCUs that contain relatively little productive old growth and the computational rule requires an amount of productive old growth that exceeds 50 percent of the existing productive old growth in the VCU, map a reserve of at least 400 acres of productive old growth.
 7. Where VCU boundaries do not match watershed or ecological boundaries, up to 30 percent of the allocated old growth acres in a VCU may be mapped in an adjacent VCU if the resulting reserve achieves old-growth reserve objectives. The resulting small reserve in both VCUs must be contiguous. Total acreage is attributed to the VCU with 70 percent of the OGR.
 8. OGR boundaries should follow recognizable features that are identifiable on the ground. Features should be permanent and easily identifiable. Features may include but are not limited to streams, roads, distinctive ridges and ridge-tops, watershed boundaries, and v-notches.

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