

**Decision Notice  
And  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
for  
Expansion of Recreation Facilities  
at the Childs Glacier  
Recreation Area**

**November 12, 2003**

USDA Forest Service  
Alaska Region  
Chugach National Forest  
Cordova Ranger District

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this Decision Notice is to document the factors I considered and the rationale I used in making a decision concerning expansion of recreation facilities at Childs Glacier Recreation Area on National Forest System (NFS) lands.

The project area is located at milepost 48 of the Copper River Highway and consists of two 40-acre parcels of National Forest System land (collectively US Survey 8366) surrounded by private land. They are located approximately 1,000 feet apart (refer to Map #1 in the EA appendix). A Forest Service road across private land connects the two parcels. These parcels were withheld from conveyance to Chugach Alaska Corporation (CAC), the surrounding land owner, to help meet the need for public recreation near Childs Glacier while providing a transportation corridor across the Copper River should the Copper River Highway be completed. Trail and road easements connect the two parcels through Chugach Alaska Corporation property. The withholding of the two 40-acre parcels was a special stipulation of the Chugach Native Inc. Settlement Agreement of 1982. The trail easements are regulated by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, Section 17b. The proposed actions will occur only on USS 8366 Lot 2. The access road across private land would not change.

This Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) also contains certain findings required by various laws and information concerning the right to Administrative Review of this decision. An environmental assessment (EA) is available for public review in the Forest Supervisor's Office in Anchorage, Alaska and at the Cordova Ranger District Office in Cordova, Alaska. The EA discloses the environmental consequences, including cumulative effects, of the three alternatives analyzed in the EA regarding potential expansion of recreation facilities at Childs Glacier Recreation Area. The EA for this project is incorporated by reference in this decision document.

In the early 1980s, the Childs Glacier Recreation Area was accessed by a low standard automobile road through CAC lands. There were no recreation improvements. Site capacity was estimated at 25 people at one time (PAOTs) with 3,000 recreation visitor days (RVDs) of use annually. In 1986, an analysis was completed and a decision was made to develop recreational facilities to accommodate projected visitor use for the next decade.

These facilities included an access road designed for a 40-passenger bus, one vault toilet, parking areas to accommodate 10-15 cars, covered shelters and picnic tables near the viewing area, and interpretive and warning signs (USDA, Forest Service, 1986). Five primitive tent camping sites were approved in 1998.

Outside of the five tent camping sites at Childs Glacier, there are no other developed camping sites on National Forest System lands on the Copper River Delta. The District has three developed day-use recreation facilities located at mile 18 and mile 22 on the Copper River Highway and at the end of Alaganik Road. There are several other areas (mile 16 pond, Sheridan River, mile 28 sand pit and mile 29 swimming pond) that attract users at various times of the year. They are not developed recreation sites, nor are they maintained by anyone other than the users, although the Forest Service patrols the areas frequently.

In the 1970s the Forest Service maintained a small campground near Cabin Lake. When the Eyak Native Corporation made their land selections, the campground and the surrounding lands became private property. Limited camping opportunities are now permitted at this site. The only other camping facilities that serve the local community are operated by the City of Cordova and are within the city proper.

## **II. DECISION AND REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

### **A. Decision**

Based on the analysis conducted in the EA for this project, it is my decision to select Alternative 3 as described in the EA. As part of my decision-making process, I considered all of the following: 1) the extensive public scoping, issues identification, follow up letters, follow up meetings and discussions that occurred between 1994 and 2002 (see the "Public Involvement" section, pages 6 and 7 of the EA); 2) the prior decision to delay this project between 1994 to 1999 while Chugach Alaska Corporation considered developing a lodge in partnership with Princess Tours Company and to allow them time to prepare an overall recreation strategy for the Childs Glacier area; 3) the continued public input and public interest in providing additional public facilities at Childs Glacier between 1994 and 1999; and 4) the decision to reinstate public scoping of the project in December of 1999, additional public input supporting the project since that time, as well as comments received during the 30-day public review of the document.

As described in the EA (see EA page 9), Alternative 3 would expand existing day use recreation facilities, reroute the access road into the site, relocate parking facilities to better utilize existing available space, improve user safety, provide for additional parking, and would construct overnight campground facilities and drive up glacier viewing facilities on the site. Specifically, the decision to select Alternative 3 would provide for the following expanded recreation opportunities on the site:

**Tent camping**

**Potable water**

**Additional picnic facilities**

**Expanded parking**

**Group use pavilion**

**Additional trails**

**Additional toilets**

**New access road**

**Identified CAC access Rd**

**Drive-up glacier viewing**

**Campground (overnight) facilities**

## **B. Applicable Laws, Regulations, and Policy**

Revised Chugach Land and Resource Management Plan (2002) - This decision is consistent with the Revised Forest Plan. The analysis area has an ANILCA 501(b)-3 prescription that emphasizes the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats while providing for a variety of multiple use activities. The proposal is consistent with the theme, management intent, and standards and guidelines for the area. This action will implement the Revised Forest Plan by providing opportunities for developed recreation facilities along the 501(b)-3 road corridor using the “enclave” concept (refer to EA page 26), while providing for opportunities for solitude, isolation, and quiet within adjacent inventoried roadless areas (see maps #7 and #8 in EA appendix). All activities that are proposed in the preferred alternative are consistent with the 501(b)-3 management prescription (refer to “Forest Plan Management Direction” pages 3 and 4, and Consistency with Forest Plan Direction on page 5 of the EA for further discussion).

Consistency with CFR 241.22 and ANILCA 501(b) Primary Purpose Direction: The Copper River Delta is mandated under ANILCA section 501(b) to be managed primarily for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat. My decision to select Alternative 3 is consistent with this law and mandate for the Copper River Delta (refer to EA pages 25, 26, and 27 for an in depth discussion verifying consistency of this proposal with CFR 241.22 and ANILCA 501(b) Primary Purpose Direction).

National Forest Management Act (NFMA) 1976 – The Revised Forest Plan complies with all resource integration and management requirements of 36 CFR 219. Application of Forest Plan direction for the analysis area ensures compliance at the project level. This proposal complies with the National Forest Management Act.

Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as Amended (CZMA) - The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the State of Alaska and the Alaska Region of the Forest Service for implementing the CZMA, identifies types of projects that affect the coastal zone and are subject to ACMP review. After review of the proposed action, the Forest Service documented and submitted our findings of a Negative Determination to the Office of Project Management and Permitting (OPMP). This Negative Determination was distributed to the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP) for their review of the Forest Service decision that this federal action would not affect the land or water uses or natural resources of the coastal zone. The State resource agencies agreed with the Forest Service determination, and thus, an ACMP review is not required for this activity (see Forest Service documentation sent to ACMP, and the ACMP response and concurrence in the project file).

Endangered Species Act of 1973 - A Biological Evaluation has been completed for this action and it indicates that no Federally listed threatened, endangered, or sensitive species of plants or animals will be affected by this

activity (refer to the Biological Evaluation, Appendix A, and Wildlife Report, Appendix G, in the Childs Glacier EA project file).

Bald Eagle Protection Act of 1940 - This activity has been determined to have negligible impacts on bald eagles (refer to the Wildlife Report, Appendix G, in the Childs Glacier EA project file).

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 – A cultural site survey of the area was conducted and the findings sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer. No sites were identified within the project area. No significant effects to any known cultural resource site are expected by the proposed recreation facility expansion (Reference Appendix B in the EA project file).

Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990)- This activity is not located on any floodplain or wetland. It will not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and will not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990 (refer to the Watershed Report, Appendix D, in the EA project file).

Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898) - I have determined that in accordance with Executive Order 12898 this activity does not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

ANILCA Section 810, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding – As described on page 11 of the EA, the effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. There is no documented or reported subsistence use that would be restricted as a result of this decision (refer to Appendix C, for the ANILCA section 810 subsistence determination in the project file).

Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended – Emissions anticipated from the implementation of any project alternative would be of short duration and not expected to exceed State of Alaska ambient air quality standards.

Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended – Selection and implementation of Alternative 3 is in accordance with Forest Plan standard and guidelines, the best management practices and applicable Forest Service manual and handbook direction and is expected to meet all applicable State of Alaska water quality standards.

### **C. Issues**

The following three issues were determined to be substantive and within the scope of the project decision. Issues for this project were identified through public and internal scoping (refer to the EA, page 7, for the summary of public issues identified). Similar issues were combined into one statement where appropriate. These issues were used in helping develop alternatives, mitigation measures, in the analysis of the environmental consequences, and in making my decision. These issues helped shape and modify the proposed action, Alternative 3, which I have selected as my preferred alternative. Other issues were raised but determined to be outside the scope of this site-specific analysis and decision to be made, or were addressed in the Forest Plan, or in the “response to public comments”, attached, or other processes (refer to EA pages 9, “Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Further Analysis”).

**Issue 1: *There were concerns regarding what level of recreational improvement (type, kind and number) are appropriate for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet the increasing public use of the area.*** The EA describes each alternative under section III (Alternatives Studied in Detail) on pages 8 and 9 of the EA.

This issue is addressed in each of the three alternatives in section V (refer to EA pages 14 and 15). The chart on page 10 of the EA compares the alternatives (also see Table 1 in this Decision Notice), to provide an easy reference as to what the differences are regarding the amount, type, and kind of recreational improvements being proposed under Alternative 1, Alternative 2, and Alternative 3 and compares each of them. The issue is further addressed in the Cumulative Effects section of the Environmental Assessment (EA pages 19-25), and a summary of the effects of the proposed expansion of recreation facilities at Childs Glacier is also provided (refer to EA page 27, summary section). The range of alternatives addresses a variety of levels of recreational facilities improvements that respond to growing public demand.

**Issue 2: *There were concerns regarding what safety standards and requirements would be needed to protect people and bears that would both be using the area.*** This issue is addressed in the three alternatives in section V (refer to EA pages 15- 17). The chart on page 10 of the EA compares the alternatives (also see Table 1 in this Decision Notice), to provide an easy reference as to what differences are being proposed under each of the three alternatives. To help mitigate possible conflicts between humans and bears, a Bear Management Plan has been prepared for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. This approved plan, which has been in effect and successfully implemented since 1999, and was prepared jointly between the USFS and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, will be the management tool used to mitigate conflicts between people and bears using the area. This plan also identifies safety standards, requirements, and procedures to help mitigate conflicts between humans and bears (refer to the Bear Management Plan, Appendix F of the EA project file, and EA pages 16 and 17).

**Issue 3: *There was a concern regarding what, if any, effects will improving and expanding recreation opportunities at Childs Glacier have on potential activities on adjacent private lands?*** This issue has been thoroughly considered throughout the analysis process, and discussions can be found in the EA in the following locations:

The issue is addressed in section II, Purpose and Need for Action, under:

1. "Introduction and History" (EA page 1)
2. "Public Involvement"
  - Scoping began in 1994 (EA page 6)
  - Project delayed 1994 – 1999 (EA page 7)
  - 1999 Scoping Reinitiated: (EA page 7)
  - Reference Eyak and Chugach Alaska Corporation, 1994 – 2002 correspondence, discussions, information sharing, scoping letters, individual meetings with Eyak and Chugach Alaska to share information concerning the proposal, gather input, and provide adjacent landowners an opportunity to comment on the proposal, meeting notes and documentation of these meetings, scoping and informational letters sent to CAC and Eyak (1994, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002), opportunity for CAC and Eyak to comment on pre-draft Environmental Assessment, response to pre-draft comments (Refer to "Public Involvement" page 7 of the EA for the specific correspondence dates, and the EA Project File for letters of correspondence.)

The issue is also addressed in section IV, Affected Environment, under:

1. "Land Status" (EA page 10)
2. "Relationship to Adjacent Private Landowners:"
  - History: (EA page 11)
  - Princess Tours/CAC Proposal: (EA page 12)
  - Public Scoping Reinitiated: (EA page 12 and 13)
  - Present Condition: (EA page 13)

The issue is also addressed in section V, Environmental Consequences, under:

1. Issue #3 – “How will the new recreation improvements affect adjacent private lands?” (refer to EA pages 17-19).

The issue is also addressed in section VI, Cumulative Effects, under:

1. Existing Federal and Non-Federal Actions Affecting the Childs Glacier Proposal:
  - Heli-skiing: (EA page 19)
  - River Rafting: (EA page 20)
  - Roadless Areas: (EA page 20)
2. Proposed Federal and Non-Federal Actions Affecting the Childs Glacier Proposal:
  - Proposed Carbon Mountain Road: (EA page 21)
  - Private Lodge (EA page 23)
3. Potential Future Federal and Non-Federal Actions Potentially Affecting the Childs Glacier Recreation Proposal:
  - Bear Viewing: (EA page 25)
4. Summary (EA page 27).

#### **D. Rationale for the Decision.**

In making my decision, I diligently considered all issues and took into account the competing interests and values of the public. The EA shows how issues raised during initial scoping were addressed. The attached *Response To Public Comments* shows how the comments received on the EA have been considered in making my decision. The selected alternative provides the opportunity for the public to enjoy public recreation facilities previously unavailable on the Cordova Ranger District. The selected facilities are designed to better facilitate traffic flow, more safely accommodate public parking and more safely accommodate pedestrian traffic. Alternative 3, the preferred alternative, was developed within the framework of existing laws, regulations, policies, public needs and desires, and capabilities of the land and site, while responding to the purpose and need for the project. Alternative 3 best meets the public demand for quality safe day use, group use, and overnight camping facilities and RV use in a 501(b)-3 developed recreation setting while meeting CFR 241.22 and ANILCA 501(b) Primary Purpose Direction for the Copper River Delta.

I have selected Alternative 3 for the following reasons:

1. Revised Chugach Land and Resource Management Plan (2002) – The selected alternative is consistent with the Revised Forest Plan and helps meet the desired conditions for the area. The analysis area has an ANILCA 501(b)-3 management prescription that emphasizes the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats while providing for a variety of multiple use activities. Developments would be localized in recreation concentration areas, minimizing effects on the overall management area. The proposal is consistent with the theme, management intent, and standards and guidelines for the area.
2. Consistency with CFR 241.22 and ANILCA 501(b) Primary Purpose Direction: The Copper River Delta is mandated under ANILCA section 501(b) to be managed primarily for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitat. My decision to select Alternative 3 is consistent with this law and mandate for the Copper River Delta (refer to EA pages 25, 26, and 27).
3. Lack of developed camping facilities: Currently there are no developed, overnight recreation campground facilities located on National Forest System lands on the two million acre Cordova Ranger District. The public has continuously, over a long period of time, requested that the Forest Service provide these facilities. The Forest Service would like to be responsive to the public and provide these

facilities.

4. Extent and level of public involvement: Extensive public scoping, issues identification, public meetings, adjacent landowner meetings and discussions, incorporation of public ideas, incorporation of adjacent landowner ideas, and refinement of this proposal has occurred between 1994 and 2002. I am comfortable with the decision being made because of the extensive public scoping that has occurred over this eight year timeframe and the continued public support for this project. I am confident that Alternative 3 represents the incorporation of these ideas and public input into a proposal that I feel best addresses the issues and concerns identified. Our public involvement efforts are described in detail later in this Decision Notice under Section IV. Public Involvement (pages 13-14.)
5. Forest Service decision to delay expansion of recreation facilities at Childs Glacier planned in 1994, after discussions with CAC, and continued public support for the expansion of public facilities at Childs Glacier from 1994 to 2003: On June 13, 1994 the Forest Service delayed plans to proceed with the Childs Glacier facility expansion proposal at that time. This was prompted by the announcement by Princess Tours and CAC of their plans to develop a large lodge in the vicinity of Childs Glacier. Following that announcement there was interest by CAC and Eyak Corporation to pursue additional developments in the same area. On July 31, 1996 an Anchorage Daily News article announced the decision by CAC and Princess Tours to shelve the plans at that time. Following that decision, the Forest Service reopened discussions regarding expansion of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet increasing public needs. For the past eight years, since 1994, there has been no development by either Eyak or CAC on adjacent private lands, until this summer when construction of a small private lodge began. However, the public desire and need for improved and expanded recreational facilities in the Childs Glacier area have not diminished during that time period.
6. Unutilized opportunity for private landowners to provide similar facilities: The decision to delay this project from 1994 to 1999 while CAC considered developing a lodge in partnership with Princess Tours Company, and to allow them time to prepare an overall recreation strategy for private lands in the Childs Glacier area, are also part of the rationale for my decision to move ahead with the proposed facility expansion at Childs Glacier at this time. Since 1994, private landowners have had the opportunity to provide the type of day use and camping services being proposed by the Forest Service, but development has not occurred. Because this type of recreation facility has not been developed, it is my decision to proceed with this proposal at this time, and implement Alternative 3, in order to provide a needed public service.
7. Different user groups are targeted: The type of recreational user (group) being targeted by the Forest Service with this proposed development is generally different than the type of recreational user (group) being targeted by the adjacent private landowners, Eyak and CAC. (See EA pg. 13 and 23) The proposed expansion of facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would have little effect on potential future development options of adjacent landowners. It is not considered to be in competition with development options in the area, should adjacent landowners decide at some point in the future to develop their lands. The facilities being proposed for construction are generally not the same type that would be proposed on Native Corporation lands.

Currently, a private lodge is being built on adjacent Eyak Corporation lands. The type of facility and the type of user group being targeted by this lodge is different than that proposed by the Forest Service. Therefore, the two facilities are not considered to be in conflict with one another, and in fact, when the lodge is finished, a mutually beneficially relationship could exist.

The proposed Childs Glacier Recreation Area expansion of public facilities could be an asset to adjacent

landowners providing more highly developed services. A certain percentage of people coming to visit the Forest Service public facilities at Childs Glacier (approximately 7,000 to 9,000 visitors/year historically) would likely also utilize adjacent private, more highly developed facilities if they were available.

8. Increased safety of recreational users of the site: One of the important factors that went into my decision to select Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative is the fact that this alternative best addresses short-term and long-term improvements for safety of the public that will be using the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. Recreation professionals considered numerous designs for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area before deciding upon the final preferred alternative layout and conceptual design. A primary consideration for the recreation site plan was user safety.

Relocation of the road along the outside boundary of the 40-acre parcel is an example of this. Vehicular traffic and public parking will be situated along the outside edge of the 40-acre parcel. Foot traffic by people walking trails and using day use sites, group use and tent sites will utilize the central portions of the 40 acre parcel and will flow inward toward these facilities, away from active vehicular traffic movement. This separation of pedestrian and vehicular traffic will greatly improve public safety.

Expansion of the parking facilities is another example of increasing user safety. Development of the site and increasing levels of tourism over the past years have brought an increasing number of people into the area. The current level of use exceeds the capacity of the facilities. It is not uncommon to find vehicles (passenger cars, tour busses, motor homes, trailers and truck campers) lining the entire loop road and extending into the entrance road. This creates dangerous driving and walking conditions that will be eliminated by providing adequate, well-planned parking facilities. In addition, construction of campground loops to facilitate RV overnight use will decrease congestion in the parking areas and therefore increase safety as well.

Sanitation and toilet facilities have also been taxed by increased use. Alternative 3 addresses this health issue by increasing the amount of available facilities.

9. Adjacent National Forest System lands will provide “dispersed recreation opportunities and will remain in their natural undeveloped condition: One of the resounding, and most often repeated comments from the public regarding the management of the Cordova Ranger District and the Copper River Delta during the Forest Plan Revision process was that people liked the way the Cordova District was being managed and they wanted to keep it the same, in its current natural undeveloped condition. In addition, the public asked for a corridor along the Copper River Highway where developed recreation opportunities could occur.

As a result, the Revised Forest Plan (2002) management direction for surrounding NFS lands (outside of the 501(b)-3 road corridor) is to provide a variety of recreation opportunities that are primarily dispersed in nature. Two large adjacent areas are classified roadless areas, and are therefore unlikely candidates for future developed facilities such as those proposed at the 40-acre Childs Glacier Recreation Area. The recreation focus within the Bering Lake and Sheridan Glacier roadless areas will be on providing dispersed recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, and hiking, which reflect the primitive ROS classification and roadless character of the landscape. Implementation of Alternative 3 will not compromise the undeveloped nature of these surrounding NFS lands.

10. Level of impact of this proposed project when put in context with the management direction of the surrounding National Forest System lands: The Childs Glacier enclave is located within the road corridor between two inventoried roadless areas but is not in a roadless area (see Map # 5 in the EA

appendix). In addition, it is surrounded by private land. When considered in context of the size of the two adjacent roadless areas (1,198,050 acres), the 40-acre Childs Glacier Recreation Area represents approximately .003% of this total. Only a very small percentage of the total area on this part of the Cordova Ranger District is dedicated to developed recreation facilities. The proposed expansion of public facilities within USS 8366 Lot 2 at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area will have no effect on the adjacent roadless area character, nor take away from the dispersed recreation opportunities available there.

11. Use of the enclave concept mitigates and minimizes effects to surrounding National Forest System lands, and better meets ANILCA 501(b) management direction: Recreational facilities along the Copper River Highway are grouped into enclaves. An enclave is the word used to describe the grouping of developed recreation facilities into selected areas whose natural character is to be changed by the works of man. The Childs Glacier Recreation Area is one of these enclaves. Use of the enclave concept along the Copper River Highway leaves most of the land within the road corridor free of development, reduces the impacts to wildlife, helps to maintain the natural character and “delta experience”, and better meets ANILCA 501(b) management direction of the Copper River Delta. I am confident that expanding the recreation facilities within the 40-acre Childs Glacier Recreation Area will result in minimal effects to the surrounding area, will provide the public needed additional recreation facilities on the Childs Glacier site, that these expanded facilities will be a benefit to the public, and that this proposal will fully meet the ANILCA 501(b) direction.
12. Alaska State Department of Transportation (ADOT) plans for the Copper River Highway: Public concerns were raised regarding the potential for flooding and reduced maintenance by ADOT to cut off future access to the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. Based on input from ADOT, the Copper River Highway to the Million Dollar Bridge, which connects Cordova to the project area, is scheduled for a variety of projects, including road and bridge improvements, to maintain accessibility for public use. ADOT has no intention of closing any section of this road, which would isolate the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. (refer to EA page 24, “Copper River Highway Maintenance”). Therefore, I feel comfortable expending public funds to make the proposed improvements at this time.
13. The Forest Service has completed and successfully implemented a Bear Management Plan for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area: A Bear Management Plan (Appendix F of the EA project file) was prepared and approved for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area. The plan has been in effect and successfully implemented since 1999, was prepared jointly between the USFS and Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and will be the management tool used at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.

### **III. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED.**

#### **A. Alternatives Eliminated from Detailed Study**

I have reviewed the rationale given on page 9 of the EA. We also addressed comments regarding other alternatives in the attached Response To Public Comments (Comment #1). I agree with the following conclusions:

Additional facilities such as a boat ramp, recreation cabin(s), and alternate locations for camping facilities were considered in the EA, but not in detail. Construction of new Public Recreation Cabins generally occurs farther from the road system. A boat ramp on National Forest System lands is not suitable for the Childs Glacier site because of its proximity to the glacier and the ADF&G Sonar Counting Station. Both opportunities could be developed on adjacent private lands should landowners desire to do so. Suitable locations for camping facilities

on public lands closer to Cordova are limited for the following three reasons: 1) most areas would require filling of wetlands; 2) it is very expensive; and 3) numerous permits would be required as the resource concerns are high. Areas that are not wetlands generally have limited access and/or amenities without building additional road to them.

The Childs Glacier area was selected because it is a natural destination for visitors, it would not compete with existing private camping facilities (Cabin Lake), and the two 40-acre parcels at Childs Glacier/Million Dollar Bridge were specifically withheld from conveyance to Chugach Alaska Corporation to help fulfill the need for public recreation and transportation facilities in the area. Also, locating the facility along the road corridor within an existing enclave minimizes effects to the fish and wildlife resources as required under the ANILCA 501(b) mandate.

## **B. Alternatives Considered**

In making my decision, I considered the following three alternatives:

1. No Action - Do not expand the recreation facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.
2. Expand day use recreation facilities, relocate access road and expand parking facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.
3. Expand day use recreation facilities, relocate access road, expand parking facilities and provide overnight (camping) facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.

**Table 1. COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES**

	<b>Alternative #1</b>	<b>Alternative #2</b>	<b>Alternative #3</b>
<b>Tent camping</b>	yes	yes	yes
<b>Potable water</b>	yes	yes	yes
<b>Additional picnic facilities</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Expanded parking</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Group use pavilion</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Additional trails</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Additional toilets</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>New access road</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Identified CAC access Road</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Drive-up glacier viewing</b>	no	yes	yes
<b>Campground (overnight) facilities</b>	no	no	yes

**Alternative 1 - No Action - Do not expand the recreation facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.** No additional recreation facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area would be constructed under this alternative. The Forest Service would continue to maintain the existing improvements including the roads, parking area, viewing platform overlooking the glacier, covered picnic sites, five overnight tent camping sites, and vault toilets (see Map #2 in the EA appendix). Site capacity would continue at 120 PAOT. Bear proof garbage containers and food storage containers would continue to be provided.

**Alternative 2 - Expand day use recreation facilities, relocate access road, and expand and relocate parking facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.** Alternative 2 (see Map #3 in the EA appendix) proposes expanding and relocating the parking area, and realigning the road so it parallels the southern and eastern boundary lines and ties into the existing entry road near the Northeast corner of USS 8366 Lot 2 (approximately 2,100 feet). The road realignment would consist of 2,100 feet of new construction. The purpose of the road realignment is to improve pedestrian safety, so that pedestrians using the recreation facilities do not have to cross the main access road. A short spur from this road (approximately 50') would also provide access to CAC land should they in the future decide to use it to access their land. The day use area would have a new 40 PAOT group use pavilion located at the down-river end of the existing day use area and potentially two to four additional covered shelters (same size as existing covered picnic sites) on the up-river end. Signing (directional, warning, and property boundary) will be designed into any new development as appropriate and needed. Supplementary interpretive signing will also be developed and incorporated into the new facilities, focusing on existing natural features, recent historical, and pre-railroad native history of the region. Additional pathways would be constructed to connect new facilities with existing. A road-accessible glacier viewing area would be constructed in the northwest corner of the lot, but would likely be included in a later phase of expansion. Parking spaces for cars would be increased from 17 to 50 and busses /RVs from two to eight. Additional toilet facilities and potable water sources will be installed. Site capacity would be 530 PAOT. Bear-proof garbage containers and food storage containers, identical to those already on site, will be installed in all newly developed areas. The existing access road and parking area would be rehabilitated and converted to a trail to access the five existing primitive tent sites. Recreation facilities within Alternatives 2 and 3 are designed to occur in phases. If funding becomes available, more than one phase may occur at one time.

**Alternative 3 - Proposed Action - Expand day use recreation facilities, relocate access road, expand and relocate parking facilities and provide overnight (camping) facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area:** Alternative 3 (see Map #4 in the EA appendix) proposes the same recreation facilities and parking area design as Alternative 2. In addition, this alternative proposes to construct campground facilities in the southeast

corner of the parcel. The campground would consist of two loops with eight to ten spurs each. A fee would be charged for overnight use of the campground. The second loop would be constructed if and when demand warranted. Additional toilet facilities and potable water sources will be installed. Site capacity would be 610 PAOT. Bear-proof garbage containers and food storage containers, identical to those already on site, will be installed in all newly developed areas.

#### **IV. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Scoping for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area Expansion Project began on January 20, 1994. A scoping letter was sent to all interested parties. On June 13, 1994, further analysis on the project was delayed to allow Chugach Alaska Corporation sufficient time to prepare an overall recreation development strategy for the area surrounding Childs Glacier (See letter from Cordova Ranger District dated June 13, 1994 in the project file). Scoping was reinstated on December 13, 1999. Between 1994 and 1999 there was continued public input and interest in providing additional public facilities at Childs Glacier. A scoping letter was again sent to interested parties describing the proposed action, and proposed plans were discussed at several public meetings in Cordova. Most parties supported the expansion of facilities. However, there were some different opinions of what facilities should be constructed at this time (Reference Appendix E, Summary of Scoping Comments in project file).

In 1999 and 2000 a conceptual recreation site master plan for the Childs Glacier site was developed based on past and present public input, and included public meetings held at that time. On October 16, 2001 a final scoping letter was sent to all interested publics who had expressed an interest or provided comments or input previously. As a part of the most recent public scoping, a meeting was held in Cordova on November 7, 2001 which was advertised on the scanner, local radio, and in the newspaper. Individual scoping meetings were also held with adjacent landowners, the Eyak Corporation, November 21, 2001 at the Eyak Corporation Office, and November 6, 2001 at the Chugach Alaska Corporation Office in Anchorage. The purpose of those meetings was to share information concerning the proposal, gather input, and provide adjacent landowners an opportunity to comment on the proposal (reference summary of scoping meeting in project file). Scoping and informational letters were sent on January 20, 1994 (CAC & Eyak), December 13, 1999 (CAC & Eyak), March 21, 2000 (CAC & Eyak), January 24, 2001(CAC), March 16, 2001(Eyak), October 16, 2001(CAC & Eyak), February 6, 2002 (CAC) and February 20, 2002 (Eyak) to review and discuss the proposed plans for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area.

Both Eyak and CAC were also given an opportunity to comment on the pre-draft Environmental Assessment (reference July 12, 2002 letter from CAC and July 12, 2002 letter from Eyak in project file). Several of their recommendations were incorporated into the EA, such as identifying and approving a potential future access road to CAC lands, incorporating interpretive signing into the new facilities that would include native history of the region, and posting common property boundaries as needed to reduce trespass.

The Childs Glacier Recreation Area Expansion Project was also published in the *Chugach National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions for Environmental Analysis* from the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of FY2001 through the 3rd quarter of FY2003. Approximately 344 quarterly schedules were mailed to interested individuals, organizations, and agencies.

In September 2002, the EA was made available for public review. A copy was mailed to those who expressed interest, a copy was posted on the Forest Web site, and copies were made available at the Supervisors Office in Anchorage and the Cordova District Office in Cordova.

We received 4 letters or e-mails in response to the EA. The attached Response to Public Comments shows

how I considered them to make my decision (refer to pages 19-22 of this document for these responses).

## **V. IMPLEMENTATION, MITIGATION, AND MONITORING.**

### **A. Implementation**

This project will be implemented in accordance with Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction, using Best Management Practices (BMP's), and according to the processes described in the EA. This direction provides a bridge between project planning and implementation and will ensure execution of the actions, environmental standards and mitigation approved by this decision and compliance with other laws.

Implementation of decisions made by the Cordova District Ranger, which are subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR part 215, may occur on, but not before, five business days from the close of the appeal filing period if no appeal is received. The appeal filing period closes 45 days after publication of legal notice of this decision in the Anchorage Daily News newspaper, published in Anchorage, Alaska. In the event an appeal is received, the decision may be implemented 15 days following disposition of the appeal.

### **B. Mitigation**

Mitigation measures are site-specific measures to reduce the adverse impacts of proposed management activities. Applicable Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines are referenced on pages 3 - 5 and 11 in the EA, and will be followed. Additional site-specific mitigation measures are specified in the EA including:

- Utilizing the Enclave Concept to minimize impacts of recreational developments along the road corridor and better meet the ANILCA 501(b) management direction and intent for the area (refer to EA page 26).
- Implementation of the Bear Management Plan for the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to mitigate and minimize potential human, bear conflicts at the site (refer to EA page 9 and EA pages 15-17).
- Use of Best Management Practices (BMP's) during construction phases of this project.
- Completion of a Biological Resources Evaluation, Archeological Resources Evaluation, and 810 Subsistence Determination for the proposed site which indicated no known negative effects to these resource as a result of the proposed facility expansion (refer to EA page 11 and Appendix B, C, and G for copies of these evaluations).
- Posting of common boundaries at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area in order to reduce inadvertent trespass onto adjacent private lands (EA page 9 and 18).
- Providing CAC with an identified access road to adjacent CAC lands from the proposed road relocation should they in the future decide to use it (refer to EA page 9).
- Supplementary interpretive signing that would include native history of the region would be developed and incorporated into new facilities where appropriate (refer to EA page 9).

### **C. Monitoring**

A baseline monitoring plan is addressed in the Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 5 – Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. In addition, during construction phases, certified Forest Service engineers, Contracting Officer's Representative, and Inspectors will be on site monitoring the construction phases to assure that engineering construction and design standards and Best Management Practices (BMP's) are being met.

## **VI. FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

Based on my review of the analysis and findings documented in the Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Environmental Assessment, and further documented in this Decision Notice, I have determined that these actions will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed. This determination is based on the following criteria identified in implementing regulations for the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR 1508.27):

### **Context**

The selected alternative applies to a project limited in scope and duration. The proposed action will take place adjacent to the Copper River Highway corridor and is located between the Bering Lake and Sheridan Glacier Roadless Areas (Final Environmental Impact Statement, Revised Forest Plan, Appendix C, page C-147 to C-168). The potential effects of implementing Alternative 3 will be confined to the 40 acres within USS 8366 Lot 2. This amounts to approximately 13 acres of additionally disturbed area on National Forest System lands. The temporary presence of heavy equipment and people associated with construction would reduce the natural integrity of the area. The temporary sound of heavy equipment and people would be noticeable within the 40-acre parcel and on the surrounding private lands for the duration of the project, estimated at one to two years.

### **Intensity**

Both beneficial and adverse effects have been taken into consideration when making this determination of significance. Beneficial effects have not, however, been used to offset or compensate for potential adverse effects.

The characteristics of the geographic area do not make it uniquely sensitive to the effects of the expansion project. Site-specific analysis and review of other similar activities lead me to expect no measurable off-site environmental effects or serious on-site environmental effects. There are no known significant irreversible resource commitments.

This action does not represent potential cumulative adverse impacts when considered in combination with other past, present or other foreseeable actions. There are no known significant cumulative effects between this project and other projects implemented or planned in the area or in areas separated from the affected area of this project.

The site is located between two roadless areas and is surrounded by private lands. National Forest System lands to the east were considered for Wilderness in revision of the Forest Plan; however, none were recommended for designation in the Final Revised Forest Plan. The proposed expansion of public facilities at the Childs Glacier Recreation Area will have no effect on the adjacent roadless area character. There would be no cumulative effects on roadless areas and their potential for wilderness classification because there would be no activities that would alter the physical setting or permanently degrade wilderness values.

The area contains no known threatened, endangered, or sensitive plants or animals. No proposed or listed endangered, threatened or sensitive species will be adversely affected. There is no critical habitat for threatened or endangered species within or adjacent to the project area.

This action does not threaten a violation of any Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment.

This action will not cause the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. There are no known cultural resource sites that would be affected by this project.

Public health and safety will not be adversely affected. In fact, it will be improved by this project.

The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. Public disagreement is not sufficient to create controversy of the nature that would require an EIS. Development and expansion of recreation facilities have occurred on the Chugach National Forest for many years, and monitoring efforts have not identified significant effects.

Development and expansion of recreation facilities are not unique uses of NFS lands, the effects of this type of project are disclosed in the EA and are not considered highly uncertain, nor do they represent unique or unknown risks. We know what the effects are based on years of experience with similar projects in the National Forest System.

This decision does not set a precedent for future decisions. Any future decisions within this analysis area or any other area on the Forest will need to consider all relevant scientific and site-specific information available at that time.

## **VII. ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW**

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to U.S.D.A. Appeal Regulations of 1993 found at 36 CFR 215. The appeal must be filed in writing within 45 days of the date the legal notification of this decision is published in the Anchorage Daily News. We expect to publish the legal notification on or about November 14, 2003. Any appeal should be sent to:

Dennis Bschor, Regional Forester  
USDA Forest Service  
Alaska Region – Region 10  
PO Box 21628  
Juneau, AK 99802-1628

Anyone who appeals must provide the Forest Supervisor sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why the decision by the District Ranger should be remanded or reversed. At a minimum the notice of appeal must:

1. State that it is an appeal pursuant to the 1993 regulations found at 36 CFR 215.
2. List the name and address of the appellant and, if possible, a phone number.
3. Identify this decision, the Chugach National Forest “Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion”, the date it was signed, and the decision maker, Rebecca S. Nourse, District Ranger.
4. Identify the change or changes in the decision that the appellant seeks, or the portion of the decision to which the appellant objects.
5. State how the decision fails to consider comments previously provided, either before or during the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6, and, if applicable, how the appellant believes the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.

**VIII. CONTACT PERSON**

For additional information about this decision, contact Bob Behrends, Recreation Forester, P.O. Box 280, Cordova Ranger District, Cordova, AK 99574, Phone # (907) 424-7661.

/s/ Rebecca S. Nourse

November 12, 2003

**REBECCA S. NOURSE**  
District Ranger

Date

**Attachment:**  
**Response To Public Comments**  
received from the  
**Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Environmental Assessment**  
**Cordova Ranger District**  
**September, 2002**

**Introduction:** Numerous issues were brought to the attention of the Forest Service as a result of the public review of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Environmental Assessment (EA). Some of the issues are issues that were identified through previous public scoping (1994 – 2002) during development of the Environmental Assessment. Other issues identified were addressed in the Chugach National Forest Revised Forest Plan Environmental Impact Statement signed 5/31/2002 (FEIS). Finally, a few new issues were identified during public review of the Environmental Assessment.

This document will discuss each of the issues identified, what the issues are, and how they are addressed, either in the EA, FEIS, or the Decision Notice.

**Issues Identified and Response to Comments Received:**

**Comment #1: Considering other campground locations between town and Childs Glacier:**

**Response #1:** In our Delta Recreation Plan of 1988 a site near mile 18 (Snag Lake), on the north side of the Copper River Highway, was identified as a potential campground. The Forest Service engineering staff in Anchorage considered the road construction cost prohibitive. The area east of Sheridan Lake and south of Sherman Glacier was also considered. Again road construction and maintenance costs plus wildlife and fish concerns eliminated the site from further consideration. The Childs Glacier site was selected for several reasons. First, it is a destination site with public support recommending camping facilities. Second, the two 40-acre parcels at the Childs Glacier/Million Dollar Bridge area were specifically withheld from conveyance to Chugach Alaska Corporation (CNI Settlement Agreement of 1982) to help fulfill the need for public recreation and transportation facilities in the area. Many of the other possible sites on the Delta are wetlands and the cost of constructing in wetlands and the likelihood of being granted a permit by the Corps of Engineers eliminated these sites from further consideration at this time. We have included this additional information on Page 8, under **Alternatives Considered But Eliminated From Further Analysis.** Also see **Appendix H, Response to Comments Received During Review of Draft Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Environmental Assessment.**

**Comment #2: Potential closure of the Copper River Highway by the Alaska State DOT:**

**Response #2:** The potential for the Copper River to affect travel on the Copper River Highway is recognized by the Forest Service as well as the Alaska State Department of Transportation. On August 15, 2002, the Forest Service and the State DOT conducted a field review of the Copper River Highway. Based on our conversation with them, it appears that the State is committed to keeping the highway open, repairing the 39-42 mile washout area, raising the fourth section of the Million Dollar Bridge and possibly paving the highway from mile 37 to mile 48. A fifth section has been added to the EA regarding **Federal and Non-Federal Actions Potentially Affecting the Childs Glacier Recreation Proposal** on Page 24, titled Copper River Highway Maintenance.

**Comment #3: Dust from concurrent construction projects between milepost 37 and 49 of the Copper River Highway:**

**Response #3:** There are several potential construction projects that could occur in the area in the near future. These include the expansion of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area, restoration of the Million Dollar Bridge, repair of flood damage to the Copper River Highway between milepost 41 and 44, paving the Copper River Highway from milepost 37 to 48, facility development on private lands on the north side of the Million Dollar Bridge and the Carbon Mt. Road. The Million Dollar Bridge restoration project is currently scheduled for 2003-2004, paving in 2003, the Forest Service Childs Glacier Recreation Area expansion project in 2004-2005, and flood damage repairs would be ongoing. Work at the lodge facility on the north side of the Million Dollar Bridge started in the fall of 2002 and would most probably be completed in time to accommodate people working on the bridge restoration project (2003). Attempting to establish a timetable for construction of the Carbon Mt. Road would be purely speculative due to the number of variables associated with construction of that road.

Airborne dust and silt is a regularly occurring natural condition on the Copper River, and the temporary disturbance of constructions projects is not expected to have a measurable effect on vegetation, fish or wildlife populations.

**Comment #4:** **Concern about inadvertent trespass on ANCSA lands and concern regarding the USFS expansion of the Childs Glacier Recreation Facility and the potential increased spill over (trespass) effect:**

**Response #4:** On page 9, under Alternative 2, page 15 (fourth paragraph), and page 18 (fourth paragraph), of Childs Glacier EA, it states that common boundaries at the Childs Glacier site will be posted in an effort to reduce trespass on ANCSA lands. This is also noted in the Decision Notice/FONSI on page 13.

**Comment #5:** **Include interpretive signing at the site to detail aboriginal history of the Chugach Region:**

**Response #5:** On page 9, under Alternative 2, and page 15, (third paragraph) Childs Glacier EA, it states that additional interpretive signing could be included in the expansion and that assistance in the design and development of this type of interpretive service would be greatly appreciated. Interpretive signing is also included in the Decision Notice/FONSI on page 12.

**Comment #6:** **Concern that the Copper River Trail was no longer relevant since the State had withdrawn its plans to construct the trail any further south than Cleave Creek:**

**Response #6:** We contacted the Alaska State DNR and they stated “The original project was shortened and now includes the upper portion of the project to Cleave Creek with a Richardson Highway connector along the Tiekel. The amendment to move forward with the less controversial part of the project does not preclude the lower trail being considered at a later date. The lower trail was dropped from the current project but could be revisited under a separate public process if enough interest is there to resolve the issues.” From that, we conclude that the Copper River Trail project continues to have the potential to affect the Childs Glacier project site.

**Comment #7:** **The Forest Service recreational plan of action for this area may be inadvertently competing with Eyak Corporation commercial interests in recreational development:**

**Response #7:** The EA identifies two campground loops of eight to ten spurs each. One loop should handle the current demand. A second loop has been planned for construction in the future in case demand increases and private landowners such as Eyak Corporation and Chugach Alaska Corporation have not provided additional camping facilities. Over the past 10 to 15 years, several locations for campgrounds have been discussed. Snag Lake on the north side of the Copper River Highway near mile 18 was considered but eliminated because of

road construction and maintenance costs, fisheries issues and flooding issues. The area east of Sheridan Lake and south of Sherman Glacier was also considered. Again road construction and maintenance cost plus wildlife and fish concerns eliminated the site from further consideration.

The Childs Glacier site was selected for several reasons. First, it is a destination site with public support recommending camping facilities. Second, the two 40-acre parcels at the Childs Glacier/Million Dollar Bridge area were specifically withheld from conveyance to Chugach Alaska Corporation (CNI Settlement Agreement of 1982) to help fulfill the need for public recreation and transportation facilities in the area.

On June 13, 1994 the Forest Service delayed plans to proceed with the Childs Glacier facility expansion proposal at that time. This was prompted by the announcement by Princess Tours and Chugach Alaska of their plans to develop a lodge in the vicinity of Childs Glacier. Following that announcement there was interest by CAC and Eyak Corporation to pursue additional developments in the same area (see letter from Cordova Ranger District dated June 13, 1994 in project file). On July 31, 1996 an Anchorage Daily news article announced the decision by Chugach Alaska Corporation and Princess Tours to shelve the plans at that time (reference Anchorage Daily News Article dated 7/31/96 in project file.) Following that decision, the Forest Service reopened discussions regarding expansion of the Childs Glacier Recreation Area to meet increasing public needs. There has been no development by either Eyak or CAC for the past eight years.

This issue is also discussed on page 17 of the EA, under Issue #3 – **How will the new recreation improvements affect adjacent private lands?**; pages 22 and 23 under **Proposed Federal and Non-Federal Actions, Item #3, Private Lodge**; on page 27 in the **Summary** section; and in **Appendix H, Responses to Comments Received During Review of the Draft Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Environmental Assessment.**

**Comment #8:** Should the expansion of the Childs Glacier facility take place, the Forest Service should consider a concession management with the adjacent ANCSA corporations:

**Response #8:** Concessionary operation and maintenance of Forest Service facilities is a common practice. If and when a decision is made to do the same with any of our existing or proposed facilities, a prospectus would be developed and the most qualified candidate selected. See **Appendix H, Response to Comments Received During Review of the Draft Childs Glacier Recreation Area Facilities Expansion Environmental Assessment.**

**Comment #9:** Concern that CFR 241.22 had been misquoted:

**Response #9:** Using the term “may” rather than “shall” in the sentence “Subject to valid existing rights, a multiple-use activity may be permitted or authorized within the area of the Chugach National Forest.....” on page 25, second paragraph had been correctly quoted. Therefore no changes were made.