

Kruzof North Beach ATV Area, Sitka Ranger District, Tongass National Forest

September 9, 2014

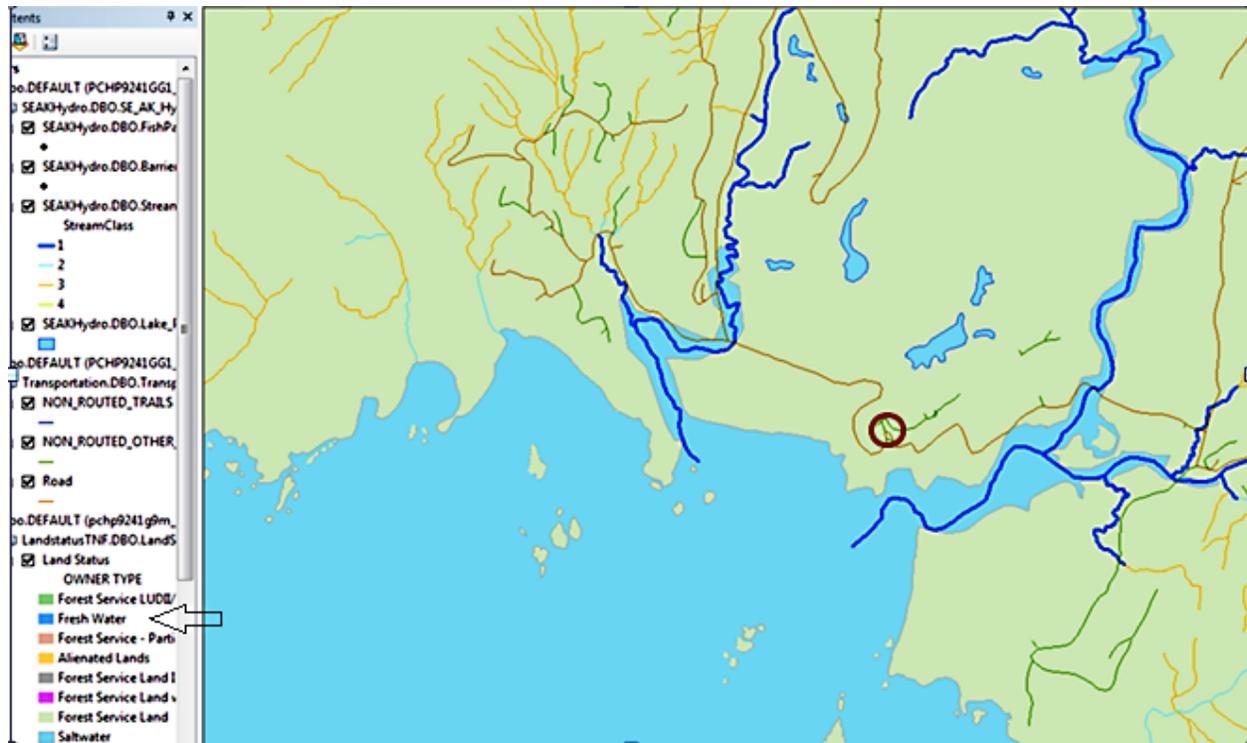
Background

This interdisciplinary trip was conducted on the Sitka Ranger District on September 9, 2014. The participants included: Chris Leeseberg (Wildlife/Fish Biologist), Katherine Prussian (Hydrologist), Mike Mullin (Recreation Specialist), Shelia Jacobson (Fish Biologist), and Jacqueline Foss (Soil Scientist).

The North Beach OHV use area was monitored under the Nationwide BMPs Rec E. Motorized Vehicle Use areas protocol. The OHV use area is a small strip of beach on the north side of Shelikof Bay on the outside of Kruzof Island. The area was very briefly addressed in the Sitka Ranger District Access and Travel Management Plan (ATM) Environmental Assessment (EA) in 2006. The area is open to all OHV use throughout the year.

BMP Review

The OHV use area was established in 1993 as a way to separate OHV users from non-motorized users. The North Beach cabin is near the use area and users have access to the beach. A small Class II stream runs along the southern end of the use area that changes outlets annually due to shifting sands and wave action. This stream is not mapped in GIS SEAKHydro geodatabase or surveyed elsewhere that anybody on the IDT could find (Figure 1).



Kruzof North Beach Figure 1. Use area with circle over the cabin. Note lack of stream mapping near the cabin.

A few years ago (it is not well-documented how many) this stream turned northwest and began running between the un-vegetated sands of the beach area and a sandy bluff. This stream is eroding the bluff at a rapid rate (Photo 1). The bluff is the habitat of the rare dune tansy. Users are not supposed to ride on any vegetated areas, but since the beach started eroding, they were using the bluff for access. Some fencing and signs were placed to protect the rare plant.



North Kruzof Beach Photo 1. Stream running between beach (foreground) and the bluff with the cabin (blue trap, background)

Monitoring Results

The IDT found evidence of OHV use outside of the designated OHV use area. The OHV use area is delineated only on the MVUM and in the Sitka ATM. The OHV use area includes "...only the unvegetated beach area off Shelikof Bay; extending from the mean high tide line to the high tide line, and is bounded on the southeast by a rock outcrop. The area also includes the tidal portion of the stream on the northwest end".

The use area also includes access to three unmarked dispersed campsites and a trail between the North Beach cabin and the use area.



North Kruzof Beach Photo 2. OHV trail in a vegetated area. The foreground is along the un-vegetated sandy area. The grasses are colonizing the sands and are found in the transition areas between the un-vegetated sands and forest.

Currently there are five trails between the North Beach cabin and the use area, all of which cross an unmapped, un-surveyed stream (Photo 1). This stream is at least Class II and possibly Class I. There are several user created trails in the vegetated areas adjacent to the OHV use area. The IDT did not measure or investigate these trails. Some of the trails between the cabin and the use area are very steep and actively eroding.

Several trails initiate in the legal portion (the un-vegetated sands) of the OHV use area and go into the woods (unauthorized/illegal portion). Three of these are legal trails to access the three dispersed campsites cited on the MVUM but since they are unmarked the IDT could not determine which

the legal trails were and which were not legal (Photo 2). Many of these trails terminate in openings that could be used as campsites. Since the IDT was confused, the user may be confused as well.

There was evidence of minimal to considerable OHV use in some vegetated areas adjacent to the use area. Some of the vegetated areas have very sparse plant growth and some OHV users may confuse these travel restricted areas with the unvegetated open areas (Photo 2).

The OHV use area on the MVUM allows some use in the tidal portion of the stream at the northern end. It is unclear from the MVUM where users are actually allowed to ride adjacent to this anadromous stream, but it is clear they are riding on the banks of the stream (Photo 3). The OHV area is inaccessible at high tides so users resort to traversing a short section of vegetated beach area to round the corner from North Beach proper to the open finger along the anadromous stream.



North Kruzof Beach Photo 3. OHV use on the banks of an anadromous stream

the legal trails and dispersed campsites. This could be outlined in the management plan. The use area has seemingly expanded from the unvegetated beach sands and designated campsites located in the adjacent forest fringe into travel restricted areas. If something looks like a trail, it will likely continue to be used as a trail unless measures are taken to control access. These areas should be designated as trails or blocked.

One or more restroom facilities near designated campsites and/or additional education of leave no trace principles pertaining to human waste management might help curb the unsightly and unsanitary waste disposal practices employed by some users.

Corrective Actions to Improve Implementation

Map and survey the Class II stream near the North Beach Cabin. Knowing more about this stream will drive any future management of the use area.

Add language to the MVUM that clarifies what exactly is open along the anadromous stream at the northern portion of the use area. The stream itself through the open area is tidal and so could be construed as open.

Create a management plan that clears up some of the vague language in the ATM and MVUM. Also, this document should describe why and how the district will allow OHV crossings of the currently unmapped stream. It is important to clarify what is/is not considered “vegetated.” Some of the places with OHV use were mostly sands with a few plants colonizing the area. The USFS should decide which percent cover constitutes vegetated.

This plan would disclose the resource impacts associated with OHV use.

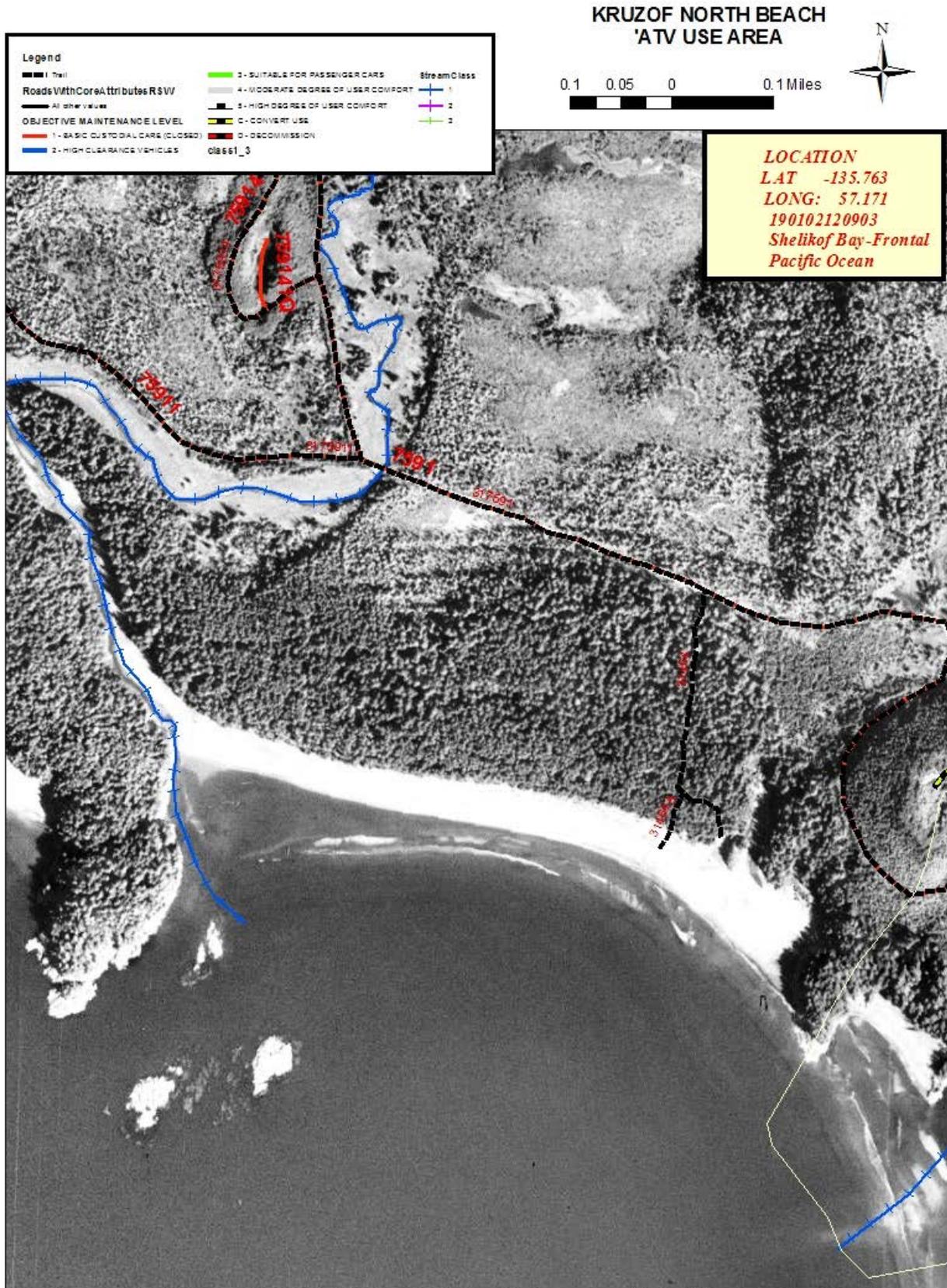
Place signs, blazes, or other features to delineate the high tide line and designate the legal trails and dispersed campsites. This could be outlined in the management plan. The use area has seemingly expanded from the unvegetated beach sands and designated campsites located in the adjacent forest fringe into travel restricted areas. If something looks like a trail, it will likely continue to be used as a trail unless measures are taken to control access. These areas should be designated as trails or blocked.



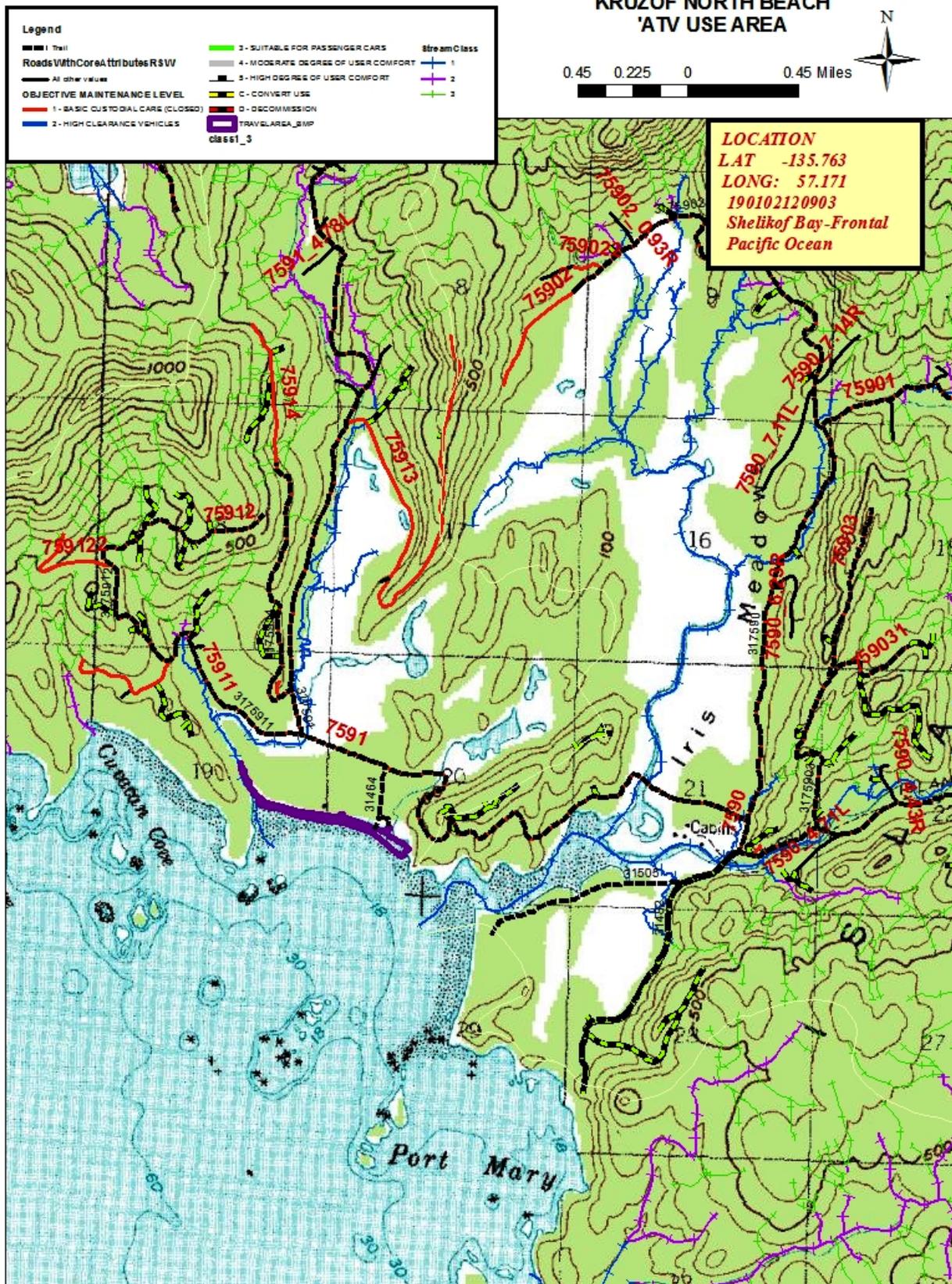
North Kruzof Beach Photo 4. OHV use area sign



North Kruzof Beach Photo 5. OHV use area



Kruzof North Beach Figure 2. Orthophoto of Kruzof North Beach ATV use area



Kruzof North Beach Figure 3. Map of Kruzof North Beach ATV use area