



File Code: 1950

Date: November 29, 2016

Dear Interested Individuals and Organizations:

Enclosed is information on the Prince of Wales Landscape Level Analysis (POW LLA) Project that is being planned under authorization of Predecisional Administrative Review Process. In development and preparation of the project, the participation of interested persons, state and local governments, and Indian tribes is encouraged at this time and throughout the process. The environmental impact statement (EIS) and draft decision will be completed and mailed to those who have submitted comments, and to those who have requested to be included on the project mailing list. A copy of the final EIS and draft decision is planned to be mailed in July of 2018.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the POW LLA Project is to improve forest ecosystem health on Craig and Thorne Bay Ranger Districts, help support community resiliency, and provide economic development through an integrated approach to meet multiple resource objectives.

There is a need to provide a sustainable level of forest products to contribute to the economic viability of the region. There is also a need to provide old-growth timber to help maintain the expertise and infrastructure of the existing timber industry so the forest products industry can prepare for an increasing amount of merchantable young-growth offerings. These businesses are fundamental to both the young-growth and restoration components of the evolving timber program, and to the economic vitality of the region.

Timber stand establishment (TSE) and timber stand improvement (TSI) activities that restore and enhance early seral forests are necessary. This translates to the need for commercial and precommercial treatments of young-growth forests to produce future desired resource values, products, services, and forest health conditions that sustain the diversity and productivity of forested ecosystems.

Past management activities have affected watershed function and fish and wildlife habitat in the project area. There is a need for restoration activities in these watersheds to reestablish self-sustaining habitats that promote viable fish and wildlife populations. These will contribute to subsistence values and the continued traditional and cultural uses by residents of Prince of Wales and surrounding islands.

Providing sustainable recreation opportunities on POW and surrounding islands is critical to maintaining the existing opportunities for residents as well as to expand opportunities for growth in the recreation and tourism business sector. A sustainable program in terms of operations and maintenance is needed in order to maintain infrastructure to an acceptable level.



Proposed Action

The proposed action will be developed through extensive public involvement to meet the Purpose and Needs for the project, with activities that will occur over the course of 10 to 15 years. Input from the tribes and the public will help determine the location and types of activities, and how extensively they will occur across the landscape. Management activities that traditionally meet the needs associated with this project include: (1) commercial and precommercial young-growth treatments including timber stand improvement activities, timber harvests, planting/interplanting, pruning and slash removal/manipulation; (2) old-growth timber harvests; (3) transportation management activities such as road construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and decommissioning in support of accomplishing other proposed management actions; (4) in-stream restoration work, riparian thinning, improvement of fish passages at road crossings, and improving water quality and both fish and wildlife habitat; and (5) developing and improving recreation infrastructure such as cabins and shelters, trails, winter recreation areas, campgrounds, interpretive sites, and boat launches. The proposed action is not limited to only the above activity types, but will be consistent with the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan.

Possible Alternatives

Scoping comments will be used to develop a full range of alternatives to the proposed action, in response to significant issues that are identified. A no-action alternative will be analyzed as well, which represents no change and serves as the baseline for the comparison among the action alternatives.

Responsible Official

The Responsible Official for the decision on this project is M. Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor, Tongass National Forest, Federal Building, 648 Mission Street, Ketchikan, Alaska, 99901.

Nature of Decision To Be Made

Given the purpose and need of the project, the Forest Supervisor will review the no action, the proposed action, other alternatives, and the environmental consequences in order to make decisions including the following: (1) whether to select the proposed action or another alternative; (2) the locations, design, and scheduling of commercial and precommercial timber treatments, restoration activities, habitat improvements, road construction and reconstruction, and improvements to recreation opportunities; (3) mitigation measures and monitoring requirements; and (4) whether there may be a significant restriction of subsistence uses. No Forest Plan Amendments are anticipated with this decision.

Scoping Process

A Notice of Intent is being published in the Federal Register to initiate the scoping process, which guides the development of the environmental impact statement. A 30-day comment period begins at the time of publication, which we anticipate will occur on November 30, 2016. However, if you want to be sure of precisely when the comment period ends, you must refer to when it is published in the Federal Register, which is available online at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/>. There will be ample public involvement opportunities on Prince of Wales Island throughout the planning process, including: public meetings held in various communities, subsistence hearings, information posted in public places and in local

publications such as the *Island Post*, and from the Prince of Wales Landscape Assessment Team, a collaborative group independently formed to provide widely based proposals to be considered by the U.S. Forest Service in the POW LLA Project development and analysis process. Project information and updates, meeting notices, and documents will be provided throughout the process on the project webpage at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50337>. Individuals may also provide comments and sign up for an electronic mailing list at that site.

This project implements land management plans and is not authorized under the Healthy Forest Restoration Act and is subject to 36 CFR 218.7 parts (a) and (b). Instead of an appeal period, there will be an objection process before the final decision is made and after the final environmental analysis document and draft decision are mailed (reference 36 CFR 218). In order to be eligible to file an objection, specific written comments related to the project must be submitted during scoping, by the comment period on the draft EIS in accordance with procedures in 40 CFR 1506.10, and any other periods public comment is specifically requested on this EIS (218.5). Individual members of organizations must have submitted their own comments to meet the requirements of eligibility as an individual. Objections received on behalf of an organization are considered as those of the organization only. Names and addresses of those who comment and/or file objections will become part of the public record.

For more information on how the objection process works for projects and activities implementing land and resource management plans and the requirements, you may read the regulations under 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B on the National Forest Service web site at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-03-27/pdf/2013-06857.pdf>.

Public meetings for this project are planned for as follows: December 12th in Thorne Bay at the Forest Service conference room from 4:30 to 6pm, December 13th in Naukati at the school from 4pm to 5:30, and December 15th in Craig at the Craig Tribal Association building from 4:30 to 6pm. Specific written comments on this project will be accepted at these meetings.

The environmental impact statement will be mailed out to those who respond to this scoping letter, to those who have requested the document, or are eligible to file an objection in accordance with Sec. 218.5(a).

Written comments may be submitted to: Matt Anderson, District Ranger, Craig and Thorne Bay Ranger Districts, P.O. Box 19001, Thorne Bay AK 99919; at the Thorne Bay District Office, at 1312 Federal Way, Thorne Bay, during normal business hours, Monday through Friday 8am to 4:30pm; by FAX at 907-828-3309; or submitted electronically at: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=50337>. Please contact Delilah Brigham, Project Leader, by telephone at (907) 828-3232, or by email at dbrigham@fs.fed.us for more information about the public meetings or the project. Thank you and we look forward to your participation in the planning process.

Sincerely,

 (FA):

MATTHEW ANDERSON
District Ranger