

## Chugach National Forest Draft Land Management Plan Frequently Asked Questions

### What is a Land Management Plan?

A Land Management Plan provides a planning and policy framework to guide a forest in managing its forest resources, goods, and services. Described as “the view from 30,000 feet,” they are strategic and broad in scope and provide guidance in the decision-making process involved with site-specific projects.

### Why is the Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan being revised?

The draft Land Management Plan responds to six overarching needs for change that emerged from public engagement, consultation with Alaska Natives Tribes and Corporations, input from the State of Alaska, or are required by agency policy or regulations. Needs to change identified are:

- *Integrate the interests of Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations and the State of Alaska with the Land Management Plan and promote collaborative relationships.* The draft Land Management Plan responds to this need with new plan components developed through consultation and/or meetings that strengthen relationships tied to mutual and shared interests (such as land ownership and entitlements, traditional uses, statutory rights, and working agreements).
- *Provide diverse recreation opportunities in cooperation with partners, while protecting the natural, cultural, and scenic environment for present and future generations.* The draft Land Management Plan provides visitor access, removes outfitter and guide capacity allocations for individual management areas and retains capacity in many Forest areas for additional commercial recreation use. The draft Land Management Plan emphasizes managing recreation facilities based on use, maintaining the ability to sustain facilities, resources, and visitor experiences as use patterns change. The draft Land Management Plan encourages building partnerships to help manage new and existing facilities.
- *Provide management direction to support terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem functions and promote ecosystem resilience to encourage the persistence of native plant and animal species in a changing climate.* The draft Land Management Plan recognizes current ecosystem trends and emphasizes adaptive management based on knowledge of these trends. Plan components consider the potential effects of projected trends on social, economic, and ecological conditions associated with snowpack and glaciers; salmon; vegetation, plants, and animals; coastal conditions; and viewscapes.
- *Review special designations on the Forest including the current wilderness recommendation within the congressionally designated Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area.* The draft Land Management Plan clarifies and expands plan components for existing designations such as the Iditarod National Historic Trail, but does not propose any new designations. Based on the wilderness inventory and analysis, the draft Land Management Plan recommends additional lands for wilderness designation within the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area.
- *Remove site-specific travel management direction from the plan, consistent with agency policy.* The draft Land Management Plan removes direction now provided elsewhere, updates and aligns Recreation Opportunity Spectrum settings with the current status of areas and routes open and closed to motor vehicle use, and proposes a few site-specific changes to Recreation Opportunity Spectrum settings based on public comment.
- *Draft Land Management Plan components consistent with the 2012 Planning Rule.* The draft Land Management Plan provides Forest-wide direction that eliminates confusion or duplication in management area direction;

reduces the number of management areas from 21 to eight; and focuses monitoring questions only on the eight categories identified in the rule. In addition, management approaches clarify management intent and add descriptions of working and desired relationships.

### **What are the goals of the draft Land Management Plan?**

The draft Land Management Plan will provide strategic vision and guidance for the 5.4 million acre Chugach National Forest over the next 10 to 15 years. The overall vision for Forest management is expressed in three goal statements, with associated desired conditions providing the detail for each of the goals. The three goals are:

#### **1. Foster collaborative relationships**

This goal includes expanding volunteer capacity; increasing youth engagement; developing shared land stewardship options and strategies; and collaborating with Alaska Native Tribes and Corporations, State of Alaska, other federal agencies, adjacent landowners, communities, and nongovernmental organizations.

#### **2. Contribute to social and economic sustainability**

This goal will be met by maintaining intact, resilient ecosystems whose associated services, benefits, and uses support rural economies both locally and regionally; contribute to subsistence lifestyles; and enhance the quality of life and sense of place for present and future generations.

#### **3. Provide for ecological sustainability**

This goal involves management to maintain the ecological integrity of aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial ecosystems necessary to sustain a diversity of vegetation, fish, and wildlife communities, including the continued persistence of native species.

### **Why does the draft Land Management Plan look different than the current Land Management Plan? How will the new Land Management Plan work?**

Consistent with requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule and based upon additional public comments, the draft Land Management Plan is restructured with new components: goals, desired conditions, objectives, suitability of areas, and standards and guidelines. Management approaches are included to clarify management intent. The draft Land Management Plan is organized in three main parts - Vision, Strategy, and Design Criteria.

**Part 1 Vision** includes the goals and desired conditions, which comprise the overall vision for the management of the Chugach National Forest. The outcome of land management activities over the next 10-15 years should be to move the plan area toward achievement or maintenance of the desired conditions.

**Part 2 Strategy** describes how the Forest intends to move toward the desired conditions. Suitable uses for each management area are defined. It includes objectives that define measurable, time-specific activities intended to make progress toward desired conditions and identifies management approaches that describe potential means for achieving desired conditions. This section also includes information about lands suitable for timber production.

**Part 3 Design Criteria** is comprised of the standards and guidelines which establish constraints and boundaries for management activities. Standards and guidelines are established to help achieve or maintain the desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet applicable legal requirements.

## **What management priorities will the Chugach National Forest emphasize during the next 10-15 years?**

The Chugach National Forest will focus on the key management themes heard from the public throughout the Land Management Plan revision process:

**Recreation:** An emphasis on sustainable recreation in the draft Land Management Plan means that the Chugach National Forest will focus on shared stewardship of recreational facilities with partners and communities. Emphasis will be on maintaining, rather than expanding, recreation facilities in the Chugach National Forest.

**Outfitter and guiding activities:** The draft Land Management Plan removes the carrying capacity requirements for each management area for outfitter guide permit issuance, providing greater flexibility for these businesses and the ability to use site specific factors to define carrying capacities for each situation or area.

**Fuelwood:** The Chugach National Forest will continue to provide opportunities for obtaining fuelwood through vegetation treatments and wildlife habitat enhancement projects and other projects involving tree removal such as highway projects.

**Maintenance of intact ecosystems:** The Forest will continue to maintain, enhance, and restore ecosystem processes and values important to local residents and visitors. We recognize that functioning ecosystems and watersheds are important to recreation, tourism, and traditional and subsistence-related activities. Maintaining intact freshwater systems for salmon is especially important.

**Hazardous fuels reduction:** The Chugach National Forest will continue to work with neighboring communities and the State of Alaska to reduce hazardous fuels in the Wildland Urban Interface.

## **What designated areas are included in the draft Land Management Plan? Are there any new designated areas being proposed?**

No new designated areas are being proposed, and no new wilderness acres are recommended in the draft plan outside of the existing Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. Existing designated areas include:

**Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area:** The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA) designated the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area (WSA) and that designation remains unchanged. During plan revision, the 2012 Planning Rule requires identification and evaluation of areas that may be suitable for wilderness designation.

The areas recommended for wilderness designation in the draft Land Management Plan alternatives are all within the designated WSA boundary. Regardless of the wilderness recommendation, management area direction remains the same for all land within the WSA management area to maintain the area's character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

**Wild and Scenic Rivers:** No changed conditions (to eligibility or suitability) since the 2002 Land Management Plan. There are nine suitable and one eligible river segments on the Forest. No rivers have been designated.

**Research Natural Areas:** There are five designated Research Natural Areas (Wolverine Glacier, Kenai Lake-Black Mountain, Green Island, Olsen Bay Creek, and Copper Sands). Of the 6949 acres in the Wolverine Glacier RNA, 6317 are recommended as wilderness within the WSA.

**Trails:** The Iditarod National Historic Trail, designated by Congress in 1978, is located on trail segments from Seward to the Forest boundary north of Girdwood, Resurrection Pass National

Recreation Trail and Williwaw National Recreation Trails administratively designated in the 1970s.

**Area:** The Kenai Mountains-Turnagain Arm National Heritage Area.

**Inventoried Roadless Areas:** Management areas are overlain on top of Inventoried Roadless Areas; a Forest-wide plan standard requires management of these lands consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Recommended wilderness within the WSA overlays inventoried roadless areas.

### **How are complex land ownerships addressed in the draft Land Management Plan?**

Land ownership status within the Forest boundary includes State and Alaska Native Tribes and Corporation inholdings, as well as lands with differing surface and subsurface ownerships, easements, and restrictive covenants. Access and other valid existing rights on these lands are clarified in the draft Land Management Plan, in response to strong interest from multiple parties.

New draft plan components were changed or refined to align with land ownership changes over the past 15 years. New draft Land Management Plan components acknowledge valid existing rights and interests in selected and conveyed parcels under the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958 and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Since 2002, over 64 parcels (18,512 acres) were selected and conveyed. These are updates to the 2002 Plan.

For lands acquired with *Exxon Valdez* Oil Spill Trustee Council (EVOS Trustee Council) funds, the draft Land Management Plan aligns with the EVOS Trustee Council Restoration Plan and program areas. Plan components clarify management of acquired lands to their specific covenants, recognizing there are multiple easement holders and private subsurface ownership. To address confusion with two islands acquired surface estate under EVOS Trustee Council funding located within the WSA boundary, the draft Land Management Plan places them in the EVOS Trustee Council acquired lands management area (not in the WSA management area).

### **How were at-risk species considered in the revision process?**

There are no federally listed threatened or endangered terrestrial species within the Chugach National Forest, so consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service was not required.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has classified the Steller sea lion (*Eumetopias jubatus*) as threatened and the Cook Inlet beluga whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) as endangered. Consultation with NMFS guided plan development and consultation will continue throughout the planning process, culminating in issuance of a Biological Opinion from NMFS.

Under the 1982 Planning Rule, the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List focused management attention on plant or animal species whose population viability was of concern. Similarly, the 2012 Planning Rule identifies at-risk species for conservation attention, but replaced sensitive species with species of conservation concern (SCC). Plant or animal species not currently recognized as federally listed species are identified as SCC when there is substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area. As such, identification and management of SCC plays an important conservation and regulatory role to prevent species from becoming federally listed. The draft Land Management Plan includes plan components to maintain or restore ecological conditions within the plan area that will contribute to maintaining a viable population of the identified SCC. The Dusky Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis occidentalis*) and the Aleutian cress (*Aphragmus eschscholtzianus*) are identified as SCC in the draft Land Management Plan.

## **Why is there no commercial timber program on the Chugach National Forest? What kind of vegetation treatments are proposed in the draft Land Management Plan?**

Forest management on the Chugach National Forest emphasizes providing economic and recreational opportunities, community fuelwood, wildfire risk reduction, and wildlife habitat enhancement. The Forest does not currently have a commercial timber program, and is not proposing one because the land that is available for timber production is inadequate to provide a flow of timber on a reasonably predictable basis. Forested lands comprise only 20% of the land base of the Chugach National Forest. The spruce beetle outbreak of the 1990s severely impacted productive forest lands on the Kenai Peninsula, leaving forest stands with low volume and low value. The Chugach National Forest will continue to offer small commercial sales for timber and fuelwood as part of integrated vegetation treatments to maintain watershed health and wildlife habitat, and will continue to provide opportunities for free use timber and fuelwood to Alaska residents.

## **How would the State of Alaska's petition to develop a state-specific Roadless Area Conservation Rule affect the Chugach National Forest?**

Secretary Sonny Perdue and Alaska Governor Bill Walker reached agreement to pursue a state-specific roadless rule. The Forest Service has convened the resources and personnel to move forward in support of this agreement, but without an updated rule in place it is not possible to speculate on potential changes specific to the Chugach National Forest.

Currently, the Forest Service is working closely with the State of Alaska to develop a collaborative process allowing all stakeholders an opportunity to inform the development of the rule. This agreement follows the precedent of previous state-specific rulemakings in Colorado and Idaho. The state-specific roadless rule approach is an inclusive, enduring, and legally proven solution which can be used to address roadless issues in Alaska.

## **What happens next in the planning process?**

A 90-day public review and comment period begins August 4, 2018 and ends November 1, 2018. The public is strongly encouraged to read the documents, and participate by attending public meetings and asking questions, and submitting formal comments.

The Chugach National Forest will review and evaluate the comments, draft a response to the comments, and review and edit the draft Land Management Plan and DEIS to produce its Final Land Management Plan and final environmental impact statement (FEIS), along with a draft Record of Decision. After an administrative review (objection period), the Forest Supervisor will sign a Final Record of Decision and the Land Management Plan will be in effect 30 days later.

## **How do I provide comments?**

During the 90-day public comment period, comments may be submitted using any of the following methods:

1. Electronically at [www.fs.usda.gov/goto/chugach/plancomments](http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/chugach/plancomments)
2. FAX to (907) 743-9476
3. Submit in writing at any public meeting hosted during the 90-day comment period
4. Send or deliver written comments to:  
Chugach National Forest's Supervisor's Office, Attn: Draft Land Management Plan,  
161 East 1<sup>st</sup> Street, Door 8  
Anchorage, AK 99501

Be as specific as possible in your comments, identifying locations and activities of specific interest or concern to you.