



Cordova Telephone Cooperative Cellular Site Proposal

Issue

On February 5, 2010, Cordova Telephone Cooperative, Inc (CTC) submitted a proposal to the Forest Service to install and operate a cellular telecommunication facility within the Naked Island Communications Site (NICS) in Prince William Sound (PWS), about 50 miles east of the city of Whittier, Alaska. The location is within the Prince William Sound Islands Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA) on the Chugach National Forest and the congressionally designated Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. This area is also within recommended wilderness under the 2002 revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Chugach National Forest.

Background

CTC desires to provide cellular service in the northern section of PWS. A facility on the NICS would provide such service. The NICS is an existing communications site on National Forest System (NFS) land currently occupied by four communications use lease holders under a Communication Site Plan. Existing facilities are shown in the photograph.

The footprint of CTC's proposed facility would be approximately one-quarter acre and consist of a tower, equipment shelter, solar panel array, and propane tanks, similar to existing facilities on NICS. Construction would require removal of about 20 trees with an average diameter of 14 inches. Due to the elevation of the NICS, only helicopters are utilized to transport people and equipment to and from the site. No road or trail has been constructed on the island for access to the site, nor has the proponent requested the development of a road or trail.



Current Situation

After screening CTC's proposal, the Forest Service accepted the proposal July 27, 2010 as a formal application, based on responses to the preliminary scoping. The Forest Service also outlined the rest of the application process, including timelines, cost recovery, 3rd party NEPA, etc. This acceptance should result in CTC obtaining an extension on their FCC license which expires sometime in October.

Federal regulations required this screening to ensure that any proposed use meets minimum requirements before receiving further evaluation (36 CFR 251.54(e)). Screening criteria included such items as determining whether the proposed use is consistent with laws and regulations governing NFS lands and determining that the proposed use will not unreasonably conflict or interfere with other authorized uses. Forest Service Handbook 2709.11, section 94.1, includes additional requirements specific to communication sites, such as remaining within the established noise floor limit and being compatible with current uses at the site.

If the Forest Service accepts the application and decides to authorize the use, it will be subject to review and approval by the Secretary of Agriculture due to the removal of trees.

If the proponent chooses to co-locate with existing authorized facilities, the proponent may immediately locate equipment in or on the facility and proceed with operations, after securing

permission from the facility owner or facility manager. Under the agency's policy for communications uses, the proponent does not need agency approval to co-locate the proposed use in or on an existing authorized facility when the proposed use is compatible with the communications site management plan and existing communications uses at the site (sec. 94.6; 60 FR 55090, Oct. 27, 1995; and 62 FR 68073, Dec. 30, 1997).

Key Points

- The project area is located within the Prince William Sound Islands Inventoried Roadless Area. It is also within the Nellie Juan - College Fjord Wilderness Study Area, designated by Congress in Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, and recommended for wilderness in the Forest Plan.
- The proposal includes minor clearing of trees and vegetation.
- The proponent could co-locate immediately with existing authorized facilities after securing permission from the facility manager, without further Forest Service approval.

More Information

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