USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Alaska Region | P.O. Box 21628 Juneau, AK 99802-1628

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Dear Reviewer:

Here is your copy of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) for the Helicopter Access to Conduct Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) in Wilderness.

I am sending out the Final EIS without the Record of Decision so I can share the current analysis with the public and determine if there are any additional concerns that need to be considered prior to making a decision. The Draft EIS had Alternative 4 (helicopter landings at 540 plots) as the Preferred Alternative. After additional analysis, Alternative 1 (no helicopter landings in wilderness areas) is the Preferred Alternative in the Final EIS because it minimizes the effects to wilderness character.

The analysis considered forested and non-forested plots as part of the proposed inventory. In response to public comments received on the Draft EIS, I am considering excluding the non-forested plots. The non-forested plots are not part of the core FIA data that is required by Congress, and it would help minimize some potential effects.

One of the key changes in the Final EIS is the analysis of alternative components and effects if non-forested plots are excluded from any of the action alternatives. This analysis indicated that the alternative components and effects from excluding the non-forested plots were not substantially different from the components and effects in the existing range of alternatives. Therefore, excluding the non-forested plots is an option that could be applied to any of the action alternatives.

It is **not** necessary to comment on the Final EIS if you have already done so for the Draft EIS. Your comments have already been considered in the analysis. If you have additional comments, they will need to be received within 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Final EIS has been published in the Federal Register so I can consider them in making a decision. Please send written comments to: USDA Forest Service, Alaska Regional Office, Ecosystem Planning Staff, ATTN: Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Helicopters in Wilderness EIS, P.O. Box 21628, Juneau, AK 99802-1628. You may also email comments to: comments-alaska-regional-office@fs.fed.us.

There is no formal comment period like there is upon the release of a Draft EIS. If you provided timely comments on the Draft EIS and all the required contact information, you have standing should you desire to appeal the decision. You will not gain standing to appeal if you did not comment during the 45-day formal comment period on the Draft EIS; however, if you wish to comment on this Final EIS, your comments will be considered before the decision is made.

Copies of this Final EIS have been sent to those who provided comment on the Draft EIS. Copies are also available for review at public libraries, at Forest Service offices throughout the Alaska Region, and on the internet at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/ro/projects-plans/fia/index.shtml. For more information, contact Ken Post, the project IDT leader, at (907) 586-8796.

Sincerely,

DENNIS E. BSCHOR
Regional Forester