



Chugach Wilderness Recommendation

Issue

The Record of Decision for the 2002 Revised Chugach Forest Plan recommends that 1,412,230 acres, or 25% of the Chugach National Forest, be added to the National Wilderness Preservation System as the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness. Until such time as Congress acts on the recommendation, the Record of Decision mandates that the entire 2,115,000-acre Wilderness Study Area (WSA) be managed under the Wilderness Study Area prescription.

Background

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act created the 2,115,000-acre Nellie Juan-College Fiord WSA in 1980. Since then, this area has been managed to maintain its wilderness values. In 1984, the Chugach Forest Plan recommended to Congress that 1,589,000 acres be designated as wilderness. No action was taken on the recommendation.

During the revision of the 1984 Forest Plan, the entire Chugach National Forest (5.5 million acres) was evaluated for suitability for wilderness designation. The Record of Decision recommends designation of 1,412,230 acres of the WSA as wilderness. The reduction in recommended acreage from the 1984 Plan to the 2002 Plan is due to changed conditions in Prince William Sound over the intervening 18 years. Those changes include very large increases in public use near Whittier; private land interests and concerns; subsistence needs; and potential mineral values.

During the revision process, some segments of the public advocated that additional areas be recommended for wilderness, including parts of the Kenai Peninsula and the eastern Copper River Delta. The decision not to recommend the eastern delta for wilderness took into account the interests of the commercial fishing industry, the local Native corporation, and other resource management agencies. Those entities expressed concern that wilderness designation might be detrimental to meeting the management intent of ANILCA Section 501(b). This section of ANILCA directs that the Copper River Delta be managed for the primary purpose of conserving fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Current Situation

The Wilderness Recommendation Report was submitted to the Department of Agriculture in May 2002. The recommendation was supported by the Administration. The proposed Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness:

- Is a world-class treasure of snowcapped mountains, large glaciers, ancient forests, wetlands, and pristine marine waters;
- Encompasses about 25% of the 5.5 million acre Chugach National Forest;
- Is located in western Prince William Sound, and is accessed primarily by boat from Whittier;
- If approved by Congress, will be the first designated wilderness on the Chugach National Forest, and the first in the Alaska Region since 1990.
- Until such time as Congress acts on the recommendation, the entire WSA is managed under the Wilderness Study Area prescription in the Forest Plan.

More Information

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