

**Chugach National Forest Service
Forest Plan Revision – Phase I
“Second” Public Forum Meeting Notes
Anchorage – February 25, 2013**

The public was invited to attend nine forest planning forums across the region during the month of February to provide input on Phase I - Assessment of the Chugach Forest Plan Revision. Attendees were divided into smaller break-out groups and asked several questions (see below) regarding use, emerging trends and issues, and communication. Below is a summary of public input. Responses with a number in parenthesis indicate an item that was discussed in multiple break-out groups, the number indicating the number of groups.

Facilitators/Note Takers: Alex Sienkiewicz, Susan Hansen, Sharon Timko, Nat'l Collaboration Cadre, and Sharon Randall

Number of breakout groups: 1

Number of attendees: 13

I. Introduction and Welcome

- Forum purpose and agenda
- Basics about Chugach National Forest Plan Revision
- New Forest Service revision process – the “new rule”
- 2002 Chugach Forest Plan + Examples

II. Small Group Breakout

a. Use and Vision

How do you use the Forest today?

- Use it as a “get away” from people and the community
- Spend time with family & “get outside to what seems like the middle of nowhere”
- Fishing
- Snowmachining
- Hiking
- Cross-country skiing; Girdwood area
- Use it for educational purposes – State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)
 - Teach the value of public lands to the community
 - Provide instruction for teachers to develop curriculum
 - Get students and teachers out to the forests
- Education for Nordic Ski Patrol
 - Training ground for:
 - Backcountry safety classes
 - Avalanche training
 - Search and Rescue
 - Use Turnagain Pass area
 - Safety training with helicopters
 - Interagency search and rescue training

b. Assessment

How do preliminary USFS assessment findings (headliners) match your understanding of what is happening on the Forest?

- Assessment headliners only mentions brown bears; should mention the broad array of wildlife within CNF; wolverines (effects of helicopters), mountain goats, Dahl sheep, moose – array of wildlife

What is working or not working in the current 2002 Forest Plan? What's working?

- Turnagain Pass split use with skiers on east side and motorized on the west side seems to be working; enforcement of seasonal closures needed....
- Resurrection Pass year on/year off seems to be working.....
- Bear Valley is nice as non-motorized area; access during low snow year is tricky for skiers....
- Railroad whistle stops seem to be working....
- Moving visitors from train to bus to boat; would like to see buses screened/ separate the uses but don't change the experience
- Trail grooming provided by Coopers Landing and Seward ski organizations is wonderful....

What Needs "Tweaking" in the current 2002 revised Plan

- Lost Lake non-motorized access from south side is only a theory....; likewise for Snow River non-motorized area – access corridor makes the whole valley motorized.....
- Crescent Lake – skiers avoiding Crescent Lake due to confusion as to whether it is open or closed to snow machines...
- Divide Creek winter motorized needs to be extended to encompass the entire watershed or Center Creek...
- Skookum Glacier non-motorized season and area need to be expanded to provide non-motorized area for backcountry touring and skate/crust skiing in spring...
- Motorized users never just have motorized use areas
- Don't close any more areas to motorized use

What do you see as emerging forest issues and trends in the Chugach?

Noise

- Important to protect areas for "natural" noise – natural silence experience on untracked snow; quality of the experience is very unique to each individual

Cultural/Heritage

- There are other cultural/historic resources that should be recognized/designated as management areas within the plan in addition to the native tribal cultural and historic resources
- Iditarod Trail is a national historic trail and should be "called out" in the plan with a unique designation; make it its own management area similar to others across the nation
- Establish a right-of-way or easement to identify the Iditarod trail; identify the corridor where it is managed according to reasons for which it was identified (see BLM who does it corridor-wise)

- Identify and manage historic/cultural corridors (and other old transportation routes) within the CNF in order to maintain the value/significance of the historic designation
- Establish the historic trail – either ROW or easement – within the corridor
- Manage corridor to minimize adverse impacts that could diminish value of historic designation
- FS recreation cabins are also a part of the history

Fire/Fuels

- Spruce bark beetle. What is occurring and what has been done since 2002? How effective have our treatments been?

Fish and Wildlife

- BLM attendee commented on the success of a project with the king salmon on the Kenai and Russian rivers.
- Chinook runs have crashed where the forest borders the Kenai. What is being done to address low King Salmon runs?

Joint Management/Communication

- Point made of distinction between CNF responsibility to manage the habitat and State Fish and Wildlife responsibility to manage the populations – importance of two agencies communicating and working together

Subsistence

- Some smaller communities' subsistence is dependent upon the CNF

Access

- Russian River made accessible to all but still wild Alaska; make things accessible without overbuilding or ruining the landscape...don't need to build something to provide better access
- Smaller volume access points have value/economic impact for smaller communities; don't just measure economic benefit based on numbers of visitors at high volume access points. It's not always the number of people who access it...it's about the experience.

Local Economy

- Recreational use of CNF is important to local economies in terms of dollars spent in lodging, equipment/supply purchases, food purchased, etc. (snowmachining, ice climbing, all service industries surrounding recreation & tourism, gas, food, etc.)
- CNF is a very important resource to state and local economies
- Designation of "Heritage Areas" is a tourism attraction for smaller communities
- Need to consider the value and economic impact of the support services provided for recreational opportunities, e.g. float planes to remote areas; guide services, etc. in economic cost/benefit analysis. Need to recognize not all economic values are visible.

Air Quality

- During low snow year, restrict snowmachine access to minimize adverse impacts on air quality

User Conflict/Motorized versus Non-Motorized

- There is an increase in “cross-utilization” – snowmachines with skis/snowboards on board
- BLM attendee gave example of an event in Montana when motorized and non-motorized work together to sponsor an event – example of cooperation between different users; motorized users ferry skiers up the mountain
- Currently skiers have infinitely more areas to access than snowmachiners – it is absurd to consider more closures for motorized use
- Find balance between areas designated “non-motorized” and “motorized” areas – an equity issue
- During a low snow year more areas are closed for motorized use yet non-motorized (skiers) can still access – “early bird gets the worm”;
- Snowmachiners are willing to share trails; skiers have a different attitude – don’t want to share

Recreation

- Alaska does a good job of providing for senior and youth accessibility to wilderness experiences
- Opportunity to enhance access point with good signage, maps

Land Designation/Management

- Consider designating areas for “motorized only” such as areas designated for “non-motorized only” areas
- Consider establishing zones and/or “areas of emphasis” as management areas within the plan, e.g. historic/cultural “zones”. Specify levels of management/treatment for those “zones” to protect value of resource
- Develop a monitoring plan for the management of the “area of emphasis”
- Designate “access corridors” for motorized users to get through non-motorized areas; Example: there are 3 ridgelines and 3 drainages – designate one drainage as an “access corridor” to get people out there. This was compared to the boardwalks that have been constructed for fisherman to get to their favorite fishing spot without degrading wilderness or wilderness experience. Such corridors could just be a designated area not necessarily a “built” corridor. Another example is the Twentymile corridor.
- Zones of management that establish noise and quiet zones; strive for each use emphasis to be a high quality experience.

Communication and Public Involvement

*What are the best ways to involve you, and others, in the Forest Plan Revision Process?
What is a good way to communicate with you?*

- Radio – particularly in remote areas
- Facebook
- Special interest forums, e.g. snow machine groups, avalanche, skiers
- Face to face
- Local newspapers effective in the smaller communities
- Mix of articles/paid advertisements; articles with interviews
- Radio interviews

- Posting notices at access points, small airports that ferry people to remote areas
- Flyers at trailheads
- Provide information to special interest groups and let them get the word out
- Avalanche website
- Back side of latrine door

Other ways to engage the public?

- Organize working groups in terms of “themes” or major issues in smaller communities
- Maintain a core group to coordinate efforts of working groups
- Not too many meetings – can be overwhelming

III. Conclusion and Wrap up