

**Chugach National Forest  
Forest Plan Revision – Phase I  
Public Forum Meeting Notes  
Soldotna – February 21, 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:** Don Rees, Kevin Laves, Elysia Retzlaff, Susan Hansen, Kevin Knauth

**Number of breakout groups: 3**

**Number of attendees: 37**

**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?*

- Fishing (2)
- Hunting (2)
- Recreation
- Snowmachining (2)
- Prospecting (3)
- Horseback riding
- Skiing (2)
- Boating (2)
- Hiking (2)
- Snowshoeing
- Camping
- Bike
- Solitude
- Kayaking
- Mushing
- Photography
- 4-wheeling (2)
- Rec cabin use

*How might use and users change over the next 20 years?*

- Envision that uses of the forest will remain the same, but fear that the allowed uses will change due to increased closures/access restrictions

- Equal access should be provided for all users and activities
- Big name projects are getting \$\$ (e.g. Spencer Bridge)
- more facilities
- more development
- Increase in backcountry use
  - Better gear, better machines gets more people in the backcountry
  - Younger generations are using the backcountry
- Increase in prospecting
- Decrease in boating in kayaking

## **b. Assessment**

*What are barriers to using the Forest?*

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

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

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

- Barriers to use:
  - Restriction of access to mining claims
  - RS 2477 road closures/constitutional right to access RS2477 roads
  - Lack of communication about plan amendments re: access restrictions
  - Access to refuge is limited due to wildlife
  - Difficult to reserve cabins in PWS
  - Need better campgrounds in PWS
  - Limited access on/from roads
  - Limited parking
  - Not enough facilities (e.g. restrooms)
  - Not enough pullouts or places to rest
  - No campgrounds in Whittier
  - Motorized access – not enough, especially for hard to reach areas

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

- Leave Resurrection Creek as it is

## **Forest Plan**

- Amendments to the 2002 revised plan occurred without an opportunity for public to comment – need to increase opportunities in the future
- Reduce the amount of changes to the plan mid-stream
- Need to ensure that government follows and works within the existing plan;

## **Air quality**

- Aerial spraying has reduced air quality
- Restricting uses to smaller areas with increased usage may lead to air quality issues, e.g. concentration of motorized use

## **Cultural/Historic Resources**

- Cultural/historic resources have been restricted to use by only certain individuals/special interests, e.g. historic cabin that has been remodeled and its use limited to “hut to hut” system – historic site not accessible to public
- Native lands and rights has led to unequal use of lands and resources

### **Efficiency**

- Concern over the Chugach’s choice to construct Whistle Stop cabin from yellow cedar.
  - Why did the Forest use such expensive supplies?
  - Why not be more efficient?

### **FS Management**

- Problems are at higher levels of management

### **Joint Management**

- Create working agreements with DOT for parking and pullouts

### **Pollution**

- Tsunami debris – how is the forest going to manage?

### **Access**

- Not enough pullouts or places to rest
- No campgrounds in Whittier
- Motorized access – not enough, especially for hard to reach areas
- Not enough ADA access
- 2477 roads should be opened up
- Need for access for 4 wheeling
- Access is an issue for prospecting
- Not enough access is an issue.
- Some campgrounds close too early (Cooper North/South; Black Bear, Turnagain)
- Responsible miners should have access.
- Fire, mining, and timber roads should be opened up

### **Vegetation/Timber**

- Have seen increase in beetle populations (infestation)
- Invasive species increasing, e.g. alders
- Fewer wildfires has resulted in encroachment of trees resulting in loss of wildlife habitat
- Lack of timber harvest has led to reduced habitat health
- Need to reevaluate areas available for timber

### **Mining**

- Increase in mining claims
- Concern over how well mining claims are being managed

### **Socio-Economic/Community**

- Different land ownerships limit the access ability of recreational users
- Populations(human) within local communities are stable or declining
- Tourism has declined due to weak national economy, increased gasoline prices
- Believe that increased value of gold has led the CNF to restrict access due to fear of increased use of and impacts on public lands
- Reducing or turning away tourists has a wide-ranging economic effect on communities

### **Fish and Wildlife**

- Questioned the validity of the brown bear population estimates in the Kenai; source of data not cited – what was the methodology for the study
- Believe that overall big game numbers are down
- Poor management of fish
- Sockeye runs coming later in year
- Size of King salmon has decreased
- Moose populations decreasing, possibly due to loss of habitat and changing hunting regulations
- Not enough predator management for wildlife. Seems as though agencies manage for tourists, rather than wildlife
- Can the forest better evaluate what occurs on “internal” lands that are not accessible by road?

### **Russian River**

- Increase in bear and human encounters
- Managing bears instead of managing people
- Not enough parking
- Question validity of preliminary finding that Chugach contributes 25% of commercial fish

### **Water**

- Agree that water is in good condition

### **Climate Change**

- Glaciers retreating
- Alders getting bigger
- Fewer fires
- Do not see any clear evidence of climate change

### **Land Use**

- Disagree with statements regarding level of satisfaction
  - A larger group of users would say that they are not satisfied (access restrictions)
  - Need to poll a larger group sample
- Not all land “owners” are paying their fair share (referring to commercial enterprises that have permits; perceived they do not pay their fair share for the management of the CNF)
- Difficult to determine which land you are traveling on between refuge, forest, native, etc.

- Falls creek used to be accessible but is not restricted.
- Public easement rights through native property
- If section line easement is protected are they still valid after conveyance to tribes?

### **Recreation**

- Recreational use has actually been reduced due to access restrictions
- Too much concentrated recreation use (ie. camping along beaches)
- Need better monitoring of recreational use
- Disagreement that recreational use is stable; it is growing
- Opening of tunnel has increased recreational use in PWS
- Concern over how to manage camping, cabins, beaches, etc. as PWS traffic increases
- Skier side of Johnson Pass closed to snowmachiners because of Chugach Powder Guides (individual is concerned at the fairness of this)

### **Winter Motorized Use**

- Snowmachines (use signs are unclear of what is closed/open)
- Snowmachines have more capability to access further distances.
- Some areas are seeing more snowmachine use in times of good snow.
- Generally satisfied with winter season open dates for snowmachines. But season – close dates are a little early.

### **Information/Communication**

- When trails are closed there is little communication as to why they are closed.
- Not enough communication between regional forester, forest supervisor and commissioner of DNR
  - Chugach should have focused discussion between/with user groups

### **Trails**

- Trails are in poor condition – need maintenance
- ATV trails overgrown with vegetation and not maintained
- Hiking trails in Prince Williams Sound overgrown
- Opportunities for trail maintenance partnerships for 4 wheeler's

### **User Conflicts**

- Very few conflicts between snowmachines and skiers since the Kenai Winter Access Amendment

### **Facilities**

- *Recreation cabins* (lower/upper Paradise not being used; this is a non-motorized area).
- Not enough facilities (e.g. restrooms)

### **c. Communication and Public Involvement**

*What are the best ways to involve you, and others, in the Forest Plan Revision Process?*

- Increase outreach efforts

- “Sound Off” radio station, Contact Public Radio KSRM 920 AM (3)
- Advertise in local papers (3)
- Craigslist
- Schools
- Target user groups
- Emails, E-mail to business owners, Caribou Hills Cabin Hoppers and email
- Mailing list (email and hard copy)
- More detail
- More frequently
- Social Media
- Face Book
- Forums (Backcountry Rebels, Snowwest, avalanche sites, AK journal)
- Advisory planning meetings with boroughs
- CNF website
- Freddy’s Roadhouse: e-mail
- 500% better communication than last time (2002)
- What about a public meeting in Whittier?
- Increase outreach efforts
- Utilize all forms of media
- Utilize local knowledge of good communication resources, e.g. contact someone in a specific community who is familiar with the most effective communication venues within the community
- Host more meetings like tonight
- Make certain that public input is used
- Future meetings should revolve around some of the specific issues raised tonight
- Make it easy for people to participate in future by contacting them directly
- Forest Service employees can be on radio panels to discuss issues – call in questions

### **III. Conclusion and Wrap up**