

**Chugach National Forest Service  
Forest Plan Revision – Phase I  
Public Forum Meeting Notes  
Cooper Landing – 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:** Karen Kromrey, Connie Hubbard, Greg Walker, Terri Marceron, Kevin Knauth (acting Seward Ranger), Sharon Timko, Elle Retslaff

**Number of breakout groups:** 3

**Number of attendees:** 20

**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?*

- Hunting
- Mining
- Logging –Finding opportunities for future logging
- Fire for Resource Benefit
- Personal Use & Commercial Logging
- Camping
- Subsistence
- Tourism – Commercial Recreation
- Trapping
- Wildlife Viewing
- Scenic Viewing
- Nature walks/Viewing
- ATV
- Dogsledding
- I grew up on the Peninsula.
- snowmachines (5)
- Hiking (4)
- cabins (3)
- mountain bike (4)
- road bike (2)

- snowboard
- skiing (3)
  - telemarking in the back country mountain to mountain
  - Cross-country
  - Downhill
- Recreate in the Russian River watershed
- Non-motorized recreation
- Birding
- Kayaking
  - Rafting (3) and white water kayaks
  - River kayaking/sea kayaking on Prince William Sound and Kenai Lake
- Drift boat
- Fishing (3)
- berry picking (4)
- Snowshoe (3) and off trails
- ice skate
- walking
- Exploring backcountry areas around Cooper Landing and Hope by horseback
- Outfitter and guide for 17 years guiding horseback trips (mostly tourists)
- Day trips
- Hunter transport service
- Provides pack service for hunters and cabin users
- Hike and ski on trails and into backcountry cabins
- Fish and hunt (subsistence use)
- Firewood gathering (2)
- Seeing a trend of non-motorized winter users starting to use snowmachines to assist with getting to remote places to pursue non-motorized activities
- Blend of non-motorized and motorized users
- Getting youth (grade school and high school) out onto National Forests for recreation activities (hiking and skiing)

*Change from Parents' time*

- Access is reduced
- More bears & fewer moose
- Kids were taught "moose safety" now "bear safety"
- Same number of cabins, but more people
- Less campground maintenance
- Less motorized access resulted in less maintenance of trails and cabins by FS & public

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

- Increased access
  - Motorized – i.e., snow machine
  - Non-motorized
- Improved trail maintenance
- Trails & infrastructure built and maintained with search & rescue needs in mind

- Winter recreation area near Cooper Lake
  - Downhill skiing at Bone Mountain/Manitoba (mountain biking in summer)
  - Cross country skiing
  - Skate – Rainbow Lake
  - Snow machine
- Zip line
- Recreation opportunities that don't involve extraction of resources “look but don't take”
- Year-round recreation

## **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?*

*What are barriers to using the Forest?*

- Access
  - Forest Service needs to have a measurable/transparent way to determine when trails are open for various uses (horse use in spring, snow machine use in winter). Example is that sometime Res Pass North Trail out of Hope may be snow free and firm up to Fox Creek Cabin well before the July 1<sup>st</sup> horse use opening. Would be nice if there was some flexibility in open/close dates.
  - Disability access is a concern. There is an accessible trail at the Russian River – to get to the Barber Cabin. I am not aware of any other sets of trails that have disability access.
  - Access is important – for the disabled, for kids, for people with an active lifestyle. How many points of access are there on this Forest?
  - More trails & roads into forest like Palmer Rd (Hope); access alpine area and views
  - Palmer Road provides intergenerational options
  - Motorized use alternative to walking
  - Between Anchorage and Russian and Kenai Rivers
    - Commercial establishments to attract visitors to stop
    - Transportation / shuttle – drop off areas
    - Connections & coordination between FS and KNWR
    - Mountain bikes on FS vs. no mountain bikes on KNWR
    - More pullouts (ADOT)
    - Fuller Lake – bear bait access
- Complex permitting
  - Summit Lake Lodge – permit need for trail grooming around campground on road; simple task is complex and not easy
- Lack of coordination among local, state, and federal land owners

- Different rules and time lines
- Example: Proposed eco zip line project/proposal would cross multiple land owners like Kenai Borough, State, National forest
- Interpretation of law
  - Subsistence interpretation of dip netting at RR falls for rural resident interpreted three different ways by different forest district offices
- Special products permits needed – resource development (private or commercial use)
  - Rip rap prohibition
  - Prohibition from gathering rocks fallen off onto the road
  - Mining
  - Logging
- Facilities
  - Bathroom facilities needed on rivers for fishing sites – human waste issue
- There needs to be connectivity among the trail systems. There should be wildlife corridors, not just development corridors. Greenbelts are important for both people and wildlife.
  - The Kenai Peninsula Borough, for example, has provided a corridor between Cooper Creek and Juneau Creek.
- Wildlife
  - Wildlife management is important, including for wildlife viewing.
  - The Forest and Peninsula have provided a lot of moose habitat in the past. Moose habit has decreased; so, too, has the moose population.
  - The Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (KNWR) has done a study of snowmachines in the Refuge and their impacts on moose habitat. It's a sound impact study, and includes an area that the Refuge shares with the Forest. The CNF should check out this study.
  - There are more wolves on the Peninsula; and John Morton has a good presentation in caribou.
  - There are changes in fox and coyote populations.
- Trapping – there is no signage required for trapping lines. Issue is that dogs can get injured or killed. Would like to see Forest Service utilize setbacks (200 feet, etc.) off of popular winter routes (roads and trails).
  - People locally are reluctant to recreate with their dogs due to potential of dogs getting injured or killed
  - Hoping FS could work with board of game to create set-backs
- Firewood
  - It would be nice if the Forest Service could provide specific firewood cutting areas in addition to the general regulations that permit collecting of down and dead wood across NFS lands. Provide access/temporary roads.
- Forest Service Presence

- It would be nice if the Forest Service had more of a presence in Cooper Landing community.
- Suggestions are: monthly meetings, Forest Service personnel attend community meetings, “Coffee with the Ranger” sessions
- Purpose: To inform Forest Service of community events and issues (deal with little things so they don’t become big issues) and have Forest Service inform community of Forest Service projects and information.

*Discussion group participants were asked to review the assessment summary or “headlines” sheet and the list of 15 assessment areas. They were asked for their feedback; ideas to improve the assessment work and suggest areas the assessment should include.*

- Assessment should include cabin access for the elderly and the development of walkable, accessible areas. The CNF could work with the KNWR and Alaska Dept. of Transportation to improve the area for walking and biking, particularly from MP 45 to MP 58.
- Assessment should include the health of the Forest communities. Item #6 refers to social and economic factors. There needs to be safe access for local businesses – how can local businesses benefit from Forest activities and management practices?
- Regarding #6. Is there a forum for working through forest conflicts? There should be a conflict resolution mechanism for communities and Forest users. This is important for dealing with conflicts over time.
- Also on #6. In Cooper Landing a lot of people trap. The ADF&G manage for trapping, but this could be handled better. It’s in part a safety issue.
- #1 – What about invasive species? Where is this in the assessment?
- The assessment should include climate change impacts, such as effects on wildlife. Moose and goat numbers are changing.
- Local economic conditions/lost economic opportunities (#6 and #8)
- Disagree with headliner – 3% suitable timber on 5.4 million
- Disagree with headliner – 624 bear population (one pole had DNA samples from 600+ bears on Russian River)

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

### **Cultural and Historic Resources**

- “The Forks” (ghost town/mining/cemetery behind Summit Lodge) needs protection and interpretation
- Gold Rush Trail – trailheads & site signs
- Dam on Canyon Creek – opportunity to interpret

### **Education**

- In the future – emphasize education. Education for both youth and adults is important. They can learn the importance of stewardship.

### **Access**

- Increase District oversight with variations by season and conditions. The CNF should consider closing areas or restricting use depending on conditions.

### **FS Flexibility/Budget**

- The Forest Plan could include flexibility at the District level. Flexibility could account for allowing horses on trails before July 1<sup>st</sup> if conditions were good, or allow snowmachine use before Dec. 1<sup>st</sup> if enough snow (a couple examples).

### **User Conflict**

- There needs to be some separation between cross country skiers and snowmachiners.

### **Subsistence**

- There also needs to be better oversight on subsistence use. Some people abuse the subsistence policy and take snowmachines into areas otherwise closed or restricted. There is a lot of ambiguity.

### **OHV**

- OHVs are a concern. How are these being managed?

### **Connectivity**

- Whistle Stop is a good example of connectivity; a good Forest project. That message needs to get out to the public.
- The area between Russian River campground, the Quartz Creek campground, and Cooper Lake could be linked. This connectivity could improve backcountry access.
- Utility corridors can serve as greenbelts. Utility corridors can support multiple uses.
- These issues of access and connectivity can support a trend to create auxiliary pathways, but they need to be connected throughout the Forest and Peninsula. The 17 miles of bike trail near Hope is connected to nothing. Imagine a bike route that went from Anchorage to Homer.

### **Kids in the Woods**

- The CNF can create opportunities for kids; summer and winter use, such as fishing.

### **Partnerships**

- Local businesses can serve as partners. Infrastructure to support recreation has been expanded but more needs to be done. There is a lot of summer recreation and not much infrastructure for fishing. The number of visitors is staggering; there are "big" weekends.
- Shifting the workload from the CNF to local businesses is worth considering. Partnerships can help. The CNF can engage user groups and volunteers; a high school group or community group can provide assistance.
- The Forest needs to evaluate partnership needs, opportunities, and potential.

- Watershed conditions are very important. Be aware of the degree to which the Borough and municipalities impact watersheds. Watersheds need to be protected. Watershed education is important.
- There could be a concessionaire who could shuttle people (bikers, walkers) in the area. This would be better than rogue riders who degrade the area.
- Partnerships could be developed to maintain the cabins, provide firewood, keep them functional. The cabins need to be accessible to the elderly. Partners can groom trails. Cabin recreation is a family tradition.

### **Avalanche program**

- Avalanche forecasting has been cut back; the CNF needs a proactive approach. Groups and volunteers could help.

### **Staff Visibility**

- The CNF could have a more visible presence on the Forest in the winter. The level of use is considerable and it would be good to see CNF staff in the field.
- The CNF needs more “boots on the ground.” Keep Districts well-staffed. Make district staffing a priority.

### **Noise**

- Airspace corridors and noise corridors should be addressed. How can airspace be managed effectively?
- Concerns were expressed about the proliferation of helicopters. The helicopter creates noise, affect wildlife, and impact airspace.

### **Local Economy**

- Limited logging & setbacks for personal and local commercial use
- Concessionaire runs campground; consider FS operating campground and hire locally
- Cost prohibitive to locals to park at Russian River and use cabins
- Snow machine closures in 2002 influenced the closure of 7-8 local businesses (i.e., Princess, Summit Lake Lodge, Gwen’s in Moose Pass and Hope)
- Research opportunities for species such as hawks and owls
- Concern with winter economy in Hope – not enough winter jobs. This is a resource Forest Service can provide with more winter recreation opportunities.

### **Information**

- Wondering about firewood activities in local community – not sure where NFS lands are located or what rules are – need better signing on boundaries. Need to know where boundaries are to know where it’s legal to do subsistence activities (federal lands).

### **Recreation**

- Birding opportunities
- Access to affordable downhill skiing opportunities (example used: Alyeksa Ski area in Girdwood is expensive and an hour + drive from local communities). Develop

something locally that can hire local help and provide that recreation opportunity that's affordable.

- Opportunities to use pack rafts on backcountry lakes
- Extend off-season opportunities for local recreation use
  - Campgrounds close after Labor Day; extend use for local berry picking into late Sept. and Oct. – Porcupine Campground
  - Open campground in early May (vs. late May)

### **Air Quality**

- Turnagain Pass – skiers getting snowmachines to get to remote backcountry areas might use a locally available downhill ski area for a similar experience without harming air quality. Increase in use of snowmachines is increasing the carbon footprint.

### **Wildlife**

- Moose population affected by vehicles, bears, wolves
  - Need protected winter corridors & protected areas during winter
- What is the status of the goat population?
- The Forrest should look at concessions and special permits and consider the impacts of permits on wildlife.
- Fresh wolf sign on every trail in Res Creek.
- Declining moose populations – one user who travels backcountry area extensively did not see one moose the whole summer.
- Palmer Creek drainage is open to hunting for moose now. Concerns with sustaining moose populations in the area with hunting pressure.
- Caribou herd behavior is different now than it was decades ago. They use to be milling around a lot more; now it seems they are on the run all the time. Last year user saw 12 cows and only 2 calves. Predation is an issue.

### **Heritage**

- Would like to see native youth continue to have opportunities to get connected with traditional hunting grounds (example is Ice Patch Archeology Expeditions for past three summers with Kenaitze Indian Tribal youth).

### **User Conflict**

- Would like to see solutions potentially where alternative routes are provided for motorized vs non-motorized users to decrease level of conflict
- Growing conflict with subsistence hunters using motorized access means in a non-motorized area (Example is Res Pass Trail)
  - This motorized use is negatively affecting user experience – Users now avoid the trails – it is changing their behavior and where and when they recreate at different areas.
  - Maybe there needs to be more alternate year use designations.
- Demand & competition for resources will continue to increase:
  - permits for hunting areas (can't get a caribou permit)
  - more difficult to get solitude

- general recreation such as campground site availability
- backcountry cabin availability
- More is not necessarily the best answer – perhaps some type of drawings for permit for cabin use on peak weekends

### **Facilities**

- Expanded backcountry Cabin opportunities in area where cabins don't exist currently:
  - Palmer Creek drainage to Summit Creek area – opportunities to use old mining roads and do some interpretation of mining history in these areas ('gold rush trail' of sorts).
- Bigger vision for hut system would be nice.

### **Trails**

- RS2477 routes all dead end – Forest Service could provide connectivity between some of these routes for system trails – establish a broader use base and get away from “fishing only” mindset for tourism opportunities. Bigger vision for trail system would be nice.

### **Scenery**

- Scenic character of trail systems is changing – Res Pass Trail is being used by 4 – wheelers by management, trail crews, miners
  - ATV use is ruining the setting and scenic character and damaging the vegetation along the trails

### **Subsistence**

- Subsistence user did not see much use on trail when they pursued subsistence activities

### **Renewable Energy**

- Would like to see increased Forest Service permitting of businesses pursuing renewable energy resources such as micro-hydro power uses (Juneau Creek/Mills Creek down to Sixmile Creek confluence is perfect area for this type of opportunity), solar, tidal
- Would like to see Forest Service supporting this type of access (proposed Manitoba Ski area is one current example)
- Would attract more businesses if there was easier access (ie. permitting process) to affordable energy.
- For FERC projects, think local use.

### **Fuels/Fire**

- Local Fuel Needs
  - Increased need for firewood for personal use as fuel oil prices increases
  - Opportunities on NFS for micro hydro, biomass, wind, solar, hydro kinetic at Kenai Lake

- Forest Service needs to continue to look at areas around communities to reduce wildfire potential (originating on NFS lands and spreading to private lands or the opposite)
  - 1990s fire breaks near Cooper Landing seem to be maintain in hardwood species which is good – not really true firebreaks
  - Forest Service should utilize firebreaks as potential for dual purpose – quick access to areas for fire suppression activities but used for public access for trails or firewood gathering.
- Fire return interval is getting shorter. Concern of fire going from FS lands into private lands, as well as from private lands into FS lands. Would like to reduce fire threat around communities.

### **Climate Change**

- Climate change – we will have more invasive species (plants, animals, insects) as climate shifts weather and vegetation
  - Concern about *Elodea*
  - Forest Service is limited on taking immediate action (sometimes takes 3 years to act on any new invasive species)
  - Need to prevent establishment
- Providing boot cleaning stations at trailheads
- Requiring use of weed-free hay for pack stock traveling into backcountry areas
- Climate change - There is more vegetation (alders) growing in some areas where it didn't use to be (climate change) (example is Manitoba Mountain near Summit Lake area).

### **Motorized Use**

- Need to designate a summer motorized use area – not very many areas available currently
  - Suggestion is to look at Gulch Creek drainage (off of Seward Highway along Sixmile Creek) and look at options to run new trail beyond current mining access route up and possible over to Seattle Creek drainage. This is already a motorized area.

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

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

- Cooper Landing use email *The Crier* (3); local paper *The Gem* (3)
- Post notices and announcements on community bulletin boards in the Post Office, grocery stores, and other commonly used locations, and libraries (2)
- Work with partners to post information.
- Make FS website more user-friendly (3)
- Make FS forest plan more user accessible (i.e., interpretative sections in “common language”) (2)
- Interactive map (i.e., Kenai Land Borough) for FS website; GIS mapping system (2)
  - Folks use the forests by location/maps
  - Provide real time maps and data.

- FS staff has regular visits to local diner/café so folks can talk; sit at table and have a sign in sheet for one-on-one conversation. CNF participation (or attendance at) some of the local committees and groups would be productive and valued.
  - Great if they could get FS representation on local committees & meetings.
  - FS staff representation on local community groups/advisory groups/local community groups