

**Chugach National Forest Service
Forest Plan Revision – Phase I
Public Forum Meeting Notes
Seward – 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: Gregg Walker, Robert Stovall, Sharon Randall, Sharon Timko

Number of breakout groups: 3

Number of attendees:

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?

- People use and enjoy the Forest in multiple ways...
- Recreation
- Firewood
- Hiking (2)
- cabins, (2) (solitude at Upper Lake Paradise)
- skiing
 - Cross-country skiing
- Dog mushing – Iditarod National Historic Trail (events)
- Biking (2)
- berry picking (2)
- Snow machine – Crescent Lake, Resurrection Trail
- Fishing – Russian River
- Hunting
- Trail building
- Photography
- Outdoor education (as teacher)
- Gold panning (recreational)
- Firewood/Fuel
- Birding/Wildlife Viewing (bears, lynx, wolverines)
- Snow camping (Great North Lake)

- Summer camping
- Ice skating (Kenai Lake)
- Mushroom harvesting
- Ice boating
- Local School – sports access for cross-country skiing, running
- Fish habitat
- Kayaking – Kenai Lake
- Marine debris cleanup
- Local Steward Areas where activities take place
- Western Prince Williams Sound (PWS)

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

- Looking to the future, the Kenai River will be hammered (overused with too many people. Kenai Lake which is virtually unused now will be used more. The concern is for habitat degradation.
- Need to manage both people and wildlife (wildlife is being displaced)
- There is and will be a heightened pressure for firewood. As energy costs rise this will become more an issue. Access to and competition for firewood is a challenge
 - Access into the forest for getting the wood is an issue. There is no wood around the road and current access into the forest doesn't go more than 100 – 200 yards so the wood is just out of reach. Could it be brought to pullouts and made available? It would be good if firewood could be brought to roadside lots because there is currently no way to access it without damaging the resource.
 - Currently more motorized vehicles are going for it and damaging the resources
- Lack of access for skiing and snow machines – winter parking
 - Lack of parking in Crescent-Carter Area
 - There is now more use (demand) from outside the local area (i.e. Anchorage, military use in Exit Glacier Area)
- Russian River Campground – parking is always full; improved but still full
- Trail River Campground now available (wasn't before)
- Iditarod NHT Threats
 - Hydro-electric dams, proposed state selection, residential
 - Establish management corridor beyond easement to address future threats and address sight and sound issues
- Loss of Fish Habitat Grouse Creek
 - Historically thousands of silver and sockeye salmon spawning
 - Change in highway design / change in culvert east side of highway – Grouse Lake
 - Today - no salmon
 - Salmon aren't following new culvert – Loss of habitat
 - Seward High School Science Bowl Competition – Student project on loss of salmon spawning habitat; worked with Cook Inlet Association
- If this is wolf habitat, then want to see wolves – want viewing opportunities
- Overcrowding fishing on the Kenai River

- Weekends packed; need to be on the water at 6 am to get access
- Hope we don't have to pay to fish if the area becomes private
- Causing damage to the environment
- Use to doing what we want to do
 - Area closures
 - Have to follow rules
- Heli-skiing
- Cruise Ship (dumping water)
 - Change in state waste water
- Vehicle access to Child's Glacier (road closure)
- Iditarod NHT protected 100% against all threats (corridors – protect sight/sound)
- Heli-skiing –could increase use

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?

Increased Use

- Tunnel usage in Whittier is up with an increase in kayakers, boat use, deer hunters on Montague . . . what has been the impact of that increased use?

Subsistence

- The Forest will need to address the issue of subsistence uses. What is a legitimate subsistence use? Motorized use under the guise of subsistence is a problem. (An example, "looking" for firewood on a snowmachine where trees don't grow.) The Forest needs to define allowable subsistence uses.
- Summer motorized use for subsistence is becoming a big issue. We spend a lot of money developing trails and subsistence users can damage them using motorized vehicles.
- Subsistence is difficult to manage because you don't have to register.

Local Economy

- More areas are opening up to heli-skiing but heli-skiing is not a local enterprise. The money is not being spent locally.

Enforcement

- There needs to be more enforcement in areas closed to snowmachines. Need increased enforcement in general.

Budget

- Sequestration – there has been an increased use of the forest (specifically mentioned was PWS as a result of the tunnel to Whittier). With less money for enforcement and implementation of the Plan . . . there is a fear that the Plan may be sitting on a shelf due to sequestration and a lack of money. You can have the best plan in the world but if you don't have the money to implement it it is useless.

- We need to maintain what we already have – to do that we need money and personnel.
- What will a 20% decrease in funds do to the Forest?

User Fees

- What about charging user fees?
- Resurrection River – people could pay to use trails in the summer. Don't like the idea of outsourced parking at the RR campground – have to pay a parking fee just to use close by trails if you want to park there – Forest doesn't get that money. That parking lot provides closer cabins in the winter.

Crowding/Conflicts

- Some areas are hit a lot harder than others . . . just depends on the location. Some areas are crowded, some are not. Some have conflicts, some do not.

Access

- Some areas are gated – forest roads need to be reopened.
- If people can spread out there would be less environmental damage. The gates block access.
- There is good hiking easily accessible from the highway but hard to park. It would be helpful if the parking lots were plowed (e.g., Ptarmigan, Grayling)
- Horse use tears up trails. Don't understand why some areas are closed to mountain bikes and open to horses. Understand that different user groups need to be accommodated.

Tourism

- Most tourists want the illusion of wilderness not real wilderness. Tourism can promote wilderness and Spencer Glacier like wilderness.
- Increase in tourism – Seward Highway (buses lined up to access Forest)
 - Noise – soundscape
 - Air Quality (diesel emissions)
 - Traffic
 - Lost Lake – soundscape (non-motorized users avoid area)

Shared Management

- The FS and State should figure out a way to share management and enforcement and work together on management of the shoreline. There is a lot of activity occurring on the shoreline and it is a political boundary not an ecosystem boundary between the state and the federal governments.

Fishing

- We haven't seen evidence of CNF actions to support and improve commercial fishing.
- Comment on the economic contribution of fishing – it is an issue of the carrying capacity of the ocean. Does it include hatcheries or totally wild fish? Is the dollar amount sustainable?

Fish and Wildlife

- Hunting is important, but moose habitat is poor. At Cooper Landing there is a small clear cut that has improved moose habitat.
- No wildlife is seen around Lost Lake. .. this absence of wildlife was attributed to noise pollution . . . it displaces wildlife.
- Assessment Area #5 – Last year was a hard winter for wildlife and many moose moved into neighborhoods. Is there any program to help wildlife out during hard winters? Large die-offs will have impacts to hunting in future years. Could partnerships be developed to help wildlife out when winters are tough?
- The PWS Regional Advisory Committee is a watchdog group looking at the quality of oil spill response in Valdez. The H2O Watershed group worries that if there is a spill what will become of the bird population for example in Cordova if it happens during the big migration in May.
- Fish Habitat – Grouse Creek – Need to return salmon
- Cook Inlet Aqua Culture
- High School Science Project – see newspaper article for contact information – possible youth engagement opportunity

Grant Lake Hydro Proposal

- The Grant Lake Hydro Proposal threatens the trail – the impact of that proposal needs to be assessed in terms of the all lands approach (State? or FERC and FS?). This proposal will have impacts on recreation, historic sites, bird habitat. Will this project and lack of assessment of impacts set precedence for future like projects?
- Hydro-Grant Lake (Threat to Iditarod NHT) – other potentially

Water Resources/Watershed/Ecosystem

- Changing water and affects to Exit Glacier Rd – NPS & FS
- NPS does a great job maintaining trails; FS needs to prevent trail erosion (water through center of trail, rock rerouting)
- Seward is a floodplain
 - Moose Pass safe place to live and build
 - Weather – wild swings, more floods and changes “weather weirdness”
 - State selections/future residential development

Timber

- There needs to be a good local supply of timber.
- The Forest needs to look at timber production. Give local people access to the Forest to clean up trails.
- Could stewardship contracting be viable?

User Fees

- Budgets may be tight; why not charge user fees? There might be access or parking fees to pay for better infrastructure – like more toilets.
- Clubs can't really do this – there is not much development or organization here.

Facilities

- This relates to infrastructure. There have been no new pullouts; no new restrooms. Winter users need restroom access. Restroom – there aren't enough of them and the doors get frozen.
- The cabins need to be managed better; there are some problems here. Cabins are often booked but not used; you can ski or snowmachine by them and see that they are empty. The rental cost is too low. People aren't accountable; not much of a consequence to reserving but not using. The booking/reservation system needs to be improved.
- More alpine cabins are needed – further back where appropriate
- Cabin Reservation System – We need to assess the on-line reservation system. Popular cabins are booked months in advance . . . and often go unused because there is no cancellation or refund policy leaving others who want to use the cabin without. Additionally there have been situations where cabins are double booked and the question of who gets it is an issue. Would be good if a cancellation policy was implemented where people could get their money back for cancelling rather than just letting it go and no one else can reserve it.

Recreation

- Horses are a problem. How can such a small user group have so much influence? Given the hikers and mountain bikers, why not close wet trails to horses – they do damage to trails like Resurrection.
- The number of recreation users is increasing a lot – both in winter and summer; the statement on the “headlines” sheet is wrong.
- Bear Baiting near heavy recreation use area (folks hike & bike) Exit Glacier
- DISAGREE with #1 headliner statement under recreation use – recreational use has definitely increased
- Corridors funnel (concentrate) use in Seward/Kenai

Winter Recreation

- Snowmachine access is important. People need pullouts and parking at trailheads (staging areas). Lost Lake is really crowded – by 1030 AM the parking lot is full.
- Winter recreation management is working well at Turnagain Pass and Summit Lake.
- If there were more parking areas/pull outs the snowmachiners would be spread out – that would be better for the forest and safety.
- Barrier to winter recreation (specifically skiing) is trapping/traplines. It is understood that everywhere will be a trap as trappers are not required to post where they are trapping. Don't need exact locations of the traps but would be good to know where general areas are so you can recreate without fear. It is currently a barrier to use.
- Snow machines are a barrier to nonmotorized use. KWA stripped nonmotorized users of “wider” areas. The conflicts are not as bad now but that is because nonmotorized users have been displaced. Open to snowmachines is a defacto closure to nonmotorized use.

Permitting/Special Uses

- Permitting is a concern. How do you get a permit for a race?
- We've been told there are no permits for races; no permits for ski resorts...no new green permit has been issued since 1995.

- Why are there no building permits? Timber should be harvested for construction – we've been told that only 3% of the Forest timber is suitable for harvest...what is that figure based on?
- Why not issue green permits and support local construction? Wood is a renewable resource.
- How did a Kings Bay placer mining permit allow the use of jet skis to access the river?

Quality of Life

- Quality of life – happiness; spiritual

Technological Advances

- Recreation use changing –motorized users can access areas today that were previously inaccessible
- Turnagain Pass area i.e., high marking
- Too much snow machine use north of Ingram Creek area – it's a moose browsing area

Trails

- Trails could be widened, such as Primrose.
- Trails could be opened up – such as the Lost Lake Trail.
- Carter/Crescent could be expanded to allow for bigger trailers
- There could be better information about trails and trail conditions – how do people learn?
- Trail grooming is important. Utilize partners to help with this.
- We need to assess the maintenance levels of trails. Lots of trails are well maintained and lots are ignored. Many of the ignored trails are good trails that just need maintaining.
 - The Resurrection River trail needs a bridge . . . it is now a dangerous trail because people still try to hike it as part of a bigger network of trails but the bridge is out. We need to investigate flood proof bridges. We are pouring lots of money into bridges that are being washed out.
- Trails – need maintenance for ones we have
- Status of Hut to Hut
 - Resurrection Trail – need designated camping areas
 - Lottery System (Reservation system is not working; too hard to get & monitor us; higher \$ to ensure use)
- Resurrection River trail (#11) great trail; bridges are out; Martin Creek Bridge is out
- Iditarod NHT – FS has taken leadership of southern trek (constructed bridges & trail linkages)
- Value of Iditarod NHT – tourism/highlight; land values adjacent to trail increase

Age

- Age-Related Use
 - No longer able to ski as much; use more motorized access

- Crescent-Carter (accessible) vs. Lost Lake (not accessible)
- Access to alpine areas for older folks via snow machines

Wilderness/WSA

- Need to work to convert the WSA to “real” Wilderness. The WSA needs to be reassessed. We are losing the WSA by loving it to death.

PWS

- The reason PWS is so pristine because it is not a national park.

Climate Change

- On climate change impacts – put roads into areas with low snow. Then open new areas with good snow that people can access. The result will be less damage.
- Climate Change – Bark Beetle Status?

Invasives

- Invasive and Nonnative Plants – the focus should be on trying to prevent them in the first place not to have to react to them after they establish themselves. It would be good to keep them at a low level.
 - Forest education and info on them is good.
 - Recently a new law prevents people from wearing traditional felts when fishing. Also some work with elodea is happening.
- We need eyes to be able to look and see changes in the Forest – need a citizen science program to evaluate the health of the Forest and monitor invasives.
 - We should get into high schools and have them help with science, monitoring, etc.
- Are invasive species invasive? Invasive species have always been here; species move around. What effects will happen if we don't pick the dandelions?

Fire/Fuels/Firewood

- There is a lot of deadfall in the woods. Some of it is due to beetle kill. It is a time bomb; a fire risk. We have to deal with it every Spring.
- There is an easy way to deal with this. Bid a job to clean up the deadfall. Give preference to local hires. For example – the blowdown at Grayling Lake.
- Some projects may be too small to bid...like trail rehabilitation. Allow locals free access to clear these trails.
- Firewood is important. Half the people in Seward use it to heat their homes. But 4-wheelers are not allowed; access is needed to get the firewood. An example is in Hope. Some land was cleared that created piles of wood. Where was the access to get the wood out before it went bad?
- The CNF should allow people to clean up trails and collect wood.
- There is concern about the overall health of the forest and wondered about the use of controlled burning.
- High cost of fuel – increase demand on wood; more wood cutting

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

- In 2004 or 2005 surveys were placed on vehicle windshields asking people how many days a year they used the Forest. Whatever happened to that survey? What were the results? How was it used?
- Missing from the list of Assessment topics is avian use and avian species across the forest. Breeding Bird Surveys are great indicators of the health of the Forest.
 - Have owl surveys stopped? They used to be a great way for community outreach and to get them involved.
- Cultural and Historic – there is no mention of the INHT even though most of it lies within the Forest. Only part of the trail that can be used all year. Good job on completing the trail. The Forest needs to 1) complete and protect it and 2) protect the corridor easements (easements are important when transferring land (to the State, etc.)).
 - The INHT is nationally recognized and needs to be regarded as more valuable than other trails.

c. Communication and Public Involvement

*What are the best ways to involve you, and others, in the Forest Plan Revision Process?
How did you hear about the meeting?*

- There was a small notice in the local paper.(3)
- The web site announced the meeting.
- The meeting news was spread by word of mouth (2)
- Email (3)
- Postcard(2)
- Trail alliance group/network
- Accident (was on the website looking for something else),
- The meeting was not on the Seward City News calendar. When we send information to the papers and other “calendar” outlets in Seward need to specifically request that they put it on the calendar. Can post or email Robert’s wife at the Seward City News or Seward City Log.

How best to communicate?

- Email – (most people indicated email)
- Local newspaper (3) (print & online); put in what is submitted, don’t edit
 - Seward City News will print stuff
- Outreach to new people
- Contacts schools – youth & teachers
- Post information & meeting announcements
 - post office
 - post announcement (flyers) and trailheads.
- Trail update on web is great
- Folks asked that comments from these forums be posted online and by community so they can see what other communities are saying. These meetings can be promoted through a big newspaper ad.

- The Avalanche website is really great – a lot of people use it. (3)
 - it's an important resource and a good model
- Send invitations/announcements to lists/addresses.
- Post on-line and distribute hard copy.
- It's good to have pro-active meetings; put more weight on these meetings.
- Go out in the field with local people...don't send us timber specialists from the lower 48. Specialists/staffers need to get out on the ground.
- Local knowledge is important to landscape assessment.
- Keep people informed about opportunities.
- Can post on Seward events.com – the chamber of commerce.
- There is no one stop shop.
- User groups can be targeted. Many have monthly newsletters. (3)
 - Plug into Irene Lindquist's trail users mailing list (she sends trail condition emails weekly re: SRD trails). She sends it to the Seward Nordic Ski Club and sometimes it is published in the Turnagain Times. It's nice to know before you drive 45 minutes to a trail whether the conditions are good or not.
 - Send to Seward Nordic Ski Club
- Create a hotline for trail conditions – develop some sort of online log
- Interactive website to keep stakeholders informed, connected & involved. Allow input of information and review of information.

How best to engage?

- Committee system (interest-based) common interests; meetings must be productive and focused
- Feel/see how input is used, then commit to participate
- Need known feedback loops
- Topic Driven Approach - targeted meetings that address 1-2 topics, i.e., cabins, trails, camping
- Kenai Winter Access Planning Process – Created disillusionment about FS planning processes
 - Spent considerable amount of time & energy at meetings; amendment didn't represent stakeholders' work
 - Where did the amendment come from? Didn't represent the feedback from the workshops
 - Will the FS forest plan revision process be transparent?
- Summer months harder for meetings everyone is in the forest
- Communication Issue – called many times about firewood but received no returned calls from the FS office.
- Can use email, phone, brainstorming meetings, variety of ways to keep people in the loop.
- Winter ends mid-May – people make their livings from mid-May through September in Seward.
- To get youth involved you need a hook (tie to gun safety or stewardship). Can make it part of a school course. You really need a hook to get “top-end” kids because they are so busy.
- Alaska Youth for Environmental Action now has a chapter in Seward.

- The iTREC Program has been successful for reaching grade school children – not so much with High Schoolers.
- F&WS has a program – summer jobs, intro jobs.
- What are our plans for summer recreators? – those that only are here during the summer months and not here any other time?
- There are 60 nonprofits in Seward – could ask groups to put in newsletters (Trail Blazers, Ski Club).
- Best way to get people involved is to create controversy.
- Madison Avenue – has people that spend their careers on how to engage people – we need to use our talented people to do the same thing.
- Need to engage with the media.
- Could put information in log books in cabins (list contact information with a phone number for more information). Could also add information for help with things.
- Stop taking the logs out of the cabins each year – valuable information is being lost that is useful to visitors (trail conditions, etc.)

III. Conclusion and Wrap up