Proposed Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project

What is the Forest Service proposing?

The Tongass National Forest is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project which proposes to make up to 3,000 acres of old-growth timber (with approximately 42 million board feet [MMBF]) available to offer for harvest and construct and reconstruct roads in the Staney and Red Bay areas within the Thorne Bay Ranger District using one or more timber sales that would be implemented over the course of 5 to 10 years.

The proposed action includes about 1,800 acres of even-aged management and about 1,200 acres of uneven-aged management, with estimated volume for even-aged management being 32.4 MMBF and 9.6 MMBF for uneven-aged management. Under the proposed action, no young growth timber is proposed to be made available for harvest and no activities would occur within designated roadless areas. No special timber cutting prescriptions around communities are included in the proposed action.

The proposed action includes approximately 3 miles of new national forest system road construction, 11 miles of new temporary road construction, and the reconditioning of approximately 35 miles of existing roads. Existing rock quarries would be used as available or new quarries would be developed as necessary to provide materials for road construction. Existing log transfer facilities at El Capitan, Exchange Cove, Lab Bay, Naukati, and Winter Harbor could be used.

Location

The project area (Figures 1 - 2) is located within the Thorne Bay Ranger District on Prince of Wales Island, approximately 75 to 100 miles west of Ketchikan, Alaska in the Staney and Red Bay areas (Figures 3 - 4). National Forest System (NFS) lands to be analyzed under this project encompass approximately 185,000 acres within the project area.

Timber would be made available to offer for harvest from the following land use designations (LUDs): Modified Landscape and Timber Production (Forest Plan, Chapter 3).

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the Twin Mountain II Timber Sale is to implement the 2016 Forest Plan direction to move the project area toward the desired future conditions described in that plan. More specifically, the purpose is to manage the timber resource for production of sawtimber and other wood products to meet public demand and to meet multiple resource objectives.

There is a need to provide a sustainable level of forest products to contribute to the economic sustainability of the region. Providing old-growth timber would preserve a viable timber industry by providing timber volume in an economically efficient manner while providing jobs and opportunities for Southeast Alaska residents.
Figure 1. Thorne Bay and Craig Ranger Districts Regional Vicinity Map.
Figure 2. Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project Vicinity Map.
Figure 3. Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project – Red Bay Area Map.
Figure 4. Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project – Staney Area Map.
Possible Alternatives
Scoping comments will be used to develop a range of alternatives to the Proposed Action in response to significant issues that are identified. A No-action Alternative will be analyzed as the baseline for comparison of action alternatives.

Forest Plan Consistency
The EIS will tier to and incorporate by reference the 2016 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) Amendment Final EIS. Proposed activities will be consistent with Forest Plan direction.

Preliminary Issues
Preliminary concerns identified by the interdisciplinary team include:

(1) Designing an economical timber sale(s) that meets market demand;
(2) Effects of timber harvest and road construction on wildlife, including habitat, travel corridors, and subsistence use of deer; and
(3) Effects of timber harvest and road construction on watershed condition.

Environmental Analysis
The Forest Service is preparing an environmental impact statement to analyze the effects of the Proposed Action, and alternatives to the Proposed Action including a No Action Alternative. The analysis will consider public scoping comments as well as those provided by the project IDT.

Responsible Official
The Responsible Official for the decision is the Tongass Forest Supervisor, M. Earl Stewart.

Decisions to be Made
Given the purpose and need of the project, the Forest Supervisor will review alternatives and consider the environmental consequences of those alternatives in making his decisions, including:

(1) Whether to select the proposed action or another alternative;
(2) Road construction, reconstruction, and closure;
(3) Mitigation measures and monitoring; and
(4) Whether there may be a significant restriction to subsistence resources.

Scoping
Scoping is the first step of public participation for the proposed Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project and begins the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. A Notice of Intent (NOI) is expected to be published in the Federal Register on September 14, 2020 initiating the scoping process, which guides the development of the EIS. Individuals and organizations wishing to subscribe to mailings concerning this project may do so at: https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USDAFS/subscriber/new?preferences=true

Public comments provided during scoping are used by the interdisciplinary team to identify and address
additional potential issues, concerns, and opportunities associated with the proposed project in the environmental analysis. Additionally, there will be opportunities for involvement including open houses and subsistence hearings held in Prince of Wales Island communities. Project information, meeting announcements, notices, and documents will be provided on the project web page at: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=58626.

Objections and Commenting

Forest Service regulations at 36 CFR part 218, Subparts A and B (78 FR 18481-18504) regarding the project-level predecisional administrative review process applies to projects and activities implementing land management plans. The Twin Mountain II Timber Sale is an activity implementing the Forest Plan and is subject to 36 CFR 218.

Only individuals or entities who submit timely and specific written comments concerning this project during this or other public comment periods established by the Responsible Official will be eligible to file an objection. It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such manner that they are useful to the agency’s preparation of the EIS. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer’s concerns and contentions. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. While comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered, they will not provide the submitters standing to participate in the predecisional review process.

How to Comment

Your input and ideas are important in designing, analyzing, and implementing the Twin Mountain II Timber Sale Project and will help the project interdisciplinary team identify issues and design possible alternatives to address issues and concerns. Written comments for the Responsible Official may be submitted electronically at: https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=58626 and shall be in Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), or portable document format (.pdf). Comments may also be faxed to 907-828-3309, delivered in person, or via mail or other delivery service to:

Thorne Bay Ranger District
Attn: Twin Mountain II Timber Sale
PO Box 19001
1312 Federal Way
Thorne Bay, Alaska 99919

Business hours for hand-delivered comments are Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays. For more information, contact Lucy Maldonado at (907) 828-3250. It is the responsibility of individual or entity to submit comments by the close of the comment period. Specific written comments should include the following:

1. Name and current physical mailing address (a telephone number is optional);
2. Your organization name if commenting as a representative; and
3. The project title, Twin Mountain II Timber Sale.

An electronic username is insufficient for identification of an individual or entity. An email address alone is not sufficient.

There will also be future opportunities for the public to comment as analysis progresses. We look forward to your participation.