



File Code: 1950

Date: February xx, 2016

Saddlebag Firewood Project Request for Public Comment

The USDA Forest Service, Cordova Ranger District is seeking public comment on the proposed Saddlebag Firewood environmental analysis. The purpose of the Saddlebag firewood project is to identify a fuelwood source for the community of Cordova on the Cordova Ranger District and a strategy for project implementation/management. This will ensure that the Cordova community has access to firewood while maintaining, to the extent practical, other resource values in the analysis area including: wildlife and fisheries habitat values, scenery and recreation values.

Purpose and Need

Fuelwood has long been an important resource for the community of Cordova and a difficult resource to access because of limited road access, steep slopes and extensive riparian-wetland areas and lack of standing dead trees. Ensuring rural community access to subsistence resources, including firewood, is an appropriate use of National Forests in Alaska. The Chugach National Forest Plan identifies the project analysis area as an ANILCA 501(b) management area which has a primary management emphasis on the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

Currently the majority of firewood needs are being met through a partnership between the Forest Service, Alaska Department of Transportation and Alaska Division of Forestry on state land at the Mile 12 community woodcutting area. While this source of firewood is projected to last approximately another five years, we need to begin planning for additional sources of community fuel wood.

The Saddlebag analysis area was identified because it represents the only significant stand of road accessible forested land along the Copper River Highway on the Cordova Ranger District. This project will identify areas suitable for fuelwood harvest within the Saddlebag area and determine how best to make those resources available to the residents of the community of Cordova while maintaining other resource values within the constraints of laws, regulations, policy and management direction.

Project Area

The analysis area is located either side of the road to the Saddlebag trailhead (i.e. Saddlebag Road), which is located on mile 24.75 of the Copper River Highway. (60.442625° 145.135505°).

The project area was determined to have three primary forest stands where management is recommended. These stands were evaluated for fuelwood harvest, based on the forest stand and site characteristics. Potential management options have been developed for each stand based on these characteristics. Additional stands were evaluated and determined unsuitable for fuelwood harvest based on wildlife values, presence of wetlands or other timber stand characteristics.



Stand 1

This stand is located west of the Saddlebag Road. Stand 1 is 87 acres of mature and older Sitka Spruce. The proposed management recommendation is a combination of clearing existing blow down trees and the thinning of dominant and subdominant live trees. The largest old trees (>30" dbh) would be maintained. Spacing will mimic old growth characteristics. Additionally, several small patch cuts up to 1 1/2 acres could be created in an orientation and size that mimic natural patches of wind fallen trees. Approximately 3000 feet of road, some of which will be temporary, would be created to access firewood.

Stand 2

This stand is located west of the Saddlebag Road, approximately 1/10th of a mile north of the Copper River Highway. Stand 2 is 15 acres of mature Sitka spruce. The proposed management recommendation is to thin the stand from below, removing subdominant trees without creating gaps in the canopy. Approximately 500 feet of access road, some of which may be temporary, will be constructed to access timber.

Stand 3

This stand straddles the Saddlebag Road, beginning approximately 2/10ths of a mile north of the Copper River Highway. Stand 3 is 43 acres of regenerating pole-sized Sitka spruce and cottonwood. This stand was harvested in 1995 and 1998. Currently this stand has an understory of regenerating spruce that is being suppressed by cottonwood and densely regenerating Sitka spruce and other understory plant species. This stand could benefit from the removal of some of the cottonwood overstory and understory thinning to speed the development of retained trees for future fuelwood needs and to aid in the transition of this stand to a spruce dominated forest, with some residual hardwoods that will be retained for stand diversity.

Roads

Up to 3500 feet of forest road, some of which may be temporary in nature, may be created to provide access to firewood. Road locations shown on the attached map are considered to be approximate locations and could be adjusted to suit site conditions. Access routes will be located away from seasonal ground water channels and ephemeral pools. A thinned buffer will be developed on the northwest side of the project area for channel protection. One hundred foot buffers will be established along the Saddlebag Trail and along anadromous streams for habitat protection, woody debris recruitment and aesthetics.

Implementation Methods

Felling may be accomplished by private contract, partnership agreements, Forest Service staff or the general public or a mix of these methods depending on specific stand management goals. Commercial timber harvest is not allowed in this management area. Areas closed to firewood harvest may also be considered as needed to ensure public safety and other resource values in the analysis area.

Project Output and Duration

Up to 200 cords of firewood could be available annually, for the life of the project. A total of approximately 100 acres will be treated in the Saddlebag area once undisturbed buffers and no

harvest retention areas are excluded. The project could begin layout as early as summer 2017 and continue based on public demand and supply of available firewood.

If you have any questions, concerns, or other comments, please contact Milo Burcham at the address in the letterhead, at (907) 424-4759, or at mburcham@fs.fed.us

Comments on this scoping proposal should be submitted in writing by Thursday, March 31, 2016

Thank you for any input you may have.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert Skorkowsky

Robert Skorkowsky
District Ranger