



United States Department of Agriculture

# Wrangell Island Project

## Record of Decision



Forest Service  
Alaska Region

Tongass National Forest  
Wrangell Ranger District

R10-MB-634d

December 2017

Cover Photo: Pat Valley, Wrangell Island. Photograph by Andrea Slusser

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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Alaska Region  
Tongass National Forest

648 Mission Street  
Ketchikan, AK 99901  
Phone: (907) 225-3101  
Fax: (907) 228-6215

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File Code: 1950

Date: December 11, 2017

Dear Planning Participant:

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the Wrangell Island Project on the Wrangell Ranger District, Tongass National Forest has been signed. The ROD is available for review at the Ketchikan Forest Supervisor's Office and Wrangell District Office, and online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>. Hardcopies and CDs of the document are available upon request.

This decision selects approximately 428 acres from Alternative 2 for commercial timber harvest and includes the construction of about 2.3 miles and recondition of about 1.4 miles of National Forest System roads, and construction of about 2.6 miles of temporary roads. This is estimated to produce from 5–7 million board feet to timber to be offered in a ten-year timber sale. The decision also keeps the first 1.2 mile of National Forest System Road 50024 open to public motorized access.

A draft ROD was provided for public review in July 2017 prior to this final decision, pursuant to the Predecisional Administrative Review Process. Five objections were received. The Reviewing Officer has reviewed the objections to the draft ROD, in accordance with 36 CFR 218.3(a) and provided instructions to me as the Responsible Official. I have complied with the instructions from the Reviewing Officer and have incorporated them into this final ROD.

Copies of this letter have been distributed to those people and organizations on the project mailing list.

For additional information, please contact Robert Dalrymple, Wrangell District Ranger, at (907) 874-2323.

I want to thank you for your interest in the Wrangell Island Project.

Sincerely,  


M. EARL STEWART

Forest Supervisor





# Wrangell Island Project

## *Record of Decision*

### *United States Department of Agriculture*

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Lead Agency: USDA Forest Service  
Tongass National Forest

Responsible Official: M. Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor  
Federal Building  
648 Mission Street  
Ketchikan, AK 99901

For Information Contact: Robert Dalrymple, District Ranger  
Wrangell Ranger District  
PO Box 51  
Wrangell, Alaska 99929  
907-874-2323

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### **Abstract**

The Responsible Official has made a Decision to select 428 acres for commercial timber harvest from Alternative 2 of the Wrangell Island Project Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The Selected Alternative includes the construction of approximately 2.3 miles and reconstruction of 1.4 miles of National Forest System roads, and construction of about 2.6 miles of temporary roads. The harvest is estimated to produce from 5–7 million board feet to timber to be offered in a ten year sale to contribute to the Tongass National Forest timber sale program. The decision also includes road management decisions for public motorized access on the National Forest System roads.



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# Record of Decision

## Wrangell Island Project

USDA Forest Service

Wrangell Ranger District, Tongass National Forest, Alaska Region

### Introduction

A draft record of decision (ROD) was made available for public review under the project-level predecisional administrative review, or “objection process” (Title 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B) on July 14, 2017. The draft ROD identified Alternative 2 as the Selected Alternative. Five objections were received. This final decision is a response to those objections.

The Record of Decision describes my rationale for the decision, including the purpose and need, the key issues I considered in the decision, the environmental effects of the Selected Alternative, my consideration of public comments and objections, and consistency with the Forest Plan and other applicable laws and regulations. The ROD contains a summary of the environmental analysis completed for this project, the rationale for my decision including the Reviewing Officer’s instructions and my findings required by law.

### Decision

Based upon the instructions from the Reviewing Officer and my review of public comments and the objections, the analysis contained in the FEIS, the project record, and the 2016 Forest Plan, I am selecting the 25 most economical timber harvest units from Alternative 2 for commercial timber harvest as the Selected Alternative. These timber harvest units along with the associated roads are shown on the Selected Alternative map (figure 2). The road management for public motorized access in the Selected Alternative is shown on the Selected Alternative Access Management map (figure 3).

The Selected Alternative will harvest approximately 428 acres and require approximately 2.3 miles of new NFS road construction, 1.4 miles of NFS road reconditioning, and approximately 2.6 miles of temporary road construction. The Selected Alternative will make an estimated 5–7 MMBF of sawlog and utility timber available for harvest. I intend to offer this timber volume in one ten-year sale.

I proposed this as a potential remedy at the objection resolution meeting after reviewing the objection issues and the deficit timber economics in Alternative 2 and the other action alternatives. I am deferring the remaining harvest units in Alternative 2 pending additional analysis in the future to determine if any options exist to improve timber sale economics and/or address other concerns identified in the objections.

The Selected Alternative also designates the first 1.2 mile of NFS Road 50024 to remain open to public motorized vehicles. This section of road was designated to be closed to public motorized travel in Alternative 2 of the FEIS. I proposed this as a potential remedy at the objection resolution meeting which resolved the concerns of the objector. Under the Selected Alternative approximately 81 miles of NFS road and approximately 8 miles of motorized trail will remain open for public use on NFS lands of Wrangell Island.

I am incorporating the project design features and measures to minimize adverse environmental effects of the Selected Alternative as part of my decision. These are described in chapter 2 of the FEIS and in the unit cards and road cards (appendices 1 and 2 of this ROD, which are located on the Wrangell Island



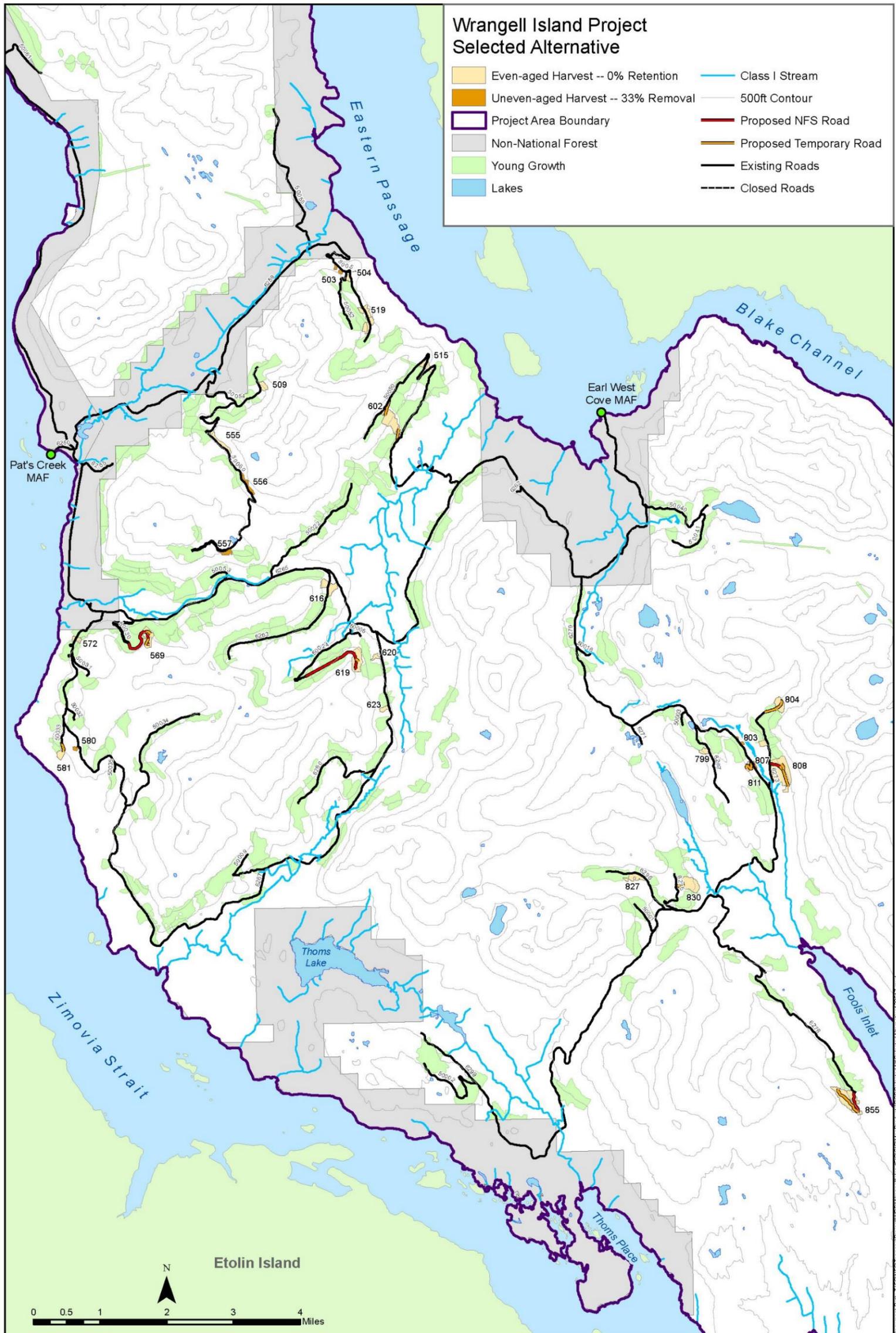


Figure 2. Selected Alternative for the Wrangell Island Project



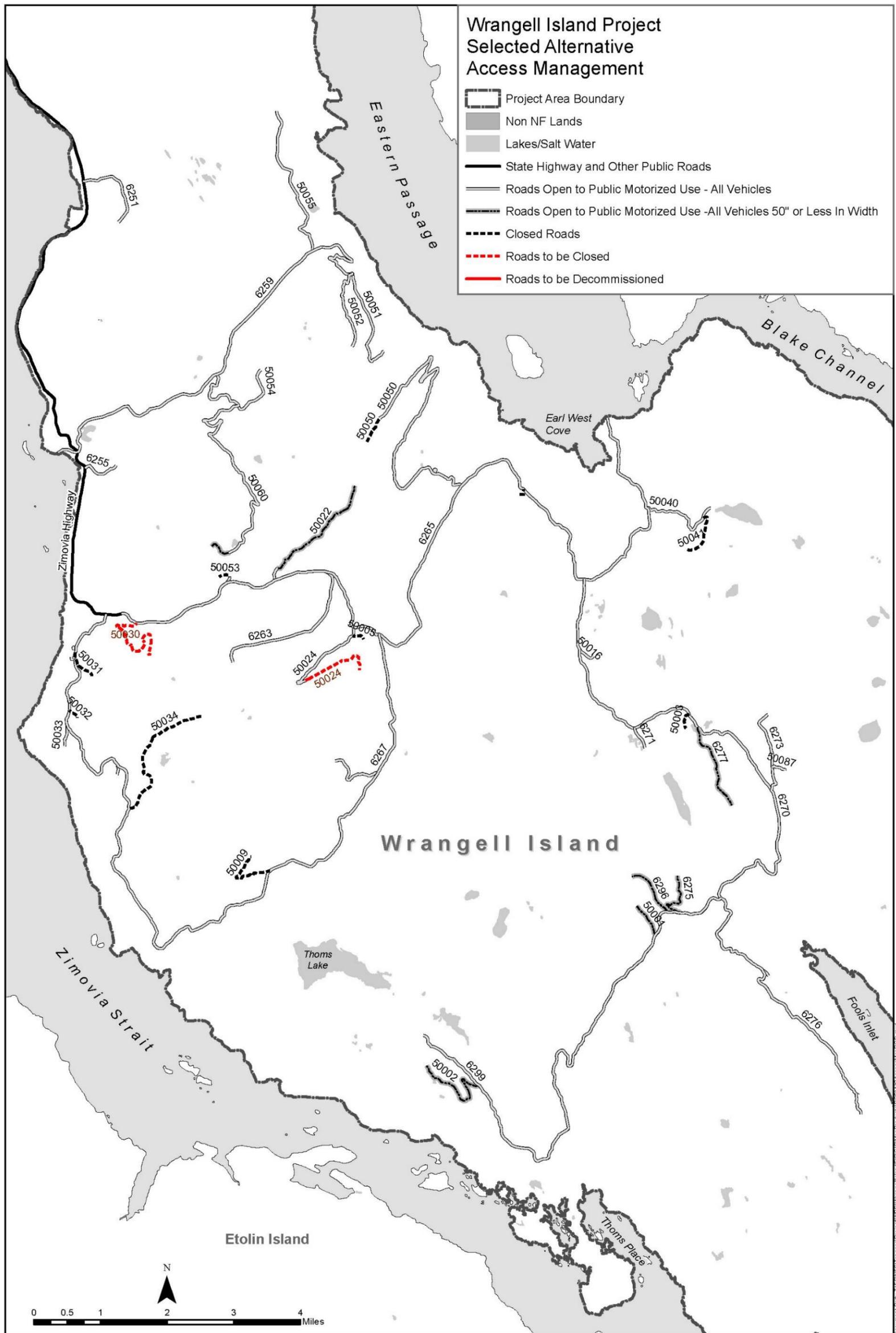


Figure 3. Road status and locations for the Selected Alternative



## Features of the Selected Alternative

The Selected Alternative will provide a supply of timber volume for the timber industry, while protecting scenic quality, old-growth habitat and wildlife habitat connectivity.

The Selected Alternative harvest timber on suitable lands, in the Timber Production and Modified Landscape land use designations (LUDs). It will construct new NFS roads and temporary roads to access timber. It also establishes road management objectives which define public motorized access.

The Selected Alternative is displayed in figure 2, figure 3, and its features are summarized in table 1. It includes harvest units 503, 504, 509, 515, 519, 555, 556, 557, 569, 572, 580/581, 602, 616, 619, 620, 623, 799, 804, 807, 808, 811, 827, 830, and 855.

**Timber Harvest:** The Selected Alternative will authorize timber harvest on approximately 428 acres making an estimated 5–7 MMBF of sawlog and utility timber volume available to industry. Silvicultural prescriptions include approximately 29 acres of uneven-aged management (partial harvest) and 399 acres of even-aged management (clearcut) using conventional cable and shovel. The partial harvest systems are designed to retain at least 67 percent of the stand's basal area to protect the scenic value, and will also reduce negative effects to wildlife. Where there are no safety or resource concerns, this alternative will allow for limited, short-term public access to gather firewood from temporary roads once timber harvest activities are complete. No young-growth harvest is included in the project.

**Roads:** The Selected Alternative will construct approximately 2.3 miles of new NFS roads and approximately 2.6 miles of temporary roads. It will also recondition approximately 1.4 mile of existing NFS roads. All temporary roads will be decommissioned after activities are complete. Existing marine access facilities at Pats Creek and Earl West may be used.

**Motorized Access Management:** The motorized access management proposed in Alternative 2 was developed through a collaborative process between the IDT and the Wrangell Borough. The process identified the roads associated with the alternative that are the most important to the community for subsistence and recreation access. These roads were then evaluated based on resource protection needs and future maintenance costs. The Selected Alternative will close approximately 18.4 miles of existing and proposed NFS road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile. Approximately 88.9 miles of NFS road would be available for public motorized access, of which 7.9 miles would be designated as motorized trail use (restricted to vehicles less than 50 inches wide).

**Table 1. Summary table of the selected alternative for the Wrangell Island Project**

Measure	Selected Alternative
<b>Area of Harvest</b>	
Timber Harvest (acres)	428
<b>TIMBER SUPPLY</b>	
<b>Estimated Timber Volume (MMBF)<sup>1</sup></b>	
Sawtimber	6.1
Utility	0.8
Total Net Volume	6.9
<b>Silvicultural system and harvest method</b>	
<b>Uneven-aged Management – Single tree selection (removal of up to 33% of basal area) (acres)</b>	
Shovel	21
Cable	8

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Selected Alternative</b>
Helicopter	0
<b>Even-aged Management – Clearcut (acres)</b>	
Cable/Shovel	399
<b>Clearcut with reserves (acres)</b>	
Cable/Shovel	0
Helicopter	0
Total Acres Harvested	428
<b>Estimated Sawtimber Volume by Species (MMBF) <sup>1</sup></b>	
Sitka spruce	1.4
Hemlock	3.2
Western redcedar	0.5
Yellow-cedar	1.1
<b>ROADS</b>	
NFS road construction (miles)	2.3
Road reconditioning (miles)	1.4
Temp road construction (miles)	2.6
<b>NFS Road Designations, following implementation (total, island-wide)</b>	
Open to all vehicles (miles)	81
Motorized trails (miles)	7.9
Closed to public motorized use (miles)	18.4
NFS roads to be decommissioned (miles)	0.2

<sup>1</sup> Rounded to the nearest ten

## Rationale for the Decision

I considered a combination of factors in making my decision:

- I looked at how each alternative responded to the Purpose and Need for the project.
- I considered how each alternative addressed the key issues developed from scoping.
- I reviewed the environmental effects of each alternative.
- I reviewed and considered the public comments to see how the alternatives responded to the issues and management concerns raised by the public other agencies, and the interdisciplinary team members.
- I verified that the decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as well as applicable laws, regulations, and policies.
- I reviewed the objections to the Draft ROD and the November 13, 2017 Reviewing Officer’s Response to Objections Wrangell Island Project determination and instructions.

A discussion of how each of these factors were considered is my decision below.

### ***Reviewing Officer Direction***

I reviewed the objections to the Draft ROD and participated in the objection resolution meetings with the objectors both individually and as a group. The Selected Alternative was offered as a proposed remedy at the objection resolution meeting. I have followed the direction provided in the Reviewing Officer’s November 13, 2017 Response to Objections Wrangell Island Project. The response to the direction is

documented in the Response to the Reviewing Officer's Instructions for Required Actions for the Wrangell Island Project Record of Decision in Exhibit 1 of this ROD. The Selected Alternative complies with the Reviewing Officer's direction.

### ***Purpose and Need***

I looked at how the Selected Alternative responded to the Purpose and Need for action (described in the FEIS chapter 1) of meeting the Timber Goals and Objectives and the Economic Goals and Objectives of the Forest Plan offering a supply of timber for harvest to meet the needs of the industry. The Purpose is to respond to the Timber, Economic, and other goals and objectives of the Forest Plan and help move the project area toward the desired conditions. The Need is to meet the requirements of TTRA to seek to meet the market demand.

I have determined that the Selected Alternative meets the Purpose and Need within Forest Plan direction for timber volume and economic opportunities. It will produce an economic supply of timber for the timber industry while minimizing effects to the environment. The direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects from project activities are consistent with the goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan.

The Selected Alternative will:

- Contribute an estimated 5–7 MMBF of timber over ten years towards the annual and planning cycle market demand for Tongass National Forest timber in an orderly flow to timber purchasers, mill operators, and value-added wood product industries in Southeast Alaska.
- Benefit the local and regional economies of Wrangell and Southeast Alaska by providing opportunities for resource uses to maintain and enhance local timber processing capacity.
- Support a wide range of natural resource employment opportunities within Wrangell and other Southeast Alaska communities.
- Manage the timber resource for production of sawtimber and other timber products from suitable forest lands made available for timber harvest, on an even-flow, long-term sustained yield basis and in an economically efficient manner while also improving forest resource conditions.
- Provide a supply of “bridge” timber that would support local jobs and facilitate the industry transition to a sustainable wood product industry based on young-growth management on the Tongass National Forest.

### ***Key Issues***

An important consideration in making my decision is how the Selected Alternative addressed the key issues developed from input received during project scoping. After reviewing the key issues (FEIS chapter 1), I find that the Selected Alternative addresses these key issues when considered as a whole.

#### **Issue 1: Timber Supply and Timber Sale Economics**

The forest products industry has been a part of Wrangell Island and the Southeast Alaska economy since the 1950s. While the forest products industry is a fraction of what it once was, it is still an important contributor to the economy and important in economic diversification. Both the timber supply and the associated economic effects produced from National Forest System lands on Wrangell Island affect the stability of Southeast Alaska's forest products industry and the ability of the industry to provide employment and contribute to the local and regional economies. The timber industry in Southeast Alaska includes large and small timber purchasers, mill operators, and value-added wood product industries that are dependent upon a reliable supply of timber.

I considered the need to manage the timber resource in the Wrangell Island Project area in order to produce an even flow of timber on an economical basis from the Tongass National Forest. The Selected

Alternative provides the most economical timber volume from Alternative 2 which will contribute toward meeting annual and planning cycle market demand.

The Selected Alternative will contribute timber volume to meet industry needs. Although there is currently no young-growth timber mature enough for economical harvest in the Wrangell Island Project area, the Selected Alternative contributes to the supply of “bridge” timber needed to maintain the timber industry during the transition to young-growth management. A reliable supply of economically viable timber is critical to maintain the expertise and infrastructure of the existing timber industry during the transition.

I evaluated the concerns for providing for economical timber sale offerings within the context of fluctuating timber markets, the amount of timber volume currently available for offer from the Tongass National Forest, and the relative environmental effects of the Selected Alternative. The Selected Alternative harvests the most economical timber units from Alternative 2. The results of the financial efficiency modeling indicate a positive value based on past market performance.

Economic and timber market conditions continue to fluctuate dramatically. The financial efficiency analysis model used for the Wrangell Island Project relies on past values and costs and represents a relative comparison between the alternatives as a whole. The results of the model are not an absolute revenue amount that an advertised, sold, and harvested timber sale may generate at some future point in time. It cannot predict market conditions at the time of offer for a particular sale, since timber markets and values are extremely volatile. The actual economic values of timber from the project will not be known until the timber sale, which will be offered by competitive bid, is awarded to the highest bidder. The timber sale must have a positive appraisal value before it can be advertised for sale.

The Selected Alternative could support an estimated 45 annualized jobs, including logging, sawmilling, transportation and other services.

The NFS roads built under the Selected Alternative will also become part of the infrastructure necessary to manage for young-growth timber in the future.

## Issue 2: Wildlife Habitat

Many commenters expressed concern that timber harvest would reduce old-growth forest habitat in the project area, thereby reducing the preferred habitat for old-growth associated species. I carefully assessed these direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to wildlife habitat in making my decision.

The project analysis disclosed the possible adverse effects of each alternative on wildlife habitat. I have determined that the Selected Alternative will not have a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any wildlife species. These effects are mitigated or reduced through the use of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, including best management practices. Site-specific mitigation measures are listed on the unit cards and road cards.

I find the Selected Alternative provides the best balance in meeting economic timber volume needs while also minimizing the effects to wildlife habitat from timber harvest. The Selected Alternative has the least overall effect on wildlife habitat of the action alternatives because it harvests only 428 acres (approximately 10 percent of the acres proposed under Alternative 2).

The use of partial harvest in some units in the Selected Alternative, will also reduce adverse effects to wildlife. Twenty-nine acres in the Selected Alternative will be partially harvested using an uneven-age selection prescription, where 33 percent or less of the basal area of the stand is removed. This prescription leaves 67 percent or more of the stand remaining to provide habitat components and retain old-growth characteristics within the stand.

Known or suspected heron rookeries or raptor nests will be protected with no-harvest buffers.

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I have determined that the Selected Alternative maintains adequate old-growth forest to provide the full range of matrix functions in order to meet the Tongass Conservation Strategy on Wrangell Island. Old-growth wildlife habitat will be maintained within T77 VCU 4790, the 2001 inventoried roadless areas, and the old-growth reserves on Wrangell Island. There will be adequate habitat connectivity on Wrangell Island (see Figure 4).

The analysis included an assessment of old-growth reserve boundaries on Wrangell Island. This included a report with a recommendation from an interagency team of wildlife biologists for a biologically preferred change to increase the size and provide more connectivity to the Fools and Thom's Medium old-growth reserves. I find that the existing old-growth reserves, by themselves, provide the necessary reserve habitat on Wrangell Island to meet the Tongass Conservation Strategy. Now, however, Wrangell Island has even more protected habitat with the 2001 inventoried roadless area designations, and VCU 4790, as a T77 Watershed and The Nature Conservancy / Audubon conservation priority area. Over 75 percent of the NFS land on Wrangell Island is now protected from development and will continue to provide wildlife habitat. Figure 4 illustrates the protected areas in relation to the areas available for harvest.

I have determined that the Selected Alternative will not have a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any migratory bird species in the project area. There may be minor direct effects on individuals or their habitat from the harvest of timber or the disturbance caused by harvest and related activities. Goshawk surveys were completed and known nest and probable nest locations were protected with no-harvest buffers to comply with Forest Plan. Should other raptor nests or great blue heron rookeries be discovered during implementation, they will be protected.

The Selected Alternative will have minimal to no impact on Threatened, Endangered, or Alaska Region Sensitive species. The Biological Assessment findings for humpback whale is "No effect". The Biological Evaluation findings for goshawk, as a sensitive species, is "May adversely affect individuals but not likely to result in a loss of viability in the planning area nor cause a trend toward federal listing". Detailed information is in the Biological Evaluation and Biological Assessment and wildlife analysis.







The Selected Alternative will have minor effect on the management indicator species. The estimates of effects are related to the 428 acres of harvested habitat. No change in the existing populations for any management indicator species is anticipated. The extent of the effects to MIS would be an estimated 1 percent reduction of existing POG.

Deer, wolves, goshawks, marten, and voles were identified as species of special interest by the Forest Service, the public and wildlife agencies.

**Deer habitat:** Deer are habitat generalists but the habitat used in the winter is the most limiting factor when discussing habitat needs. The Selected Alternative will have the least effect of the action alternatives on deer habitat. Timber harvest under the Selected Alternative would be similar to existing modeled densities because only about 1 percent of the total existing POG will be harvested. It would reduce deep-snow winter habitat (high-volume POG below 800 feet elevation on south-facing aspects) by less than 1 percent, reduce the average winter habitat (all POG below 1,500 feet in elevation) by less than 1 percent, and reduce the non-winter habitat by less than 1 percent from the existing condition. The cumulative reduction in deep-snow winter habitat would be reduced by 34 percent of historical condition, the reduction in average winter habitat would be reduced by 19 percent, and the reduction in the non-winter habitat would be reduced by 5 percent from the historic condition. The analysis treats all timber harvest as though it were clearcut, when in reality, single-tree selection partial harvest may be applied. Therefore, in the Selected Alternative, impacts are not expected to be as severe in the single-tree selection units as the deer model predicts, because 67 percent or more of a stand's pre-harvest basal area would be maintained. Ninety-nine percent or more of the deer habitat on National Forest System lands on Wrangell Island (productive old-growth) would remain after the Selected Alternative is implemented.

A result of the objection review found two small typographical errors in Table 8 of the Subsistence Resource Report. They have been corrected in the Subsistence Resource Report Addendum and in the Final ROD. These typographical errors did not affect the analysis. The percent remaining DHC and DHC one year post implementation is still at 84 percent of historical condition. The DHC numbers in the Wildlife Resource Report table were correct.

**Wolves:** Wolves are habitat generalists but productive old-growth provides habitat for their prey. Deer density derived from habitat modelling is used to measure effects of timber harvest and road density is used to measure potential adverse effects from human access for trapping and hunting wolves. Of the action alternatives, the Selected Alternative would have the least effect on wolves and effects are expected to be minor. The current deer density on National Forest System lands in the project area is 12.8 deer/mi<sup>2</sup>. Under the Selected Alternative, the deer density is estimated to be similar because only 428 acres would be harvested. The road density below 1,200 feet is estimated to increase by 0.1 mi/mi<sup>2</sup> from the existing condition on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, deer density measures are expected to increase only negligibly from existing conditions: 10.0 deer/mi<sup>2</sup> and a road density of 1.1 mi/mi<sup>2</sup>.

**Wolf mortality:** A wolf mortality concern has not identified in GMU 3, which includes Wrangell Island. The removal of POG habitat and construction of new road under the selected alternative would cause a minor reduction in habitat (direct effect) and increased mortality from hunting (indirect effect of roads). Overall, wolf populations are expected to remain stable based on modeled deer population levels and road density levels.

**Goshawk nesting habitat:** The Biological Evaluation for goshawks determined that the Selected Alternative may adversely affect individuals but not likely to result in a loss of viability in the planning area nor cause a trend toward Federal listing. Of the action alternatives, the Selected Alternative has the least effect on goshawks because it harvests only 428 acres. The Selected Alternative would reduce productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 1 percent from the existing condition and reduce the high-volume productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by less than 1 percent on National

Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, the Selected Alternative would reduce the productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 2 percent from historic conditions and reduce the high-volume productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 1 percent.

Implementation of the selected alternatives would not directly affect goshawk individuals (known nesting sites), but could affect potential nesting and foraging habitat. The removal of POG and high POG habitat could result in local population declines. The amount of habitat removed under the selected alternative in WAA 1903 would amount to approximately 1 percent of the existing habitat which would not result in a loss of viability for goshawks on Wrangell Island nor cause a trend toward federal listing.

All known goshawk nests are protected by the Forest Plan standard and guideline that requires a 100-acre no-timber-harvest zone around the nest (2016 Forest Plan, WILD4 II C, p. 4-95). All other areas where goshawks were detected but no nests were found are protected by a no-harvest buffer.

Language about the effects to goshawks have been clarified in the BA/BE Addendum and carried through to the final ROD. A typographical error was identified during the objection review where the word “not” was omitted. The error has been corrected. Implementation of the selected alternatives would not directly affect goshawk individuals (known nesting sites), but could affect potential nesting and foraging habitat. The removal of POG and High POG habitat could result in local population declines. The amount of habitat removed under the selected alternative in WAA 1903 would amount to approximately 1 percent of the existing habitat which would not result in a loss of viability for goshawks on Wrangell Island nor cause a trend toward federal listing.

**Marten habitat:** Habitat requirements for martens reflect a strong interaction between food, cover, climate, predation, with forest cover being particularly important for travel, dens, resting sites, hunting, and avoiding inclement weather, so habitat below 1,500 feet in elevation is more important in the winter. The Selected Alternative has the least effect on marten habitat of the action alternatives because it harvests only 428 acres of timber and habitat. The Selected Alternative would reduce productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 1 percent from the existing condition and reduce the productive old-growth habitat at elevations lower than 1,500 feet in elevation by less than 2 percent on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, the Selected Alternative would reduce the productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 2 percent from historic conditions.

Harvesting POG and road construction will have minor direct or indirect effects to marten under the selected alternative, because only 1 percent or less of existing habitat (depending on which elevation scale) on Forest Service land will be affected. The selected alternative could result in small local reductions in marten denning and foraging habitat. Marten population numbers are expected to remain stable based off the remaining available habitat on Wrangell Island.

**Wrangell southern red-backed vole habitat:** The Wrangell southern red-backed vole was identified as a concern by some commenters. It is considered an endemic mammal, currently known only to occur on Wrangell and Sergief Islands. A southern red-backed vole was also detected on Etolin Island but has not been categorized into a subspecies. There is a limited understanding of the populations and habitat of the Wrangell southern red-backed vole but old-growth habitat was used as indicator to estimate the effects from timber harvest. The Selected Alternative would have the most effect on the southern red-backed vole because it harvests the most acres. The Selected Alternative would reduce productive old-growth habitat by an estimated 1 percent from the existing condition on National Forest System lands. For the cumulative effects on all land ownerships in the analysis area, the Selected Alternative would reduce the productive old-growth habitat at all elevations by an estimated 16 percent from historic conditions.

Removal of POG habitat under the selected alternative would have minor direct/indirect effects on Wrangell Southern red-backed voles, which could lead to some population declines, increased habitat fragmentation and reduced genetic interchange. Effects would be reduced under the selected units from Alternative 2, because less than 1 percent of the existing POG habitat on Forest Service would be affected compared to the 8 percent from implementing all of alternative 2. Although, there would be effects to Wrangell Southern red-backed voles or their habitat, populations are expected to remain stable because approximately 99 percent of the existing POG on Wrangell Island would remain.

All literature that was submitted by the objectors has been reviewed and is part of the project record. The majority of this literature submitted by the objector pertained to flying squirrels. The literature pertaining to the Wrangell southern red-backed voles was already considered in the analysis and included in the project record, which contains other applicable literature not submitted by the objector. This review finds that the most current, applicable literature that applies to Wrangell Island was used and the analysis is still sound.

### Issue 3: Scenic Quality

Scenic quality was a key issue in the analysis. The proposed timber harvest, combined with past and reasonably foreseeable timber harvest, could affect scenic integrity from visual priority travel routes and use areas identified in the Forest Plan, and in areas of particular scenic importance to the community of Wrangell.

The concern for maintaining scenic quality in the analysis area was one of the driving factors used in designing the harvest units and developing the alternatives. The Forest Plan established scenic integrity objectives for all the visual priority routes in the project area. In order to meet the scenic integrity objectives, partial harvest, rather than clearcut, was proposed in visually sensitive areas.

The Selected Alternative has the least potential adverse effect to visual quality because it has the fewest acres harvested and the least amount of road construction. Due to careful location and strategic visual screening, all timber harvest in the Selected Alternative will meet the scenic integrity objectives. I find that the Selected Alternative provides the necessary scenic quality protection while also providing timber volume toward meeting annual and planning cycle market demand.

### Issue 4: Access Management

Roads and road access were a key issue in the analysis. Public motorized access is an important concern for many Wrangell residents who expressed concerns that the roads involved in the project will be closed limiting their access to subsistence resources and recreation opportunities on the National Forest. The public uses the roads for subsistence hunting and gathering of firewood, timber, berries and other subsistence resources.

When assessing whether to close each road or keep it open to public motorized access after timber harvest activities were completed, the IDT considered the subsistence, hunting, and recreation values of keeping roads open to the public against the maintenance costs of keeping roads open, and the potential impacts of open roads to soils, water quality, fish, and wildlife.

The Selected Alternative will provide public motorized access. The Selected Alternative will close approximately 18.4 miles of NFS road to public motorized use (existing and proposed) and will decommission 0.2 mile of NFS road. Approximately 81 miles of NFS road and 8 miles of trail will remain open for public motorized use, for a total of 89 miles, as shown on the Selected Alternative Access Management map (figure 3). All temporary roads will be decommissioned and allowed to revegetate.

In response to an objection, the first 1.2 mile of NFS road 50024 will remain open to public motorized use, rather than be closed following timber harvest activities, as was proposed in Alternative 2.

I find that the access management in the Selected Alternative provides a balance between providing motorized access to the public while considering maintenance costs and protecting the forest resources. It is the minimum road system necessary to achieve the multiple use objectives of this alternative.

### Other Environmental Effects

The analysis documented in the FEIS and project record disclosed the possible adverse effects of implementing the actions proposed under each alternative. These effects were mitigated or reduced through the use of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, including best management practices. Specific mitigation measures are listed on the unit cards and road cards in appendices 1 and 2, which are located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). The environmental effects are discussed in the FEIS, project record, and are summarized in table 2 of the Wrangell Island Project FEIS.

I considered the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects of the alternatives in making my decision. The Selected Alternative creates less overall environmental effect than the action alternatives because it proposes the least amount of timber harvest and road construction. I find that the Selected Alternative provides the best balance between providing a supply of timber and minimizing the overall environmental effects from the timber harvest. The FEIS and project record display the effects, both positive and negative, resulting from the action alternatives.

While I reviewed all of the resource effects in addition to the key issues, the public raised some specific concerns, which I will address below. More information on these effects is summarized in the FEIS and in the project record.

**Yellow-cedar decline in Alaska:** There is concern for yellow-cedar decline in Alaska and the regeneration and persistence of yellow-cedar in stands where it is present. There is a petition currently under review by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list yellow-cedar under the Endangered Species Act. The scientific understanding of this species is still developing as additional research results become available. A recent article by T.M. Barrett and R.R. Pattison published by NRC Research Press September 27, 2016 found that yellow-cedar may be increasing across its range, despite its decline in some parts of Southeast Alaska. I have examined the silvicultural prescriptions and determined that appropriate measures are provided by the Selected Alternative to ensure establishment of yellow-cedar in regenerated stands where appropriate. Recent research publications regarding yellow-cedar decline have been considered and are included in the project record.

**Aquatic effects:** I considered the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Selected Alternative combined with past harvest on the aquatics resources. I find that the Selected Alternative provides the best balance in meeting timber volume needs while also minimizing the effects to water quality and fish habitat from timber harvest. The project design and implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines, best management practices, and buffers will limit the effects to the watersheds and fisheries habitat.

**Soil stability:** The Selected Alternative would cause the least potential adverse effect to the soil resource because it would harvest the fewest acres and would construct the least amount of road. I find that the Selected Alternative provides the necessary soils protection while also providing timber volume toward meeting annual and planning cycle market demand. The effects to soils from the Selected Alternative will be minimized by the project design and the implementation of Forest Plan standards and guidelines and best management practices. All areas with unstable slopes will be avoided or addressed through geotechnical design to minimize adverse impacts to soil and water resources.

**Plants:** The Selected Alternative has the least potential effect on plants because it has the fewest acres of timber harvest and the least amount of road construction. There may be minor effects to one rare plant and five of the listed Alaska Region sensitive plants. The risk of adverse impacts to inundated clubmoss, a

Region 10 rare plant, is low to moderate. The Biological Evaluation determination of effects is that Selected Alternative “May affect” individuals, but is not likely to result in a trend toward Federal listing or loss of viability for edible thistle, mountain lady’s slipper, Calder’s lovage, Alaska rein orchid, and lesser round-leaved orchid. Detailed information is in the Plant Biological Evaluation and summarized in the FEIS, chapter 3. The action alternatives avoid all known occurrences of the sensitive plant species.

Measures described in the unit cards (appendix 1) will be implemented to reduce the possibility of invasive plant species that may compete with native species.

**Climate change:** Climate change is an important consideration, however, the magnitude of this project is so small compared to the factors that contribute to climate change that foreseeable effects would be immeasurably small for all alternatives and would not contribute to a meaningful choice among the alternatives. The Forest Plan FEIS discusses climate change factors and discloses the risk of possible effects. The Tongass National Forest will continue to monitor potential effects of climate change through the existing Forest Plan monitoring programs, and other studies that are occurring regionally and nationally.

**Recreation:** While recreation occurs throughout the project area and recreation sites are interspersed in areas with timber harvest, the adverse effects to recreation are expected to be minor. Implementation of the Selected Alternative would not noticeably decrease or change the current recreational opportunities. Past timber harvest has provided access and views from recreation sites. The primary effects to recreation users will be effects to the scenery. Partial harvest of timber (retaining 67 percent or more of a stand’s basal area), and unit design is being used along visual priority routes and recreation sites to minimize the effects on scenery and recreation. Recreational driving is one of the most popular activities on Wrangell Island and approximately 81 miles of NFS road and approximately 8 miles of motorized trail will remain open for public use on NFS lands of Wrangell Island under the Selected Alternative.

**Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Exchange:** Congress enacted an exchange of lands between the Alaska Mental Health Trust and the USDA Forest Service. As a result, approximately 1,071 acres of land on Wrangell Island will become part of the National Forest. The legislation contains specific provisions that lands transferred to the Forest Service will be managed to preserve its undeveloped natural character, and provide for recreational opportunities. The exchange will have overall beneficial effects for the resources of Wrangell Island, when it is completed, in several years’ time.

### ***Objections and Public Comments***

The Wrangell Island Project draft ROD received five objections, with a variety of concerns ranging from public access to subsistence hunting areas to sufficient volume for commercial timber operators to effects on wildlife habitat. Informal objection resolution meetings or phone calls were held following the end of the objection period, and a formal objection resolution meeting was held on October 30, 2017 at the Regional Office in Juneau. During the formal objection meeting, I proposed remedies to some of the objections to offer only the currently economical timber harvest units and keep one section of road open for public motorized access to subsistence resources. The Regional Forester issued a formal objection response, with instructions which I have followed in this decision.

I have considered the public comments submitted during the public comment periods. The input was valuable to me in identifying issues, creating alternatives for this project, and making a more informed decision.

Timber economics was a concern, and one that I share. Timber market conditions fluctuate dramatically over time. The current market conditions are very poor and are driven by international markets. By law, timber on Forest Service land cannot be advertised for sale unless its value appraises positively, so the actual timber values of the sale from this project will not be known until the sale is advertised and awarded to the highest bidder. I am selecting the most economical units from Alternative 2 in order to

provide some volume to industry. The timber industry in Southeast Alaska needs a reliable source of timber in order to survive and I am selecting an alternative that provides timber volume while minimizing the environmental impacts from the timber harvest.

The volume of timber being made available to industry was also a concern. I am selecting an alternative that is most likely to provide economically viable timber, to serve as “bridge” timber to facilitate the Tongass National Forest transition to young-growth harvest. This timber volume will benefit the local and regional economies by providing jobs, which is especially important to those smaller communities where the timber industry is located. The State and Southeast regional economy is currently in a downward trend and additional jobs are especially important.

There were comments requesting access to firewood, a subsistence resource. To address the request, I will allow limited, short-term public access to gather firewood from along temporary roads once timber harvest activities are complete if there are no safety or resource concerns. These firewood gathering opportunities will be posted at the Wrangell Ranger District Office. All temporary roads will be decommissioned and allowed to revegetate after activities are complete.

There were many comments on effects to wildlife. I feel that the Selected Alternative design and protection measures will minimize the effects to wildlife from timber harvest. While some may still consider the amount of harvest to be too large, the Selected Alternative affects only a small portion of Wrangell Island. The Selected Alternative will clearcut about 0.3 percent and will partially harvest about 0.03 percent of NFS lands on Wrangell Island. The partial harvest systems are designed to retain at least 67 percent of the stand’s basal area, in part to reduce negative effects to wildlife. Approximately 84 percent of the productive old-growth on Wrangell Island’s NFS lands will remain undeveloped and will continue to provide wildlife habitat. These areas are protected by 2001 inventoried roadless areas, old-growth reserves, T77 VCU 4790, beach fringe and riparian zones. Figure 4 displays the areas protected from development along with the limited area available for timber harvest. The Selected Alternative minimizes timber harvest in deep-snow winter habitat.

There were comments on the effects of timber harvest and road building on the other forest resources. I find that the Selected Alternative will minimize the environmental effects through alternative design and the use of best management practices (BMPs), Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and standard operating procedures.

There were many comments in support of, and in opposition to, public motorized access on the roads following timber harvest. I find that the Selected Alternative best meets the desires of the community of Wrangell by providing some public motorized access while closing other roads for environmental and economic reasons. Public road access is closely tied to subsistence use in the rural subsistence communities such as Wrangell. I am keeping the first 1.2 mile of NFS road 50024 open for public motorized access to subsistence resources.

Many comments were on topics analyzed at the Forest Plan level, such as regional policies on export, regional market demand calculations, viability of wildlife species and interpretation of law which are considered outside the scope of this project analysis. These topics were analyzed in the 1997 Forest Plan revision and the 2008 and 2016 amendments to that revision.

### ***Consistency with the Forest Plan and other Applicable Laws and Regulations***

As the Responsible Official, it is my responsibility, prior to making a decision, to ensure that this project is consistent with the Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) and other applicable laws and regulations. The Forest Plan describes in detail Forest-wide management direction, goals, objectives, research needs, desired conditions, standards, and guidelines.

I have determined that the Selected Alternative is consistent with the Forest Plan and other applicable laws and regulations. The Selected Alternative will meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and will contribute toward reaching Forest Plan goals and objectives. The Selected Alternative is consistent with all land use designation standards and guidelines. I also find that my decision to implement the Selected Alternative is consistent with all applicable laws and regulations including National Forest Management Act (NFMA), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the other laws presented in the section “Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations” in this ROD.

My decision is consistent with Forest Service policy outlined in agency directives. By providing timber for offer and supporting jobs, the Selected Alternative also contributes to the USDA Investment Strategy for Creating Jobs and Healthy Communities in Southeast Alaska.

### ***Summary of the Rationale***

In making this decision I considered how the alternatives responded to the Purpose and Need, key issues, environmental effects, public comments, Forest Plan and applicable laws, regulations, and policy and the Reviewing Officer’s objection response.

I found that the Selected Alternative provides a mix of beneficial resources for the public, within a framework of existing laws, regulations, policies, public needs and desires, and the capabilities of the land. None of the alternatives can provide benefits for and meet the needs of all members of the public. My decision includes the evaluation of the trade-offs between effects to resources, desired products, and social values.

The Selected Alternative meets the stated Purpose and Need for the project. It makes approximately 5–7 MMBF of timber available to the timber industry while minimizing effects to the environment.

It also addresses the key issues as a whole by providing a supply of timber, maintaining old-growth forest habitat, preserving scenic quality, and providing and maintaining public access to the National Forest System lands on Wrangell Island.

The Selected Alternative will meet the Forest Plan direction and conforms to the National Forest Management Act. The direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental effects from project activities are consistent with the goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan. I have found that the design features and mitigation measures in Appendix 1 – Wrangell Island Project Unit Cards, and design criteria in Appendix 2 – Wrangell Island Project Road Cards, are effective in reducing environmental impacts based upon the Forest Plan analysis and experience in using these measures.

The Selected Alternative complies with the Reviewing Officer’s objection response and instructions.

## **Alternatives**

### ***Alternatives Considered in Detail***

The Forest Service designed five alternatives for detailed analysis as part of the Wrangell Island Project. These include the no action alternative, the proposed action, and three other action alternatives developed in response to key issues and to provide a reasonable range of alternatives. With the exception of Alternative 1 (the no action alternative), all were designed to achieve the Purpose and Need for the Wrangell Island Project. These five alternatives are described in detail in chapter 2 of the FEIS.

#### **Alternative 1**

Alternative 1, the no action alternative, proposed no new timber harvest or road construction in the project area. It does not preclude timber harvest from other areas or from the project area in the future. This

alternative represents the existing conditions and serves as a baseline for comparing the action alternatives.

Road access management would fully implement the 2007 Wrangell Ranger District Access and Travel Management Plan decision (ATM) for Wrangell Island. The ATM deferred closure of some roads until the Wrangell Island Project EIS is complete. Under Alternative 1, approximately 23.5 miles of NFS road currently open to motorized use would be closed, and 2.5 miles of existing NFS road would be decommissioned. Approximately 73.7 miles of existing NFS road would be open for public use for motorized vehicles of all types.

### Alternative 2

Alternative 2 was designed to harvest timber in Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs while maintaining scenic quality, old-growth habitat and habitat connectivity as specified in the Forest Plan. Alternative 3 is designed to address Issues 2 (Wildlife Habitat), 3 (Scenic Quality) and 4 (Access Management). Alternative 3 would yield an estimated 56 MMBF from approximately 4,767 acres. Alternative 2 would construct 16.8 miles of new NFS roads, 9.9 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 4.4 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 2 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access, by closing 18.4 miles of road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile of road. Approximately 86 miles of NFS road would be open for public motorized access of all types and 14.5 miles would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail).

### Alternative 3

Alternative 3 was designed to harvest timber in Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs while maintaining scenic quality, old-growth habitat and habitat connectivity as specified in the Forest Plan. Alternative 3 is designed to address Issues 2 (Wildlife Habitat), 3 (Scenic Quality) and 4 (Access Management). Alternative 3 would yield an estimated 41 MMBF from approximately 2,648 acres. Alternative 3 would construct 15.4 miles of new NFS roads, 8.9 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 4.4 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 3 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access, by closing 16.4 miles of road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile of road. Approximately 85.4 miles of NFS road would be open for public motorized access of all types and 13.2 miles would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail).

### Alternative 4

Alternative 4 was designed to harvest timber in Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs. The alternative was designed to maximize the economic value of the timber harvest from which to offer individual timber sales (Issue 1) while protecting scenic quality, old-growth habitat and connectivity. Alternative 4 would yield an estimated 43 MMBF from approximately 2,992 acres. Alternative 4 would construct 15.9 miles of new NFS roads, 10.3 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 4.0 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 4 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access, by closing 16.8 miles of road to public motorized use and decommissioning 0.2 mile of road. Approximately 85.7 miles of NFS road would be open for public motorized access of all types and 12.9 miles would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail).

### Alternative 5

Alternative 5 was designed to harvest timber in the Timber Production and Modified Landscape LUDs. The alternative emphasized Issue 2 (Wildlife Habitat) while providing timber harvest. Alternative 5 would yield an estimated volume of 39 MMBF from approximately 3,440 acres. Alternative 5 would construct 12.7 miles of new NFS roads, 6.6 miles of temporary roads and the reconditioning of 2.9 miles of existing NFS roads. Alternative 5 would implement road management objectives which define public motorized access. Alternative 5 would fully implement the ATM and close all newly constructed roads. Approximately 37.0 miles of road (existing and proposed) would be closed and 2.5 miles of existing road

would be decommissioned. Approximately 72.9 miles of existing NFS road would be available for public use for motorized vehicles of all types and no road would be open to off-highway vehicles (motorized trail). Comparison of Alternatives

Table 2 compares outputs and provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative, including the Selected Alternative, for all resources.

**Table 2. Alternative comparison table**

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
<b>Basic Project Data</b>						
Timber Harvest (acres)	0	4,767	2,648	2,992	3,440	428
Estimated Volume of Harvest (MMBF)	0	56	41	43	39	5–7
Road construction (total miles of NFS and temporary road construction)	0	31.1	28.7	30.2	22.2	4.9
<b>ISSUE 1: TIMBER SUPPLY AND ECONOMICS</b>						
<b>Timber Volume</b>			<b>Millions of Board Feet (MMBF)</b>			
Sawtimber	0	51	36	38	35	6.1
Utility	0	4.9	4.6	4.8	4.4	0.8
Total Net Volume	0	55.8	40.7	43.3	39.1	6.9
<b>Logging System</b>			<b>(Acres)</b>			
Cable	0	998	969	1,010	576	224
Shovel	0	528	411	543	343	204
Helicopter	0	3,241	1,268	1,439	2,521	0
Total Harvest Acres	0	4,767	2,648	2,992	3,440	428
<b>Timber Volume by Species</b>			<b>Millions of Board Feet (MMBF)</b>			
Sitka spruce	0	11.2	8.0	8.5	7.6	1,895
Hemlock	0	26.5	18.8	20.0	18.0	4,479
Western redcedar	0	4.1	2.9	3.1	2.8	689
Yellow-cedar	0	9.2	6.5	6.9	6.2	1,550

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
<b>Financial Efficiency Analysis</b>			<b>(Current Region 10 Export Policy)</b>			
Indicated Advertiser Rate (\$/thousand board feet (MBF) net removed)	\$0.00	(\$59.23)	(\$55.00)	(\$61.54)	(\$92.74)	\$16.10
Road Construction and Reconditioning Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$81.60	\$96.80	\$98.20	\$85.40	\$51.77
Logging Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$325.55	\$298.66	\$303.96	\$352.30	\$232.82
<b>Financial Efficiency Analysis</b>			<b>(Domestic Processing )</b>			
Indicated Advertiser Rate (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	(\$220.64)	(\$216.41)	(\$222.95)	(\$254.15)	(\$145.31)
Road Construction and Reconditioning Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$81.60	\$96.80	\$98.20	\$85.40	\$134.37
Logging Costs (\$/MBF net removed)	\$0.00	\$325.55	\$298.66	\$303.96	\$352.30	\$252.10
<b>Employment</b>			<b>Number of Annualized Jobs Supported</b>			
Total Jobs Estimated under Current Region 10 Policy (includes export and domestic processing)	0	222	158	168	151	38
100% Domestic Processing	0	267	190	202	182	45
<b>ISSUE 2: WILDLIFE HABITAT</b>						
<b>Cumulative Change to Deer Habitat on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Percent Change From Historical Acres</b>			
Historical Deep Snow Winter Habitat (high-productivity old-growth (POG) ≤800' elevation on south-facing aspects)	-33%	-34%	-34%	-34%	-33%	-33%
Historical Average Winter Habitat (POG ≤1,500' elevation)	-18%	-25%	-22%	-22%	-23%	-19%
Historical Non-winter Habitat (all habitats except older young growth)	-4%	-5%	-5%	-5%	-5%	-5%

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
<b>Cumulative Change in Deer Model Habitat Capability (DHC) on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Percent Change in DHC Since 1954 (at stem exclusion)</b>			
1954 Theoretical Number of Deer	-17%	-22%	-20%	-21%	-21%	-17 to -18% (reduction from the existing condition is not statistically significant)
<b>Effects on Wolves on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Deer Density Compared to Historical Deer Density (deer/mi<sup>2</sup> at stem exclusion)</b>			
Deer Model Deer Density – 1954	10.6	10.0	10.3	10.2	10.2	10.2 to 10.6 (reduction from the existing condition is not statistically significant)
<b>Road Density below 1,200' for all roads (open and closed)</b>			<b>Road Density (mi/mi<sup>2</sup>)</b>			
Road Density	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.1
<b>Cumulative Change to Bear Habitat on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Percent Change From Historical Habitat</b>			
Historical POG within 500' of Class I fish streams	-17%	-19%	-18%	-18%	-18%	-18%
<b>Cumulative Change to American Marten Habitat on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Percent Change From Historical Habitat</b>			
Historical Winter Habitat – High-volume POG < 1500' in elevation	-34%	-40%	-38%	-38%	-39%	-35%
Historical Year-round Habitat – POG	-15%	-21%	-18%	-19%	-19%	-19%

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
<b>Cumulative Change to Goshawk Habitat on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Percent Change From Historical Habitat</b>			
Historical Nesting Habitat by WAA – High-Volume POG	-32%	-39%	-36%	-36%	-37%	-37%
Historical Foraging Habitat by WAA – All POG	-15%	-21%	-18%	-19%	-19%	-19%
<b>Cumulative Changes to High-Volume POG and all POG Habitat on All Land Ownerships</b>			<b>Percent Change From Historical Habitat</b>			
High-volume POG	-32%	-39%	-36%	-36%	-37%	-37%
All POG	-15%	-21%	-18%	-19%	-19%	-19%
<b>ISSUE 3: SCENIC QUALITY</b>						
Scenic integrity objectives met?	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Relative impact on scenery as a result of proposed timber harvest (lowest=1 to highest=5)	1	6	5	4	3	2
Relative impact on scenery as a result of proposed road construction (lowest=1 to highest=5)	1	5	4	6	3	2
<b>ISSUE 4: ACCESS MANAGEMENT</b>						
Proposed NFS road construction (miles)	0	16.8	15.4	15.9	12.7	2.3
Proposed temporary road construction (miles)	0	9.9	8.9	10.3	6.6	2.6
Proposed road reconditioning (miles)	0	4.4	4.4	4.0	2.9	1.4
<b>Road designations, following implementation (total, island-wide)</b>						
Open to all vehicles (miles)	73.7	86.0	85.4	85.7	72.9	81
Motorized trails (miles)	0	14.5	13.2	12.9	0	7.9
Closed to all vehicles (miles)	23.5	15.9	16.4	16.8	37.0	18.4
Decommissioned (miles)	2.5	0.2	0.2	0.2	2.5	0.2

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
<b>AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE</b>						
Contribute to the effects of or current rate of climate change, including carbon sequestration?	not likely	slight increase				
Contribute to Yellow-cedar decline?	not likely	not likely	not likely	not likely	not likely	not likely
Contribute to greenhouse gas emissions?	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
<b>AQUATICS</b>						
<b>NFS road stream crossings</b>						
Class I	0	2	2	1	1	0
Class II	0	8	5	6	3	1
Class III	0	29	25	21	21	3
<b>Temporary road stream crossings</b>						
Class I	0	0	0	0	0	0
Class II	0	2	1	1	1	0
Class III	0	11	7	4	8	1
<b>CULTURAL RESOURCES</b>						
Impacts to cultural resources?	no	no	no	no	no	no
<b>ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE</b>						
Disproportionately high or adverse impact on low-income or minority populations who use the project area?	no	no	no	no	no	no
<b>INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS</b>						
Impact on inventoried roadless areas?	no	no	no	no	no	no
<b>PLANTS: SENSITIVE AND RARE</b>						
Sensitive plants: lung lichen and Henderson's checkermallow	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact	No risk of adverse impact
Sensitive plants: Alaska rein orchid, Calder's lovage, edible thistle, mountain lady's slipper	No risk of adverse impact	Minor risk of adverse impact				

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
Sensitive Plant: lesser round-leaved orchid	No risk of adverse impact	Minor to moderate risk of adverse impact				
<b>PLANTS: INVASIVE</b>						
Risk of introduction and spread of invasive species	Low	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low
<b>RECREATION</b>						
Relative ranking of impacts to inventoried recreation sites on Wrangell Island, not including roads (1 = least impact, 5 = most impact)	1	6	4	5	3	2
<b>SILVICULTURE</b>						
<b>Silvicultural system and harvest method (acres)</b>						
<b>Even-aged management - clearcut</b>						
Cable/Shovel	0	1,340	1,269	1,352	737	399
<b>Clearcut with reserves</b>						
Cable/Shovel	0	68	68	68	68	0
Helicopter	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Uneven-aged management – single-tree selection (up to 33% removal)</b>						
Cable/Shovel	0	118	43	133	114	29
Helicopter	0	3,241	1,268	1,439	2,521	0
Total Acres Harvested	0	4,767	2,648	2,992	3,440	428
<b>SOILS</b>						
<b>Estimated acres of detrimental soil disturbance</b>						
Yarding	0	70	65	75	45	3
Temporary Roads	0	54	48	56	36	14
Landings	0	19	17	18	13	10
Rockpit	0	27	24	26	19	5
Total acres	0	170	154	175	113	32
<b>Estimated harvest acres and road miles on steep slopes</b>						
Acres of harvest proposed on slopes > 72% (all harvest methods)	0	199	132	153	177	<10

Measure or Question	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5	Selected Alternative
Miles of proposed road on slopes > 67%	0	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.3	<0.5
<b>WETLANDS</b>						
<b>Acres of wetlands impacted by activity</b>						
Harvest (acres)	0	1,554	871	927	1,082	70
Rock quarry (acres)	0	11	10	11	8	5
Road construction (acres)	0	55	50	56	39	4

### ***Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis***

Ten alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis throughout the planning process. These are presented in the FEIS chapter 2, under “Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study”.

### ***Environmentally Preferred Alternative***

The Council on Environmental Quality defines the environmentally preferred alternative as “the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in NEPA's Section 101”. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources. 40 CFR 1505.2(b) requires that one or more environmentally preferable alternatives be disclosed. The environmentally preferable alternative is not necessarily the alternative that will be implemented, and it does not have to meet the underlying need for the project. It does, however, have to cause the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protect, preserve, and enhance historical, cultural, and natural resources.

I have reviewed the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of each alternative.

I have determined that Alternative 1, the no-action alternative, is the environmentally preferable alternative. This alternative is environmentally preferable because it would result in no environmental effects and thereby best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources on the National Forest. Alternative 1 does not meet the purpose and need, but it does provide me with a baseline to measure the direct and indirect effects of the action alternatives.

Of the action alternatives in the FEIS, I identified Alternative 5 as the environmentally preferred alternative, because it would propose the highest proportion of partial harvest, which would retain at least 67 percent of the stand, and it requires the fewest miles of road construction. As a result, it would cause the fewest environmental impacts.

## **Public Involvement**

The Wrangell Island Project included an extensive public involvement process, as documented in the FEIS chapter 1 and in the project record. I want to thank the individuals, organizations and agencies that participated and provided comments that helped to shape this analysis. The public and agency comments received during scoping helped me to define the key issues, which in turn helped to develop the alternatives. Public comments on the draft EIS were addressed in the final EIS and responses to those comments are presented FEIS appendix B.

I want to especially acknowledge the City and Borough of Wrangell, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for their cooperative work in developing the alternatives and providing information for this project.

## **Mitigation**

My decision includes the project design criteria and measures to minimize adverse environmental effects of the Selected Alternative as described in the unit cards and road cards, located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). I am satisfied that these are practicable and effective in avoiding or minimizing environmental effects. I have found them to be effective when implemented elsewhere on the Forest.

## **Monitoring**

Monitoring is a tool which involves observing the results of management activities as a basis for evaluation. The NFMA requires national forests to monitor and evaluate their Forest Plans (36 CFR 219.12). Monitoring of the Selected Alternative will be performed during implementation and as part of the Forest Plan monitoring program as shown on the Tongass public website. Specific monitoring items are outlined in chapter 2 of the Wrangell Island Project FEIS and are included in the unit cards and road cards, located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage.

## **Project Record**

The project record for this project includes the DEIS and FEIS, reports containing analyses by resource with supporting documentation, public communication and comments, all material incorporated by reference (except those documents readily available, such as the Forest Plan and Forest Service directives) and other materials produced during the environmental analysis of this project. The project record is available electronically upon request from the Wrangell Ranger District.

## **2016 Forest Plan**

The Selected Alternative is consistent with the 2016 Tongass National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (2016 Forest Plan) which was signed on December 9, 2016.

The 2008 Forest Plan was developed under a prior planning regulation (1982 Planning Rule) and was amended by the 2016 Forest Plan pursuant to the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). Project consistency requirements depend upon the origin of plan direction applicable to the project. Project consistency for plan direction which was developed under the previous planning rule requires that the project be consistent only with plan standards and guidelines (chapters 3 and 4 of the 2016 Forest Plan, and FSH 1909.12, ch. 20, sec. 21.33). Project consistency requirements for plan components added or modified in conformance with the 2012 Planning Rule (chapter 5 of the 2016 Forest Plan) are governed by 36 CFR 219.15(d).

The Wrangell Island Project includes design features intended to avoid or minimize environmental impacts and must be complied with by law, regulation, or policy. These design features include, but are not limited to BMPs, Forest Plan standards and guidelines, and standard operating procedures. The Selected Alternative is compliant with all applicable LUD-specific and forest-wide standards and guidelines in chapters 3 and 4 of the 2016 Forest Plan.

The Selected Alternative also complies with the applicable forest-wide plan components in chapter 5 of the 2016 Forest Plan (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Compliance of the Selected Alternative with applicable forest-wide plan components found in chapter 5 of the 2016 Forest Plan Amendment**

Plan Component	Selected Alternative
DC-01. The Desired Condition of the Tongass National Forest is characterized by extensive, unmodified natural environments. Old-growth forests are one of the predominant vegetation types on the Tongass and connections between patches of old-growth are evident.	Ninety-two percent of the old-growth on the Tongass National Forest is still in an unmodified condition. The Selected Alternative will modify approximately 428 acres of old-growth by timber harvest. Over 70 percent of existing National Forest old-growth will remain in a natural state on Wrangell Island after the Selected Alternative is implemented.
O-TIM-01. Seeking to accelerate a transition to primarily young-growth harvest, offer an average of 46 MMBF annually in a combination of old-growth and young growth. When young growth offered is less than 41 MMBF, provide old-growth to make up the difference and achieve the average annual projected timber sale quantity of 46 MMBF. After the transition, offer an average of 5 MMBF of old-growth annually to support Southeast Alaska mills.	The Selected Alternative makes available about 5–7 MMBF of old-growth timber in multiple sales, which contributes to the Tongass timber program’s average annual projected timber sale quantity of 46 MMBF. No commercial young growth timber is currently available within the project area.
O-TIM-02. Seek to provide an economic timber supply sufficient to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, and the market demand for the planning cycle. The volume of young growth as part of the yearly offer will increase from an average of 9.2 MMBF annually in the first decade to an average of 25 MMBF annually in years 11-15 as the program nears full transition.	The Selected Alternative seeks to contribute to an economic timber supply in order to meet the annual market demand for Tongass National Forest timber, and the market demand for the planning cycle.
S-TIM-01. Not including salvage or sanitation harvest, the quantity of timber sold in a decade may not exceed the sustained yield limit of 2,480 MMBF.	The Selected Alternative contributes to the Sustained Yield Limit by providing approximately 5–7 MMBF of timber.
G-WILD-02. The National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines (USFWS 2007, or current) should be used when working or authorizing activities near eagle nests.	The Selected Alternative follows the latest National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines. All known bald eagle nest sites within the project area fall within the established 1,000-foot beach fringe buffer; therefore, the Forest Plan guideline for bald eagles is being met.
S-WILD-03. The intent of this standard is to use the Chapter 4 Forest Plan direction for seabird colonies to address the addition of the Aleutian tern as an Alaska Region sensitive species.	The Selected Alternative provides for the protection and maintenance of seabird (marine bird) colonies. Sensitive species such as the Aleutian tern are not found within the analysis area. Timber harvest is not planned within the beach fringe buffer; therefore, seabird colonies are protected which meets Forest Plan standards and guidelines.
S-WILD-04. Provide a minimum distance of 330 feet from human activities on the ground and waterfowl or shorebird intertidal concentration or nesting areas.	The Selected Alternative maintains a minimum 330-foot distance from waterfowl or shorebird intertidal concentrations or nesting areas. Timber harvest is not planned within the beach fringe buffer and MAFs are not located near shorebird nesting areas; therefore, the black oystercatcher is protected, and Forest Plan standards and guidelines are met.

**Former Management Indicator Species:** The Wrangell Island Project analyzed the 13 management indicator species (MIS) from the 2008 Forest Plan, which was in effect at the time analysis was started. The 2016 Forest Plan used the 2012 Planning Rule to amend the 2008 Forest Plan. Although the 2012 Planning Rule does not require the use of MIS to analyze project effects, the 2016 Forest Plan Amendment FEIS included these same 13 species in its effects analysis under the heading of “Former Management Indicator Species” (Forest Plan FEIS, page 3-230). The Wrangell Island Project

interdisciplinary team has reviewed the new references used in the 2016 Forest Plan FEIS for applicability to the Wrangell Island project activities, and updated the effects analysis as needed. Therefore, Wrangell Island Project analysis for wildlife is consistent with the best available science used in the 2016 Forest Plan.

**Suitability of Lands for Timber Production:** The Selected Alternative complies with direction in appendix A of the 2016 Forest Plan. In the Development land use designations (LUDs), old-growth forest located within Phases 2 and 3 of the Tongass Timber Sale Program Adaptive Management Strategy, or within the Tongass 77 Watersheds (T77 VCUs) and The Nature Conservancy / Audubon conservation priority areas are identified as not suitable for old-growth harvest. Under the Selected Alternative, there will be no timber harvest in the T77 VCU 4790 (Thoms Lake), which is no longer suitable for old-growth harvest.

## **Findings Required by Law and Regulation**

### ***Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980; Section 810***

**Subsistence Evaluation:** The subsistence analysis is presented in chapter 3 of the FEIS and in the project record. Based on the information in the analysis, effects within the foreseeable future from this project alone would not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction on any subsistence resources. However, cumulatively under full implementation of the Forest Plan itself including this project, may result in a significant restriction to subsistence use of deer due to the potential effects of projects on the abundance and distribution of these resources, and on competition for these resources. Because there was a finding of a significant possibility of a significant restriction to subsistence use of deer, two subsistence hearings were held in Wrangell.

**Finding:** In accordance with Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 810, I have made a determination for the subsistence evaluation that the direct effects of the Selected Alternative will not result in a risk of a significant restriction on the subsistence use of any resources, including deer (FEIS, chapter 3 in the “Subsistence” section). Cumulatively, since additional timber harvest may occur at some future time in the development LUDs in WAA 1903, there may be a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence use of deer in WAA 1903 in the future due to additional reductions in habitat capability. This is consistent with the Forest Plan finding that full implementation of the Plan could lead to a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence use of deer. The potential foreseeable effects, directly and cumulatively, from the Selected Alternative will not have a significant possibility of a significant restriction on subsistence uses for other resources including bears, furbearers, marine mammals, waterfowl, salmon, other finfish, shellfish, and other foods such as berries and roots.

The evaluation determined that this project has complied with ANILCA by considering the following three considerations.

#### **Necessary and Consistent with Sound Management of Public Lands**

I have determined that the Selected Alternative is necessary and consistent with sound management of public lands. In this regard, I have evaluated this project against the National Forest Management Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the Tongass Timber Reform Act, the Wilderness Act, the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, and the Alaska State Forest Resources and Practices Act. Based on the analysis presented in the Wrangell Island Project Final EIS, the findings I have made in this ROD and the analysis for the Forest Plan, I have determined that the Selected Alternative strikes a balance between meeting the resource needs of the public and protecting the forest resources.

### Amount of Public Land Necessary to Accomplish the Proposed Action

I have determined that the amount of land necessary to implement the Selected Alternative is, considering sound multiple-use management of public lands, the minimum necessary to accomplish the purpose of this project. The entire forested portion of the Tongass is used by at least one rural community for subsistence purposes for, at a minimum, deer hunting. It is not possible to avoid all of these areas in implementing resource use activities, such as timber harvesting and road construction, and attempting to reduce effects in some areas can mean increasing the effects in other areas. The Forest-wide standards and guidelines and LUD prescriptions provide for management or limit activities in many of the area's most important for subsistence uses, such as beaches and estuaries, and areas with high fish and wildlife habitat values.

### Reasonable Steps to Minimize Adverse Impacts to Subsistence Uses and Resources

Subsistence use is addressed specifically in a Forest-wide standard and guideline, and subsistence resources are covered by the Forest-wide standards and guidelines for wildlife, fish, riparian areas, and biological diversity, among others. I have determined that fish and wildlife habitat productivity will be maintained at the highest level possible for the Selected Alternative, consistent with the overall multiple-use goals and improved protection of the Forest Plan.

### ***Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940 (as amended)***

I have determined that the Selected Alternative complies with the most recent information for the protection of bald eagle protection requirements in 50 CFR Part 22.

### ***Clean Air Act of 1970 (as amended)***

I have determined that emissions from the implementation of the Selected Alternative will be of short duration and are not expected to exceed State of Alaska ambient air quality standards (18 AAC 50).

### ***Clean Water Act (1977, as amended)***

I have determined that the project activities meet all applicable State of Alaska Water Quality Standards. Section 313 of the Clean Water Act and Executive Order 12088 of January 23, 1987 addresses Federal agency compliance and consistency with water pollution control mandates. Agencies must be consistent with requirements that apply to "any governmental entity" or private person.

Compliance is to be in line with "all Federal, State, interstate, and local requirements, administrative authority, and process and sanctions respecting the control and abatement of water pollution."

Clean Water Act Sections 208 and 319 address nonpoint source pollution caused by activities such as timber harvest. Soil and water conservation practices are recognized by EPA as the primary control mechanisms for nonpoint source pollution on National Forest System lands. The site-specific application of best management practices (BMPs), with a monitoring and feedback mechanism, is the approved strategy for controlling nonpoint source pollution as defined by Alaska's Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Strategy (ADEC 2007). In 1997, the State of Alaska approved the BMPs in the Forest Service's Soil and Water Conservation Handbook (USFS 2006) as consistent with the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Regulations. The BMPs are incorporated into the Tongass Land Management Plan. My finding is based in part on the fact that annual Tongass National Forest BMP monitoring results consistently report a high success rate at applying BMPs (USFS 2005-2012).

A discharge of dredge or fill material from normal silvicultural activities such as harvesting for the production of forest products is exempt from Section 404 permitting requirements in waters of the United States, including wetlands (404(f)(1)(A)). Forest roads, as defined by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers guidance, are exempt from Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting if they are constructed and maintained in accordance with State-approved BMPs and the 15 Federal baseline provisions to assure that flow and

circulation patterns and chemical and biological characteristics of the waters are not impaired (404(f)(1)(E)). The baseline provisions are incorporated into the Alaska Region Soil and Water Conservation Handbook under BMP 12.5. I have determined that all roads approved in this project are exempt from Section 404 permitting requirements in waters of the United States, including wetlands (404(f)(1)(A)).

The Wrangell Island Project will implement both the National BMPs and Alaska Region BMPs.

### ***Endangered Species Act of 1973 (as amended)***

A biological assessment for this project was prepared for the threatened and endangered fish species and humpback whale. I concur with the finding of “No effect” for the threatened and endangered fish species and the humpback whale (Mexico DPS).

### ***Federal Cave Resource Protection Act of 1988***

I have determined that the activities of the Selected Alternative will not have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any significant cave (karst) resource in the Wrangell Island Project area, since these features do not exist in the project area.

### ***National Forest Transportation System Final Administrative Policy and Final Rule***

The FEIS and this ROD are prepared to be consistent with the National Forest System Transportation Final Administrative Policy and Final Rule (2001), as well as the Tongass National Forest Level Road Analysis (2003), the 2005 Travel Management Rule (36 CFR 212). I have determined the proposed road system in the Selected Alternative is the minimum road system needed for safe and efficient travel and for administration, utilization, and protection of National Forest System lands (36 CFR 212.5).

### ***Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act***

The Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation Act requires the Forest Service to consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service on projects that may affect essential fish habitat (EFH). The potential effects of the project on EFH are discussed in chapter 3 of the FEIS and in the project record. Chapter 3 also includes a description of the EFH in the project area, a description of the proposed activities, and a description of the measures that will protect these essential habitats. I have reviewed the potential effects of the project on EFH and have determined that this project may adversely affect EFH because of the effects of timber harvest activities, road construction, and log transfer activities at the log transfer facilities but these effects will be minimized through the use of Forest Plan requirements, BMPs, and design measures.

National Marine Fisheries Service was formally consulted on the project. Information on applicable BMPs, standards and guidelines, and design measures and criteria to minimize effects to EFH are presented in appendices 1 and 2 of this ROD, and in chapter 3 of the FEIS and the project record.

### ***Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972***

Actions authorized in the Selected Alternative will not have a direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on marine mammals. All marine wildlife guidelines, including special prohibitions on approaching humpback whales in Alaska as defined in 50 CFR 216 will be followed during project implementation. These marine mammal viewing guidelines are administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service and enforced by the Coast Guard, and are deemed sufficient for their protection.

A biological assessment for this project was prepared for the humpback whale. I concur with the finding of “No Effect” for the humpback whale (Mexico DPS).

### ***National Forest Management Act of 1976 (as amended)***

The National Forest Management Act requires several specific determinations in the Record of Decision. These are consistency with the governing Forest Plan, a determination of clearcutting as the optimal method of harvesting, if used, and specific authorizations to create openings over 100 acres in size.

### **Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan (as amended)**

Based on the discussion that follows, as well as that of the 2016 Forest Plan, I have determined that this decision is consistent with the Forest Plan as amended.

### **Clearcutting as the Optimal Method of Harvesting**

Based on the information presented in the FEIS, the project record and on Forest Plan direction, I have determined that clearcutting is the optimal method of harvesting where it is applied. Site-specific information and rationale where clearcutting is optimal is presented in the silvicultural prescriptions. Clearcutting (an even-aged method) has been prescribed in this project to preclude or minimize the occurrence of potentially adverse impacts from windthrow where the potential is moderate to high, to remove or reduce mistletoe infestations, and to reduce wounding due to logging damage to adjacent trees.

### **Harvest Openings Over 100 Acres in Size**

I have determined that there will be no created openings in excess of 100 acres with the harvest of the Selected Alternative units.

### ***National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966 (as amended)***

The NHPA requires the agency to consider the effects of its actions on historic properties that are eligible or listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and to consult with the State Historic Preservation Officer, Indian tribes, and interested stakeholders.

Under the provisions of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, I have made a finding of “No Historic Properties Affected”, with a concurrence of opinion by the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer. There will be no effects to known sites listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Cultural resource surveys were conducted in the analysis area in accordance with the inventory strategy procedures in the Third Programmatic Agreement between the Forest Service, Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The State Historic Preservation Officer was consulted, following Standard procedures, in accordance with 36 CFR Part 800, Subpart B for the evaluation of National Register eligibility and for assessment of effects on historic properties.

Local Indian tribes have been contacted during this process, and government-to-government consultations have been completed for the purposes of fulfilling Section 106 obligations.

While no known historic properties will be affected, unanticipated discoveries of cultural resources requires immediate cessation of activities nearby, protection of the site, and notification of the State Historic Preservation Officer as soon as practicable but not later than 48 hours in accordance with 36 CFR 800.13. In the case of the inadvertent discovery of human remains, the State of Alaska and local Indian tribes are immediately notified in accordance with State laws, and the Native American Graves Protection Act (NAGPRA).

### ***Tongass Timber Reform Act (TTRA) of 1990***

I have determined this project is in compliance of the relevant provisions of TTRA. Any timber harvested under the Selected Alternative will provide part of the timber supply to the Tongass National Forest's timber program as stated in Section 101 of TTRA "... the Secretary shall, to the extent consistent with providing for the multiple use and sustained yield of all renewable forest resources, seek to provide a supply of timber from the Tongass National Forest which (1) meets the annual market demand for timber from such forest and (2) meets the annual market demand from such forest for each planning cycle."

No commercial timber harvest will occur within 100 feet of any Class I stream or any Class II stream flowing directly into a Class I stream, as required in Section 103 of the TTRA.

## **Applicable Executive Orders**

### ***Executive Order 11988 (Floodplains)***

Per Executive Order 11988, I have determined that the Selected Alternative avoids occupation and alteration of floodplains.

### ***Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands)***

I have determined that the long- and short-term adverse effects associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands in the implementation of the Wrangell Island Project will be avoided to the extent possible. The techniques and practices required by the Forest Service serve to maintain the wetland attributes, including values and functions. In some areas, soil moisture regime and vegetation composition or structure may be altered; however, these altered acres would still be classified as wetlands and would function as wetlands in the ecosystem.

Where wetlands cannot be avoided, road construction will adhere to BMPs, which include at a minimum the Federal baseline provisions in 33 CFR 323 and State-approved BMPs. There will be approximately 9 acres of wetland that will no longer function as wetland due to road construction in the Selected Alternative.

### ***Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice)***

The FEIS analyzed environmental justice to determine whether a disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impact on minority populations, low-income populations, or Indian tribes was likely to result from the proposed action and any alternatives. The Executive Order specifically directs agencies to consider patterns of subsistence hunting and fishing when an agency action may affect fish or wildlife. I have determined that no communities are identified as being adversely affected in this area and that none of the alternatives would have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on the health of the environment of the minority, low-income, or Indian populations that use the Wrangell Island Project area.

### ***Executive Order 12962 (Aquatic Systems, Recreational Fisheries)***

Per Executive Order 12962, I have determined that the Selected Alternative minimizes the effects on aquatic systems through project design, application of standards and guidelines, BMPs, and site-specific mitigation measures. In the Wrangell Island Project area, opportunities for recreational fishing are limited. For the Selected Alternative, recreational fishing opportunities would remain essentially the same as the current condition, because aquatic habitats are protected through implementation of BMPs and riparian standards and guidelines.

### ***Executive Order 13007 (Indian Sacred Sites)***

Executive Order 13007 directs Federal agencies to consider the protection of American Indian sacred sites and allow access where feasible. In a government-to-government relationship, the tribal government is responsible for notifying the agency of the existence of a sacred site. A sacred site is defined as a site that

has sacred significance due to established religious beliefs or ceremonial uses, and which has a specific, discrete, and delineated location that has been identified by the tribe. I have determined that tribal governments or their authorized representatives were consulted and they did not identify any specific sacred site locations in the project area.

### ***Executive Order 13112 (Invasive Species)***

A risk assessment completed for the FEIS evaluated the status of invasive species in the project area and the effects from the proposed activities on them. The specific measures to minimize the introduction and spread of invasive plant species in the Selected Alternative are provided in Appendix 1 – Wrangell Island Project Unit Cards.

### ***Executive Order 13175 (Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments)***

Executive Order 13175 directs Federal agencies to respect tribal self-government, sovereignty, and tribal rights, and to engage in regular and meaningful government-to-government consultation with tribes on proposed actions with tribal implications. I have complied with this Order and have consulted with and provided information to the Wrangell Cooperative Association, a federally recognized tribal government about this project.

This consultation is documented in chapter 1 of the FEIS and in the public involvement records.

### ***Executive Order 13186 Migratory Birds***

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (amended in 1936 and 1972) prohibits the taking of migratory birds, unless authorized by the Secretary of Interior. The law provides the primary mechanism to regulate waterfowl hunting seasons and bag limits, but its scope is not just limited to waterfowl. The migratory species that may stay in the area utilize most, if not all, of the habitats described in the analysis for breeding, nesting, and raising their young. The effects on these habitats were analyzed for this project. I have determined that the decision will not have a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative effect on any migratory bird species in the project area. There may be minor direct effects on individuals or their habitat from the harvest of timber or the disturbance caused by harvest and related activities.

### ***Executive Order 13443 (Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation)***

Executive Order 13443 directs Federal agencies to facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting opportunities and the management of game species and their habitat. The analysis considered and disclosed the effects on hunting activities. I have determined that the Selected Alternative will maintain hunting opportunities by adhering to the Forest Plan standards and guidelines that maintain habitat for hunted species.

### ***Federal and State Permits***

Federal and State permits necessary to implement the authorized activities are listed at the end of chapter 1 in the FEIS.

## **Implementation**

The timber from the Wrangell Island project will be offered in a variety of sale sizes to meet the needs of both large and small timber operators. Market conditions will be considered when offering sales. The City and Borough of Wrangell and other interested stakeholders will be consulted during the implementation design phase.

Appendices 1 and 2 contain the Selected Alternative unit cards and road cards, respectively, and are located on the Wrangell Island Project webpage (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>). These cards are an integral part of this decision because they document the specific resource concerns, management objectives, and mitigation measures to govern the layout of the harvest units and construction of roads. These cards will be used during the implementation process to ensure that the project is implemented within applicable standards and guidelines and that resource effects will not be greater than those described in the FEIS. Similar cards will document any changes to the planned layout, which may occur during implementation.

Minor changes are expected during implementation to better meet on-site resource management and protection objectives. Minor adjustments to unit boundaries are also likely during final layout to improve logging system efficiency. This usually entails adjusting the boundary to coincide with logical logging setting boundaries. Proposed changes to the authorized project actions will be subject to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act the National Forest Management Act, and other laws concerning such changes.

This project will be implemented in accordance with Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2430 and Forest Service Handbook FSH 2409.18 direction for timber sale project implementation. This direction provides a bridge between project planning and implementation and will ensure execution of the actions, environmental standards, and mitigations approved by this decision, and compliance with the Forest Plan and all applicable laws, policy and direction. The current applicable BMPs will be applied to the Selected Alternative.

Changes made during implementation will be reviewed, documented, and approved by the Responsible Official through the Tongass Supplement to FSH 1909.15-2009-1. In determining whether and what kind of NEPA action is required for changes during implementation, the Forest Supervisor will consider the criteria in the Code of Federal Regulations (40 CFR 1502.9(c)), and Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, sec. 18 to determine whether to supplement or revise an existing environmental impact statement. I will determine whether the proposed change is a substantial change to the Selected Alternative as planned and already approved, and whether the change is relevant to environmental concerns. I will consider connected or interrelated changes to particular areas or specific activities in making this determination. The cumulative impacts of these changes will also be considered.

The implementation unit cards and road cards, as approved by this process, will be incorporated into the timber sale contract. The sale administrators and road inspectors then enforce the contract requirements with the operators.

The implementation record for this project will display the following:

- Each harvest unit, transportation facility, and other project components as actually implemented,
- Any proposed changes to the design, location, standards and guidelines, or other mitigation measures for the project, and
- Authorization of the proposed changes.

## **Implementation Date**

Implementation of decisions subject to the objection process may commence immediately after a final decision is signed.

## Implementation Date

Implementation of decisions subject to the objection process may commence immediately after a final decision is signed.

## Contact Information

For additional information concerning this decision, contact Robert Dalrymple, District Ranger, Wrangell Ranger District, P.O. Box 51, Wrangell, AK 99929, or call (907) 874-2323.

## Responsible Official

The Responsible Official for the Wrangell Island Project is M. Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor of the Tongass National Forest.



M. EARL STEWART  
Forest Supervisor



Date

## Exhibit R-1

### ***Response to the Reviewing Officer's Instructions for Required Actions for the Wrangell Island Project Record of Decision***

#### Results of the Objection Process Pursuant to 36 CFR 218

The Wrangell Island Project draft Record of Decision (ROD) was subject to review and objection pursuant to 36 CFR 218, Subparts A and B regulations (the objection process). Five objections were received during the objection filing period, from Bruce Smith, George Woodbury, Alaska Forest Association, Earthjustice, et al., and the City and Borough of Wrangell. Based on the objection points raised, the Reviewing Officer summarized 20 issue statements covering a number of issues.

#### Objection Resolution Meeting

On October 30, 2017, the Responsible Official and Reviewing Officer met with the objectors to discuss the issues raised in the objections. All objectors were given an opportunity to present their concerns. This meeting helped clarify the issues and remedies suggested by the Forest Service and the objectors. I proposed two remedies during the objection meeting. One was to select only the most economical units from Alternative 2 (25 units comprising approximately 428 acres, providing an estimated 5–7 MMBF of timber). The second was to keep the first 1.2 mile of NFS road 50024 open to public motorized access. The objectors are encouraged to continue discussion with the Forest Service as the project is implemented.

#### Written Response to Objections and Instructions to Forest

After a deliberative and extensive review of concerns raised and remedies suggested by objectors, on November 13, 2017 the Reviewing Officer, Regional Forester Beth Pendleton issued a response to the objections letter to the objectors that responded to their objection points, summarized as 20 different issue statements. That response letter is available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=34831>. The objection response also provided me with instructions to address and update certain areas in the analysis that were brought up during the objection process. Specifically, the objection response directed me to complete the following seven items before signing the final ROD for the Wrangell Island Project:

**Document the decision to keep the 1.2 mile segment of road 50024 open to the public, as displayed in the Objection Response [Enclosure 1].**

Forest response: The Selected Alternative in the Record of Decision keeps the first 1.2 mile of NFS Road 50024 open to public motorized access as shown on ROD Figure 3 and road card 50024.

**Document the decision to move forward with the proposed remedy offered at the objection resolution meeting, discussed on page 3 and Enclosure 2 of the Objection Response. This includes moving forward with approximately 5–7 MMBF of economically viable timber (the harvest of approximately 428 acres) and deferring the remaining harvest units pending additional analysis in the future (either as a Supplement to the Wrangell Island FEIS or as a separate, new analysis).**

Forest response: The Selected Alternative in the Record of Decision is the proposed remedy offered at the objection resolution meeting. I have documented the decision to move forward with the proposed remedy to harvest approximately 5–7 MMBF of economically viable timber. The harvest units and road are shown in ROD Figure 2 and 3. The remaining harvest units in Alternative 2 have been deferred pending additional analysis in the future.

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**Update the Final ROD (including Table 2) and any other necessary project record documentation to reflect the Selected Alternative with the harvest units deferred.**

Forest response: The Record of Decision and project record have been updated to reflect the Selected Alternative. The timber harvest units from Alternative 2 which were not identified in the Selected Alternative have been deferred pending additional analysis in the future.

**Review the deer numbers in the Wildlife Resource Report and the Subsistence Resource Report and correct and/or clarify any discrepancies in those numbers.**

Forest response: After review of the wildlife documents, two small typographical errors were found in Table 8 of the Subsistence Resource Report. They have been corrected in the Subsistence Resource Report Addendum and in the Final ROD. These typographical errors did not affect the analysis. The percent remaining DHC and DHC one year post implementation is still at 84 percent of historical condition. The DHC numbers in the Wildlife Resource Report were correct.

**Review the analyses in the Wildlife Resource Report, the BA/BE, and the FEIS and include more meaningful and concise conclusions on the potential effects of the project alternatives on wildlife, including the red-backed vole, marten, deer, wolves, and goshawks, in the Final ROD and/or appropriate documentation in the project record, such as addendums to the Wildlife Resource Report and BA/BE. This review should consider any additional protections afforded by IRAs and the Tongass 77 Watershed, as well as the decision to defer the majority of the harvest units from the Selected Alternative at this time. These summary statements/conclusions should specifically discuss whether the project's effects are likely to alter existing population trends, contribute to current trends, or not alter trends, with rationale for those conclusions.**

Forest response: The Wildlife Resource Report was updated with conclusions on the potential effects of the project on wildlife: red-backed vole, marten, deer, wolves, and goshawks.

Red-backed Vole: Removal of POG habitat under the selected alternative would have minor direct/indirect effects on Wrangell Southern red-backed voles, which could lead to some population declines, increased habitat fragmentation and reduced genetic interchange. Effects would be reduced under the selected units from Alternative 2, because less than 1 percent of the existing POG habitat on Forest Service land would be affected compared to the 8 percent from implementing all of Alternative 2. Although there would be effects to Wrangell Southern red-backed voles or their habitat, populations are expected to remain stable because approximately 99 percent of the existing POG on Wrangell Island would remain.

Marten: Harvesting POG and road construction will have minor direct/indirect effects to marten under the selected alternative, because only 1 percent or less of existing habitat (depending on which elevation scale) on Forest Service land will be affected. The selected alternative could result in small local reductions in marten denning and foraging habitat. Marten population numbers are expected to remain stable because the remaining available habitat on Wrangell Island is adequate.

Deer: The units under the selected alternative would have minor effects on deer and/or habitat because only 1 percent or less of the different deer habitat types would be reduced from existing condition. Deer population on Wrangell Island would be expected to remain stable because upon project completion approximately 99 percent of the existing deer habitat would remain on Wrangell Island.

Wolves: The removal of POG habitat and road construction under the selected alternative would have minor direct/indirect effects on wolves, which could lead to some local population declines due to a reduction in habitat and increased hunter mortality. Wolf population numbers are expected to remain stable on Wrangell Island based on the modeled deer and road density levels.

Goshawk: Language about the effects to goshawks have been clarified in the Wildlife Resource Report Addendum and BA/BE Addendum and it will be carried through to the Final ROD.

Implementation of the selected alternatives would not directly affect goshawk individuals (known nesting sites), but could affect potential nesting and foraging habitat. The removal of POG and High POG habitat could result in local population declines. The amount of habitat removed under the selected alternative in WAA 1903 would amount to approximately 1 percent of the existing habitat which would not result in a loss of viability for goshawks on Wrangell Island nor cause a trend toward federal listing.

Under the selected alternative there would be minor effects to goshawk nesting and foraging habitat, but the remaining habitat on Wrangell Island would continue to provide goshawk foraging and nesting habitat by maintaining at least 99 percent of the existing POG and High POG mature forest habitat.

Cumulative reductions in nesting and foraging habitat on Wrangell Island could result in the local population declines, expansion of individual goshawk home ranges, and potentially leading to a reduction in breeding density. Effects would be least under the selected alternative because approximately 1-2 percent of the historic habitat would be impacted. Timber harvest and associated activities from the Wrangell Island Project could also temporarily disturbed or displaced some individuals, and similar disturbances also has the potential to occur in association with future projects such as timber harvest on FS land, non-FS land, and future State of Alaska transportation and utility construction. These disturbances are considered low incremental effects when combined with past, present and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

**Review the information related to the red-backed vole submitted in the Earthjustice, et al. objection to determine if the analysis in the Wrangell Island FEIS is still sound, and document that review in the Final ROD and/or project record.**

Forest response: All literature that was submitted by the objectors has been reviewed and is part of the project record. The majority of the literature submitted by the objector pertained to flying squirrels. The literature pertaining to the Wrangell southern red-backed voles was already considered in the analysis and included in the project record, which contains other applicable literature not submitted by the objector. This review finds that the most current, applicable literature that applies to Wrangell Island was used and the analysis is still sound.

The discussion of Wrangell southern red-backed vole in the Wildlife Resource Report has been updated.

**Correct and/or clarify the conclusion on page 96 of the FEIS regarding the effects of the project on goshawk nesting and foraging habitat, which appears to be inconsistent with the analysis in the FEIS and project record.**

Forest response: Language about the effects to goshawks have been clarified in the BA/BE Addendum and carried through to the Final ROD. A typographical error was identified where the word “not” was omitted. The error was corrected. Implementation of the selected alternatives would not directly affect goshawk individuals (known nesting sites), but could affect potential nesting and foraging habitat. The removal of POG and High POG habitat could result in local population declines. The amount of habitat removed under the selected alternative in WAA 1903 would amount to approximately 1 percent of the existing habitat which would not result in a loss of viability for goshawks on Wrangell Island nor cause a trend toward federal listing.

**Summary**

In response to the Reviewing Officer's letter and instructions, I have completed these updates and clarifications to the Wrangell Island Project Record of Decision.



M. EARL STEWART  
Forest Supervisor



Date



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