



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Alaska Region
Tongass National Forest
Petersburg Ranger District

P.O. Box 1328
Petersburg, AK 99833-1328
Phone: (907) 772-3871
Fax: (907) 772-5995

File Code: 1950

Date: February 21, 2013

PUBLIC SCOPING LETTER MITKOF ISLAND SMALL SALES PROJECT

The Forest Service is seeking your involvement regarding a proposal to make timber and other forest products available for sale through the Tongass National Forest Timber Sale Program. The proposed Mitkof Island Small Sales Project would occur on Mitkof Island, on the Petersburg Ranger District.

Your input and ideas will help us design a project that meets the diverse needs of operators on Mitkof Island and in nearby communities. A proposed action and alternatives, including a “No Action” alternative, will be developed and presented to the public at a later date.

Project Area

The project area includes all National Forest Service lands located on Mitkof Island (see attached map), within the Petersburg Ranger District, Tongass National Forest. National Forest Service lands encompass approximately 81 percent of Mitkof Island (108,887 acres of the total 134,156 acres). The project area includes all of Value Comparison Units (VCUs) 4490, 4500, 4510, 4520, 4530 and 4540, and a portion of VCUs 4470 and 4480 and is located within Wildlife Analysis Area (WAA) 2007.

The project area is roaded as a result of past timber sales beginning in the 1950s. There are approximately 107 miles of open and 20 miles of closed National Forest Service (NFS) roads within the project area. Non-NFS roads comprise an additional 47 miles of road within the project area. The project area has two permitted Marine Access Facilities (MAFs), Woodpecker Cove and Blind Slough.

The enclosed map shows the existing condition of the project area. Geospatial Information System (GIS) layers will be updated as the project progresses and harvest units are developed.

The project area contains lands within Phase 1 and Phase 2 portions of the Timber Program Adaptive Management Strategy. Management activities proposed in Phase 2 lands would be restricted to activities specified in the Forest Plan. More information regarding the Timber Program’s Adaptive Management Strategy can be found on pages 64-66 of the Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan Record of Decision.



Need for Action

Direction in the Forest Plan reflects the need to provide a sustained yield of timber volume responsive to local, regional, and national needs. Numerous communities within the region have wood product businesses of varying capacities, each seeking forest products to support their business. In general, small businesses with limited capital investment resources are typical in the current Southeast Alaska timber industry. These businesses operate on both salvage and green tree timber harvest, creating a wide range of natural resource employment opportunities for local entrepreneurs. Local interest for small and micro sales from mill operators on Mitkof Island and surrounding communities currently exists. Larger operations based in nearby communities also have a history of purchasing forest products from the project area.

Based on national, agency and forest direction, the needs for this project are to:

Provide a predictable and steady supply of sawtimber and other forest products to support commercial firewood cutters, local mill operators, and forest product businesses.

Past and present requests for forest products from local and prospective entrepreneurs for sawtimber, and commercial and personal use firewood calls for an even-flow and available supply to help provide more stability and economic relief to the local forest products industry.

Capture the economic value of salvage timber in an efficient and timely manner.

The district has typically responded to public requests for small and micro sale opportunities by NEPA clearing individual projects which can take several months. Developing a proactive proposal that consolidates multiple harvest activities into one NEPA analysis would help resource managers provide a more responsive, efficient and cost-effective means to meet public interest in salvage and small and micro sale opportunities by pre-clearing lands for certain activities. This programmatic approach has been used successfully in other areas of the Tongass National Forest and could be successful on Mitkof Island.

Traditionally, timber sale and “salvage” activities on the Tongass have been implemented in the Development Land Use Designation (LUD) group. The Forest Plan, however, does provide guidance for salvage harvest activities within the Non-Development LUDs not withdrawn from harvest. For example, windthrown trees or trees known to be a hazard to the public may be harvested from Non-Development LUDs. Salvage opportunities vary in each LUD, and the LUD objectives would need to be met before approving this type of activity on NFS lands (Forest Plan pages 4-73 and 4-74).

Provide commercial young-growth opportunities.

There are various scales of commercial young-growth harvest possibilities within the project area. Developing young-growth opportunities may provide industry operators the chance to acquire and work with this emerging forest product; to develop new markets; or to refine the skills and equipment needed to economically harvest and process young trees regenerated from past harvest activities.

Make available sawtimber accessible by helicopter.

Offering helicopter sales across Mitkof Island would provide a range of sale opportunities and contribute to the local and regional economy on lands where road building is not economically feasible. Multiple operators / purchasers within the region are interested in sales that offer helicopter yarding when species composition, prescription and available volume combine for an economically positive sale.

Land Use Designations (LUDs)

The following table displays the Forest Plan LUD acres included in the Mitkof Island Small Sales project area. Land Use Designations are similar to land use zoning designations used by communities. Each “zone” or LUD is a defined area of land with specific management direction that outlines the activities that may or may not occur (see attached map). Three development Land Use Designations (LUDs) comprise approximately 77 percent of the project area, and the remaining 33 percent is located within five Non-Development LUDs. The removal of commercial green tree sawtimber is only allowed to occur within Development LUDs. Harvest activities generally confined to salvage of trees can occur within Non-Development LUDs as specified by the Forest Plan.

Mitkof Island Land Use Designation Acreage

Development LUDs	Area (acres)
Modified Landscape (ML)	33,912
Scenic Viewshed (SV)	14,079
Timber Production (TM)	31,033
Total Acres of Development LUDs	79,024
Non-development LUDs	Area (acres)
Municipal Watershed (MW)	4,760
Non-national Forest (NNF)	25,269
Old-growth Habitat (OG)	16,097
Special Interest Area (SA)	4,701
Semi-Remote Recreation (SM)	3,162
Wild River (WR)	1,143
Total Acres of Non-development LUDs	55,132
Total Acres for all LUDs	134,156

Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA)

Three IRAs in their entirety (36,125 acres total) are located within the project area (Mitkof, Crystal and Manzanita IRAs).

Preliminary Issues

The following preliminary issues have been identified based on project area information, and input received through open houses, collaborative stewardship meetings, and past scoping on similar projects.

Deer Habitat

Due to past and reasonably foreseeable future timber harvest on Mitkof Island, the cumulative reduction in wildlife habitat, combined with the proposed project, raises possible concerns for deer in particular.

Socioeconomics / Timber Economics

The demand for small timber sales and commercial firewood sales exist. District timber sale records show that small sales and fuel wood sales have successfully sold in the past. The Tongass Microsale Program is also currently operating on Mitkof Island and has grown in popularity among island residents. Timber purchasers are concerned about the quality and quantity of timber available to maintain a viable business. Timber sale economics affect the vitality of Southeast Alaska's forest products industry and the ability of the industry to contribute to the local and regional economies.


What are your thoughts about this area?

Your input and ideas are important in designing and completing the Mitkof Island Small Sales project. They will help the interdisciplinary team identify issues important to the public and design a proposed action and alternatives to address the issues. Comments are most helpful when they refer to specific areas, roads or resources within the project area.

Please email your comments to comments-alaska-tongass-petersburg@fs.fed.us with "Mitkof Island Small Sales" in the subject line. Comments can also be faxed (907-772-5995) or mailed to Carey Case, PO Box 1328, Petersburg, AK 99833. For more information about the project, you can contact Carey Case at (907) 772-3871 or ccase@fs.fed.us.

It would be most helpful to have your comments by April 1, 2013, for this process; however, comments will be accepted at any time. We look forward to your participation. Your input and ideas will help ensure a successful assessment.

Sincerely,


Acting for -
JASON C. ANDERSON
District Ranger